Men and Women, Serving and Leading God's Church Together

Romans 12:1–8 • Char Brodersen

Introduction: Good morning, Church! If it's your first time joining us, Welcome! We're taking a break from our teachings in Acts to talk about one of our key values as a church community, as we've done with other values and practices like Baptism and Communion. The topic we want to look at together is—Men and Women, serving and leading God's church in a shoulder-to-shoulder kind of partnership with one another.

Calvary Chapel Costa Mesa believes and practices the ordination of both men and women to ministry as a recognition of the priesthood of all believers (Rom. 12:1–2; 1 Pet. 4:9), and the unique gifting of individuals by the Holy Spirit to continue the ministry and mission of Jesus in the Church and the world (Rom. 12:4–9; 1 Cor. 12:4–11; Eph. 4:7–13; 1 Pet. 4:10–11). We believe that both men and women are created by God, in his image, and have been called by God, from the beginning of creation, to partner with him in building for his kingdom. Both men and women are essential in ministering to God and to one another in the work of partnering with God in his redemption through Jesus Christ, serving and ministering to the Church, the home, and the world.

We have been practicing these things for nearly a decade, as women already lead and serve in every echelon of our church and organization. We aren't changing anything in our current practice but want to simply clarify our biblical position and conviction.

As we consider the role of women in Scripture, I want to begin by reminding us that this topic falls under the category of secondary issues. It's an open-handed issue that many faithful, Jesus loving, biblically grounded and convicted people hold different views on, and sometimes those views are held very strongly. As a community of Jesus people, we want to avoid judging those who think and interpret these things different from us as being less spiritual, less committed to the authority of Scripture or any other thing like that. I've wrestled through this topic for many years, and have read very broadly and had numerous conversations and feel that I have clarity on the biblical view. But you might strongly disagree with my biblical interpretation and conclusions, and that's okay. We always hold secondary, non-doctrinal, non-salvific topics with open hands and with humility.

As one wise Christian put it—

> **In essentials unity, in non-essentials liberty, in all things charity.**
>
> —Rupertus Meldenius

I've heard a lot of pastors and leaders use a common phrase as of late when talking about women and their place in Scripture, redemption, and the Church: "Well, I don't really have a dog in this fight." I think I get what they're saying. They're trying to say they don't have an agenda or insist on something. But as a follower of Jesus who believes in the authority of Scripture and therefore both male and female as equal bearers of the image of God, you should have a dog in this fight.

This is not just a female issue, it's a humanity issue.

©2026 Property of
Calvary Chapel of Costa Mesa
All Rights Reserved.

James Emery White, in his book *Generation Z,* says:

> **The doctrine of humanity is, by far, the most pressing doctrine of our day in regard to culture. It is the one area of Christian thought that is most challenged by the world in which we live….As the first five centuries hammered out Christology and later generations tackled everything from the Holy Spirit to revelation, ours is the generation that will be forced to examine and elucidate the doctrine of humanity in ways that confront both changing morals and new technological frontiers.**
>
> —James Emery White

Now whenever we are dealing with any kind of scriptural topic, we always want to practice proper interpretation principles. We call this Hermeneutics, and it is about how we interpret Scripture faithfully and accurately.

Historical faithful hermeneutical/interpretation principles:

- **We do not derive doctrine from one verse or passage.**
- **We do not derive doctrine from confusing or interpretively problematic text; instead, we use clear passages to interpret and understand confusing or problematic passages.**
- **We use the full witness of Scripture to interpret Scripture and not the other way around.**
- **This means we account for the most data with the fewest difficulties. We seek to interpret Scripture as a connected whole and not take one verse in isolation to the whole witness of Scripture.**

I. In the beginning

A. When we consider any biblical topic, we have to consider where this topic first shows up. With the topic of humanity and women, we must start at the beginning.

