

A photograph of a man and a woman sitting on a lawn. The man, on the left, is wearing a grey suit jacket and blue jeans, and is holding an open book. The woman, on the right, is wearing a white hijab, a pink long-sleeved top, and dark pants. They are both looking at the book. The background is a soft-focus lawn.

heirs together

OF GOD'S GRACIOUS GIFT OF LIFE

Christian Men and Women
Serving Together in God's World



PART TWO

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Lesson 7: Servant Head and Servant Helper Living the One Flesh Partnership of Marriage

What a picture Scripture paints for us! Christ is the Bridegroom. All believers, his holy Christian Church, are his bride. At Baptism, Christ's righteousness is the beautiful wedding gown with which the one baptized is clothed so that the bridegroom can truly delight in his bride. Every stain, wrinkle, and blemish of sin is gone. Heaven is an eternal wedding banquet in which bride and Bridegroom will delight in each other forever in the Father's presence.

These and similar "marriage" pictures are frequent analogies throughout Scripture. First and foremost these pictures give us a fuller understanding of the awesome depth of our God's saving love for us and the joys he has planned for us in heaven. But these pictures also tell us something else: The marriage relationship is a good gift of God. Scripture has much to say about how unique callings and equal status will express themselves when God joins a man and a woman in marriage.

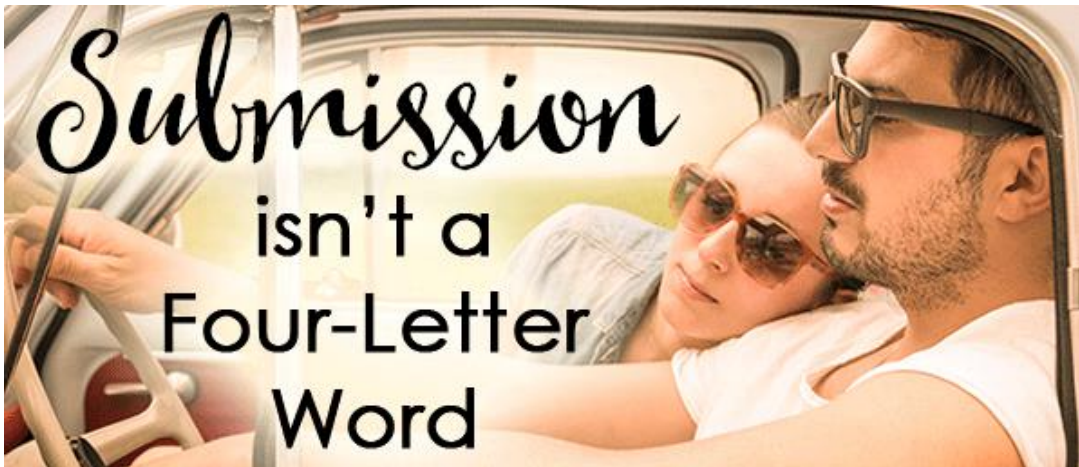
Serving Love Like That Between Christ and His Church and the Church and Christ...

Today many families struggle to stay together and understand love as carried out in their callings. Marriages are developing without a healthy model to follow or a compass to guide their relationships. The messages of society only confuse the real heart of the relationship. The heart of this lesson will not make sense to either husbands or wives unless the Spirit has worked faith in Jesus Christ in their hearts. Everything Paul says in Ephesians chapter 5 flows from knowing that we have been given the glorious status of loved and redeemed children of God in Christ.

Notice that, as Paul begins the second half of Ephesians (**4:1**), he prefaces everything he says by urging us to live lives worthy of the gracious call to faith we have received in Christ. As chapter 5 begins, he urges us as dearly loved children to imitate our Father's love by loving one another (**5:1-2**). As we come to the last half of chapter 5, Paul urges us not to be drunk on wine but rather through the means of grace to be filled, and to fill one another, with the Spirit of grace (**5:18**). Paul then traces four ways to give evidence that we are filled with that Spirit of grace. Our section, **5:21-33**, is part of that fourth way (**5:21-6:9**) we give evidence that the Spirit's gracious power is at work in our lives. The fourth way is for those who find themselves under the headship of others to serve under that headship as if they were serving

Christ himself. At the same time, Paul urges those in positions of headship to remember that their position is not a perk or privilege for their own benefit. Rather, their position is one of privileged responsibility. To be Christian heads is to be little Christs caring for those entrusted to them.

Read Ephesians 5:21-33. As Paul asks Christian wives to submit to their husbands, Paul has not forgotten that wives and husbands share an equal status as children of God. However, he is reminding us that husbands and wives have unique callings within marriage. On the basis of what we have studied from Scripture in our lessons so far, take 3 minutes to individually write below a definition of *submission*.



Use "Submission in God's World" (the article below) to evaluate and modify the definition of *submission* you just wrote. Note any places in the article you have questions.

Submission in God's World

Especially for those who live in "democratic" societies, submission easily sounds archaic and possibly even repulsive. Encouraged by a culture that fiercely guards all its real and perceived personal "rights," we instinctively import weakness and inferiority into the picture of submission.

We quickly forget that, as much as we may value our independence (“me” thinking), it is **interdependence** (“us” thinking) that God has woven into the fabric of his world. **For those called to submit, as well as for those in positions of headship**, our quest for independence easily deteriorates into the same idolatrous retreat from God’s design for life that we saw in the Garden of Eden. We turn Jesus’ words in the Garden of Gethsemane upside down as we say to God (and those he puts around us): “Not **your** will but **mine** be done!”

But remember, whenever God calls us to submit to another human being, he has not forgotten that he has given us all an equal status as loved children and heirs in Jesus (**Galatians 3:26-29**). Our heavenly Father is not setting up a system by which he “plays favorites” in his family. Rather, in his grand design of interdependence among his creatures, he gives us direction for living out that interdependence for the blessing of everyone in any particular relationship (home, church, work, etc.).

Those who know they possess the full eternal rights of God’s children have the desire and strength to trust him when he calls them to loosen their grip on their “rights” in order to serve each other. Viewed in such a light, submission is neither weakness nor inferiority. Submission is an act of gracious strength flowing from those who know themselves to be valued children of God. Such submission to the will of our gracious heavenly Father is included in his call **both to head and helper! His calling to both head and helper is a calling to willing and humble service to God and others just as Christ served us (Matthew 20:28).**

So then, how would Scripture define *submission* from human helper to human head? Wherever a particular calling in life places us under the headship of another human being, submission is, at its heart, recognizing that head as our Savior’s gift to us. Submission is recognizing that the Savior has granted a bit of his authority to that head so that through that head’s loving leadership the Savior might give some of his loving guidance, protection, and care to those under that head. Submission also recognizes that the purpose of that relationship will blossom as both head and helper use their God-given gifts in partnership according to God’s design.

Here is a one-sentence definition: ***Submission is honoring the leadership of a God-given head with whom we work in partnership as we use our God-given abilities to accomplish the God-given purpose of that relationship.***

Why it is no burden for the Church to submit to Christ? How does that help a Christian wife grasp the benefit in submitting to her husband?

No husband will be a perfect reflection of Christ. That's why it is so important for Christian wives to notice in **verse 22** that submission is given "as to the Lord." This is especially important if the husband is a far cry from the self-sacrificing leadership of Christ our Head. How vital then for the Christian wife to "look beyond" that poor example and see that the submission given to her husband is a gift she is presenting to the Lord who loves her. She is more than anything acknowledging her Head (Christ) as she acknowledges her head (her husband). There is also much here for Christian husbands to ponder as they consider their loving service as heads for the benefit of their wives. Their calling to love is not cancelled by their wives' imperfections, either. Dealing with abuse is another topic not specifically addressed here.

As we turn to Paul's words addressed to husbands, just notice how much longer this section is compared to the section addressed to wives. Might this be another reminder that headship is not perk and privilege, but greater responsibility to God for the entire family?

Describe what it would mean for Christian husbands to model their love for their wives after Christ's love for the church.

Some maintain that Paul is appealing to selfishness in the point he makes in **verse 28** ("He who loves his wife loves himself"). This is not an appeal to selfishness. It is a reminder of the God-given essence of marriage. How do **verses 29-31** show that to be true?

It is vital to note that **verses 22-24** are addressed **to wives**. They are **not** a demand husbands are to make of their wives. In the same way, **verses 25-32** are addressed to **husbands**. They are **not** a demand wives are to make of their husbands. What is the importance of noting that distinction?

The Greek verb Paul uses just a few verses later for children “obeying” father and mother is a “stronger” verb in Greek than the verb translated as “submitting” in our section. Why would a Christian husband be wise to ponder that difference?

What is the primary focus of the headship of the home?

Discuss the challenge that the call to submission presents to the Christian wife married to an unbelieving husband. In what ways can her submission still bring God’s blessing to her and to her husband? (See **1 Peter 3:1-6** for the blessing the husband may receive.)

Explain how the Christian husband in his calling as head is in a unique position to help make his wife’s calling as helper the joy God designed it to be.

