

Women in Leadership Ministry

The Foursquare Church

Introduction

This document is intended to serve several purposes. It is, first of all, an explanation of why our family of churches believes women should serve in ministry and why they should be encouraged to rise to the highest levels of leadership. We make no attempt to write a lengthy theological defense of our position; there are already many books written on this subject. This booklet is certainly theological, but written with a simple style and with a positive tone, explaining why we believe it is both Biblical and practical to encourage every woman to fulfill the calling God has put in her heart—whatever that calling may be. The contents herein are intended to be relevant to a broad audience: the board of directors and cabinet of The Foursquare Church, Foursquare churches, ministers, members. Our goal is to provide a quality document that strengthens a concept that is unmistakably important to the life of our denomination.

Further, we hope this document will allow us to explain ourselves gracefully to the larger Body of Christ; and we also hope it will allow us to release some Foursquare pastors who, because of concern over certain Bible passages, have quietly opposed women leaders. In some areas of the church, a person's stance on this issue is seen as an indicator of whether or not that person holds a high view of the authority of the Bible: anyone who releases women to lead is thought by some to be disregarding Scripture. To answer this, we will address these controversial passages with a defense that tries to reveal the meaning in a straightforward way. We realize there is room for sincere disagreement on this topic, but we want it to be evident that our position is not a compromise or an accommodation to current trends. Rather, it is heart-felt obedience to what we believe the Bible commands.

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Part One: Position Statements

Introduction

The publication of a booklet on women in ministry leadership is the process of a few months; however, the framing of the conceptual basis for such a document is the result of years. Throughout its history, The Foursquare Church has addressed the subject with brief statements, including the following:

1988 Board of Director's Declaration

On April 12, 1988, the board of directors unanimously passed the following declaration:

The present and historical position of the Foursquare Church affirms the Biblical truth that women are called of God to roles of leadership and public ministry. We hereby reaffirm and encourage the ministry of women throughout the International Church of the Foursquare Gospel.

1998 Women in Ordained Ministry Leadership

The 1998 excursus for the Foursquare Church entitled “Women in Ordained Ministry Leadership” was foundational to this document. We thank the dedicated writers of that excursus for the work they did regarding the role of women in ordained ministry leadership.

2005, Our Statement and Our Spirit

The Great Commission, along with the need of the dying world in which we live, calls for all the people of God, His sons and daughters, to engage the harvest using whatever gifts He has entrusted to them. Since women are redeemed, anointed, gifted, called, and loved by God in exactly the same way as men, we categorically affirm that they should be fully released to exercise their gifts for every facet of ministry in His church.

Since its founding, the International Church of the Foursquare Gospel has affirmed the place of women in ordained ministry and leadership. The position of the Foursquare movement regarding ministry leadership has always been the following:

Anyone called by God and verified through character, spiritual experience and preparation for service or leadership, is qualified for Foursquare Church ministry in any role or office, regardless of gender, age, or ethnicity.

This understanding has afforded women positions in all capacities in the local church, on the mission field, and at all levels of government in the Foursquare corporate structure. The Foursquare Church has never presented this issue as an essential of the faith, but, at the same time, it is a distinctive of our movement's tradition—the atmosphere we have

chosen, after searching the Scriptures, for relating to one another. Foursquare's "Declaration of Faith" clearly notes a determination to exercise "in all things charity," and we are committed to avoiding any polarization that exists in the Church at large. The following discussion, though brief, is not intended to engage in debate with any who hold differing perspectives. We simply wish to indicate that a studied view of God's Word undergirds the position taken by the Foursquare Church to release women into ministry leadership, rather than restrict them from that role.

