

# **Pillar Community Church**

## **Position Paper on Leadership Roles within the Church**

*This article is designed to offer an overview of Pillar's position on women in ministry and leadership within the local church. We will present a host of the most pressing biblical passages that are often engaged in this ongoing conversation and provide a brief interpretation of each one. We will also provide a reference section for further study.*

*Please keep in mind that Pillar's statement of faith (appended to the end of this paper) is broad enough to include those who disagree with our position.*

*We have affirmed a 'two-tier' approach regarding our statement of faith, establishing the 'first tier' as those affirmations that we believe are essential, and then a 'second-tier' which notes important, but not essential, issues on which like-minded believers may disagree. Issues such as baptism, end-times, gifts of the Holy Spirit, and leadership roles fall within this 'second-tier.' We welcome your feedback.*



Celebrating God's Presence

We begin our reflection by considering the Creation account and how its interpretation frames the entire dialogue.

### Genesis 1 – 3

#### Genesis 2:18 - 25

<sup>18</sup> Then the Lord God said, “*It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper who is just right for him.*” <sup>19</sup> So the Lord God formed from the ground all the wild animals and all the birds of the sky. He brought them to the man to see what he would call them, and the man chose a name for each one. <sup>20</sup> He gave names to all the livestock, all the birds of the sky, and all the wild animals. But still there was no helper just right for him. <sup>21</sup> So the Lord God caused the man to fall into a deep sleep. While the man slept, the Lord God took out one of the man’s ribs and closed up the opening. <sup>22</sup> Then the Lord God made a woman from the rib, and he brought her to the man. <sup>23</sup> “At last!” the man *exclaimed*. “This one is bone from my bone, and flesh from my flesh. She will be called ‘woman,’ because she was taken from ‘man.’” <sup>24</sup> This explains why a man leaves his father and mother and is joined to his wife, and the two are united into one.

The two Hebrew words, *‘ezer k<sup>e</sup>neḡdô*, located in v. 18 are traditionally rendered “helpmate, helpmeet, aid,” etc. These English translations tend to reduce the female’s role to one of subservience to males. We believe this is an unfortunate and incomplete interpretation of the words in question. A more suitable way to interpret this phrase is “a power or strength corresponding to or equal to” the man. Walt Kaiser, along with other Old Testament and Hebrew scholars and linguists, argue for this interpretation. If this is correct, and we believe it is, then the New Testament passages which refer to this foundation passage must all be interpreted in this light.

Let’s consider, for a moment, the context and setting of the Creation account. In Genesis 2, Adam seems to have everything a man could want! He experienced magnificent surroundings. He engaged in meaningful work. He enjoyed a majestic relationship with God. In this marvelous environment, however, something - someone - was missing.

In the poetic narrative, wonderfully captured in the Hebrew language, God causes Adam to fall asleep (literally, *slumbers* Adam) and creates one who would complete him. When Adam discovers this treasured gift from God, he exclaims, “At last, I am home.” Adam proclaims the original intent of the term when he encounters the woman as *one who complements or completes*. Indeed, the Hebrew terms for male and female (*ish/isha*) are so similar that it appears *the words are extracted from and depend upon one another* for their fullest, most human meaning. The Hebrew, in other words, is the very picture of partnership and equality before God from the earliest days of Creation.

Some see *subordination* or the establishment of *hierarchy within human relationships* in Genesis 1 and 2. They would argue that Adam *named* Eve, thus establishing authority and order. We suggest that no such thing happened until the Fall, in Genesis 3. In Genesis 2 Adam doesn’t name Eve, as much as he *proclaims his wonder and awe in her presence*. In Genesis 3 we note actual naming. Indeed, subordination seems to be more germane to The Fall than it is to Creation. In Creation, *life as it ought to be*, we see a beautiful gift of different-yet-equal and alike humans - male and female - joined to co-labor with Yahweh in His world.

Therefore, it is our firm - yet humble - conviction that *God designed male and female to co-labor as equal partners with one another*. Together we co-labor with Him as His minor partners! Further, we affirm sexual differentiation (alike and unlike) as presented in the biblical narrative.