...in a Glorious Partnership that Makes the Most of all Wisdom, Gifts, and Talents of Both Husband and Wife

We often create preconceived pictures of what it means to be a husband or wife based on the families in which we were raised or the television sitcoms we viewed. Let's keep in mind as we look at Scripture's definition of servant-head and servant-helper that the way we've been conceptualizing the words may not be what God was trying to tell us. Exactly how that will work itself out in day-to-day living will be as unique as the packages of wisdom, gifts, and talents God distributes to each husband and wife and the cultural settings in which they live. God has permitted great freedom to every married couple as to how they will live out their partnership.

Read Genesis 3:16-19. God has not dictated exactly how head and helper will carry out their task in every marriage. In a bit of reverse engineering, draw some general conclusions about how the specific consequences for Adam and Eve after the fall may reveal their primary strengths or responsibilities.

Although we often think of the wife's concern for maintaining the vital relationships in the household, what do Paul's words in **Ephesians 6:4** address, "Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord"?



There is no better balance "in the other direction" (the wife's role in providing support for the family) than a thoughtful reading of Proverbs chapter 31. It is to that fascinating and enlightening chapter of Scripture to which we now turn our attention.

Read Proverbs 31:10-31. As we read these verses, we need to realize that Scripture isn't setting up this woman as the model of precise activities to which every other believing woman must now conform. (Ladies, do you know where your distaff is?) This isn't a "to-do" list that every Christian wife must precisely copy. Ruth is also called a woman of "noble character," yet she does not do precisely the same things as this wife of "noble character." Proverbs 31 is a wonderful window into the many ways this partnership is carried out by the helper and the high respect from her husband of her character, gifts, and abilities.

Identify the key characteristic of this woman of "noble character" that is the foundation of everything she does.

Make a list of all the wisdom, talents, and abilities displayed by this wife of honorable character who is called "blessed" by her children and who is praised by her husband.

How may this portion of Proverbs 31 challenge some of our assumptions about how husband and wife will partner in caring for their family?

Show how this challenges the world's accusation that to follow a biblical pattern for marriage (with the principle of head and helper) reduces the wife to nothing but the husband's doormat. (Of course, remember, the unbelieving world won't truly "get it" apart from the cross of Christ!)

Look at the list of 12 “tasks” in the chart. Each task is a part of married life and functioning as a family. Behind each “task” place an “**h**” if it can be established clearly from Scripture that this is part of the husband’s calling. Place a “**w**” behind a task if it can be established clearly from Scripture that this is part of the wife’s calling. If Scripture indicates a general tendency that a task might belong to the husband or wife, place a “**?**” behind your “h” or “w” to “qualify” your answer. Place an “**e**” behind the task if Scripture does not assign this “task” to either husband or wife. This would mean that a husband and wife would be free to organize this part of their life together by the wisdom, talents, and abilities God has given to either or both partners in the marriage.

Fill this chart out individually in the next 5 minutes and be ready to explain your answers.

Task	One Responsible
Household Cleaning	
Discipline of Children	
Managing Finances	
Meal Preparation	
Social Calendar	
Family Relationships	
Taking Out Trash	
Lawn & Garden	
Initiating Sex	
Providing Income	
Spiritual Care	
Physical Care	

Why do many tend to want more “hard and fast rules” for the distribution of tasks between husband and wife in married life? What do we tend to consider as **the** “hard and fast rules” for how all marriages are supposed to operate? How does our upbringing influence these rules?

God’s plan for marriage is a simple principle—“head” and “helper”—lived out in great freedom in the details of everyday life. Why is this infinitely better than a detailed rule book?

As male and female who are heirs together of God’s gracious gift of life, what truths do we want to treasure in our hearts from this seventh lesson of our study?

List at least two ways your words and/or actions will be affected by what we have learned today.

As we close our lesson, for what does this lead us to pray?



For Further Study

Ephesians 5:21 - The Christian's Mutual Service and Submission to a God-given Head

Before we discuss the rest of this section, it is worthwhile to note that verse 21 has been understood in two different ways. Some have understood Paul to be speaking a general encouragement to all Christians for a "mutual submission" that all Christians give to one another.

It is certainly true that **mutual service** is clearly and repeatedly encouraged in the New Testament. It is patterned after the humble service of Christ as he lived and died to redeem us (see Philippians 2). All Christians are called to imitate Christ in such humble service to all those God puts around us. In such **mutual service** questions of head and helper, submission and authority are not the issue. The issue is seeing someone in need of our help and kindness, our compassion and love, and providing what is needed.

However, the context suggests Paul **isn't** speaking in verse 21 about that mutual service which all Christians show to one another. Rather, Paul is speaking of the kind of submission that Christians are to show in all the places where God has given someone to be their head.

This verse is a transition between two sections of Paul's letter. It points back as it gives us another way to show that we are filled with the Spirit. It points ahead as Paul begins a long section on submission to various "heads" in various places (**5:21– 6:9**).

Evidence that Paul is speaking about **submission to a God-given head** is found in the verb Paul uses in verse 21. The verb "to submit" is used 38 times in the New Testament. When used about Christians, it is always used in the New Testament for situations where someone is to recognize another as a God-given head. For example, in both Romans chapter 13 and 1 Peter chapter 2, the verb "to submit" is used to urge Christians to acknowledge the authority God has given to government. Nowhere in the New Testament is the verb ("to submit") or the noun that comes from it ("submission") used to speak about the mutual service Christians are called to give to one another. Scripture has other terms and phrases it uses for such mutual service.

There is one more indication in the context that Paul is speaking in verse 21 about various kinds of submission **to a God-given head**. Although the NIV translates as if the verb of verse 21 is repeated in verse 22, the Greek actually has no verb in verse 22. The verb from verse 21 serves both verses. If verse 21 were talking about a different type of submission (mutual service, or submission **without** authority) than what is spoken of in verse 22 (submission **with**

authority), this would be an abrupt shift of meaning between verses 21 and 22. We would have a rare meaning for a verb, followed by its usual meaning, without even a restatement of the verb. However, if Paul is using the verb in the same way in both verses, it is not unusual for him to allow the reader to “supply” that verb from the context.

Literally translated, verses 21-22 would sound like this: “Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ—wives to your husbands as to the Lord.” To add some parenthetical thoughts from context, it would read: “Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ [wherever God has given you someone who serves as a head...for example]—wives to your husbands as to the Lord.”

God’s Own Limitation to Submitting “in Everything”

Scripture points very clearly to the exception where a wife will not be able to submit to her husband “in everything.” No head has the right to force or compel someone under his headship to sin or to insist that she permit sin to continue.

It is idolatry to place the will of anyone else above God’s will (**Matthew 10:37**). That cannot be submission “in the Lord” because it would tolerate what the Lord himself calls evil. In such situations, the head is acting against the divine authority that entrusted that position to him. When those who are heads make such demands, a wife has the same right to say what the apostles once said to their governmental heads in the Sanhedrin: “We must obey God rather than men” (**Acts 5:29**).

This sad corrective is needed to inform the conscience of those who are the victims of abuse. A God-fearing Christian wife, who honors her Lord’s Word, may wrongly conclude, for example, that she must continue to suffer violence against her and/or her children because her husband is her God-given head. At such times the Fifth Commandment applies for herself (and her children). She must act to protect her and her children’s bodily welfare.

One of the consequences of the fall is that a women’s desire for her husband’s support and approval can become so intense that she will even accept abuse from her husband. That is one example of what the Lord was speaking about in **Genesis 3:16** (“Your desire will be for your husband”). No “helper” is duty-bound to stand by quietly while her husband’s persisting in sin harms his family physically and/or spiritually. To submit to that would turn marriage into idolatry!

It is instructive to take note of God-fearing wives in Scripture like Jael (Judges 4 - her husband aided the enemies of God's people) and Abigail (1 Samuel 25 - her husband refused to help David as God's anointed). These two believing wives overruled the sinful foolishness of their husbands. On the other side, think of the sad example of Sapphira (Acts 5), who knowingly assisted her head in a foolish attempt to deceive the Lord and his church. Enabling someone to continue in sin is not God's definition of "suitable helper."

Everyone Was Busy at Home!

When Paul says that "older women" should teach the "younger women...to be busy at home" (**Titus 2:3-5**), some feel that they have found the biblical warrant they have been looking for to insist that the woman's place is "in the home."

But that would be a simplistic misreading of Scripture! We would be reading back into Scripture our cultural ideas that "busy at home" means childcare and housework while being "busy outside the home" means the task of earning a living for the family.

We do well to remember that in biblical times, being busy around the home was not only taking care of "childcare and housework." In a more agricultural society, being busy at home meant, for **both** men and women, providing the income and resources the family needed. With most people being "employed" in the fields and/or individual skilled "trades," the home was the place where all these activities took place. Being "busy at home" was what typically **both** father and mother were doing in order to provide and care for their families.

First Timothy chapter 5 helps us understand that, when Paul speaks about being "busy at home," he is speaking primarily to head off the temptation to be busybodies in the homes of others. To read into Paul's words a strict division of duties for husbands ("Mr. Outside") and wives ("Mrs. Inside") is to say much more than Paul is saying.