Part Two: A Biblical Basis for Women in Ministry

Introduction

The Foursquare Church is now, and has been since its founding, a movement submitted to the authority of Scripture. Our first article of faith unmistakably places the Bible as the foundation of all we believe, signifying clearly that we consider the Word of God to be the final authority in all matters of faith and practice. The issue of women in ministry leadership is not an exception to this value. We are proud of our history, and we deeply respect our founder, Aimee Semple McPherson; we are grateful that she invested her gifts and talents in establishing a denomination that would outlast her—something possible only because the foundation upon which The Foursquare Church was built was not Sister McPherson, but the inerrant Word of God. Our honoring of her example of godly ministry and our desire to perpetuate that example are based on a strong conviction that Sister McPherson's ministry was clearly consistent with Biblical truth. We believe that the Word of God requires us to include women as equal partners in ministry with men. Our position is a matter of obedience, not compromise.

Commentary on Relevant Bible Passages

Question 1: *Was the Old Covenant more generous than the New?*

To say that the culture of the ancient Near East was male-dominated would be an understatement. Although numerous women played very significant roles in Old Testament history, the truth is that only a few had positions that included providing spiritual leadership to men. Because of the cultural context out of which those examples come, passages that boldly acknowledge women leaders become all the more meaningful, especially when divine favor is shown toward their leadership. It is significant that the Biblical writers felt no shame in reporting that such women led them, nor did they hide the fact that those women leaders were empowered in their ministries by God's Spirit. No suggestion is made that these women were out of order or unauthentic in that which they ministered. In fact, the opposite is the case.

- a) Miriam was called “the prophetess” (Exod. 15:20) and was one of the three main leaders “sent before” Israel by God to lead the people out of Egypt (Mic. 6:4).
- b) Deborah, the wife of Lappidoth, sat as judge of Israel, keeping the land “undisturbed for forty years” (Judg. 4:4-5; 31). Her assistant, Barak, deferred to her primary leadership because he recognized her gifting and calling (Judg. 4:8). In the song written to commemorate the victory gained over their enemies, Deborah wrote of how the common people were afraid to travel in their own land “until I, Deborah arose, until I arose, a mother in Israel” (Judg. 5:7).
- c) When Hilkiah, the high priest, found the lost Book of the Law in 621 B.C., King Josiah chose to inquire of the Lord from the prophetess Huldah, wife of Shallum, who then advised both the high priest and the king in regard to their futures (2 Kings 22:14-20).
- d) Esther, who had become queen of the Persian Empire, saved the lives of her people through her bravery, and she also established the 13th and 14th of Nisan as a celebration of that deliverance. The Feast of Purim is observed to this day.
- e) Isaiah referred to his wife as “the prophetess,” showing full acceptance of her gift and calling (Isa. 8:3).

These passages lead us to explore some essential concepts. The Old Covenant is defined far more by rules and law than the New, yet it celebrates women leaders. It does not seem possible, then, to interpret New Testament passages in a way that restricts women’s leadership. There seems to be no explanation to satisfactorily support the assertion that the New Covenant requires women to be silent and offer no leadership in Christian gatherings when any man is present. It is, however, logical to expect the New Covenant to emancipate women and provide them entry to greater levels of ministry rather than to subordinate them further.

Question 2: *Did Paul disagree with Peter concerning Joel’s prophecy?*

Joel 2:28-31

According to Joel 2:28-31, one of the wonders accompanying the arrival of the “Day of the Lord” would be the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on God’s people. Although the event would include judgment upon the unrighteous, the righteous were to anticipate it joyfully, for it would bring great blessings. And there could be no greater blessing than the unlimited gift of God’s Spirit. This same theme is expressed by other prophets as well. Isaiah and Habakkuk pictured the earth immersed in God’s presence “as the waters cover the sea” (Isa. 11:9; Hab. 2:14). This comparison of the Spirit to liquid may be one reason that both John the Baptist and Jesus later described this outpouring of God’s Spirit as a “baptism with the Holy Spirit” (John 1:33; Acts 1:4, 5; 11:16). Something like an ocean of God’s presence would immerse believers, men and women alike, and transform them into Spirit-empowered ministers. Joel very specifically prophesied that the Spirit would be “poured out” on males and females, young and old, and he went on to say that, when the Spirit arrived in that dimension, He would enable people to operate in supernatural levels of ministry, including prophecy, prophetic dreams, and visions. This fits quite well with the theme that runs through much of the Bible—that it is God’s desire for His people to