B. Scripture clearly teaches that men and women are created by God with equal honor and dignity and worth (Gen. 1:26–27). Together, they bear the image of God and are created to partner with God in building his garden kingdom and spreading it to the ends of the earth. The garden of Eden is a garden temple, where heaven and earth intersect, where the divine and human live together in harmony. Adam and Eve are set over this garden temple to "work it and keep it" (Gen. 2:15). This is the same language that is later used of the Levitical priest in their priestly service of the tabernacle (Num. 3:6–9). Humans, male and female, are made in God's image, placed in his garden temple to do the priestly work of caring for it. They are commissioned by God to multiply, to rule, and to extend the garden temple boundary.

1. This is God's original design for creation, male and female. And within the text of Genesis 1 and Genesis 2, we don't have any language of Adam having any kind of authority over Eve—of being her spiritual teacher, and her being his student. Now, the mention of

©2026 Property of
Calvary Chapel of Costa Mesa
All Rights Reserved.

dominance does come later as a result of the fall, but when we're just taking the original text itself at face value, we see that though Adam is created first, the language is of oneness and partnership—not of authority and subordination. Adam and Eve are king and queen over God's good creation; together they image God, ruling over creation as a priestly work, and partner with God in spreading his kingdom to the ends of the earth.

C. Now, in chapter 3 of Genesis, the whole plan goes off the rails. When God's judgment is dealt out for Adam and Eve's disobedience, God says that one of the results of their sin will be this wrestling for dominance. God says to Eve, **"Your desire will be for your husband, and he will rule over you."—Genesis 3:16**

1. With the entrance of sin, there is this enmity and struggle between the man and the woman who previously were one, who were partners. Now they are competitors. So, the struggles of the sexes that we see in history and culture is something that has come into human dynamics through sin and is not something created or intended by God.

    a. Men are not created to rule over women, and vice versa. Humans are created to partner with one another, to image God, and partner with him to build his kingdom.

    b. Last note here. Even before God's judgment is pronounced upon Adam and Eve, God promises redemption and salvation will come—not through the man, Adam—but through the Seed of the Woman. That is radically significant in the Christian perspective on women and God's redemptive purposes to include her.

II. The collective voice of Scripture regarding women in God's plan of salvation + redemption

A. As we continue through the biblical narrative, we need to remember that we are in a world that is broken and dysfunctional because of sin. What is represented in the stories of God's people is not always the ideal, God's will, or according to his instruction. Israel's culture is a is the same as the Ancient Near East culture. It is a Patriarchal, Patrilineal, Patrilocal culture. (For more on this, read Sandra Richter's *The Epic of Eden*.) YHWH meets Israel within that culture and often accommodates that culture, and at other times, corrects and subverts it. Theologians call this *Divine Accommodation*, meaning, God meets Israel where they are at in the cultural environment and perspective of their time, but he improves their condition with his instruction and values. He brings them forward into his ideal of what he has for humanity. Throughout the biblical narrative, we see God upsetting cultural norms. One great example of this is with the firstborn priority of inheritance in the stories of Isaac and Ishmael, Jacob and Esau, David and his brothers. In that culture, the firstborn was the one that gets all the inheritance, all the blessing passed on to them. But God is constantly upsetting this. He does this with the twelve patriarchs of Israel. He does this later with women in the narrative as well. God appoints and gifts whom he wills. God is constantly breaking into Israel's practices with his kingdom values and purposes.

1. Hannah's prayer in 1 Samuel 2:1–10 is the way that we need to read the Old Testament. Hannah declares that God is constantly in this work of subversion. He takes what is humble, lowly esteemed by this world, and he exalts it. And he takes what is exalted in this world, and he casts it down. Paul capitalizes on this in 1 Corinthians as supremely seen in the work of our crucified King, Jesus. Now, I say all that because I think that's

©2026 Property of
Calvary Chapel of Costa Mesa
All Rights Reserved.

what we're seeing throughout the Old Testament. We are seeing Israel mimic the cultures around them, the culture of the day, rather than living out God's ideal laid out in Genesis chapters 1 and 2.