We believe, however, *this differentiation is **not one of role distinction as much as it is one of relational completion***. As we serve and love together, we taste of this relational completeness that God offered so freely to the initial couple and extends lavishly to us all. This lesson of shared leadership ought to be a well-spring of life and love in the home and church.

Then, of course, comes the curse.

### Genesis 3

v. 16, *"I will sharpen the pain of your pregnancy, and in pain you will give birth. And you will desire to control your husband, but he will rule over you."*

The issues surrounding this text are plentiful and, as such, are too vast to tackle in this brief outline. I will, however, summarize the difficulties with the modern translations and why we interpret them to mean something entirely other than what's read.

The issues revolve, primarily, around the terms 'desire' and 'rule' and the way New Testament scholars connect Paul's discussion in I Corinthians back to this passage. A close look at the Hebrew term\* for desire (תִּשְׁקֶה), is helpful here. The Hebrew term desire is more aptly rendered 'turn.' In fact, this is widely attested in ancient literature. The interpretative slant that leans toward *desire* can be traced back to a Dominican Monk named Pagnino (see Katherine C. Bushnell) who introduced the idea of lust/desire around 1528. Nearly every English version has, unfortunately, adopted *desire* as its translation. The difference between the two terms cannot be overstated. If we utilize the more attested and accurate translation, turning, then we get a clause that looks like this:

*"And you are turning away from God to your husband, and (as a result) he will rule over you (take advantage of you)."*

Kaiser makes a strong case that the word 'turn' gives us an example of what life looks like – in our most intimate relationships – when sin takes over: a turning away from God. It is certainly not life as it should be experienced, ever. The clause referring to the husband ruling over is a simple statement of likelihood given a fallen world – *not a command for relationships to be ordered in this way*.

While we realize our Complementarian brothers and sisters in Christ would and do differ on this interpretation, we suggest that even if we insert the word desire, its most basic definition would fit this framework as well. For example, as a result of the Fall, Eve's desire has been re-directed - away from God toward man – as such, desire is causing a disordering of our human relationships. This disordering is not designed to be, nor is it ever called, *good*. Rather, this distorted desire awaits a Redemption yet to come – prophesied in this very text.

Similarly, Adam naming Eve happens as a direct result of the Fall (misaligned or distorted desire) and occurs as an outcome of sin.

Genesis 3:20 – 21, *Then the man—Adam—named his wife Eve, because she would be the mother of all who live.* <sup>21</sup> *And the Lord God made clothing from animal skins for Adam and his wife.*

Those arguing for a hierarchical relationship argue that Adam named Eve at Creation. As we noted earlier, it's not that Adam names Eve in Genesis 2, but he proclaims his joy to God for alleviating his aloneness with one who is a power or strength perfectly equal to and fit for him.

That Adam does name Eve after the Fall, implies and indicates that hierarchy is a result of sin, rather than an outcome of creation. That this hierarchy is 'redeemed' in Christ is what I believe Galatians 3 and Ephesians 5, among a host of other NT texts, begin to indicate and illustrate.

## General Epistles

### Galatians 3

In Galatians 3:26 – 28, Paul illustrates the spiritual realities that belong to those now found by God in Christ when he says,

*"<sup>26</sup> You are all God's children through faith in Christ Jesus. <sup>27</sup> All of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. <sup>28</sup> There is neither Jew nor Greek; there is neither slave nor free; nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus."*

Ben Witherington, in his excellent commentary on Galatians, defines the limits of this verse, even as he explains its reach when he says,

*"It is also well to be aware here that Paul is not suggesting here the obliteration of the distinctions he mentions in this verse, but rather their redemption and transformation in Christ. The new creation is the old one transformed and transfigured. These ethnic, social, and sexual distinctions continue to exist but in Christ they are not to determine one's soteriological or spiritual or social standing in the body of Christ."*

Pillar affirms and teaches that this text redeems and transforms ethnic, social, and sexual distinctions previously distorted as a result of the Fall. Though such distinctions still exist (because of the persistence of sin), they are not determinative of one's placement regarding leadership within a local congregation or community. Pillar understands that there are those who would limit this text to the spiritual realities of salvation alone. Under such an argument, our brothers and sisters who hold to it insist that the text simply doesn't address issues of church leadership or congregational involvement. We, however, believe that limiting the text in such a way minimizes the far reaching realities of the redemption offered in Christ and, more importantly, is never a limit the Apostle intended to be made.

