

Church Leadership II

Review:

The church is governed by elders. The pastor is an elder who specializes in teaching (as opposed to ruling elders). The pastor and elders are equal in power. Each church is connected to one another through a regional gathering of elders who have oversight over all the churches in the region.

What about women elders?

(1) The biblical view of gender:

God created men and women as equals, both in the image of God

Genesis 1:27

So God created man in his *own image*, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.

Men and women have equal worth, but different roles

Ephesians 5:22-24

²² **Wives, submit to your own husbands**, as to the Lord. ²³ For the **husband is the head of the wife** even as Christ is the head of the church, his body, and is himself its Savior. ²⁴ Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit in everything to their husbands.

(2) But do the gender roles of the family apply to the church? **Yes.**

1 Timothy 3:1-7

¹ The saying is trustworthy: If anyone aspires to the office of overseer, he desires a noble task. ² Therefore an overseer must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, sober-minded, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, ³ not a drunkard, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money. ⁴ **He must manage his own household well, with all dignity keeping his children submissive,** ⁵ **for if someone does not know how to manage his own household, how will he care for God's church?** ⁶ He must not be a recent convert, or he

may become puffed up with conceit and fall into the condemnation of the devil. ⁷ Moreover, he must be well thought of by outsiders, so that he may not fall into disgrace, into a snare of the devil.

1 Timothy 3:14-15

¹⁴ I hope to come to you soon, but I am writing these things to you so that, ¹⁵ if I delay, you may know how one ought to behave in **the household of God, which is the church of the living God**, a pillar and buttress of truth.

(3) Paul prohibits women from having the responsibilities of an elder

1 Timothy 2:11-14

¹¹ Let a woman learn quietly with all submissiveness. ¹² **I do not permit a woman to teach or to exercise authority over a man**; rather, she is to remain quiet. ¹³ For Adam was formed first, then Eve; ¹⁴ and Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and became a transgressor.

Acts 18:24-26

²⁴ Now a Jew named Apollos, a native of Alexandria, came to Ephesus. He was an eloquent man, competent in the Scriptures. ²⁵ He had been instructed in the way of the Lord. And being fervent in spirit, he spoke and taught accurately the things concerning Jesus, though he knew only the baptism of John. ²⁶ He began to speak boldly in the synagogue, but when **Priscilla and Aquila** heard him, **they took him and explained to him the way of God more accurately.**

“Authoritative teaching”

1 Timothy 3:2

Therefore an overseer must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, sober-minded, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach,

1 Timothy 4:11

Command and teach these things.

2 Timothy 2:2

And what you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses entrust to faithful men who will be able to teach others also.

Acts 2:42

And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.

1 Corinthians 12:28-30

²⁸ And God has appointed in the church first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then miracles, then gifts of healing, helping, administrating, and various kinds of tongues. ²⁹ Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Do all work miracles? ³⁰ Do all possess gifts of healing? Do all speak with tongues? Do all interpret?

“Women should be silent in the churches”

1 Corinthians 14:33-35

³³ For God is not a God of confusion but of peace. As in all the churches of the saints, ³⁴ the **women should keep silent in the churches. For they are not permitted to speak, but should be in submission**, as the Law also says. ³⁵ If there is anything they desire to learn, let them ask their husbands at home. For it is shameful for a woman to speak in church.

1 Corinthians 11:4-5

⁴ Every man who prays or prophesies with his head covered dishonors his head, ⁵ but every wife who prays or prophesies with her head uncovered dishonors her head – it is the same as if her head were shaven.

(4) What are deacons?

Philippians 1:1

Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus, To all the saints in Christ Jesus who are at Philippi, with the **overseers and deacons**:

Comparing elders and deacons:

1 Timothy 3:1-7

¹The saying is trustworthy: If anyone aspires to the office of overseer, he desires a noble task. ² Therefore an overseer must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, sober-minded, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, ³ not a drunkard, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money. ⁴ He must manage his own household well, with all dignity keeping his children submissive, ⁵ for if someone does not know how to manage his own household, how will he care for God's church? ⁶ He must not be a recent convert, or he may become puffed up with conceit and fall into the condemnation of the devil. ⁷ Moreover, he must be well thought of by outsiders, so that he may not fall into disgrace, into a snare of the devil.