2. But again, God is regularly upsetting Israel's cultural norms and practices. The Scripture's view and treatment of women has historically been countercultural to the world's view and treatment of women. Starting from the Imago Dei in Genesis 1–2, to the law of Moses that protected and dignified women, to the pictures of female judicial authority and spiritual leadership in the Book of Judges.

    a. Deborah, **the Prophetess** (Judg. 4–5) was both a spiritual and political leader over Israel, one who ruled in a time before the kings of Israel. **The Queens** (Abigail, Bathsheba, and Esther) are celebrated heroine queens in the biblical story. **Prophetesses of the Old Testament** (Miriam, Deborah, Hannah, Huldah, Isaiah's wife) are called the Prophetess.

    b. Huldah, **the Prophetess** lived during the reign of King Josiah (c. 640–609 BC). When Hilkiah the high priest found the long-lost "Book of the Law" (most likely Deuteronomy) in the temple, Josiah the king sent a delegation to consult her, rather than prophets like Jeremiah or Zephaniah. Why? Because she is on equal standing with these more well-known prophets

3. We see this culmination of the place of women in the Jesus stories of the Gospels, in which women were among Jesus' inner circle of disciples, highlighted as understanding Jesus' teaching when religious leaders and even the inner circle of the 12 don't. We know these female disciples stay with Jesus when every other disciple flees. They are last at the Cross and first at the tomb. The female disciples are the witnesses of the crucifixion and the first witnesses of the resurrection! Remember that according to John's Gospel, it was Mary Magdalene who was the first "apostle," or "sent one," with the good news of Jesus' victory over death!

    a. This is all wonderfully and powerfully subversive for the culture of its day, and very progressive. That a Jewish rabbi would have female disciples was actually unheard of, and Mark specifically highlights their faith and faithfulness as they are outdoing the male apostles and disciple. They are even outdoing the religious leaders in their faith and their faithfulness to God.

4. When it comes to the rest of the New Testament, we need to consider Junia, Priscilla, and Phoebe as some female characters who stand out. In Romans chapter 16, Paul calls out 10 different women who are serving and leading in the church. They are to be recognized, imitated, and supported.

    a. Junia—Paul, speaking of Junia, says that she is well known or outstanding among the apostles (Rom. 16:7). Commentators argue whether this should be interpreted as Junia being among the apostles (the apostles of the church like Barnabas, Timothy, etc.) or being highly regarded by the apostles. Whatever it means, she was definitely regarded highly by them.

©2026 Property of
Calvary Chapel of Costa Mesa
All Rights Reserved.

b. Priscilla—Priscilla discipled and taught Apollos, along with her husband Aquila, explaining to him the way of God more thoroughly. They are mentioned six times in the New Testament (Acts 18; Rom. 16:3; 1 Cor. 16:19; 2 Tim. 4:19), always together as a team, but interestingly, Priscilla is always mentioned first and plays the more dominant character in the stories about them—possibly because she is the one with the teaching/instructing gift. (Similar to discussions around Paul and Barnabas mentions in Acts—Paul is always mentioned first and is the primary speaker/preacher.)

c. Phoebe—Finally, there is Phoebe (Rom 16:1–2).

i. Deacon (*Diakonos*): Paul identifies Phoebe as a deacon, a minister or servant of the church in Cenchreae.

ii. Benefactor (*Prostatis*): literally means a woman set over others and a female guardian, protectress, patroness, caring for the affairs of others and aiding them with her resources.

a. She is described by Paul as a benefactor, providing financial and physical support and leadership to many for ministry and mission, including Paul himself.

iii. Letter Courier: She delivered Paul's letter to the church in Rome, a high-stakes, dangerous task requiring her to navigate safe passage to Rome. Not only that, but these church couriers were those who were deeply trusted and had the ability to expound on the instruction given in these letters and Epistles.

d. Cynthia Westfall, assistant Professor of New Testament at McMaster Divinty College, writes in her book, *Paul and Gender,*