All this is said to make sure we don't "box in" either the husband and wife beyond anything Scripture has to say. At the same time, however, this is not to downplay the vital importance of "homemaking" and "childcare." What love and security children enjoy when mom and dad are both concerned that they grow up in a well "made" home!

Complementary Distortions

We mentioned earlier that God typically gives to the husband a *primary inclination* to be concerned about providing for the family and to the wife a *primary inclination* to be concerned about the relationships of the family. These complementary inclinations of husbands and wives are good gifts of God. However, Satan is often at work to distort this in the minds of both husbands and wives.

It is true that God typically gives husbands an inclination and gifts to be the primary “bread winner” for the family while the wife will typically have a stronger inclination and gifts in the nurturing of children. Because of that general tendency, that means the places where Satan will tempt each spouse will often be polar opposites of each other.

For the husband, the temptation can be very great to “lose” himself in providing for the family until the family fades into the background and all that matters is success at work. This is really “idolatry of the workplace.” At the same time, he can also become so focused on the need to provide more income for the family that he may begin to look down on his wife for not having a “real job” as she cares for home and children. This can happen even though they may have begun this arrangement as a joint decision. Instead of appreciating his wife’s vital gifts of being a nurturer and caregiver, he may resent that she doesn’t have the exact same intense “drive to provide” that he does!

The temptation is the opposite for the wife. She can become so focused on the needs of home and children that she refuses to see any need to assist with providing for the financial needs of the home. With her focus on the home, she may resent the time her husband spends on the job as she is “left alone” to care for home and children. Instead of appreciating her husband’s God-given gifts to provide for the family, she may resent that he doesn’t have the exact same “need to nurture” that she does.

You may already have recognized the twin dangers of envy and arrogance at work, just in a different disguise. The answer is to remember that God created head and helper not as duplicates of each other, but as beautiful complements. Our different gifts and inclinations are not a problem, but the very design of our Creator! Here again we have reason enough to return to the cross for the forgiveness we need in common and our Savior delivers to us equally. Forgiven at his cross and empty tomb, we find again the strength to see our differences not as curses, but as blessings!

Here it might also be wise to note that there may be some couples for whom the inclinations and skills are reversed. The husband’s skills may be in the care and nurturing of children, and

the wife's skills may be in earning income for the family. While "house husbands" may never be the "typical" division of tasks, wise heads and helpers are more concerned about making the most of their complementary gifts rather than conforming to a preconceived mold that fails to recognize unique gifts.

Holy and Wholly Single

Jesus indicates in **Matthew 19:11ff** that being single is a gift God gives to some in this life. For those so gifted by God, the calling to single life is as holy of a calling as marriage is to those to whom God gives that gift. The apostle Paul was among those to whom God has given this gift (**1 Corinthians 7:7**). And because those who are single are no longer living alone in the Garden of Eden, they benefit in many ways also from the interdependent giving and receiving of God-given wisdom, gifts, and talents with their fellow Christians.

In other words, not only is the single estate just as holy in God's sight, but those living in it can be just as "whole" as those who are married. A church family is wise if it fosters rich opportunities for interdependent Christian relationships not only for those who are "married with children" in their midst, but also for those who are single.

God has clearly reserved the full expression of sexual intimacy for marriage. In an immoral world, marriage serves an additional purpose of being a buffer against temptations to sexual immorality. Yet, since God equips where he calls, he will also equip by his grace those he calls to single life with the spiritual strength to resist temptations to abuse God's gift of sexuality.

The growing number of singles among us raises two more challenges. First, we need to be careful that we do not ignore the gifts and talents of the single members of the congregation, both male and female. Second, we need to make sure that we include them as a vital part of the family of faith. Just as much as those who are married, God has gifted the singles of our church families for service to their fellow Christians.



Lesson 8: Heirs Together Rejoicing as God Uses the Gifts of Women to Advance the Gospel

Paul's co-workers included Mark, Luke, & Timothy, AND Euodia, Syntyche, & Priscilla. The greatest spiritual influences on Timothy are Paul AND Louis & Eunice. Servants of the Church whom Paul used to deliver one of his inspired letters to a particular congregation include Tychicus AND Phoebe.

From the privacy of the Christian household to the more public working together of Christians in the household of God, God has used both women and men to forward the cause of his gospel. And while he has given us some clear directions for how women and men serve together in gospel ministry according to their unique callings, the opportunities and avenues for gospel service are wide and varied for both.

In this lesson, we will marvel at the ways God has used the service of women both more quietly AND publicly to advance the gospel's cause.

The more "quiet" gospel service of godly women

Review the stories of Hannah (**1 Samuel 1**) and Lois and Eunice (**2 Timothy 1:1- 5**). Describe the gospel service God accomplished through each of these women.

Read the story of Tabitha (Dorcas) as found in **Acts 9:36-43**. In what quiet yet powerful way was Tabitha using her gifts in service to her Lord?

Consider next the service of three women at the time of the prophets Elijah and Elisha. Review **1 Kings 17:7-24 and 2 Kings 4:1-37**. What vital service for the gospel do these three women offer to God as they serve Elijah and Elisha?

How did the following women in the New Testament also serve “quietly”?

Matthew 27:55 (NIV) Many women were there, watching [Jesus’ crucifixion] from a distance. They had followed Jesus from Galilee to care for his needs.

Luke 10:38 (NIV) As Jesus and his disciples were on their way, he came to a village where a woman named Martha opened her home to him.

Acts 16:15 (NIV) When [Lydia] and the members of her household were baptized, she invited us to her home. “If you consider me a believer in the Lord,” she said, “come and stay at my house.” And she persuaded us.

The more “public” gospel service of godly women

Read Romans 16:1-16. From Paul’s greetings, list the ways many women had offered significant “public” service for the cause of the gospel.

Of the women listed in Romans 16, we know the most about Priscilla. The Scripture references to Priscilla offer a fascinating glimpse into the more public gospel service of women in the New Testament. There are six references to Priscilla (and her husband, Aquila) in the New Testament. Read the following references to Priscilla listed in the order of when they were written. As you read, list what we can know about how this coworker of Paul served her Lord and others.

Acts 18:1–4 (NIV) After this, Paul left Athens and went to Corinth. ² There he met a Jew named Aquila, a native of Pontus, who had recently come from Italy with his wife Priscilla, because Claudius had ordered all Jews to leave Rome. Paul went to see them, ³ and because he was a tentmaker as they were, he stayed and worked with them. ⁴ Every Sabbath he reasoned in the synagogue, trying to persuade Jews and Greeks.

Acts 18:18–19 (NIV) Paul stayed on in Corinth for some time. Then he left the brothers and sisters and sailed for Syria, accompanied by Priscilla and Aquila. Before he sailed, he had his hair cut off at Cenchreae because of a vow he had taken. ¹⁹ They arrived at Ephesus, where Paul left Priscilla and Aquila. He himself went into the synagogue and reasoned with the Jews.

Acts 18:24–26 (NIV) Meanwhile a Jew named Apollos, a native of Alexandria, came to Ephesus. He was a learned man, with a thorough knowledge of the Scriptures. ²⁵ He had been instructed in the way of the Lord, and he spoke with great fervor and taught about Jesus accurately, though he knew only the baptism of John. ²⁶ He began to speak boldly in the synagogue. When Priscilla and Aquila heard him, they invited him to their home and explained to him the way of God more adequately.

Romans 16:3–5 (NIV) Greet Priscilla and Aquila, my co-workers in Christ Jesus. ⁴ They risked their lives for me. Not only I but all the churches of the Gentiles are grateful to them. ⁵ Greet also the church that meets at their house. Greet my dear friend Epenetus, who was the first convert to Christ in the province of Asia.

1 Corinthians 16:19 (NIV) The churches in the province of Asia send you greetings. Aquila and Priscilla greet you warmly in the Lord, and so does the church that meets at their house.

2 Timothy 4:19 (NIV) Greet Priscilla and Aquila and the household of Onesiphorus.

God has also given to women spiritual gifts we might list among the more “spectacular” gifts that the Spirit has given to the church. Compare **2 Kings 22**; **Acts 2:14-18**; **Acts 21:7-9**; and **1 Corinthians 11:3-5**. Take 5 minutes to answer at your table or a table near you: What gift has God in these instances given to women in both the Old & New Testaments?

The Bible guards us against rating the service of women or men. They are not more or less important based on how spectacular their gift. Nor are they more significant if they are in more “public” service in church compared to more “quiet” service rendered to God and neighbor. How does the following sections of Scripture clarify that?

1 Corinthians 12:4–6 (NIV) There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit distributes them. ⁵ There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord. ⁶ There are different kinds of working, but in all of them and in everyone it is the same God at work.

Matthew 25:34–36 (NIV) “Then the King will say to those on his right, ‘Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. ³⁵ For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, ³⁶ I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.’”

Mark 9:41 (NIV) Truly I tell you, anyone who gives you a cup of water in my name because you belong to the Messiah will certainly not lose their reward.

Ephesians 2:10 (NIV) For we are God’s handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.

Living It!

Find actual examples of the service of women in our midst that come to mind when you think of the biblical examples we considered.

