

ELDER POSITION PAPER ON MEN AND WOMEN IN CHURCH LEADERSHIP

Adopted by The Board of Elders September 13, 2018

The identity and role of men and women in the life of the church is very important and yet it is also controversial. It demands Biblical clarity, explanation, and room for learning and growth. The Board of Elders of the Chapel Hill Bible Church offers this position paper in that vein as an explanation of our theological commitments as well as our applications of this Biblical theology of gender in our church. Not every issue will be handled and articulated in this paper, but we hope to craft a clear expression of our Biblical beliefs and some key areas of ministry implication. We offer this in a spirit of shepherding, love, and unity for the good of the Chapel Hill Bible Church and the glory of God.

INTRODUCTION

Men and women are equal in essence, dignity, and worth. At the same time, men and women are unique in significant ways, designed by God to complement one another in important and loving creation roles, most notably in the home and the church. As it relates to the church, men and women are both expected to lead and serve in love; however, the office of elder is reserved for qualified men (1 Tim. 3; Titus 1). As it relates to the home, husband and wife are both expected to lead, serve, and love; however, God has established the husband as a uniquely responsible leader and the wife as a uniquely trusting abider in that loving leadership (Eph. 5). This paper will focus on the roles of men and women in the church body.

EQUAL AND ALIKE HUMANITY

The Bible stresses the shared humanity of men and women in the opening chapters of Genesis. Men and women are both made in the image of God and, in fact, constitute together the image of God (Gen. 1:27-28). There is no hint of inequality or subordination of personhood. The woman is created as a helper for the man, but that term connotes partnership in a complementary manner in order

to follow God in his call to steward the creation (Gen. 2:18-25). Marriage is a picture of unity and partnership from its very beginning.

Therefore, it is important to begin with the sameness of men and women, rather than difference. We are both fully human and humanity is fully expressed when men and women use their gifts, time, and resources to worship and serve God together. There are three important values that we want to promote, given our sameness:

The first value is **unity**. Men and women are created as unified in our common humanity and our common design to know and love God. We must begin with a spirit of that unity in our discussions on spiritual leadership, church life, church governance, and ministry opportunities (1 Cor. 12:4-31). This unity is more than practical and relational. It goes to the deepest level of our beings. Therefore, we must obey who we actually are as men and women, namely, two parts of a whole as God intends, for the health of the church and kingdom.

The second value is the imagery of **family**. The Bible refers to the relationship between members of the church, universal and local, to be one of brothers and sisters (Matt. 12:50; Jas. 2:14-17). We are family partners, and this is a primary metaphor in the New Testament for our relationships. This family relationship emphasizes our unity, our common Heavenly Father, and frees us to embrace love and loyalty, rather than competition and threat. There is no subordination of value, dignity, and ability in families. Rather, there is mutuality, joy, and common identity. The family metaphor also enables us to serve together with a relational carefulness, knowing that men and women living and serving in intimate settings, like a church, can unwittingly invite sexualized feelings. When men and women see each other primarily in terms of spiritual siblings, it empowers careful integrity, and the commensurate protection of sexuality within marriage alone. Therefore, we want to cultivate an environment of brotherly and sisterly love within complementarian gender commitments. Our aim is to foster healthy ministry and relationship between men and women, where honor, care, loyalty, and sacrifice are hallmarks.

The third value is that we are **Great Commandment and Great Commission Partners**. Both men and women are called to love God and others, and to proclaim the gospel to the world. If the heralding of the gospel were carried out by only one gender, the kingdom would be impoverished. The missionary identity of the

believer is for men and women. Both men and women are examples of dedicated service and gospel proclamation in the Bible (Acts 18:26; 16:14-15).

DIFFERENT AND COMPLEMENTARY ROLES

We have already stated that men and women are equal in essence, dignity, and worth, and there is no subordination of being among them, but the Bible does teach that there are differing roles for men and women. That is not to say there are no overlapping roles. Our previous discussion on sameness has established that. But, nonetheless, there are clear, beautiful, and significant places of difference between the callings of male and female.

Though men and women are unified by creation and redemption, are brothers and sisters, and partners in gospel love and proclamation, we nonetheless affirm that we are not interchangeable. Men and women are wonderfully different in many ways by creation design, not simply by cultural formation. The image of God in the early chapters of Genesis is connected to how God uses the first person plural pronoun for himself, "Let us create man" (Gen. 1:26ff). This plural self-reference is a reflection of the Triune being of God; and this helps us understand the logic of male and female. God is One and Three. In order to image forth His being in creation, God created man to be a twofold office, male and female – one and yet two. God is One and yet the Three Persons of the Trinity are not interchangeable. So also humanity is one, and yet the two parts of humanity, male and female, are not interchangeable.

