

Does the New Testament make any gendered distinctions in authority or role?

GENDERED DISTINCTIONS

The following are texts widely agreed on by both egalitarian and complementarian scholars as either denying or affirming gendered distinctions in role or authority.¹

New Testament texts affirming gendered distinctions in role:

- 1 Corinthians 11:4-5: '**Any man** who prays or prophesies **with his head covered** disgraces his head. But **any woman** who prays or prophesies **with her head uncovered** disgraces her head'^{2 3 4 5 6 7}

¹ Texts which are only recognized as such by complementarians on the one hand or egalitarians on the other are not listed, such as Galatians 3:28, since although there are egalitarians who believe it denies gendered distinctions in role there are many egalitarians who agree with complementarians that it does not make any such denial; likewise 1 Timothy 3:11 is omitted, since although there are complementarians who believe it affirms gendered distinctions in role, there are many complementarians who agree with egalitarians that it does not

² In the absence of any indicators to the contrary, it is preferable to understand Paul's directives here as applying to everyone in the community, married or unmarried: women should have covered heads in worship; men should not.', Hays (egalitarian), 'First Corinthians', Interpretation, a Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching, p. 185 (1997).

³ 'He did not forbid the Corinthian women to prophesy, but he demanded that they cover their heads when they prayed in public, and in 1 Corinthians 11:8-9 he added a statement — "For man was not made from woman, but woman from man. Neither was man created for woman, but woman for man" — that uses Genesis, a sacred text, to define women as subordi-

- 1 Corinthians 14:33, 34: '**the women should be silent in the churches... it is disgraceful for a woman to speak in church**'⁸
- 1 Timothy 2:11: '**A woman must learn quietly with all submissiveness**'⁹
- 1 Timothy 2:12: '**But I do not allow a woman to teach or exercise authority over a man. She must remain quiet**'^{10 11 12}

nate to men.', Murphy (egalitarian), 'The Word According to Eve: Women and the Bible in Ancient Times and Our Own', p. 225 (1999).

⁴ 'Yet there also he insists on **distinct headdress for men and women in worship**, which symbolized **traditional gender boundaries and had hierarchical implications**.' Gundry-Volf (egalitarian), 'Putting the Moral Vision of the New Testament into Focus: A Review', Bulletin for Biblical Research (9.278), (1999).

⁵ '**Sexual distinctions are not erased** (as implied in Paul's statements about **marriage, sex, and gender-specific headdress**).', ibid., p. 281.

⁶ '**It is broadly conceded within the contemporary church** that Paul's urging **women to have some sort of head covering in worship** (1 Cor 11) reflects a cultural component of life in Corinth.', Webb (egalitarian), 'A Redemptive-Movement Hermeneutic: The Slavery Analogy', in Pierce & Groothuis (eds.), 'Discovering Biblical Equality: Complementarity without hierarchy', p. 396 (2nd ed. 2005).

⁷ 'While affirming the delicate interdependence of man and woman under God (vv. 11–12), **Paul also upholds the distinctiveness of the two sexes by reasoning from the relational dynamics within the Godhead (v. 3) and from human origins** (vv. 7b–9; cf. Gen. 2:18–25). For a woman, therefore, **to venture into male behaviour violates the transcendent ordering of relationships**.' Ortlund, 'Man and Woman', in Alexander & Rosner, 'New Dictionary of Biblical Theology' (electronic ed. 2001).

⁸ 'Later, in 1 Corinthians 14, he employed a reprise of the same argument **to single out women and insist that they should keep silent in church**.' Murphy (egalitarian), 'The Word According to Eve: Women and the Bible in Ancient Times and Our Own', p. 225 (1999).

⁹ '**A woman is to learn in quietness and full submission**.' Fee (egalitarian), '1 and 2 Timothy, Titus', New International Biblical Commentary, p. 72 (1988).

¹⁰ The corollary of these requirements is the instructions in the Pastorals that **women and slaves must be submissive and appropriately obedient**. Women are **forbidden to teach or be**

- 1 Timothy 3:2, 4: 'The overseer then must be above reproach, the **husband of one wife... He must manage his own household well**'^{13 14 15 16 17}

New Testament texts affirming gendered distinctions in authority:

in authority over men; they must learn in silent submission (1 Tim 2: 11-15).', ibid., p. 335.

¹¹ 'But then, third, Paul goes further **and states that he does not allow a woman to teach nor to exercise authority over a man**.' Marshall (egalitarian), 'Women in Ministry', in Husbands & Larsen, 'Women, ministry and the Gospel: Exploring new paradigms', p. 59 (2007).

¹² '**Moreover, a woman is to 'learn in silence with full submission'** (v. 11). Then Paul explains more fully what this silence with full submission entails: '**I permit no woman to teach or to have authority over a man**' (v. 12).', Ortlund, 'Man and Woman', in Alexander & Rosner, 'New Dictionary of Biblical Theology' (electronic ed. 2001).