Hannah, Lois, and Eunice

Tabitha (Dorcas)

Priscilla

Tryphena and Tryphosa (**Romans 16:12-13**)

Why it might it be harder for us to think of women in the more “public” areas of gospel service (relating to the last two sets of names above)?

Share ways we can express our respect and appreciation to women as they use their God-given gifts to advance the gospel among us.

As male and female who are heirs together of God’s gracious gift of life, what truths do we want to treasure in our hearts from this eighth lesson of our study?

List at least two ways your words and/or actions will be affected by what we have learned today.

As we close our lesson, for what does this lead us to pray?



For Further Study **The Gift of Prophecy**

One of the richest gifts that God has given to his church in both the Old and New Testaments is the gift of prophecy. Prophets of God ***spoke by direct revelation from the Holy Spirit.*** The gift of prophecy is the means by which God gave direct revelation to human beings that would otherwise not have been known. On the other hand, the gift of teaching is the gift by which God enables his truth already revealed to be explained and applied. While in the church today we sometimes use the term “prophets” more broadly to include those who teach or preach his Word without direct revelation, Scripture chooses to use that term more narrowly for those receiving direct revelation.

The gift of prophecy was not limited to males in either the Old or New Testament. However, in no way does the biblical description of how female prophets carried out their calling from God indicate that they disregarded or violated the scriptural principle of headship.

God has not promised the gift of prophecy to every Christian (**1 Corinthians 12:29**), nor has he promised to give this gift to his church in every time or place. As the inspired New Testament books were still being given to the church and gathered into the “canon” of Scripture, it is not difficult to see the rich blessing the special gift of prophecy would be. The early Christians did not have the completed Scripture to turn to as we do. With the words of God’s “mouthpieces” in front of us every day in inspired Scripture, our need for this gift is not the same as theirs.

It is not surprising that the history of the Christian church shows the gift of prophecy fading from the scene as God’s people received the gift of his completed New Testament revelation. This may be what Paul was referring to in **1 Corinthians 13:8** when he said that “where there are prophecies, they will cease.” While we would be saying more than Scripture does to declare that God will never again give such gifts to his church, we have no promise of God that such gifts will be present in our day.

This much we can say with certainty: Anyone who claims to speak by direct revelation from God and yet disagrees with the inspired Scriptures has clearly marked herself/himself as a false prophet. That person is a false prophet even if what he/she predicts comes true and even if he/she actually performs miracles (**Deuteronomy 13:1-5 & 2 Thessalonians 2:9-12**).



Lesson 9: Heirs Together Rejoicing as Unique Callings Are Applied in Our Work Together

In 1 Timothy chapter 2 we find Paul's most straightforward application of the principle of head and helper to our work together in God's church as men and women.

As we turn our attention to that portion of Scripture, please note that the editors of the NIV have done us a bit of a disservice by placing the title "Instructions on Worship" over this chapter. (Chapter or section headings are not part of the inspired text.) While the context of public worship may often in this section be uppermost in Paul's mind, much of what Paul speaks of here has application beyond our formal gatherings for worship. Some portions (for example, the encouragement concerning "wardrobe selection" for Christian women) have very broad application to believers' lives far beyond Sunday worship.

In particular, the primary context Paul clearly has in mind is how Christian men and women live and serve together in God's household (as Paul calls the Christian Church in 3:15). That includes many venues beyond formal worship where God's people, men and women, gather to advance the work of the gospel. The furthering of the ministry of the gospel for edifying God's people and evangelizing Christ's other sheep is foremost in Paul's mind.

Read 1 Timothy 2:1-15. Look at **verses 1-7**. Here Paul urges God's people to pray for all people. What foremost concern in the heart of God is behind all of this?

Notice the concern that dominates the rest of Paul's letter. It is the concern that nothing gets in the way of the gospel being freely and faithfully preached, taught, and witnessed by the words and lives of God's people. That is the spirit behind every direction he is about to give.

As we come to **verse 8**, once again the NIV does us a bit of a disservice. It fails to show that Paul changes his vocabulary as he moves to **verse 8**. In **verses 4-5** Paul had used the more generic term "men," a word that could just as rightly have been translated "mankind" or

“people” (“God wants all people to be saved” and “one mediator between God and mankind.”). However, in **verse 8**, the Spirit inspired Paul to shift to a different Greek word. Instead of using the word for “mankind” or “people,” Paul uses a Greek word that indicates he is speaking specifically to “males.”

Paul has just urged all Christians, both male and female, to be constant in prayer for all people. Considering that context, Paul’s point obviously cannot be “On second thought, maybe only males should pray!”

Notice what Paul is moving toward in **verses 11-15**. What point is he already alluding to by mentioning the “males” specifically in this verse as “lifting up holy hands in prayer”?

Paul offers to Christian men a warning that they carry out their leadership responsibility without giving in to their temptation to respond with “anger or disputing.” Why is such a warning especially important for those charged to be wise leaders over the body of Christ?

In **verses 11-12**, some limit the authority with which Paul speaks by focusing on the fact that Paul writes “I do not permit...” They claim such wording indicates Paul is giving only his “opinion,” which does not need to be binding on Christians either in Ephesus then or among us today. How does **verse 7** show us this is not just his opinion?

Paul speaks of a woman being “silent.” What in the immediate context of this chapter tells us that Paul is not commanding absolute silence for Christian women when they assemble with their fellow Christians?

As we remember what we studied in the previous lesson (especially **1 Corinthians 11:5**), how do the Scriptures show that Paul is not prohibiting all sharing of the Word by Christian women?

When Paul says, *"I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man,"* he is not issuing two directives: a woman can't teach and a woman can't have authority over a man. Rather, the second statement helps define the first. A recent English translation of the Bible (*God's Word to the Nations*) captures that close connection quite well. It translates this verse: ***"I do not permit a woman to teach in such a way as to have authority over a man."*** What Paul addresses is the kind of teaching by a woman that would violate the headship God has given to man. We don't want to elevate Paul's statement to a blanket prohibition of women teaching men in any way. It is for a specific application to teaching that takes over the authority of headship. Evaluate how this understanding of **verse 12** guides us in the ways it should be applied.

Some have suggested that Paul is speaking only to a particular situation in the Ephesian congregation. How do **verses 13-14** show that Paul's words were not merely for a specific situation in Ephesus?

1 Timothy 2:15 is one of the most difficult verses to grasp in all of Paul's letters. Such passages humble us and lead us to continue to search the Scriptures so that other, simpler passages can help throw light on challenging verses like this one. Here is a comment from Armin Schuetze's ***People's Bible*** commentary on the book of 1 Timothy.

This verse has been called the most difficult in the pastoral letters [1 & 2 Timothy and Titus] and has received a number of interpretations. There is no need to consider them all. One that we can rule out, however, is that through bearing children a woman may gain salvation for herself. For women as for men, salvation is received by continuing in "faith, love and holiness with propriety." Faith embraces the Lord Jesus who gave himself as a ransom for all. It produces the fruit of love and holiness with propriety which is evidence of a living faith.

But how does "through childbearing" fit into the picture? Some commentators see in the "childbearing" a reference to the birth of a particular child, the Lord Jesus. This expresses a basic, important truth and would render a valid meaning. We may still ask, however, whether this is the meaning Paul had in mind.

Paul has been speaking about the woman's specific role as given in creation. She had stepped out of that role, had been deceived by Satan and became a sinner. She need not, however, feel deprived or inferior as man's helper. Salvation is hers, living in the role God had assigned to her. Unique and special in that role is bearing children and the mothering that goes with it. Living according to her God-given role will not in any way deprive her of the salvation that we all have alone through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. A Christian woman will find genuine fulfillment as she conducts herself according to God's plan. (pp. 44-45)

How would you answer someone who said, "If a woman has God-given gifts for sharing the Word, doesn't that outweigh anything Paul says here?"

Teaching with authority over men is a primary application of the headship principle that Paul makes in the life of a Christian congregation. How can having the men vote in the governing bodies of a congregation also be a consistent application of the scriptural principle of headship?

How will congregations make sure that the wisdom, insights and concerns of single Christian women are heard? (This would also include hearing from those who are "spiritually single" - no husband in the congregation.)

Scripture has not set for us one particular form of church government or organization. Christian freedom allows congregations to organize themselves in whatever way advances the cause of the gospel while maintaining God-pleasing order in their midst. This side of heaven no one will ever discover a “perfect” form of church government because we carry our sinful natures with us into any form we devise. Below you will find a brief description of two forms of church government. Considering what we have learned in this Bible study, what are the strengths and weaknesses of each of these forms?

- 1) **Voters’ Assembly:** The vast majority of our congregations operate with an organizational system that invests final congregational authority in the voters’ assembly made up of all adult male members.
- 2) **Consensus Model:** Some of our congregations have shifted to a consensus model in which open forums for all members replace almost all regular voters’ meetings. At these forums information is presented and issues are discussed that are a concern for the entire congregation. Discussion is facilitated in a way that helps differing viewpoints work toward a common consensus. Final congregational authority is vested in a coordinating council or board of elders made up of elected or appointed male leaders.