become “a kingdom of priests” to fulfill offices that are authoritative by their very nature (Exod. 19:6; 1 Pet. 2:5,9; Rev. 1:6; 5:10). Joel said that God’s prophetic gifts would be given to both men and women, and prophetic gifts are normally meant to be spoken so others can hear and obey. The passage in Joel goes on to describe some of the cataclysmic turmoil that will immediately precede the return of Christ (Joel 2:30,31). Joel issued a warning to people who would be living in those tumultuous days, urging them to repent and “call on the name of the Lord,” assuring them that, if they do so, they “shall be saved” (v. 32). The implication is that people will call on the name of the Lord and be saved as a result of a spirit-empowered generation, including both genders, proclaiming God’s promise of salvation. According to Joel, both men and women will be anointed in the same way, with the same Spirit and the same enablement, giving both men and women the authority and the power to speak to that generation. Without pursuing the eschatology of this text any further, the point that is of particular application to our discussion is this: something remarkable will happen to God’s people before the return of Christ (v. 31). God’s people will be transformed by an endowment of the Spirit, and God will use them to extend His invitation to be saved to whoever will hear it. Afterward, the world will face the terrifying judgment of God (Joel 3:12-16). With this summary of these verses of Joel in mind, let us turn to Peter’s application of the same verses on the Day of Pentecost.

Acts 2:14-21

On the Day of Pentecost, about ten days after Jesus’ ascension into heaven, 120 believers gathered in Jerusalem for prayer in an upper room (Acts 1:13-15; 2:1). The group included women, one of whom was Jesus’ mother, Mary (Acts 1:14). Upon all of these the Holy Spirit fell suddenly and powerfully, coming in a way that first produced a loud sound and then appearing visibly as flames of fire over each person’s head. The symbolism of “tongues of fire” over their heads would have been meaningful to Jews who were well-versed in the Torah. That manifestation was a sign that the Spirit had chosen to abide in them, just as the pillar of cloud and fire had proclaimed His presence over the tabernacle in the wilderness (Exod. 40:34-38). The flames declared that those disciples had become living “tabernacles” in whom the Spirit dwelled. What happened next was even more remarkable. The believers began to extol the “mighty deeds of God” in foreign languages they had never learned. As they did so, a crowd of pilgrims from many different nations gathered to observe the phenomenon. Some, misunderstanding the spiritual event they were watching, mocked the disciples as being drunk. At that, Peter stood up to address the crowd of thousands. Without the slightest hesitation, he told them what they were seeing was not drunkenness, but the arrival of the moment promised by the prophet Joel. Peter then quoted the same verses we examined in the previous section. There is no mistaking the point he made: he was announcing that the “last days” season promised by Joel had arrived (v. 16). Its arrival was the reason men and women were prophesying in such miraculous fashion. Peter then went on to quote Joel 2:28-32 to prove his point and to warn the crowd that they were being given an opportunity to repent before facing the day of God’s judgment. As a result, approximately 3,000 souls responded to Peter’s call to repentance (Acts 2:41).