### I Corinthians 11

I Corinthians 11, particularly v. 3, is one of the most critical in relationship to the roles of man and woman.

*But I want you to understand that the head of every man is Christ, the head of a wife is her husband, and the head of Christ is God.*

We must ask the question, "In what way(s) is man head of (over) woman?" Many interpret this in the traditional hierarchical view of a man having authority over woman. Many translations favor this interpretation as well. Therefore, as with all these texts, we need to proceed with both humility and caution. I do not believe the traditional interpretation is correct or warranted. But, even if it is, I would further argue that the subject may well be marriage again (as in Ephesians) and not the relationship of man/woman, generally speaking.

First, the Greek term used here is kephale. Kephale, head, has a vast range of meaning. However, when one studies the Greek term, itself, one notes that ‘authority over’ is not native to this term. In fact, when the term occurs in the New Testament, it may well be used in relationship to its metaphorical meaning, “source” (e.g., Mt 10:25; 13:52; Lk 13:25; 14:21).

Cyril of Alexandria, an important Greek-speaking leader of the church in the fourth century, commenting on this text wrote: “Thus we say that the *kephalē* of every man is Christ, because he was excellently **made through him**. And the *kephalē* of woman is man, because she was taken from his flesh. Likewise, the *kephalē* of Christ is God, because he is from him according to nature.”

Walt Kaiser adds, “This temporal, sequential thought continues in the sentence “And the head of the woman is man” (that is, “the man is the source of woman’s life”). According to Genesis 2:21–23, Adam is the origin of Eve’s being. And it is precisely this Old Testament text which Paul has in mind (1 Cor 11:8, 12). That “source” is the appropriate meaning of *kephalē* in 1 Corinthians 11:3 is confirmed by Paul’s “source” language in his appeal to Genesis 2.

This interpretative slant on I Corinthians 11:3 is the one that most fits within the context of the argument Paul is making. Inserting the term source changes the verse to read:

*“I want you to understand that Christ is the source of man’s being; the man is the source of woman’s being; and God is the source of Christ’s being.”*

This translation removes the traditional interpretation, which we believe is imposed on the text, and helps us excavate the remainder of the chapter. In so doing, we move away from “authority” and toward “life-giving source.” Such movement not only makes perfect sense, but it also – and more importantly – comports with the biblical evidence weaving its way all the way back to the Creation account.

Though this interpretation makes complete sense in our eyes, many, of course, will disagree with us and prefer a more traditional interpretation of ‘head.’ In that case, then, we need to consider the context again and confess that this must apply to marriage and can, in no way mean the church or public gatherings.

For example I, as a husband, am not ever – in any relationship – head over any woman, other than my wife (if, in fact, that’s the meaning here). And the way I interpret headship should face as much scrutiny as my commitment to it.

Gordon Hugenberger helps us identify the limits of this passage, for those who wish to see it through a more traditional interpretative grid:

“Similarly, the “headship” mentioned in 1 Cor. 11:3 is exactly the same as the “headship” mentioned in Eph. 5:22. The husband is the “head” of the wife, who is compared in this metaphor to his own body, which he loves, cares for, etc. This “one flesh” image, which is based on Genesis 2 (to which both 1 Corinthians 11 and Ephesians 5 make allusion), is a profound key to marital happiness: a husband is called to love his wife as his own body, etc. I consider it strange, however, and perhaps dangerous for a man to imagine himself to be the head of any woman other than his own wife. Hence, in my opinion 1 Corinthians 11 concerns the marriage relationship, not gender relationship

(e.g., "the head of a woman is her husband," as the RSV renders 11:3, rather than "the head of the woman is man," with the NIV)."