> **Paul refers to Junia as an apostle (Rom. 16:7) and Phoebe as a deacon (16:1), but there are no instances where he gives specific women the title "pastor." "elder," or "teacher." However, Paul does not give specific men these titles either, except for two cases when he calls himself a teacher (1 Tim. 2:7; 2 Tim. 1:11). The fact that Paul commends so many women so strongly with terms that he uses for his ministry team indicates that women were in various positions of leadership and service in the church, women to whom Paul gave honor, recognition, and in some cases submission, including apostle, deacon, prophet, fellow worker, and one who works hard. In two cases (Priscilla and Phoebe) he gives women honor as patrons (Rom. 16:1–3). According to Pauline practice and Greek grammar, outside of 1 Timothy there is no compelling reason to suggest that women would be excluded from being pastors, elders, or teachers in a house church that is modeled on the household, since Paul has honored them for filling these other roles. Paul's teaching on spiritual gifts indicates that the Spirit distributes the spiritual gifts of pastor and teacher as he wills, so that only the Spirit is qualified to restrict any group from serving those functions. Yet the position of elder/bishop was appointed by Paul and his mission team.**

©2026 Property of
Calvary Chapel of Costa Mesa
All Rights Reserved.

The only evidence for any restriction on women comes from the way the church has traditionally interpreted the prohibitions in 1 Timothy 2:12.

—Cynthia Westfall, *Paul and Gender*

e. As we seek to interpret Scripture wisely and accurately, it is important for us to use all the data and see how the Scriptures speak of women in gifting, function, and roles in both the Old Testament and New Testament.

III. The priesthood of all believers

A. Some would agree with everything I've said so far, but then get stuck on two points:

1. Jesus never appointed female spostles.

2. There aren't any female priests among the Levites.

B. As to the issue of Jesus never appointing female apostles, this is true. Also, the fact that Jesus appoints 12 men to be his inner circle of disciples and his apostles (sent ones) was clearly symbolic that Jesus was establishing a new Israel under his Messianic mission and reign. This is most likely why women are not included. The 12 represent the tribes of Israel being reformed and regathered under Jesus the Messiah.

1. It's important to note that women, however, were disciples of Jesus—which was unheard of in the 1st century Jewish world. But also that these women were his patrons. They financially and physically supported Jesus' itinerant ministry and mission.

C. As regards the Levitical priesthood in the Old Testament only being male, this is true. Israel was a patriarchal culture and society, and God worked within that culture to bring about his redemptive plan. We know that the need for the Levitical priesthood and their work was fulfilled in Jesus' once for all sacrifice for sin. Scripture teaches that Jesus sacrificial work has actually instituted a new priesthood that includes all believers (1 Pet. 2:5–9; Rom. 12:1–2; Rev. 5:9–10).

1. We understand that what we see in the life, death, resurrection of Jesus, his ascension, and sending of the Spirit is a work of redemption. Jesus is bringing Israel and humanity back into the very heart and ideal that God desired from the beginning. Jesus restores what was lost at the fall—men and women living under God's reign, bearing his image—the image of Jesus Christ—partnering with God as a new priesthood, not of Levites, not of men only, but male and female, Jew and Greek, slave and free, in offering sacrifice and praise to God and to partner with God to spread his kingdom to the ends of the earth (1 Pet. 2:9; Rom. 12:1–2; Rev. 5:9–10). Jesus has established through the New Covenant the priesthood of all believers.

D. Paul the apostle, in Romans 12, expounds and unpacks this priesthood of all believers. Let's read this text together:

Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship. Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be

©2026 Property of
Calvary Chapel of Costa Mesa
All Rights Reserved.

transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will. For by the grace given me I say to every one of you: Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the faith God has distributed to each of you. For just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, so in Christ we, though many, form one body, and each member belongs to all the others. We have different gifts, according to the grace given to each of us. If your gift is prophesying, then prophesy in accordance with your faith; if it is serving, then serve; if it is teaching, then teach; if it is to encourage, then give encouragement; if it is giving, then give generously; if it is to lead, do it diligently; if it is to show mercy, do it cheerfully.