The foremost Biblical implication of this is that we believe the office of elder/pastor is reserved for qualified men (1 Tim. 5:17; Titus 1:7; 1 Pet. 5:1-2). The only roles specific to the elder are Scripture calls elders to lead the church (1 Tim. 5:17; Titus 1:7; 1 Pet. 5:1-2), preach the Word (1 Tim. 3:2; 2 Tim. 4:2; Titus 1:9), protect the church from false teaching (Acts 20:17, 28-31; Titus 1:9), pray for and visit the sick (Jas. 5:14; Acts 20:35), equip the saints for ministry (Eph. 4:11-12), and use proper judgment in theological and doctrinal matters (Acts 15). Most of these traits are also the clear call of life and ministry for every believer according to the Bible, both men and women. But, the elders are to model and train others in these roles as God-appointed leaders, who are uniquely accountable before God for the local assembly. Likewise, in shepherding, overseeing, leading, caring for, and praying for the local church, elders practice sacrificial male headship. Therefore,

although we encourage all men and women to actively participate in the life of the church, we reserve the office of elder, and the responsibilities unique to it¹, for certain qualified men within the church. Apart from the role of pastor/elder, we believe the Bible explicitly encourages and assumes that women will be involved in the ministry of the church, including many forms of spiritual leadership.

Another Biblical implication, though not the focus of this brief, is that in marriage the husband is the head (spiritual leader) of the wife (Eph. 5:21-33). This is important to note in passing because the familial imagery of the church reflects the nature of the marriage and family design. Some argue that what is clearly taught in the marriage relationship is more ambiguous and questionable when it comes to the elder office. But when the strong family identity is traced between the family and the local church, theological and exegetical weight comes to bear on a complementarian understanding of church life and leadership.

AFFIRMATIONS AND DENIALS

Based on the conclusions drawn from Scripture, we have created a list of affirmations and denials that encompass our beliefs on gender and the role of women in ministry.²

We affirm that both men and women have been created in the image of God and are entitled to the privileges and held accountable to the responsibilities that come with reflecting our Creator.

We deny that either gender has been given or is entitled to greater dignity in society, the home, the church, or the kingdom of God.

We affirm that both men and women are needed and necessary for the health and ministry of the church. Godly men and women should be visible partners in the corporate life of the church, deploying their diverse gifts for the good of the body. Simply put, all Christians contribute to the ministry of the church.

¹ See section under Gathered Worship for unique elder functions.

² Adapted from the Article "The Role of Women at the Village Church", produced by the leadership of Village Church, Dallas, TX. <https://www.tvcreources.net/resource-library/articles/the-role-of-women-at-the-village-church>.

We deny that the church can flourish without brotherly/sisterly partnership. We deny that a church can exist in which the men flourish and the women do not, or vice versa.

We affirm that the role/function of elder is reserved for qualified men. Elders are distinctly responsible for overseeing the church (1 Tim. 5:17; Titus 1:7; 1 Pet. 5:1-2) and preaching the Word (1 Tim. 3:2; 2 Tim. 4:2; Titus 1:9).

We deny that the role of elder being withheld from women diminishes their importance or their influence in the church. The indispensable help women were created to give can and should be exercised in all manner of roles/offices in the church, excepting those reserved for qualified men.

We affirm that all members of the church should be in glad submission to the elder body, and that all should be in glad and sacrificial submission to the Lordship of Jesus Christ, the Head of the Church.

We deny that all women are subject to the leadership and authority of all men. Further, biblical submission is not indicative of subordination or inequality, as seen in the Son's submission to the Father (Phil. 2:1-11).

We affirm that complementarianism, rightly practiced, will lead to the recognizable flourishing of both sexes.

We deny any version of complementarianism or theological position that leads to the subjugation, abuse, or neglect of any man or woman. We strongly denounce any distorted view of Scripture that contributes to the belief that biblical manhood or womanhood includes or permits practices such as marginalization, subjugation, intimidation, neglect, or any form of abuse.

We affirm that all men and women have been created in the image of God, whether single or married.

We deny that single men and women must be married to be meaningful participants in the corporate life of the church. We deny that single men possess any authority over single women. The way that they love and serve their sisters should not patronize, victimize, or show force, but rather should be the fruit of brotherly love, and vice versa.

We affirm that both men and women can take up positions of leadership and authority in secular realms, like business, science, arts, government, and the like,

since these areas are not directed in the same way by Biblical instructions on marriage, family, and the local church. We also affirm that women can teach and train men and women in ministry preparation institutions like seminaries, Bible colleges, and other preparation programs. We will leave it to the wisdom of para-church organizations as to how they want to shape policies on women in leadership.

