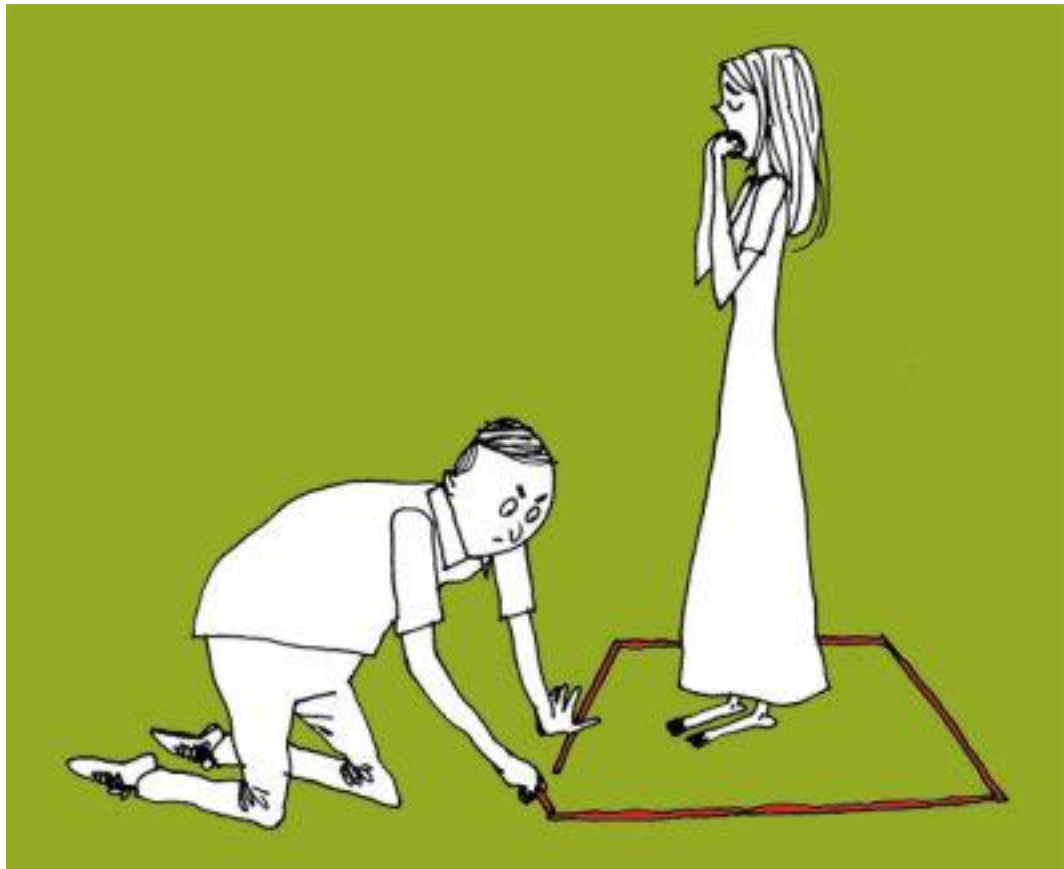


Is the 'order of creation' male authority Bible argument valid?

By [Philip B. Payne](#), Contributor | Sunday, June 04, 2023

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One of the mantras of complementarians is the “order of creation,” by which they mean that because man was created before woman, men should have authority over women. Is this biblical? Is it valid? [Genesis 1–3](#) states nothing about an “order of creation” in the sense that what was created earlier has authority over what was created later.

If temporal priority in the order of creation had established a hierarchy of authority, the animals created on the fifth day would have authority over animals created on the sixth day, and both of them would have authority over man and woman. The Genesis creation narrative states the opposite, that God gave man and woman together, God’s final creation, authority over the earlier-created earth and creatures.

The Danvers Statement asserts: “Adam’s headship in marriage was established by God before the Fall.” [Genesis 3:16](#), however, states that “he will rule over you” is a result of the fall. God’s statement that this is a result of sin and will happen in the future requires that prior to the fall man did **not** rule over woman.

Wayne Grudem (*Evangelical Feminism*, 40) correctly insists “we should *never* try to perpetuate the elements of the curse!” How, then, can there be male headship before the fall? Grudem asserts that “he will rule (*mashal*) over you” refers to “husbands ruling harshly” (40). Both major Hebrew dictionaries, however, analyze every Old Testament instance of *mashal* and list no negative meaning for it. *Mashal* doesn’t imply harsh rule. Grudem admits two pages earlier (38 n. 27) that he was wrong to teach a specific meaning of a different word without support from Hebrew dictionaries. The “order of creation” argument contradicts the natural meaning of [Genesis 3:16](#).

[Genesis 1](#) clearly teaches that male and female are equally created in God’s image and given dominion over the earth and all animals.

[Genesis 2](#) also consistently emphasizes man-woman equality. The creation of woman is its climax. It describes the woman not as a subordinate “helper,” but as an ezer kenegdo, “a strength corresponding to him.”

John Chrysostom (AD 347–407), affirmed that Eve “was not subjected as soon as she was made; nor, when He brought her to the man, did either she hear any such things from God, nor did the man say any such word to her: he said indeed that she was ‘bone of his bone, and flesh of his flesh’ (Gen. ii, 23); but of rule or subjection he nowhere made mention unto her” (NFPF 12:150–51). The naming formula appears only after the Fall: “The man called his wife’s name (shem) Eve” ([Genesis 3:20](#)). Neither “name” (shem) nor a proper name occurs in 2:23.

The man blamed “the woman whom you gave to be with me, she gave me the fruit from the tree, and I ate” (3:12). This is why God criticized him for “listening to your wife” (3:17). Listening to his wife was wrong only because she was offering him fruit God had forbidden.