Strengths of Voters’ Assembly Model

Strengths of Consensus Model

Weaknesses of Voters’ Assembly Model

Weaknesses of Consensus Model

As we have just discussed, nowhere does Scripture mandate a particular organizational form to a Christian congregation. Having a form of church government in which decisions are reached by voting is neither commanded nor forbidden by God.

Even where voting is a part of the life of a congregation, not all voting in a congregation is an exercise of the kind of authority about which Scripture speaks. When a governing body must in love exercise church discipline, in which the sins of the impenitent are bound to them, that is certainly exercising God-given authority. When a governing body, representing Christ and all the priests of God in that congregation (or larger grouping like a high school federation), extends a call to someone who will serve them in the public ministry, that, too, is exercising Christ's authority. However, a congregation that takes a poll of all its members for the best time for Sunday worship is also wisely recognizing that not every decision needs to be considered as a matter of authority and should have the direct input of God-given helpers.

We cannot leave this issue of exercising authority in Christ's church without urging all governing bodies to consider carefully how they conduct themselves. They do not want to make headship into something more—or less—than it is in Scripture. In particular, they will want to take every opportunity to show that they value the wisdom, gifts, and expertise of all the members of the body, especially the women who are heirs together with them of God's gracious gift of life! Scripture unfolds the importance of that interdependence. Special care in this area needs to be taken especially on behalf of single women and widows.

Read Acts 6:1-4. The early church recognized that being an adult male is certainly not the only qualification for being an effective spiritual head in the kingdom of God. Paul speaks of the importance of the deacons in Jerusalem being "full of the Spirit and wisdom." Determine how that should affect decisions as to which men are to be involved as the final congregational authority.

In any system of church government, how can the spiritual heads incorporate the insight and wisdom of women - especially the single women and widows - in the decision-making process of the congregation?

Living It!

As male and female who are heirs together of God's gracious gift of life, what truths do we want to treasure in our hearts from this ninth lesson of our study?

List at least two ways your words and/or actions will be affected by what we have learned today.

As we close our lesson, for what does this lead us to pray?



For Further Study Teaching With Authority

There is another important pair of terms in these verses. In **1 Timothy 2:11** Paul uses a Greek verb that literally means "to learn as a disciple." The noun form of that word is usually translated in the New Testament as "disciple."

In **verse 12**, Paul uses a form of the Greek verb *didasko*. The dominant meaning of *didasko* in the New Testament is "to teach with God-given authority." That word is also frequently found as a noun (*didaskolos*—"teacher"). Almost without exception that noun is used in the New Testament for someone who has been called by God to teach with authority. It is the opposite of "learning as a disciple." This kind of teaching instructs disciples.

The vast majority of the uses of both noun (*didaskolos*) and verb (*didasko*) are for the teaching ministry of Jesus. There are only two uses of the noun that could possibly be something other than someone serving in "public ministry" (**Hebrews 5:12** and **Romans 2:20**). In a handful of cases, the verb is used in a broader sense for the more general "teaching" that all Christians

do as royal priests. (**Matthew 28:20**; **Colossians 3:16**; and **Romans 12:7** are three examples.)

Understanding the dominant biblical use of these terms helps us grasp Paul's point in these verses. They help us understand which kind of teaching of the Word by women would and would not be appropriate.

Paul forbids women to teach in every situation that would violate male headship. He is speaking about the kind of teaching by one who will clearly be seen as having been called to the position of teacher (*didaskolos*) by the disciples sitting at his feet. Those disciples will understand that teacher to be speaking with God's authority, much as Jesus' hearers understood that about him (**Matthew 7:29**).

In all of this, it is important that we do not elevate an application of the principle (where and when a woman should teach) into the principle itself (male headship). Otherwise, we easily say much more than Paul said. Paul does not forbid all authoritative teaching of the Word by women. That would make a principle out of his application. He does forbid women to teach the Word with authority where this would overrule male headship.

Paul does also encourage the kind of sharing of the Word that women do ***as part of the priesthood of all believers***. He would urge Christian women to continue:

- giving encouragement to another Christian whenever needed—even when the one needing encouragement is a man;
- sharing their faith in the midst of daily life with either men or women whenever they have opportunity to give a reason for their hope;
- sharing biblical insights and understanding in the midst of the discussion of the Word as part of a mixed group of men and women; and
- asking questions and seeking information in a way that does not violate the principle of headship.

An Interesting Prayer Distinction

It is interesting to note a general distinction in the prayers of women and men as we find them in Scripture. The prayers of women recorded in Scripture tend to be prayers of thanksgiving for acts of God's grace they have experienced. See Mary's hymn of thanksgiving, for example, in Luke chapter 1, or Hannah's in 1 Samuel chapter 2.

While there are certainly similar prayers of thanksgiving by men, it is interesting that nowhere in Scripture do we find a prayer spoken by a woman that is the equivalent, for example, of Solomon's intercessory prayer spoken before all Israel in 1 Kings chapter 8. This, too, seems to be another reflection of the headship principle lived out.

We must be careful, however, that we do not create "a rule" beyond what Scripture has clearly spoken. Scripture in no way forbids intercessory prayers by women and certainly would encourage such prayers by either men or women in more informal settings or private prayers. We would even be going beyond Scripture to rule out all speaking of public intercessory prayer by women. Especially at gatherings such as women's retreats or women's Bible studies, women should be encouraged to speak a public intercessory prayer.

The general distinction of the prayers of women and men in Scripture may help us understand Paul's statement about "men lifting up holy hands in prayer" in 1 Timothy chapter 2. Paul uses almost the identical expression that was used for Solomon at the dedication of the temple in **1 Kings 8:22**. The setting of prayer in public worship is certainly one fitting place for men to exercise spiritual leadership on behalf of God's people and all people.

Could it also be that Paul is hinting at the fact that as leaders seeking to "get things done" it is a special temptation for men to forget that it all still depends on God's gracious blessing? Forgetting that can easily lead to a neglect of prayer where it is needed most of all - by those entrusted with the privileged responsibility of being heads for God's people. Leaders set a powerful example for us all when they run in prayer to the Father, who in Christ delights to hear and answer his people.

Christian Fashion Statements?

In **1 Timothy 2:9-10** Paul is most of all concerned with how Christian women adorn their lives rather than issuing binding fashion directions for how they will adorn their bodies. Certainly, Paul is warning about an outward vanity that concerns itself chiefly with outward beauty and dresses that flaunt wealth and social status. If Paul is speaking only - or even primarily - about clothing, then Christian women would be reduced to somehow fashioning their good deeds into suitable apparel. That task would tax beyond limits even the most capable clothing designer! Similar encouragements can be found also in **Proverbs 31:25,30** and **1 Peter 3:4-5**. The primary emphasis is clear. Christians are to be concerned with fruits of faith giving testimony to believing hearts rather than with designer labels bearing witness to opulent lives. What a blessing for Christian women and men to recapture this emphasis on what is true beauty in God's world!

When a Boy Becomes a Man

Paul says, "I do not permit a woman to teach in such a way as to have authority over a man" (NET). We already discussed that Paul is not forbidding all teaching of the Word by women. He is forbidding the kind of teaching by women in a mixed group of men and women when a woman would clearly be seen as having been called to the authoritative position of a "teacher" at whose feet "disciples" follow as their head.

That leads to a simple question: When is a boy a man?

On the one hand, no one would think of cautioning a mother from disciplining her teenage son when he sins and forgiving him when he repents. On the other hand, few who value the biblical principle would defend a congregation that asks a woman to make a "straying sheep" call on a middle-aged man who is persisting in the same sin as that teenage son. But exactly when does that "boy" become a "man"?

Scripture chooses not to settle the debate in "black and white" fashion. The exact time when different cultures consider a boy to have become a man can vary dramatically. Scripture calls someone "a man" who with mature and considered choice leaves father and mother and is united to his wife (Genesis 2:24). But that also can happen at a wide variety of ages. And, obviously, just because someone remains single does not mean he perpetually remains a "boy."

Among the Jews, a boy would have his bar-mitzvah (roughly equivalent to our confirmation) at age 13. Yet he wasn't considered to be fully mature until age 30. No one in the Jewish culture would be taken seriously moving from "disciple" to "teacher" before then. Consider the fact that even the Word made flesh, our Lord Jesus, did not begin his earthly ministry in that culture until he reached that age!

In our culture, the point at which a boy is considered to have become a man is debatable. Is a boy a man when he is able to vote or die for his country (age 18) or when he is able to purchase an alcoholic beverage (age 21)? Some might even argue that what brain research appears to have discovered (the brain reaches full development at about age 24) may be a better measuring stick for when maturity has arrived.



Lesson 10: Heirs Together Wrestle with Challenging Questions in Our Joint Gospel Work

As we saw in the previous lesson, there are some difficult portions of Scripture. They challenge us to pray for an extra measure of the wisdom God has promised to us (**James 1:5**). In many ways, Scripture is like a deep ocean. The smallest toddler can enjoy playing in its waves along the shore. And the most learned oceanographer can gain greater insights by probing its depths. As long as we permit Scripture to be its own interpreter (as simpler sections throw light on more difficult sections), we will not stray from a faithful understanding even as we wrestle with more difficult portions of Scripture.