—Romans 12:1–8

1. Paul lays out for the (big C) Church, both brothers and sisters, that each of them are priests before God, offering sacrifice to God. That sacrifice is their own body handed over to God to discover from the Spirit how God has gifted them to serve the body of Christ. In Paul's list of gifts given by the Spirit, prophecy, teaching, and leading are listed. These are all gifts associated with leadership roles in the Church. Now the interesting thing about this and other passages (Ephesians 4, where Paul lists Spirit-gifted roles in leadership—Apostles, Prophets, Evangelists, Shepherds, and Teachers—as well as 1 Corinthians 12, when Paul talks about the gifts of the Spirit in the Church, or 1 Peter and his mentioning of speaking and serving gifts), none of these mention anything about being gender specific but are in fact applied to all of God's people, by the Spirit of God, to empower them to continue the ministry and mission of Jesus in the Church and in the world. Again, it is the Spirit of Jesus who distributes them to God's people as he determines.

2. But what many have done with these passages is to overlook the plain teaching and application of these passages and apply poor hermeneutic/interpretive principles. We have taken one single passage in 1 Timothy 2, which is a personal letter to a son in the faith about a certain specific situation that Paul is writing about—false doctrine in the church in Ephesus—and we have laid that over these clear passages. And by doing so, we are telling more than half of the Church that the plain meaning and application of Romans 12 actually doesn't apply to them. Only certain parts of Ephesians 4, 1 Corinthians 12, or 1 Peter 4 apply to you. You can maybe do some mercy or helps ministry.

    a. But the Spirit of God, and the gifts and abilities that he supplies, have been given to the people of God to continue the ministry and mission of Jesus. These gifts are not gender specific and are distributed by the Spirit as he wills (1 Cor. 12:11). We don't get to decide who gets what gift, and Paul makes it clear that we don't get to say to any part of the Spirit-gifted body of Christ—we don't need you (1 Cor. 12:21–26).

    b. Again, unfortunately, we have taken a very difficult to understand, specific passage in 1 Timothy 2, and we have used it to interpret and color everything else. I'm going to spend our time next week unpacking that difficult passage for us.

©2026 Property of
Calvary Chapel of Costa Mesa
All Rights Reserved.

3. Cynthia Westfall writes in her book, *Paul and Gender*, that the early church was an organic house church movement, not a formal institution with top-down, heavy authoritarian leadership. They lived like a family. She writes:

> **Paul and his ministry team set up people responsible for the house church, using leadership labels that he related to household functions: He defined elders as caregivers in the household (Tit. 1:7) and as servants (deacons), both of whose functions he correlated with household management (1 Tim. 3:4–5, 12; cf. 3:15). The content of the worship service would have come through the exercise of spiritual gifts; all the members came ready to participate. In order to understand what Paul really means by the terms that he uses for those who labor hard in the house churches, we need to strip away the associations that these words developed as technical terms for positions of power and status in church history and traditions. When Christianity was legalized in 313 CE and moved into public space, the terms "elder" and "deacon" quickly became titles of power, authority, and prestige in the gentile world. The fellowship meal became a stylized ritual (Eucharist) that was controlled by men in public space. The positions of leadership became public offices instead of household roles, reflecting masculine concepts of hierarchy in the public sphere. When the context of worship changed, "elder," "deacon," and "bishop" soon became titles that were far different from Paul's use of the terms. The rhetoric of gender would lead to the exclusion of women from public leadership when it would not have excluded them from household leadership. Therefore, apart from the assumption that the prohibitions of a woman teaching and dominating a man in 1 Timothy 2:12 apply to "public worship," there is no cultural, grammatical, or textual reason to exclude women from Pauline leadership in the house churches as far as the positions themselves are concerned or the responsibilities associated with them.**
>
> —Cynthia Westfall, *Paul and Gender*

Conclusion

So where do we land? We believe what the Scripture envisions for men and women redeemed by Jesus. We are called to image him to the church, in the home, and the world together. Shoulder to shoulder. Not Egalitarianism. We don't believe that men and women are the same. We are wonderfully different in the way we image God. Not Complementarianism, though we do believe that men and women compliment one another in imaging God. But this viewpoint is often played out preferring men and their roles and seeing them as primary and women only helping and supporting them.