1 Timothy 3:8-13

⁸Deacons likewise must be dignified, not double-tongued, not addicted to much wine, not greedy for dishonest gain. ⁹They must hold the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience. ¹⁰And let them also be tested first; then let them serve as deacons if they prove themselves blameless. ¹¹ Their wives likewise must be dignified, not slanderers, but sober-minded, faithful in all things. ¹² Let deacons each be the husband of one wife, managing their children and their own households well. ¹³For those who serve well as deacons gain a good standing for themselves and also great confidence in the faith that is in Christ Jesus.

The First Deacons:

Acts 6:1-6

¹Now in these days when the disciples were increasing in number, a complaint by the Hellenists arose against the Hebrews because their widows were being neglected in the daily distribution. ²And the twelve summoned the full number of the disciples and said, "It is not right that we should give up preaching the word of God to serve tables. ³Therefore, brothers, pick out from among you seven men of good repute, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we will appoint to this duty. ⁴But we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word." ⁵And what they said pleased the whole gathering, and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit, and Philip, and Prochorus, and Nicanor, and Timon, and Parmenas, and Nicolaus, a proselyte of Antioch. ⁶These they set before the apostles, and they prayed and laid their hands on them.

(5) What about women deacons?

1 Timothy 3

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Romans 16:1-2

¹I commend to you **our sister Phoebe, a servant** of the church at Cenchreae, ²that you may welcome her in the Lord in a way worthy of the saints, and help her in whatever she may need from you, for she has been a patron of many and of myself as well.

N o t e s

(1) The biblical view of gender:

This is a huge topic; we can't do justice to it today. So today, just a very brief outline.

The Bible holds two positions on gender that our modern culture thinks is contradictory:

- (1) Men and women are equal in dignity and worth.
- (2) In the family, the husband is the head and the wife submits. Note this is a servant-headship, like Christ.

The world says, "different gender roles means different worth." But why does that have to be?

Look at the Trinity. There you have each of the persons of the Godhead are equally God, and yet there are different roles. The Son submits to the Father. That doesn't make the Son less glorious than the Father.

And so in the family, both the husband and wife play the role of Christ (re-enacts the gospel).

The husband acts as Christ the head of the church – serving his wife and sacrificing himself.

And the wife submits as Christ submits to the Father – subordinating her own desires to trust her husband.

(2) But do the gender roles of the family apply to the church? Yes.

Read the whole of 1 Timothy 3:1-7. This is a pivotal text in understanding who elders are. Notice most of the description Paul gives us is not about the duties of an elder, but his character qualities and spiritual maturity.

Verse 4 is key. The elder must manage his family well. Why? Because if he can't govern his small family, how can he be entrusted with a much larger family, which is the church. That's the logic.

The church and family are held in parallel. How do we know this?

Within the same chapter, Paul says the church is "the household of God" (v. 15).

Therefore, if the church is basically a family, then same gender roles apply in the church as it does in the family.

By the way, it is not all women submitting to all men. It is men and women submitting to the elders, and only to elders.

(3) Paul prohibits women from having the responsibilities of an elder

1 Timothy 2:12 is the key text that shows women cannot be elders. Now, how do we interpret this text?

Some interpret it very rigidly – any and all kinds of teaching of adult men is prohibited.

I think that's too restrictive because if you look at Acts 18, Priscilla teaches Apollos.

Notice also that Priscilla is named before Aquila, which shows that she was the more gifted teacher.

So then what kind of teaching is Paul prohibiting?

Notice Paul prohibits two things: teaching and exercising authority.

You could take those as two separate activities that are off-limits. But the better way to read it is as a couplet – meaning they are in parallel and are synonymous. So this is authoritative teaching that elders do.