While I am not fully on board with the way in which Dr. Hugenberger interprets 'head' from a quasi-Complimentarian position, I do believe his argument has merit. At the very least, it limits the passage in a way that attempts to capture the thrust of the text.

### **I Corinthians 13 - 14**

1 Corinthians 14:33–40, where Paul instructs women in the church to "remain silent," we believe that this restriction was not universally applied either by Paul or by other early congregations. For example, women functioned in prominent leadership positions (Phoebe, Lydia, Euodia, Syntyche, Priscilla, Junia), were designated as ministers (or deacons, Rom 16:1), fellow workers (Rom 16:3), co-laborers in the gospel (Phil 4:2–9), and apostles (or messengers, Rom 16:7).

As Dr. Ben Witherington notes, Paul is once again dealing with a specific issue within the local congregation:

Paul is correcting problems as they arise in the house churches in Corinth. One such problem is caused by some women, apparently just some wives, who are interrupting the time of prophesying by asking questions. Now Paul has already said in 1 Cor. 11 that women are allowed to pray and prophesy in Christian worship if they wear head coverings (authority) to hide their 'glory' (i.e. hair), since only God's glory should be visible in worship, and he is not renegeing on that permission in 1 Cor. 14.33b-36. The largely Gentile congregation in Corinth brought with them into the church their pre-existing assumptions about prophecy and what was appropriate when approaching a prophet or prophetess.

The Spirit of God empowered both men and women to be proclaimers of God's redemptive work in Christ (Acts 2:14–18). Women's participation in the edifying presentation of the gospel and vocal prayer in the congregation were a normal part of early church life (1 Cor 11).

### **Ephesians 5**

"Headship" in this context is subsumed under the larger metaphor of marriage, which is already a one-flesh relationship, as well as the imagery of mutual submission (5:21) which is the outcome of a Spirit-filled relationship (5:15 – 19). As noted above, the Greek term here, *kephale*, contains a host of meanings. While its literal meaning is 'head of man or beast,' its metaphorical meaning is 'source.' In this text (as well as the other New Testament texts where this term occurs), we believe the best – and most valid – interpretation is 'source.' Because it's a reference back to Genesis 1 – 3 which reminds the reader that the man is the 'source' of the woman's life, who was created as his equal – counter partner – but not the authority over her.

I also believe this fits best within the context of the analogy of Christ and His church. His life is the *literal and metaphorical* 'source' of the church. If it was Paul's desire to express a more authoritative relationship, then it seems more likely that he would have chosen the term *exousia*, which is more restrictive in its interpretation. One might add that if the idea of submission included obedience from the wife toward the husband, then Paul would have chosen the term he uses just a few verses later in Ephesians 6 when addressing the child's relationship to parents.

The Ephesians text is also built off of (in form, at least) the Roman Household codes. These codes were notoriously restrictive toward women and children. Women would not even be addressed in these codes. We believe that Paul is actually subversively bringing liberation to women (in a fully patriarchal culture) – via the Gospel – by addressing them at all. The totality of the argument of Ephesians 5 is one of submission, one to another, based upon the God-given equality of male and female and the God-surrendered life of husband and wife that leads them to ‘self-submit’ and to relate to one another out of their mutual divine Source of love and life.

## Pastoral Epistles

### I Timothy 2 and 3, Titus 1

The arguments against women teaching and holding leadership positions in the church ultimately come down to a couple of pivotal passages in the Pastoral Epistles. We will consider two of the central issues normally leveled to restrict women from teaching with authority.

1. **The use of masculine language to delimit leadership to male only status.** Appealing to the presence of masculine language to prevent women from leading is insufficient for several reasons. First, it’s common for the Bible to express legal norms in masculine language, yet intend those norms to extend to both male and female. Secondly, *job descriptions* often, if not always, occur in male gender throughout Scripture. Yet, when we read further, we find that women hold the positions which are being described in masculine language (see for example, Ex. 15:20, Numbers 12:6 – 8, Deuteronomy 13, 16, 17 – 18).