The Scriptures don't use either of these terms.

The clearest New Testament term for men and women in Jesus is mutualism. What the Scripture envisions for God's people is a mutual submission in love, **"Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ" (Eph. 5:21).**

©2026 Property of
Calvary Chapel of Costa Mesa
All Rights Reserved.

This kind of mutual submission in love is how the Triune God, whose image we bear, functions in creation, salvation, and redemption. Each member of the Trinity submits to the other—glorifies the other, supports while one leads and is showcased. The Father glorifies the Son, the Son glorifies the Father, the Spirit glorifies the Son, the Father and Son send the Spirit and magnify his work.

I believe that this is also how a healthy biblical marriage works—mutual submission in love. Grace (my wife) has gifts, abilities, knowledge, and experiences that are different and complimentary to mine, and there are areas in our life—marriage, family, etc.—where she leads us and I support. And the same is true for me. There are areas where I am gifted. I have abilities, knowledge, and experience where I lead our life, marriage, and family. It's a dance where we defer/submit to one another's leadership for the good of the marriage and home.

When Paul writes about the gifted leadership of the church in Ephesians 4—listing Apostles, Prophets, Evangelists, Shepherds, and Teachers—he shows a community of leaders. These leaders also must practice this mutual submission in love—this deference to one another's spiritual gifting and abilities to lead in specific areas: **"to equip the saints for the work of ministry,"** for the benefit of the whole church to grow into what it's supposed to be—a community that reflects the beauty of Jesus Christ and his kingdom to one another and to the world (Eph. 4:1–16).

I believe when we actually look at the New Testament, God's ideal is that the Church would operate like a household, with family-like dynamics. Mother and father figures, who will oversee God's people and will genuinely serve, care for, teach, protect, and restore the family of God. And what I mean by that is those who show that kind of motherly, fatherly care and concern for God's family.

That's what mothers and fathers do, and I believe that that's what God's ideal is for the Church, that there would be mothers and fathers, males and females who would lead in this way, empowered by the Holy Spirit, and lead the Church, serve the Church, care for the Church, teach the Church—and raise up a whole generation of men and women who will discover the gifts and abilities that the Spirit of God has gifted them to continue the ministry and mission of Jesus to build his Church and his kingdom in the world.

I believe that this is what we see in the New Testament, and this is what we want to model, male and female together, shoulder to shoulder submitting to one another, imaging the renewed humanity in Jesus Christ, partnering with God, by the empowering and gifting of His Holy Spirit, to continue the ministry and mission of Jesus in the world; to serve the Church, the home, and to build for his kingdom.

Communion

As we close our time together by coming to the table, the Spirit of Jesus is here, with bread and wine—offering us his presence to abide with us. And just like on that night when he first did, he is offering forgiveness, healing, restoration, and renewal. He offers us repentance—the offer to turn back to him.

But this table is about even more than that—it is about our identity, about ongoing fellowship, partnership, and communion with Jesus each and every day.

©2026 Property of
Calvary Chapel of Costa Mesa
All Rights Reserved.

As we take the bread and the cup, we are partaking and participating in his identity, his life, his mission.

So, Church, come to the table this morning and partake and participate in the life that Jesus Messiah has made available to us by the pouring out of his blood for many.

Also, for those of you today who may feel beyond this offer, it's not for you—a failure, a skeptic, a denier, a betrayer, an outsider, or a plain old sinner. This offer is for you as well. Jesus welcomes you as his special guest at his table. He offers forgiveness, healing, restoration. Partake and participate in the life his has made possible for you through the shedding of his blood.

Come to the table, take it back to your seat, and as you are ready, partake of the bread and the cup.

©2026 Property of
Calvary Chapel of Costa Mesa
All Rights Reserved.