¹³ 'The domestic assumptions of the code, which may respond to a heretical tendency (4:3), **present the overseer as a husband and father**.' Towner (egalitarian), 'The Letters to Timothy and Titus', New International Commentary on the New Testament, p. 251 (2006).

¹⁴ 'The first specific characteristic in the 1 Timothy list is **μᾶλλον ἄνδρα ὡς κύριον, literally "a man of one woman," or "a husband of one wife."**', Knight (complementarian), 'The Pastoral Epistles: A commentary on the Greek text', New International Greek Testament Commentary, p. 157 (1992).

¹⁵ 'In languages where rhetorical questions are not normally used in this way, this rhetorical question will need to be changed into a statement, as for example **"A man who does not know how to manage his own family will surely not know how to take care of the church of God."**', Arichea (egalitarian), & Hatton, 'A handbook on Paul's letters to Timothy and to Titus', UBS Handbook Series, p. 69 (1995).

¹⁶ '**The man** who is a failure at one (family) is thereby disqualified for the other (church).', Fee (egalitarian), 'New International Biblical commentary: 1 and 2 Timothy, Titus', p. 82 (1988).

¹⁷ '...he seeks to ensure that positions of leadership **are filled by those of an appropriate social standing – male heads of households**.' Horrell (egalitarian), 'Leadership Patterns and the Development of Ideology in Early Christianity', Sociology of Religion, p. 331 (58.4.97).

- 1 Corinthians 11:3: ‘the **man is the head** of a woman’^{18 19 20 21}
- 1 Corinthians 14:34: ‘Rather, **let them** [the women] **be in submission**, as in fact the law says. If they want to find out about something, they should **ask their husbands at home**’^{22 23}

¹⁸ ‘What does κεφαλή ‘head’ imply? 1. It implies a hierarchical meaning of authority of one over another [AB, Alf, BAGD, Ed, EGT, Gdt, Herm, Ho, ICC, Lns, MNTC, My, NIC, NTC, TG, TNTC, Vn]’, Trail, ‘An Exegetical Summary of 1 Corinthians 10-16’, p. 58 (2nd ed. 2008); the 17 references cited show agreement from a range of standard Bible commentaries and lexicons.

¹⁹ ‘Even if by “head” Paul means “more prominent/preminent partner” or “one through whom the other exists,” his language and the flow of the argument seem to reflect an assumed hierarchy through which glory and shame flow upward from those with lower status to those above them (see Thiselton 2000: 812–22; Watson 2000: 43–44n3; Loader 2004: 100).’, Beale & Carson, ‘Commentary on the New Testament use of the Old Testament’, p. 731 (2007).

²⁰ ‘(Some interpreters have tried to explain away the hierarchical implications of v.3 by arguing that *kephalē* means “source” rather than “ruler.” This is a possible meaning of the word, and it fits nicely with v. 8, in which Paul alludes to the Genesis story that describes the creation of woman out of man; however, in view of the whole shape of the argument, the patriarchal implications of v. 3 are undeniable. Even if Paul is thinking here primarily of man as the source of women rather than authority over woman, this still serves as the warrant for a claim about his ontological preeminence over her, as vv. 7-9 show.), Hays (egalitarian), ‘First Corinthians’, Interpretation: a Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching, p. 184 (1997).
²¹ ‘But Paul reinforces the convention with the claim that the husband is the woman’s *head*, which in 1 Cor. 11 is based in the Genesis story of Adam and Eve. ‘Head’ means master (see on 1:22); contrary to widespread claims, the word never meant ‘source’ in biblical Greek.’ , Carson et al, ‘New Bible Commentary: 21st century edition’ (4th rev. ed. 1994).

²² ‘The New Testament also instructs women to be silent and not to raise questions within congregational gatherings.¹⁹ Should they have any questions, they are to ask their husbands at home. In short, women are to be silent, and the text assumes a gender perspective: the male/husband is the repository of biblical knowledge.’ , Webb (egalitarian), ‘A Redemptive-Movement Hermeneutic; The Slavery Analogy’, in Pierce & Groothuis (eds.), ‘Discovering Biblical Equality: Complementarity without hierarchy’, p. 396 (2nd ed. 2005).

²³ Three points need to be noted in seeking to understand the passage, (i) Wives prayed and prophesied in Christian

- Ephesians 5:22-24: ‘Wives, **submit to your husbands** as to the Lord, because the **husband is the head** of the wife as also Christ is the head of the church – he himself being the savior of the body. But as the church submits to Christ, so **also wives should submit to their husbands** in everything.’^{24 25 26}
- Colossians 3:18: ‘Wives, **submit to your husbands**’^{27 28}

gatherings (see 11:5). This was a common practice in all the apostolic churches (33b). The context is crucial viz. the evaluation of prophecy (v 35). (ii) The law requires the acknowledgement of the distinctive roles of men and women (34), a reference to Gn. 2:20–24 or 3:16. Paul has already cited the former in 11:8–9. (iii) The wife is to seek the elucidation of points at home, which could well mean that it is her husband who has given the prophecy (35).’, Carson et al, ‘New Bible Commentary: 21st century edition’ (4th rev. ed. 1994).