Application: If Peter was inspired by the Spirit to announce, "...This is what was spoken of through the prophet Joel..." (v.16), then it is clear that, at that moment, God was beginning a new season of His work on earth. As the chronicle of the Early Church unfolds throughout the Book of Acts, it is apparent that the apostles (including Paul) did not consider Pentecost a once-for-all event; they saw it as the beginning of a new spiritual potential for all believers (See Acts 2:39; 4:31; 8:14-17; 10:44-48; 11:15-18; 19:1-7.). The Holy Spirit's equipment for supernatural ministry was being given without discrimination to all God's people: male and female, young and old alike. Moreover, that availability and inclusiveness would continue until "the great and glorious Day of the Lord..." (v.20). The dilemma these passages pose for our discussion is this: If, as some assert, Paul absolutely forbade women to speak in a gathering of believers, he would have been rejecting Peter's announcement and stating that he believed the fulfillment of that portion of Joel had not yet arrived. This point needs to be made firmly because, if that were the case, we would be forced to decide whether we believe Peter or Paul is correct. If Paul forbade women to prophesy in a service, then he stood in direct opposition to Peter. And if Peter's announcement was correct, then Paul must not have been inspired when he commanded women to remain silent in a church service. Of course The Foursquare Church does not believe that there is a contradiction in the Holy Spirit's words through these two great apostles. Paul did not reject Peter's application of Joel, but fully agreed that the era of the Spirit which had begun meant that men and women, young and old, would be equally empowered for spiritual ministry. Paul's admonishments to women "to keep silent in the churches" (1 Cor. 14:34) and not to "teach or exercise authority over a man, but to remain quiet" (1 Tim. 2:12) were not a refusal to acknowledge a woman's spiritual potential; they were pastoral solutions to specific problems being faced by those to whom he wrote. In fact, the verse from 1 Timothy cannot be extracted from the surrounding verses and explicated outside of the greater context in which it occurs. Much of the content of the second and third chapters of 1 Timothy has to do with husband and wife relationships, and, because of that specific application, should not be generalized to address all male/female relationships. Paul wanted both men and women to avoid being conformed to the gender roles that had been shaped within a world system that was completely Godless. When we look more closely at those frequently cited passages later on, we will see that they were not universal commands forbidding women to exercise their spiritual gifts in public.

Question 3: *Did Paul allow women to minister in 1 Corinthians chapter 11 and then forbid them to minister in chapter 14?*

1 Corinthians 11:2-12

It seems that confusion rather than rebellion was the reason women had stopped covering their heads in the churches of Corinth. Paul's opening affirmation, "...I praise you because you...hold firmly to the traditions, just as I delivered them to you" (v.2), indicates that the churches had been trying to obey him in this matter. But it seems that they had failed in that attempt. Paul did not specifically say what caused the misunderstanding, but the women may have over-zealously applied the principle

that “in Christ” believers are set free from observing religious rituals (Gal. 3:24-4:7). While the “Law” had passed away, there were still social norms that should be respected and observed. By removing their traditional head covering, the women in Corinth made an unintentional but inappropriate social statement.

Verse 3: With the heart of a pastor, Paul asked those women to restrict some of their freedom, a theme he repeatedly applied in this letter to all believers (1 Cor. 9:19-23; 10:23-11:1). Then he listed several reasons for asking them to do this. The first reason, is the principle of “leadership.” The word “head” as it is used here is best explained by Paul himself in verses 7-12. Although the word can express several basic meanings, Paul seemed to use the word to refer to that which is the source of another’s existence; this concept includes the implication that one who comes forth from the “head” is intended to bring honor (glory) to the “head.” He illustrated this by using the examples of three persons who are the “head” of someone else: Christ, Adam, and God the Father. First, Paul identified Christ as the agent of creation for Adam in the Garden of Eden (Gen. 2:7; Col. 1:16; Heb. 1:2; John 1:10; 1 Cor. 8:6). The statement “Christ is the head of man” indicates that Adam came forth from the pre-incarnate Son and was, therefore, intended to bring honor to Him. The next reference is to the creation of the first woman, which occurred when God, through His pre-incarnate Son, took a rib out of the man and fashioned Eve. In that way, the man was the source of the woman. She was made as a partner to help him and to complete what was lacking in him (Gen. 2:20-25). Finally, this passage of Scripture points out that even Christ has a “head,” God the Father. The Father begot the Son and is His eternal source, and the Son honors the Father by faithfully carrying out His part of God’s plan. This last example, drawn from the Trinity, shows the proper attitude within which these relationships are to function. The relationship between the Father and Son is marked by love and mutual respect. The Son freely chooses to honor the Father, and the Father delights in honoring the Son (1 Cor. 15:28). It is Christ’s attitude that Paul asked the women to emulate in their relationships with their husbands by continuing to cover their heads with a shawl during worship services. The reason the shawl mattered will become clearer as we consider the next three verses.