There is ample evidence that this is the case. Paul uses the word teaching almost always as a kind of technical term to describe what the apostles and elders do. So for example:

1 Timothy 3:2 – notice one of the chief attributes of an elder is the ability to teach. Now this could be interpreted to mean the ability to stand in front of a class and be a teacher. I don't think so. This is the ability to make doctrinal determinations and guard the gospel and hand it down to the church.

1 Timothy 4:11 – Paul's instructions to Timothy, a pastor. Command and teach are, again, in parallel and synonymous. To teach is to have authority over the congregation. It's not optional for the congregation.

1 Corinthians 12:28-30 – Teaching is a special gift in the church.

“Women should be silent in the churches” (1 Corinthians 14:33-35)

This is not teaching that women can't talk in church. In chapter 11 of the same letter, Paul talks about women prophesying in the church. Obviously women can and do talk in the church.

So what is Paul talking about? Notice that in contrast to “speaking,” women should be in “submission.”

Speaking and submission are opposed. What is submission?

It is submitting to the authority of the elders – meaning women are not to speak authoritatively as elders.

This is the same meaning in 1 Timothy 2, where women are “to remain quiet.”

It should be repeated again that Paul is not calling on all the women of the church to submit to any man in church.

Submission is only given to the elders. And this applies to the men of the church too.

(4) What are deacons?

Elders and deacons comprise the two ordained offices we see in Scripture (Philippians 1:1).

Comparing elders and deacons (1 Timothy 3):

In our most comprehensive passage on elders and deacons, Paul mostly focuses on the character qualities – which are largely similar. But if you place the two paragraphs side-by-side, what are the major differences?

What aspects of being an elder are absent from being a deacon? (2 things)

(Notice in v. 8, the “likewise” includes much of the character traits that may happen to be absent from deacon list.)

The two main aspects missing in the deacon list is that deacons are not called to “manage” the church. Not that deacons shouldn’t manage their families well – they should be examples to the church – but that this isn’t an essential aspect of their responsibility. Only elders “manage” (or govern) the church.

Second, notice that deacons are not required to “teach.” Again, I don’t think “teaching” here is the ability to stand in front of a classroom, but to be able to explain/defend doctrine. Meaning, only elders have doctrinal authority.

Of course deacons should know the gospel – “hold the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience” – but they don’t make doctrinal determinations like elders.

The First Deacons (in the early church):

The passage that gives us a sense of what deacons are to do is Acts 6.

The word “deacon” isn’t explicitly used, but most agree this is first time deacons are introduced into the church. The reason for this is because the word deacon in Greek (*diaconos*) means “one who serves”.

That’s the exact same word at the end of verse 2, *diaconeo*, “to serve.”

This passage illuminates the role of deacons in the church. What happened is that there was so many ministry needs that the apostles/elders couldn’t do it all. So the church decided that the apostles/elders would focus on preaching and prayer, and the deacons would focus on the service ministry of the church, specifically mercy.

So this gives us a breakdown of duties in the church:

elders

prayer
teaching

deacons

service
mercy

(5) What about women deacons?

This is a controversial issue among Reformed churches. It's not settled and there's friendly dispute. My position is that women can be deacons for the following reasons:

- (1) Paul prohibits women from having doctrinal authority in the church. This only applies to elders, not deacons.
- (2) The passage in 1 Timothy 3:11 mentions the "wives" of deacons. This seems somewhat odd. Why mention the deacons' wives but not the elder's wives? Should only deacons have wives that are sober-minded, non-slanderers, etc? The key is to realize that in the Greek, the word for wives (*gunai*) can mean either "wives" and "women" – depending on the context.

So verse 11 could be talking about the wives of deacons *or* about women-deacons (deaconesses). It seems to me the more logical interpretation is "deaconesses" since there is no mention of the wives of elders.

- (3) The other bit of supporting evidence is Romans 16:1. It says, "Phoebe, a servant of the church at Cenchreae." In the Greek, it literally says, "Phoebe, a deacon of the church at Cenchreae." The word is *diaconos*. Now again, *diaconos* could mean a generic servant or it could mean the office of deacon – again depending on the context.

All these points by themselves are not sufficient. But together, I think they make a compelling case for women deacons.