Applying the Principle as We Wrestle with Some Challenging Scriptural Verses

In this first part, we are going to briefly take a look at two portions of 1 Corinthians that give us some ocean-like depths to prayerfully explore. At first glance Paul will almost seem to be contradicting himself. Yet as we patiently allow Scripture to interpret Scripture, we will find that in these challenging sections, Paul continues to faithfully and consistently apply the principle of headship and helper. Studying these passages will give greater depth of understanding of what it means to be Heirs Together of God's Gracious Gift of Life.

Read 1 Corinthians 11:2-12 and 1 Corinthians 14:33b-40. Identify the ways Paul clarifies the principle of headship.

Compare **11:4-5** with **14:33-35**. What initially seems to be a contradiction that we need to work through?

Understanding what Paul is and isn't saying in 1 Timothy chapter 2 helps us begin to solve the apparent contradiction we see in 1 Corinthians chapter 11 and 1 Corinthians chapter 14. We need to remember that Paul has **not** established absolute silence for women as the principle guiding us in all gatherings of Christian men and women. To apply absolute silence to women would be to misunderstand 1 Timothy 2, annul 1 Corinthians 11, and over-apply 1 Corinthians 14. The principle is simply head and helper. The primary application Paul made in 1 Timothy 2 was that woman teaching with authority over men contradicts the headship principle. Remember that "teaching with authority" is a way a rabbi would teach his followers or a master his disciples. Once we realize that silence itself is not the principle, nor even the primary application of 1 Timothy 2, we are on our way to solving what may appear at first reading to be a contradiction in 1 Corinthians. Explain how the context of 1 Corinthians 14 helps us understand why Paul is forbidding the kind of speaking by women that would violate the principle.

Evaluate how the context of 1 Corinthians 11 shows that Paul is permitting the kind of praying and speaking that would not violate the principle.

A Tale of Two Old Testament Women and the Principle

Two prominent Old Testament women give us an interesting study in contrasts. One, Deborah, appeared to work very hard to honor the principle as much as possible in an unsettling time for Israel. The other, Miriam, at least in one incident, tried to override the principle.

In Judges chapters 4-5, we have the fascinating story of Deborah, a prophetess who was serving as judge in Israel. The whole period of the Judges is one of great upheaval and uncertainty in Israel and repeated unfaithfulness to God. The leadership of Israel's men was often either godless or absent. In this setting God raised up Deborah as a leader in Israel. But what is fascinating to note throughout the account was how hard Deborah worked to encourage Israel's men, in particular a man by the name of Barak, to play their role as leaders in Israel. Deborah clearly had leadership gifts, but she did not desire to overturn the Lord's principle of head and helper.

In contrast, we have the story of Miriam. Miriam was Moses and Aaron's sister. She is identified in Scripture as both a prophetess and a leader in Israel (**Exodus 15:20** and **Micah 6:4**). In Numbers chapter 12, we find her joining her brother Aaron in challenging Moses' authority. The Lord rebukes both Aaron and Miriam for speaking against Moses. Yet it is only Miriam who suffers a temporary consequence of leprosy, which results in her living outside Israel's camp as unclean for seven days. What was God indicating by this difference in the judgment that fell on Aaron and Miriam? While both were rebelling against God-given authority, was Miriam, a woman in a position of prominence in Israel, in danger of crossing that line in a double way?

Junia - A New Testament Female Apostle?

Paul's letter to the Roman Christians ends with a lengthy list of greetings. Several women are included among those for whom Paul publicly gives thanks to God for their hard work "in the Lord." In particular, **Romans 16:7** presents a challenge. The challenge is to understand whether Paul is speaking of a woman by the name of "Junia" or a man by the name of "Junias" (as the NIV understands the reference). The second question is whether Paul is saying that Andronicus and Junia(s) are "outstanding among the apostles" (as the NIV takes it) or if the Greek should be translated that they are "honored by the apostles" (another possible translation).

The masculine name "Junias" appears to be almost unknown at the time of the New Testament (unless it is a shortened form of the more common masculine name "Junianus"). On the other hand, the feminine name "Junia" is quite common and may very well be the best way to understand what Paul has written. Many ancient commentators, including St. John Chrysostom, understood Andronicus and Junia to be a husband and wife "team." Therefore, when it comes to the name, the NIV may not reflect what the more likely understanding is.

However, the NIV translation in the last part of the verse ("outstanding among the apostles") may be the grammatically more defensible translation of that part of the verse. Therefore, it is very possible that in **Romans 16:7** Paul speaks of a woman whom he numbers among those he calls "apostles."

That does not mean that the listing of the Twelve in places like **Matthew 10:2-4** must have included a woman masquerading as a man. The New Testament knows a "narrower" use of the word *apostle* and several "broader" uses of the term. By far the most common use of the

term (at least 58 of the 80 uses) is for those we normally call “the Twelve” (as well as the apostle Paul). Obviously neither Andronicus nor Junia(s) was part of that group. That narrower definition fits those who 1) were eyewitnesses of the risen Christ (**Acts 1:21-22** - including Paul on the road to Damascus), 2) were directly called by Christ (**Matthew 10:1ff** and **Acts 9:5**), and 3) were given miraculous spiritual gifts such as the gift of healing (**2 Corinthians 12:12**).

While not as frequent in usage, there are “broader” uses of the term in the New Testament. The term *apostles* is used for some of Paul’s coworkers (see **Acts 14:4,14** and **1 Thessalonians 2:6**). It would seem that this would be consistent also for the use of the term to describe Andronicus and Junia(s). As they worked with Paul, they had even shared with him imprisonment for the cause of Christ. Such a use of the term *apostle* seems to spring from the basic etymology of the word, which literally means “one who is sent.” An apostle is then an emissary or ambassador for Christ. Even Jesus once uses this broader meaning of the term (**John 13:16**).

As many commentators in the early church suggest, Adronicus and Junia(s) may well be a husband and wife team that served as ambassadors for Christ wherever they went. The work they did would then be very similar to what we read in Scripture about Priscilla and Aquila.

Applying the Principle to Specific Situations in the Congregation

You will look in vain if you are searching for the section of this study that will give you the “official” rule book for all tough questions. The Scriptures do not supply us with “canon law” that dictates how the gifts of women and men should be used in every situation in the work of the congregation.

God has supplied us with a simple principle (headship) and some examples of primary applications of that principle in the life of his church (and in the home). Unlike his Old Testament church, whom he dealt with as “minor children” under the guardianship of the Sinaitic covenant, God treats his New Testament church as “mature” in Christ. As believers in Christ, he empowers us through the means of grace to respect and not ignore what his Word says. Empowered by the gospel, he then entrusts to us the task of making wise decisions in each age and situation as we carry out the gospel mission he has entrusted to both the men and women of his church.

That explains why you will find the following in this next section:

- 1) Some general guidelines that can assist us in making the tough decisions about the use of the gifts of both women and men in his church, and
- 2) Some specific questions for you to wrestle with as God's children in the specific setting of your congregation.

May God give you two things in particular as you pursue this part of our study:

- 1) An extra measure of patient love toward one another as you discuss these questions (**Galatians 5:22-26**), and
- 2) The spiritual wisdom he promises to give to all without finding fault (**James 1:5**).

Here is a list of general guidelines that can help keep the discussion that follows "on track." As we strive to make application of the principle to specific situations, there are often two issues that need to be kept in proper biblical balance with each other. The wise biblical middle ground is found when we honor both of the issues that are "in tension" with each other. Often by saying "two things," we are preserved from errors that lurk on either side.

#1. Biblical boundaries—neither stretching nor overly safeguarding the principle

- a) Christians who believe in the goodness of God's moral commands do not seek to stretch the outer limits of God's law. We should not be looking for loopholes in God's law or for pretexts to evade the intent of God's law.
- b) Christians do not want to add so many "safeguards" to God's law that they deny women opportunities for service that the Lord permits.

#2. Conscience—neither burdening nor excusing decisions

- a) Christians do not want to burden consciences by legalistically imposing arbitrary applications of God's law upon the church.
- b) Christians do not want to provide each other with conscience-soothing excuses for conforming to the practices of the world. We must beware of adopting the methods of interpreting Scripture used by those who search for strange word meanings and obscure historical settings in order to evade the clear meaning of God's Word.

#3. Walking together—neither church law nor every congregation for itself

- a) Our church does not want to establish a detailed code of church law that prescribes practices for all Christians regardless of their local circumstances. We want to preserve the same gospel freedom Paul used as he adapted ministry forms and methods to the particular culture in which he was serving so that he might have opportunity to deliver God’s unchanging message (1 Corinthians 9:19-23).
- b) Because we live in a mobile society, a certain amount of mutually agreed upon uniformity of practice is helpful to avoid confusion and offense among the members of our synod (and the members of other synods in fellowship with us). We would all do well to remember that as individual congregations (or as a synod) the gospel did not begin with us nor does it end with us (**1 Corinthians 14:36**).