Verses 4 and 5: The custom of Jewish men covering their heads with prayer shawls had apparently not yet begun in Paul’s day. A man’s uncovered head symbolized his acknowledgment of God as his source (v.7). A covered head would have been a disgraceful statement. This portion of the text indicates that some of the women had decided that, if men did not have to cover their heads during worship, then neither did they. Of course, theologically, they were right. But, in the culture of that day, removing their head covers was an inappropriate social statement. As a symbol of modesty, Jewish women of that time normally braided their hair and covered it with a shawl when in public or in worship (Edersheim 142). They covered their beauty to avoid attracting undue attention and as a public acknowledgment that they were married women. A woman untied her hair and let it hang freely only in the presence of her husband. In that setting her uncovered hair was a beautiful expression of marriage. But when the women of Corinth sat in church with their heads uncovered,

they pressed cultural sensitivities too far. They were engaging in behavior that labeled them as immodest and single. So Paul tried to explain that, though they were free from religious ritual, they still needed to consider the effect of their behavior on others. It is significant to our discussion to point out that this verse specifically alludes to women praying or prophesying in the formal gatherings of the church; the matter-of-fact tone gives no hint of disapproval. Paul's sole concern was the social statement made by their uncovered heads. This acknowledgment of women praying and prophesying in public services needs to be kept in mind as we consider the next passage.

1 Corinthians 14:33-35

Verse 33: In chapters 11-14, Paul communicated important truths regarding Christian worship gatherings. One such truth is that the Spirit sovereignly distributes His gifts to each believer. Another is that love should control how and when those gifts are expressed. Verse 33 includes another foundational principle: God's own personality is orderly and peaceful. Therefore, if God is really in charge of a meeting, the meeting will express His personality and will not degenerate into noisy confusion. Paul told the Corinthians that their loud tumultuous services were very different from the gatherings of believers in other cities. It seems unlikely that anyone at that time had been in more churches than Paul had, and he informed the Corinthians that they were the only ones behaving that way. If the disorderly services they conducted were truly under the Spirit's control, then it would have been logical to expect a similar disorder to exist in other churches that welcomed the Spirit's presence and work in their gatherings. Instead, the services in other cities were peaceful and well-ordered. The dignity of those churches stood as a testimony against the wildness in Corinth. The lack of order was not the unique working of the Spirit in Corinth; rather, it resulted because the church was immature and out of step with God and His people.

Verse 34: Paul wanted peace and order restored to the Corinthian services. Having just dealt with tongues and prophecy he addressed another aspect of their gatherings that was producing noisy disorder. It seems that women were engaging in some sort of disruptive questioning. We can speculate about the type of questions they posed and whether or not men and women were seated separately, but those matters really do not change the significance of this passage to our topic. If these verses were intended as a pastoral correction to noisy women, telling them to ask their questions at home, then Paul's admonition, "The women are to keep silent in the churches..." was not meant to be a censorship of women who were trying to minister properly in the services. Paul was not imposing a new law that prohibited women from making a sound in a service. The "law" referred to in verse 34 is not identified, but it is logical to infer that it is the same principle he pointed to in 11:3-16, which was the idea of women showing respect to men. If so, then the questions being asked may well have included antagonistic challenges toward some of the men. Significant to our discussion is that this passage was not meant to stop women from making constructive contributions such as praying or prophesying; it was written to restrain a pattern of disruptive dialogue that had emerged in the first-century church. At times

these verses have been taken out of context, and people ignore the fact that that Paul had already acknowledged the possibility of women praying and prophesying. These verses are then used as evidence to prove that women are forbidden to participate in the spoken gifts during a meeting.