We deny that basic maleness and femaleness are done away with outside marriage, family, and local church life. Though there is great flexibility in roles in the secular realm or para-church organizations, we still want to value the general nature, habits, and commitments of complementarity, whenever and wherever those might play out. Prudence and prayer must guide the way, alongside a strong commitment to stay as close to Scriptural instruction and framework as possible.

SUMMARY

1. All roles in the church are open to qualified men and women except the office of elder.
2. The office of elder is limited to biblically-qualified men.
3. The elder role includes unique responsibilities for overseeing the church, preaching the Word in gathered worship, the administration of the Lord's Supper, the administration of baptism, exercising church discipline, and exercising judgment in theological and doctrinal matters.
4. Any exceptions to this policy require approval by the Board of Elders, which may be delegated to staff elders.

APPENDIX

MINISTRY AT CHAPEL HILL BIBLE CHURCH

In coming to these conclusions and how to implement them, we recognize that some will find our position and practice on women in ministry far too conservative. We also recognize that others will find our position and practice on women in ministry far too liberal. We ask for charity from both as we focus on the primary task of making disciples of Jesus Christ.

Additionally, we believe it is important to note that a theological confession of complementarianism does not necessarily result in uniform complementarian practice. We are eager to co-labor with brothers and sisters, churches, and other ministries who view these issues differently than we do.

The CHBC practices of ministry below are not meant to be so rigid that there is no room for adaptation and contextualization. Please read the following paragraphs as normative practices, but where Scripture does give freedom, the elders and pastoral staff can utilize that freedom to apply Biblical truth in order to meet a particular need or extenuating circumstance.

Life Groups, Cohorts, Smaller Environments (does not involve regular expository preaching of the Bible)

In gender-specific groups a leader of the same gender typically leads. Men lead men's groups, and women lead women's groups. Either a man or a woman can lead mixed-gender groups. When there is a mixed-gender group where a man partners with a woman in leadership we expect there to be a co-discipleship relationship between the man and the woman leader. Co-discipleship in the group doesn't mean that male and female leaders are interchangeable or lead in the exact same way, but as co-disciplers the man and the woman operate in their roles according to gifting. Both men and women may serve as group coaches, group ministers and group leaders.

In age-specific ministries, like our children's ministry, youth ministry, and college ministry, the structure of leadership will be sensitive to the specific ages of the group or class. The status of adulthood can vary in subtle ways from culture to culture, but in general young adulthood begins in the late teenage years. In light of that, while we do not think there are hard and fast Biblical requirements for male-only leadership for our youth and collegians, we want the freedom for both genders to teach and lead to be coupled with a desire to model the overarching good of godly male leadership before our young women and men who are experiencing worldview formation. Either Ministers or Pastors who oversee these respective ministries will make particular decisions and provide guidance for our children, youth, and college ministry teaching environments. Those staff roles will equip and entrust men and women to teach and lead, sensitive to context and Scriptural wisdom.

Teaching and Training Environments

Mixed-gender teaching environments, like adult learning environments, mid-week seminars, discipleship training courses, etc., are overseen by elders who currently delegate most of the leadership to the Pastor of Discipleship and Training and the Minister for Community and Care. These men should seek out, equip, and utilize gifted men and women to help lead, teach, and shape these ministries. In gender-specific teaching environments, our general pattern is that a leader of the same gender will teach. In general, men teach men's environments, and, in general, women teach women's environments. Exceptions will include one-off lessons, special topics, etc.

Professional/Organizational Status

The title "pastor" is the name we give to elders on staff at Chapel Hill Bible Church. Therefore, the pastoral role is reserved for qualified men. The elder team as a whole is reserved for qualified men. The minister, director, and assistant staff roles are available to qualified men and women, as are internships, residencies, and other trainee positions. The deacon office is available to qualified men and women, including the roles of chair, vice chair, and secretary. Every professional or volunteer role, other than that of elder, is open to qualified men and women. This provides both men and women opportunities to advance and grow in leadership and includes women participating in every level of the organization, except that of pastor/elder.

Gathered Worship

Every member of CHBC participates in our gathered worship, regardless of the role they play. Every area of service is open to men and women, except those that define the pastor/elder office due to the nature of 'teaching and authority' named in 1 Timothy 2:12, namely, the regular expository preaching of the Bible and the administration of the Lord's Table and baptism. Both men and women can read Scripture, lead musical worship, lead public readings, testify publicly, give announcements, pray publicly, and serve in many other roles that enable our times of gathered worship to unfold to the glory of God.