#4. Biblical examples—neither ignoring them nor building the principles from them

- a) We want to rejoice over the many biblical examples of women using their spiritual gifts in service of their Savior and his people.
- b) We don’t want to abuse those biblical examples by drawing conclusions or making assumptions from them that override clear passages that establish principle and make clear application of that principle.

#5. Status and callings—neither forgetting what is equal nor what is unique

- a) We want to hold high the equality that Scripture gives to women and men both in their status as God’s redeemed children and in their calling as royal priests to use their spiritual gifts in every area of their lives to the glory of their Savior.
- b) We also want to hold high the unique callings God gives to men and women as good gifts of God that reflect his perfect order for his creation.

#6. Christian freedom—neither denying gospel freedom nor wounding consciences

- a) We thank God for the Christian freedom God has given us in many areas of our congregational life. We must not allow someone to bind our consciences by calling something sin that Scripture has not called sin.

- b) We must also remember that identifying something as a matter of Christian freedom does not end discussion but begins it in earnest. For the sake of the gospel and the tender consciences of others, not everything we are free to do will be wise to do (**1 Corinthians 10:23-24**).

#7. Servant leadership—neither ignoring humble service nor forgetting proper authority

- a) We know that service in God’s kingdom is always to be lived out in the spirit of humble service that is patterned after our Savior.
- b) We also know that there are callings and positions in Christ’s church where such humble service also carries with it being entrusted with spiritual authority.

What follows is a list of areas of service within a typical congregation. For each area of service, consider from Scripture where you can encourage a man, woman, or both to serve. Take 7 minutes to complete this task individually.

As you wrestle with each part of the list, be sure to keep in mind what we have studied from Scripture. Don’t lose sight of the guidelines listed previously that can assist you in doing just that. Be prepared to share your reason for making the determination you did.

Be aware that Scripture does not address all of these areas of service specifically. We may not always agree on the best way to apply the principle in every case. As long as we are taking the biblical principle seriously, we can work with each other in patient love as brothers and sisters in Christ even in situations where we might make a different application of the principle.

Remember:

- The gospel unfolds responsible Christian freedom to serve to God’s glory— not a rule book of new laws for Christ’s church.
- Not everything that is permissible is beneficial.
- Because of different ministry situations and settings, what is wise in one place may not be wise in another.

As you discuss the following areas of service and who we want to encourage to serve in these ways, please keep in mind the different ministry settings. Scripture defines what is permissible while culture may often determine what is wise and permissible.

Specific Area of Service	Woman (W), Man (M), or Both (B)	Reason for Answer
Preaching the sermon or leading public worship for men & women together		
Sunday school coordinator		
Coordinating the use of members' volunteered time and talent		
Reading the Scripture lessons in worship		
Serving on the evangelism committee		
Directing the adult choir		
Congregational financial secretary (making & tracking offering deposits)		
Congregational treasurer (paying the bills)		
Ushering for worship		
Teaching a mixed adult Bible study		
Making a presentation to a mixed adult Bible study		
Serving on the board of elders		
Assisting with the regular distribution of the Lord's Supper in congregational worship		

Living It!

As male and female who are heirs together of God's gracious gift of life, what truths do we want to treasure in our hearts from this tenth lesson of our study?

List at least two ways your words and/or actions will be affected by what we have learned today.

As we close our lesson, for what does this lead us to pray?



For Further Study

There's Asking Questions, and Then There's QUESTIONING!

It is interesting to note that Paul uses a verb for "inquiring" in **1 Corinthians 14:35** that in many contexts has a note of argumentative questioning. The word is used repeatedly in contexts where Jesus is being "questioned" by the religious leaders of his day as they sought to discredit him or catch him in his words. See **Luke 20:21** for one such example.

Determining Paul's intention in using this verb is somewhat challenging. He almost never uses it in his letters. We find it only here and in **Romans 10:20**. If Paul is using the term here for what easily becomes "argumentative questioning," as it is often used in the gospels, that would shed further light on what Paul is saying. Then he would have in mind the kind of "inquiring" that quickly becomes far more than asking for information as it openly challenges authority.



Lesson 11: Heirs Together Living in the Midst of an Unbelieving World

In the world Christians and unbelievers too often think they are playing the very same game (life), but with slightly different rules. Bear in mind, Peter tells us we are “strangers and aliens” in the pagan world. The life of the Christian has a totally different focus. Too often we try to import the relationships we live out in the Christian church into the way the world plays its game. When we do so, we often create obstacles for communicating the heart of our message. A Christian’s view of what he or she does (for the glory of God) and his or her values (humble service to others out of love) won’t match up with a worldly desire to get ahead, wield power and control, prove your worth, or just “win at your game.” The purpose of the Christian’s life and service—to declare the praises of him who called us out of darkness to his marvelous light—won’t be understood by those who play a different game with different “rules.” The challenge for the Christian is to be a “stranger” to the world’s game without being offensive or rude. While we’d all like some “rules” to operate by in the non-Christian world, there isn’t a rule book here. The Bible often shows us how Jesus approached it. Learning to live and witness in the unbelieving world as Christian men and women is a lifelong journey. It isn’t easy. God didn’t say it would be. It is best guided by God’s Word and the wisdom the Holy Spirit will give in order to discern what to do in each case.

Recognize What You Know...and What You Don’t!

As we head out into the unbelieving world, the setting around us changes dramatically. We are often no longer surrounded by fellow Christians who recognize this as our Father’s world in which we live according to our Father’s will. Although the situation changes, we do not. We do not cease being loved children of God who are his royal priests. We do not cease having the privilege of being his representatives in everything we do. We also do not cease being men and women of equal value yet with unique callings.

As we turn to God’s Word for living out our callings in an unbelieving world, we begin in 1 Peter. No other book of the New Testament offers more helpful insight and encouragement for living in the midst of a hostile, unbelieving world. We are going to take a “whirlwind tour” of this letter. The book of 1 Peter will help us reflect our faith as we live out all our callings, also our unique callings as men and women, in an unbelieving world.

Read **1 Peter 1:1-9**. In **verse 1**, what is the significance of Peter calling us "God's elect, strangers in the world"?

Look at **verses 3-9**. Indicate the ways Peter gives us confidence for living in an unbelieving world.

Read **1 Peter 1:13-16** and **2:4-12**. We have "an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade." While we wait to take possession of that inheritance, we are "royal priests of God." List the encouragements Peter gives us for our life "out there" in the unbelieving world.

What specific encouragement does this give us as we seek to live out the principle of head and helper in an often hostile society?

Read **1 Peter 2:13-3:6**. Describe what will often be especially challenging for Christian citizens, employees, or wives who are under unbelieving "heads."

What doesn't change, however, in situations where the head is unbelieving? Look at **Romans 13:1-5**. Remember, Paul wrote those words to Christians in Rome under the rule of a cruel and ungodly emperor (Nero).

Read **1 Peter 3:14-15**. After encouraging us one more time to be prepared to suffer even for doing good, Peter speaks about being ready to give “the reason for the hope that you have.” Explain how honoring the principle of head and helper in challenging situations may be an avenue for someone to ask you about the hope that you have.

A Biblical Balancing Act Requiring Spirit-Given Wisdom!

Scripture has not told us what it would have looked like in a perfect world as men and women lived out the principle of head and helper in every structure of society. Even in a fallen world, Scripture has not seen fit to tell us specifically what it will look like as Christian men and women seek to reflect their unique callings of “head” and “helper” in the world. This reminds us again that Scripture was not given to us primarily as a rulebook to define for us the “right” and the “wrong” choice in every decision of life. More than anything, Scripture seeks to fill us with the power of the immeasurable love of Christ, so that we have the wisdom and the strength to live out Christlike love in our actions wherever we are.

Therefore, as we prepare to face difficult decisions, it is important that we clearly confess what we do know and humbly admit what we do not. We are going to turn to some examples from Scripture of believers facing difficult decisions. We will see those believers in situations where two good principles of God appear to be in conflict with each other when living in the middle of a sinful world.

Esther was one of the examples. God had put her in a unique position where she could save many lives if she boldly stepped forward without concern for her own well-being. “Who knows but that you have come to royal position for such a time as this?” (Esther 4:14). With those words Mordecai urged Esther to recognize that God had permitted her to come to her royal position in a pagan government for the great good she could accomplish.

Now it is our turn to head out into that unbelieving world in the “royal position” God has given also to us as his royal priesthood of believers! In the specific callings God has given us in the world (from Little League coach to corporate employee), there are rich opportunities to carry out our priestly service as a bright light in a very dark world.

The challenges will be great, the decisions and choices often difficult, but God has planned that his impact through us on our little corner of the world will be eternal!

Read **Esther 4:1-16**. With what two good biblical principles is Esther being asked to wrestle?

How would she appear to be violating at least one of those principles no matter what she chose to do?

Was Esther's decision a wise one?

What help this example can give as we struggle to honor God's principles in a fallen world?