Once again, OT scholar and Pastor, Gordon Hugenberger is helpful here:

“The 10th Commandment, for example, states, "You shall not covet your neighbor's wife, or his manservant, etc." The fact that this text mentions "your neighbor's wife" rather than "your neighbor's husband," and that all the references to "you" and "your" throughout the verse are masculine (in Hebrew) rather than feminine, ought not to be misinterpreted as if this commandment applies only to men. In the absence of other constraints, norms which utilize male-oriented terminology ought to be construed, in general, as including both sexes in their purview. Appropriately, at least according to one interpretation of Mark 10:12, Jesus recognized this principle with respect to the male-oriented divorce law of Deut. 24:1-4 when he applied its provision to a divorce initiated by a wife.”

2. **Paul’s argument in I Timothy 1 – 2 is taken as a universal injunction against women teaching/leading in the church.** Let’s begin with what we know. The life of the church is being called into question by the prevalence of false/heretical teaching. Therefore, Paul is, unquestionably, dealing with the key issue of how we respond to heresy and maintain the purity of the life of the church. As such, it’s an important passage, in this regard. Within this interpretive framework one can easily detect that Paul is using a ‘General to Specific’ argument to make his case. In other words, he moves from the general problem of false teaching to the specific issue of its embodiment – *some women who have been deceived by false teachers and are now spreading that teaching within the church.*

Therefore, there are a couple of things happening here that guide our interpretation:

- a. The women instructed to listen and come under submission are the very women who are causing a disturbance. Paul is likely calling them to submit to the authority of the teachers/elders of the congregation. An application any of us would, no doubt, make to men who were/are engaged in false teaching as well.
- b. The Greek term Paul employs supports the fact that he is encountering subversive and intentionally false and manipulative teaching. In fact, the only natural interpretation of this term is 'usurping authority,' 'grasping authority,' or exhibiting 'domineering authority.' Again, if Paul were addressing typical authority issues that he intended to have universal application regarding gender, then it seems likely he would have used one of the other terms at his disposal, rather than this direct and unquestionably aggressive term.

Therefore, we believe that the limits of the text are clear and immediate and do not constitute a universal prohibition against women leading/teaching within the life of the church. If the prohibition were to be universal, then we would need to interpret the entire passage within this view.

This is but a brief sampling of the many important Scriptures related to this important issue. It is not our intention to convince you of our position, nor to create any division with our many brothers and sisters in Christ who disagree with us on this issue. Yet, we do seek to clearly communicate our convictions related to this subject and others on which we in the body of Christ often disagree.

We have also included only the briefest of explanations with the hope that one, after considering this position, might find the biblical support to be sound, accurate, and faithful to the original intent of the text.



\*The word appears in the Hebrew Old Testament only three times: here in Genesis 3:16, in Genesis 4:7 and in Song of Songs 7:10. Of the twelve known ancient versions (the Greek Septuagint, the Syriac Peshitta, the Samaritan Pentateuch, the Old Latin, the Sahidic, the Bohairic, the Ethiopic, the Arabic, Aquila's Greek, Symmachus's Greek, Theodotion's Greek and the Latin Vulgate), almost every one (twenty-one out of twenty-eight times) renders these three instances of *tešûqâh* as "turning," not "desire." The often-repeated rejoinder to this will rule/shall rule argument is to go to Genesis 4:7: "Sin is crouching at the door; unto you is its turning, but you will [or shall in the sense of must] rule over it." There is no doubt that both the word *tešûqâh* ("turning") and the verb to rule are found in both contexts. But what is debated is the best way to render the Hebrew. Several suggestions avoid the traditional interpretation that insists on an obligatory sense to the verb to rule. One way predicts that Cain, now governed by sin and pictured as a crouching beast at his door, will rule over him (his brother, Abel). This, however, does not appear to be what the author meant. A preferred way of handling this phrase would be to treat it as a question. (The absence of the particle introducing questions is a phenomenon witnessed in about half of Hebrew questions.) Hence we would render it "But you, will you rule over it?" or "Will you be its master?" (This interpretation is also favored by H. Ewald, G. R. Castellino and, to some extent, Claus Westermann.) Kaiser, *Hard Sayings of the Bible*.