Question 4: *To what extent do gender roles disappear for those who are joined to Christ?*

Galatians 3:21-4:7

Paul was dismayed that certain churches he had planted in Galatia were being drawn away from the central tenet of the gospel, which is that the gift of Christ's righteousness is received on the basis repentance and faith alone. He taught that believers must abandon all hope of earning their way to heaven by either performing good deeds or religious rituals. The context of this letter indicates that self-appointed teachers had gone to Galatia after Paul left, telling the churches that Paul had misled them. In particular those "teachers" claimed that Christians still needed to observe certain practices of Judaism, circumcision being foremost. They said that faith in Christ must be supplemented with obedience to certain commandments from Old Testament Law. Paul wrote to the Galatians to correct that deception. In the middle of his theological explanation about the relationship of the Law to salvation, he made a startling remark about women. He stated that women and men were one in Christ and, as such, heirs of the same promise (v.28).

Verse 25: When a person is saved through faith in Christ, the role of the Law as a teacher in regard to salvation is finished. The teacher then hands us over to our Heavenly Father.

Verse 26: Faith in Christ brings us into an entirely new relationship with God. He becomes our Father, not in a metaphorical sense, but in a literal sense. By being joined spiritually to His only begotten Son, we become adopted sons; this position of "sonship" applies to both men and women. "In Christ" women stand before God (along with men) as "sons" (vv. 26; 4:6, 7). This term is not intended to disparage the position of a daughter but to emphasize the point that women are not ascribed a lesser status than men. Women are "sons" in this case because they are joined to the Son. They stand on exactly the same level as men, they inherit exactly the same promises, and they can have exactly the same types of ministry.

Verse 27: Water baptism illustrates how completely we have been placed into Christ. Just as we are plunged into water, we are immersed into Christ. There is a mystery here, but the concept of being "in Christ" is affirmed so often in the New Testament that the spiritual reality it points to is surely meant to be taken literally (See John 17; Rom. 6; Eph. 1.). Paul could accurately say, "...You... have clothed yourselves with Christ."

Verse 28: So that there would be no mistaking to whom Paul referred when he used the plural pronoun "you," he listed specific categories of people. This indicates that

inclusion in Christ supersedes all other human categories. Being a Jew or a Gentile makes no difference in a person's standing before God. Coming from a high or low position in society makes no difference. Following those remarkable statements, Paul made a further declaration that applies directly to our discussion concerning women in ministry leadership: "...There is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus." Gender distinctions do not limit a person's spiritual capacity. Joined to Christ, all inherit everything He has inherited (See Rom. 8:32; 1 Cor. 3:21-23.). All are clothed with His righteousness, and all are equipped with His authority.

Question 5: *Are women subordinated to men because of Adam and Eve?*

1 Timothy 2:9-15

Paul wrote this letter to give Timothy guidelines for pastoring the Ephesian church. Although Paul was not the first Christian to evangelize that major regional city, his was the foundational ministry that produced the explosive growth that made it a leading church in Asia Minor (Acts 18:18-21; 19:1-41). Departing from his pattern of evangelizing other cities, Paul remained in Ephesus and pastored the congregation for three years (Acts 20:17-38). He knew that after he departed those who opposed him would grow more outspoken (Acts 20:29, 30), so he appointed Timothy to pastor in his place until mature elders could be raised up. And controversy did arise just as Paul predicted. Self-appointed teachers tried to impose aspects of Old Testament Law onto the gospel. A picture of those false teachers emerges in Paul's letters to Timothy. They were theologically ignorant (1 Tim. 1:6,7), they aggressively opposed essential elements of Paul's gospel (1 Tim. 1:3,4; 4:1; 6:20,21), and they exploited their role as teachers for financial gain (1 Tim. 6:5-10). The false teachers found that some of the women in the church were a very responsive audience (1 Tim. 4:7; 2 Tim. 3:6-9). In such an environment, church services must have had tense moments of conflict that required Timothy to correct and teach with great boldness. To help him do that, Paul reminded him of the prophecies that had been spoken over him (1 Tim. 1:18; 4:14; 2 Tim. 1:6,7). In the strongest of terms, Paul exhorted Timothy to preach the truth (2 Tim. 1:7; 4:1-5) and not be self-conscious about his relatively young age (1 Tim. 4:12). When it was necessary for him to rebuke an older man or woman, he was to deliver the rebuke, but he was to be sure that he did so in a respectful tone of voice (1 Tim. 5:1,2).