When living in the world and its workplace, Christian principles and values often seem to collide with each other. In those instances, we will have to make tough decisions and honor others who have had to do the same. It may seem to some like stepping beyond what God has said, yet in that situation, it may actually be taking the opportunity to use God-given gifts and situations to bring him greater honor. Hard questions need to be personally asked. Does this let my light shine? Does this provide me greater opportunity to show my love to others? Does this honor God in the use of my gifts? Pray to God for the wisdom and good counsel to sort it out. Discuss how **Jeremiah 17:9** "*The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it?*" should lead us to proceed with caution as we wrestle with these difficult decisions in a sinful world.

As we seek to apply the principle of head and helper to our lives in an unbelieving world, let's begin by summarizing what we know from Scripture and what Scripture has not told us.

Here is what we know from our study of Scripture so far:

- *We go out into the world as dearly loved children of God and heirs of eternal life. We have nothing to prove to God but are only seeking to delight in our Savior by living for him and our neighbor.*
- *We go out into the world as Christ's royal priests with the high and holy calling to be salt and light to a dying world.*
- *Our royal priesthood is lived out not just in our various callings within Christian families and the Christian church, but also in the unique callings God gives us "out there" in the unbelieving world.*
- *The principle of head and helper given in the perfection of Eden is included in the unique callings God has given us.*
- *Even in a world that often doesn't care about or openly rejects those unique callings for women and men, the Christian will always want to be aware that those callings remain a good gift of God for every area of life.*

But along with what we do know, there are also things that we must humbly admit we do not know:

- *We do not know exactly how these unique callings of head and helper given to men and women would have played themselves out in every setting and situation in a perfect world. Scripture deals with the reality of our sinful world. It does not paint for us the "what ifs" of a non-fallen world.*
- *In a fallen world, we may often find ourselves in situations where we may not know how to act in order to honor all of God's good principles at the same time.*
- *Since God has not spoken on each and every such situation, we must be very careful about making blanket statements that bind the consciences of others. We may be able to offer nothing more than our personal opinion. We often cannot say what "must" be the best or wisest choice every Christian "should" make in challenging situations.*

What blessings do we receive as we struggle to know precisely how to live out our callings as head and helper in the midst of a sinful world?

What can we learn from the following two quotations about the impact of women in general in our society?

Let me begin by stating something fairly obvious: women constitute over half the population of this country. Even so, their contributions are often undervalued. The fact is that society needs the influence of women. Women are the ones who primarily pass on our culture and our values. We shape and mold the youth of the nation. We have profound influence. In fact, our influence is so great that we might have trouble with pride if we realized how strong it really is. (Dee Jepsen, "Women in Society: The Challenge and the Call," *Rediscovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*, p. 389)

When God created woman, He created her with sensitivities that most men possess to a lesser degree. We need these sensitivities because we were created to be the life-bearers, the nurturers. That's part of what it means to be a woman. It's important that women are allowed to bring these womanly qualities into every area of life. The whole fabric of our society needs to be touched by the qualities that women possess. But Satan has diverted us. As women began to ask why they were relegated to positions of lesser importance in the world's eyes, he stepped in to tell them that men were doing all the important work. Consequently, child-raising and homemaking began to be viewed as lesser occupations. The enemy has convinced many women to go so far to the other side that they have modeled themselves on the very men they have criticized. In the process, they have denied their own womanhood. (Jepsen, pp. 390-391)

Here's one more quotation from Dee Jepsen for our discussion. As you read this paragraph, what do you think is the most important point for men to take from it? For women to take from it?

I believe women really are key players in God's plan for the present age. We are not the only players, but our role is an important, even a crucial one. I am both glad and excited to be a woman living in these days. And I pray that Christian women will begin to understand who they are and how God wants to use them. It is my prayer that Christian men will begin to look at women through new eyes, through the eyes of God who made them and fashioned them for His purposes. (p. 393)

Our theme passage for our study, **1 Peter 3:7**, reminds us as men and women that we are "heirs [together] of the gracious gift of life." How does that give us comfort and purpose as we struggle to express our shared purpose and our unique callings in an unbelieving world?

Living It!

As male and female who are heirs together of God's gracious gift of life, what truths do we want to treasure in our hearts from this last segment of our study?

List at least two ways your words and/or actions will be affected by what we have learned.

Think back over all the “Living It!” sections from the beginning of this study up to this point. What are the three things you want to take home from our entire study?

What changes need to be made in your life, your home, or your congregation to more fully honor God with what you have learned?

As we close our last lesson, for what does this lead us to pray?



For Further Study

Biblical Balance: Questions to Test Out Your Situation

Keeping in mind what we know and what we don't, here is another series of "balanced sets" of biblical truths we do well to keep in mind as we seek to answer this lesson's basic question. What will it look like as Christian men and women seek to reflect their unique callings in the midst of an unbelieving world? Test them out with situations where you or those you know have wrestled with keeping your biblical "balance."

#1. Wrestling to apply the principle beyond home and church

The principle of head and helper is a part of God's grand design for his creation. Nowhere does Scripture teach that these unique callings cease to have application as we step over the threshold of home and church. As we step out into the world, nowhere does Scripture indicate that the principle of head and helper means that every woman must look at every man she meets as her head.

Discuss how **1 Corinthians 11:3-5** maintains this balance. *(It will be helpful in your answer to notice the absence of the word "every" in the second phrase of **verse 3**. It is present both before and after in almost every other phrase.)*

#2 Facing situations where God's principles seem to be in conflict

Because of the corrupting influence of human sin on anything it touches in this world, there will often appear to be situations in which two of God's good principles seem to be in conflict with each other. In such situations the Christian will seem to be able to honor fully only one of those principles. Even when a Christian seems to be left with a difficult decision of honoring one principle over another, the Christian will seek in every way possible to make it known that he/she still honors the other principle he or she appears to be violating.

Review **Esther 4:1-16** for help seeing such challenging situations set before God's people.

#3. Encouraging others in difficult decisions

As our fellow Christians wrestle with many difficult decisions, we will want to pray for one another and urge and encourage one another to live to God's glory and in genuine love for others in all decisions. As Christians we will want to be careful not to bind consciences by labeling difficult decisions made by other Christians as "sin" where Scripture has not clearly spoken.

How do **1 Thessalonians 4:9-10** and **Romans 14:1-4** help us maintain this balance?

#4 Examining the motives of our hearts

In all of this, we want to remember that we make our decisions as those with whom God is already well-pleased because of the substitutionary life, death, and resurrection of Christ. We aren't trying to make God well-pleased with us. In Christ he already is! We are striving to reflect our high calling as his children in our daily decisions. We also know that our sinful heart can easily confuse us about our own motives and turn Christian freedom into a license to sin. Therefore, we keep that sinful nature in check by daily contrition and repentance.

Explain how **2 Corinthians 5:14-15** and **Ephesians 4:22-24** help us maintain this balance.

Women in Governmental Leadership

The question is often raised about women serving in positions of leadership in government. We surely value the contributions of women who have served well in some sort of government leadership. God has often used their special gifts to be a unique blessing to nations. Yet the attempts to clarify this concern with blanket statements reveal the tensions a Christian face when trying to apply scriptural principles in a world that operates differently from God's original design. Since God has not answered all of our questions on this matter, we need to respect the struggle a Christian woman faces to sort out the issue and come to a God-pleasing solution.

Isaiah chapter 3 gives us some insight to a time when the government of God's people was in turmoil and the country was beginning to experience shame. Those men who were leaders didn't display a servant's heart but merely what they could get out of the people for their own selfish gain. God is not pleased with that type of leadership. Love for God and love for people were absent. When other men were asked to lead, they refused to take such a position. God is not pleased when men step back from carrying out their responsibilities. Through Isaiah, God said women would rule over them. That was not the norm. While not the only reason, one of the purposes for that may have been to call men to repentance for abandoning servant like leadership.

At times, as with Deborah, God may use the tremendous gifts of godly women in positions of governmental leadership to serve his unique purposes for that time. Of course, the time of the Judges is hardly held out to us as a model for the way things "should be." It was a time when "everyone did as he saw fit" in his own eyes. But God still is the overriding designer who will raise up the leaders he desires in order to accomplish his will.

When we look at leadership service within the government, things will often be confusingly out of "alignment" with God's original design. Christian women may need to make some very challenging decisions. They should be encouraged to pray for God's guidance on how to best bring glory to his name when they are asked into leadership positions. Again, here we will be wise not to make blanket statements that go beyond Scripture. It is helpful when faced with such decisions to again review the "biblical balance" sets of principles to come up with a God-pleasing solution and to honor those who serve with God-fearing hearts.



Reflections on Our Unique Callings

**MEN, WOMEN, AND
THE BODY OF CHRIST**

Are women today still called to fulfill the role of helper—a role first applied to Eve in Genesis 2:20? Can women serve in leadership positions in the church? Should a woman hold a job where she has men working under her?

As members of the body of Christ, men and women are privileged to share blessings and responsibilities in partnering together to serve their Savior. But men and women also have unique callings—callings that can be misunderstood, that sometimes feel out of step with our world today.

Reflections on Our Unique Callings is a series of twice-weekly devotions from WELS Women's Ministry that explores biblical principles and applications, poses thoughts and questions for further reflection, and encourages conversations on how these unique callings find their fulfillment in the home, the church, and the world.

Read this devotional series here: wels.net/devotions/unique-callings/





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