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**PCC Statement of Faith  
What We Believe**

**The Top-Tier Beliefs**

In recent decades, we have seen many authors, pastors, and churches, explore the truths of Christianity through the lens of Classic or Orthodox Christianity. The fullest representation of Orthodoxy Christianity is recorded in the ancient creeds. These ancient creeds, such as the Apostle's Creed and the Nicene Creed, have formed the 'boundary lines of belief' for the people of God for centuries. These creeds are able to be affirmed by all believers regardless of denominational affiliation. Pillar's 'top tier' beliefs are captured specifically in the Apostles' Creed.

**Apostles' Creed**

I believe in God, the Father Almighty,  
creator of heaven and earth.

I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord,  
who was conceived by the Holy Spirit  
and born of the virgin Mary.  
He suffered under Pontius Pilate,  
was crucified, died and was buried;  
The third day he rose again from the dead.  
He ascended to heaven  
and is seated at the right hand of God the Father almighty.  
From there he will come to judge the living and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit,  
the holy catholic church,\*\*  
the communion of the saints,  
the forgiveness of sins,  
the resurrection for the body,  
and the life everlasting.

Amen.

\*\*The word *catholic* means "universal."

From the Apostles Creed we are able to affirm the following as a Statement of Faith that rests within the convictions and truths we believe are self-evident in the Biblical witness.

1. We believe the Bible to be the inspired, the only infallible, authoritative Word of God.
2. We believe that there is one God, eternally existent in three persons: Father, Son and Holy Spirit.
3. We believe in the deity of our Lord Jesus Christ  
in His virgin birth,  
in His sinless life,

in His miracles,  
in His vicarious and atoning death through His shed blood,  
in His bodily resurrection,  
in His ascension to the right hand of the Father,  
and in His personal return in power and glory.

4. We believe that for the salvation of lost and sinful people, regeneration by the Holy Spirit is absolutely essential.
5. We believe in the present ministry of the Holy Spirit by whose indwelling the Christ-follower is enabled to live a godly life.
6. We believe in the resurrection of both the saved and the lost; the saved unto life and the lost unto death.
7. We believe in the spiritual unity of believers in our Lord Jesus Christ.

### **Important but Second-Tier Beliefs**

- Baptism
  - Pillar seeks to affirm two positions on baptism which the church has historically held and believed. We will work with families to baptize infants if that is their particular church background, and we will work with families to dedicate children. We see both modes of baptism within Scripture. Regardless of which form/mode of baptism you would like to explore, we do not believe that baptism is regenerative. In other words, baptism does not save you. Only the faith of and in Christ redeems the lost.
- Men as well as women are both gifted for leadership within the church
  - Pillar affirms the role of women in leadership at every level in the church (see handout).
- Gifts of the Holy Spirit
  - God empowers and guides His people through His Spirit.
  - God has extended at least one 'gift of grace' to every believer for the edification of the church.
  - The Spirit is active and alive in the world today.

Though Pillar sees evidence of the gift of 'tongues' in Scripture, we note that it is considered a minor gift and is only affirmed without conflict in the context of a private prayer language. In fact, when it occurs in the context of the assembly in Scripture, it does so as a matter of conflict and disruption that is discouraged. Therefore, while we affirm that a believer might well experience a rich prayer language, we seek to uphold the unity and integrity and protection of the gathered assembly by also affirming the role of the Spirit in bringing order, not confusion to the people of God. If one were to 'utter ecstatic' language in the church, the Elders would expect interpretation from another and then seek to counsel with them at a later date. It might also be noted that there is some clear evidence that the utterance of the Holy Spirit also indicated what is known as a missionary gift that enables one to speak in a native language and yet understood by another who speaks in a different 'tongue.'