Complementarians interpret Paul’s references to woman coming from man to imply male hierarchy. The conclusion regarding Paul’s three references to woman coming from man, her “head as source” in [1 Corinthians 11:3](#), 8–9, and 11–12, however, is: “The important point is that woman is not separate from man, nor is man separate from woman in the Lord, for just as woman came from man, so also man comes through woman, and all this is from the Godhead.”

Paul argues that men and women leading worship in prayer and prophecy should show respect to their source. Paul isn’t arguing from a hierarchy of authority. This passage’s only reference to “authority” is that “woman ought to have authority over her head” (11:10). As I argued in my op-ed ["Does 1 Corinthians say women have to cover their heads?"](#), Paul is not requiring women to veil. He is prohibiting women when praying or prophesying from symbolizing undisciplined sexuality by letting their hair down. Letting her hair down shamed her husband. Since man is woman’s source, she should respect him, and men in general, by doing up her hair for “her long hair is given to her for a covering” ([1 Corinthians 11:15](#)).

Paul's appeals to woman coming from man and man coming through woman stress that each should respect the other as their source. This same focus on respect for your source fits [1 Timothy 2:13](#): "For Adam was formed first, then Eve." For women deceived by the false teachers ([1 Timothy 5](#); [2 Timothy 3:6–7](#)) to seize authority to teach men in the church, they disrespected men. Paul argues that women should not do this because they owe respect to man as their source. Paul instructs Timothy to apply this precisely crafted rule to keep deceived women from seizing authority to teach a man (2:12). Eve is the perfect example of how serious the consequences can be when a woman conveys false teaching to a man.

William Wolfe's op-ed "[Male leadership in the Church: God's good and timeless plan for His people](#)" cites [1 Timothy 2:12–13](#) of "the distinct nature of God-given gender roles, as rooted in creation" and attributes to Paul an interpretation that, as we have shown, contradicts the overwhelmingly egalitarian message [Genesis 1–3](#). Wolfe argues from the ESV's anachronistic mistranslation of *authenthein* as "to exercise authority." This meaning is first clearly documented three centuries later.

Wolfe asserts that [1 Timothy 2:12](#) teaches that "women should not teach men." But his interpretation is contradicted by Deborah, Huldah, Phoebe, Priscilla, Mary, Junia, Tryphena, Tryphosa, Persis ([Romans 16:1–12](#); [Acts 18:1–7, 26](#)), Philip's four daughters who prophesied ([Acts 21:8–9](#)), Timothy's grandmother Lois and mother Eunice ([2 Timothy 1:5](#)) who "from childhood" taught Timothy the Scriptures ([2 Timothy 3:15](#)) with no indication that this teaching ever stopped, Euodias and Syntyche ([Philippians 4:2](#)), and Mary Magdalene, to whom after his resurrection Jesus first appeared and commissioned to announce his resurrection and ascension to the disciples ([John 20:11–18](#)).

Thomas Aquinas wrote, "she had the office of an apostle; indeed, she was an apostle to the apostles" ([John 20](#), Lecture 3; 2519). Paul repeatedly commands "women," "all," or "whoever" to teach or prophesy ([1 Corinthians 11:5](#); [14:5](#), [24](#), [26](#), [31](#), [39](#); [Colossians 3:16](#); [1 Timothy 3:1–2](#); [Titus 2:3](#); [2 Timothy 2:2](#); cf. [Hebrews 3:1](#), [12](#); [5:12](#)). God even revealed inspired Scripture through women ([Exodus 15:21](#); [Judges 5:2–31](#); [1 Samuel 2:1–10](#); [25:24–31](#); [Proverbs 31](#); [Luke 1:25](#), [42–55](#)).

Wolfe's interpretation, "Women can and should teach, but not to men" requires that "to teach" and "to seize authority to teach a man" together convey one prohibition. This is how Paul typically used *oude*. Consequently, Paul was prohibiting women in Ephesus from "seizing authority to teach a man" (See [here](#), and [here](#)). Paul's statement does not imply that "women should not teach men." Nevertheless, Wolfe calls women teaching men "a blatant act of disobedience against Scripture" and "challenges the God-given authority structure for a local church, which is — by command — exclusively male-led." Yet seven of the ten people Paul identifies by name in [Romans 16](#) as co-laborers in ministry are women. Paul instructs "female elders" (*presbytidas*, the identical word forbidding the appointment of "female elders" in the fourth century Council of Laodicea canon XI, *Apocryphal Acts of Matthew* 28, and inscriptions to "Angelos Epiktous elder" and "women elders") "employed in sacred service ... to be teachers

of what is excellent” ([Titus 2:3](#)). Wolfe’s interpretation contradicts Paul’s many affirmations of female church leaders.

Wolfe interprets Jesus’s command to be “innocent as doves” as a call for violent resistance and “our battle,” indeed, “the fiercest battle.” Wolfe inaccurately equates “*egalitarian*” with both “*androgynous*” and an “*assault on gender differences and authority*.” Christians for Biblical Equality, like most egalitarians, repudiates each of these caricatures. Wolfe is, therefore, an unreliable guide regarding both the Bible and the egalitarian position.

Wolfe’s “hierarchical structure” in which man’s “vocation is the primary and foundational one” in which “the office of ‘pastor’ or ‘elder,’ including its functions and title, is only given to men does not change the ontological equality and value of women in the local church” echoes *Animal Farm*’s “all animals are equal, but some animals are more equal than others.” Accordingly, Wolfe asserts, “It’s never, ‘You (women) ... can’t do that’.”

We should affirm the Bible’s complete teaching, not clichés like “the order of creation” and “[male headship](#)” that foster a result of the fall.

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