1 Timothy 2:1-10

In this passage, Paul issued a series of instructions to help Timothy counter some of the problems he faced. First, Paul addressed the church's corporate prayer life, which was lagging, probably because of the internal strife (2:1-8). Anger had diminished their unity. Next Paul addressed the immodest clothing and ornate hairstyles of some of the women whose behavior, whether naïve or deliberate, brought strife to the church (2:9,10). Some dressed in revealing clothing, and others wore expensive gowns and jewelry; those behaviors produced envy in other women. As their apostle, Paul commanded the women of the church to dress modestly and to avoid public

displays of wealth (Rienecker and Rogers 620). He told them that the notice a Christian woman receives should not be the result of lust or envy that draws the eye, but rather the light of Christ's love shining through her as she carries out her God-given ministry. That Christ-like beauty is the "clothing" that belongs to every woman who professes reverence toward God.

1 Timothy 2:11-14

These verses have been the subject of much debate in Christian circles. Some have used them to prevent women from teaching in public gatherings. Others have reacted angrily against what the verses appear to say, accusing Paul of uninspired bigotry toward women. However, considering their historical context, these verses were probably written to silence certain women who had become aggressive proponents of legalism and to warn them of the danger they faced in rejecting Paul's gospel. It has already been clearly established that Paul did not forbid women to speak authoritatively in church. He acknowledged in his first letter to the church in Corinth that he expected women to pray and prophesy (1 Cor. 11:5,13). It would be extremely odd for him to say one thing to the church in Corinth and another to the church in Ephesus. And, of course, Paul did not contradict himself with such inconsistencies. We must let the context of this passage reveal the meaning.

As was mentioned earlier, false teachers were trying to control what was being taught in the church. They, along with some of their disciples, were defying Timothy (See 1 Tim. 1:3-7; 18-20; 2:8; 4:1-5, 7; 5:1,2; 6:3-5, 20, 21.). Judging from the force of Paul's statements, some of Timothy's greatest opposition was from women. In the liberated atmosphere of the Early Church, they apparently challenged the young pastor's authority and rejected the doctrine Paul had taught him. The culture of that day denied education to women, especially theological education, and this kept women vulnerable to deception (Spencer 84-86, 91, 94). Timothy was to be bold and insist that the women learn from him. Week by week as he taught the Word (1 Tim. 4:13, 16; 2 Tim. 4:2), they would gain the theological training they lacked. If they would "quietly receive instruction," in time there would be women teaching in Ephesus (Spencer 95).

Verse 11: This verse has traditionally been translated, "Let a woman learn in silence..." (KJV), a translation that leaves the impression that a woman is not permitted to teach in a church service when men are present. But the word some translate as "silence" does not mean the absence of sound. Several other Greek words do mean the absence of sound or the muzzling of the voice, but Paul chose to use none of them in this passage. The term he used, *hesuchia*, has to do more with a person's attitude than speech. It refers to people calming down and no longer arguing. The word in one form or another is used in the following passages: Luke 14:4; 23:56; Acts 11:18; 21:14; 22:2; 1 Thessalonians 4:11; 2 Thessalonians 3:12; 1 Timothy 2:11, 12; and 1 Peter 3:4. These verses indicate that Paul actually told the Ephesian women to stop being contentious. He asked them not to join the public arguments that were going on, but to remain quiet. The final phrase in this verse, "...in all subjection"

pictures someone maintaining the attitude of a “student” rather than becoming a “teacher.” This all makes sense if we recall that Paul’s purpose was to mediate a difficult situation, not define women’s ministry potential for all other situations.