²⁴ ‘Women, children, and slaves are instructed to be submissive, the husbands, fathers, and masters are urged to be loving and just in their actions towards those under their care.’, Horrell (egalitarian), ‘Leadership Patterns and the Development of Ideology in Early Christianity’, Sociology of Religion, p. 334 (58.4.97).

²⁵ ‘The irony of the household code is that, whereas the early chapters of Ephesians describe a new kind of equality, through Christ, of Jew and Gentile and the breaking down of the dividing walls, these exhortations are clearly not about equals but about hierarchy; they do not break down dividing walls, but rather establish them and teach one to live within hierarchical bounds in the name of Christian unity.’, Tanzer (egalitarian), ‘Eph 5:22-33 Wives (and Husbands) Exhorted’, in Meyers, Craven, & Kraemer, ‘Women in Scripture: a dictionary of named and unnamed women in the Hebrew Bible, the apocryphal/deuterocanonical books, and the New Testament’, p. 482 (2001).

²⁶ ‘The call for the wife to obey her husband (and that is roughly what the verb ‘submit’ means in this context; cf. 1 Pet. 3:5–6) was virtually a universal convention of Paul’s world.’ , Carson et al, ‘New Bible Commentary: 21st century edition’ (4th rev. ed. 1994).

²⁷ ‘The submission of wives to husbands. In Paul’s “household codes” he instructs women to “submit to” their husbands (Eph 5:22; Col 3:18). Some Christian interpreters water down the idea of submission in an attempt to make it more palatable today.’, Webb (egalitarian), ‘A Redemptive-Movement Hermeneutic; The Slavery Analogy’, in Pierce & Groothuis (eds.),

- 1 Timothy 2:12: ‘But I do not allow a woman to teach or exercise authority over a man. She must remain quiet.’^{29 30}
- Titus 2:5: ‘being subject to their own husbands’^{31 32}
- 1 Peter 3:1: ‘In the same way, wives, be subject to your own husbands.’^{33 34}

(Jonathan Burke, 2010)

‘Discovering Biblical Equality: Complementarity without hierarchy’, p. 397 (2nd ed. 2005).

²⁸ ‘The wives, as free and responsible agents, are asked voluntarily to submit themselves to their husbands since this is entirely proper (*fitting* has a Stoic ring to it but the motivation is entirely Christian).’, Carson et al, ‘New Bible Commentary: 21st century edition’ (4th rev. ed. 1994).

²⁹ The corollary of these requirements is the instructions in the Pastorals that women and slaves must be submissive and appropriately obedient. Women are forbidden to teach or be in authority over men; they must learn in silent submission (1 Tim 2: 11-15).’, Fee (egalitarian), ‘1 and 2 Timothy, Titus’, New International Biblical Commentary, p. 335(1988).

³⁰ ‘But then, third, Paul goes further and states that he does not allow a woman to teach nor to exercise authority over a man.’, Marshall (egalitarian), ‘Women in Ministry’, in Husbands & Larsen, ‘Women, ministry and the Gospel: Exploring new paradigms’, p. 59 (2007).

³¹ ‘Finally, he urges that they also be subject to their husbands cf. 1 Tim. 2:11; Col. 3:18; Eph. 5:21–23; 1 Pet. 3:1).’, Fee (egalitarian), ‘New International Biblical commentary: 1 and 2 Timothy, Titus’, p. 188 (1988).

³² ‘As elsewhere Paul assumes that the Christian wife should be submissive to her husband.’, Carson et al, ‘New Bible Commentary: 21st century edition’ (4th rev. ed. 1994)

³³ ‘What relationship is indicated by ὁμοίως ‘likewise’? 1. It refers back to the general theme of submission began in 2:13 [Alf, BNTC, IVP, NCB, NIC, NTC, Sel, TNTC]. 2. It indicates a comparison with the command for slaves to submit to their masters in 2:18 [ICC, TG, TNTC]. The comparison of a wife’s submission to a slave’s submission is not extended in every way that the slave would be subject to a master, but is similar in terms of doing it reverently for the Lord’s sake, whether the husband is bad or good [TNTC].’, Abernathy, ‘An Exegetical Summary of 1 Peter’, p. 110 (2nd ed. 2008).

³⁴ ‘The sense of the verse then would be that since Christians are expected to “be submissive,” it is likewise expected that wives should submit to their husbands.’, Arichea (egalitarian), & Nida, ‘A Handbook on the first letter from Peter’, UBS Handbook Series, p. 88 (1994).