Verse 12: Paul said, “...I do not permit a woman to teach or exercise [a self-taken] authority over a man, but to be in silence [*hesuchia*].” In the flow of the sentence, the words “teach” and “exercise authority” seem to define one action rather than two. In other words, Paul was not talking about teaching and authority, but teaching in a manner that uses a particular kind of authority. The kind of authority to which he referred is explained by the uncommon Greek word he chose, *authentain*. The common word for “authority” is *exousia*, and Paul used this word twelve times elsewhere in his letters. The word *authentain* is based on the personal pronoun for “self” and is used to describe those who exercise an authority that no one has given to them. Paul’s goal was to keep those women from using a self-taken authority when addressing Timothy or Paul himself (1 Tim. 3:1,2; 5:17). The women were to be humble and learn from them. Naturally, Paul would not have wanted a man to teach with autocratic authority either, but that is not the situation he addressed in this passage.

Verses 13, 14: In verses 11 and 12, Paul told the Ephesian women to learn from Timothy peacefully. Of course, the implied message for Timothy was “Do not back down when strong personalities confront you.” In this passage, Paul wanted to show those who are being contentious that they had been deceived. The warning he issued was based on the example of Adam and Eve because there was a striking similarity between the situation in Ephesus and the Garden of Eden. Adam was created first and had lived in Eden prior to Eve. During that time, he personally heard God speak to him forbidding him to eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil (Gen. 2:16, 17). He had a firsthand revelation from God Himself. However, Genesis does not record a similar incident involving Eve. It is certainly possible that the topic of the forbidden fruit came up in conversation as the two humans walked together with the Lord “in the cool of the day” (Gen. 3:8), but it is also possible that Eve received her knowledge of this command from Adam rather than directly from God. This seems to be most consistent with the Biblical text. It is this second understanding that turns these two verses in Timothy into a powerful warning to the Ephesian women without disparaging them as the gender more vulnerable to deception (“but the woman being deceived,” v.14). In fact, a universally applicable principle emerges in these verses, and it fit the crisis in Ephesus perfectly. If Eve received the command from Adam, then an additional level of trust would have been required of her, beyond what was required of Adam. When tempted, she had to decide if she would obey the command, but she also had to determine whether or not Adam’s information was accurate. The serpent’s temptation may have caused her to doubt that Adam had understood what he heard (Gen. 3:4-6). In a similar way, the Ephesian women had to choose whether or not to trust Paul’s report of the gospel, which he claimed to have received directly from Christ. He said the gospel he preached was not something he had invented or something he had been taught by another teacher. He had received it by revelation (Gal. 1:11,12). Just as God first spoke to Adam, who then spoke to Eve, so God had

also first spoken to Paul. Because Eve rejected Adam's report, she fell into deception and, ultimately, death. If the Ephesian women rejected Paul's report of the gospel, they would make the same mistake Eve had made. She doubted Adam; they doubted Paul. Paul had appointed Timothy as his representative and had taught him the gospel. By listening to the voices of the false teachers, the Ephesian women were being deceived by the serpent just as Eve had been. They needed to stop trying to correct Timothy and trust that he was accurately presenting the gospel that leads to salvation. They needed to "receive instruction with all submissiveness" so that they could gain a solid theological foundation. Then they could rise to the levels of ministry leadership to which God had called them. We should be careful to note that Adam and Paul were not simply representatives of men in general. They were humans selected by God to receive special revelation. Paul was not just another teacher; he was a true apostle. The analogy would not apply otherwise.

Conclusion

It may seem odd that a discussion about women in ministry leadership would devote so much attention to the question of whether or not women are allowed to speak in a church service. Yet an examination of these passages is necessary because most of them have been used to prevent women from taking leadership roles. If women can not even speak in a service, any discussion about their authority to lead is ended. We in The Foursquare Church, a Biblically based movement, are addressing these passages once again to demonstrate that they are applied improperly when they are offered as proof that women should not lead. We are fully convinced that gender does not determine the ministry capacity people can receive from God. Therefore, we rejoice when women as well as men move forward to lay hold of their full inheritance in Christ.

*The booklet Women in Leadership Ministry can be purchased from
Foursquare Media at www.foursquare.org.*