

# A Position Statement on Gender Roles Within the Church

---

The shepherds wish to announce their commitment to full opportunity for women to serve in any and all capacities within the body of Christ, to use whatever gift has been given by God for his glory and the edification of his church.

This statement is the culmination of several years' study by the leadership, the results of which was presented in a sixteen-week class and can be accessed by contacting the office.

In this and all things, we affirm our commitment to God's sovereignty, the Holy Spirit's guidance, and Jesus' authority as expressed in his life and the written Word of God.

## How We Read Scripture

We recognize that such a position on women is sometimes challenged on the basis of certain Scripture passages. However, we believe that all pertinent Scriptures need to be interpreted in the light of their immediate contexts, as well as in the context of Scripture as a whole. We also believe that no passages of Scripture clearly prohibit women from holding positions of authority. The passages that on the surface appear to do so are often twisted by interpretations stemming from biased readings of the text. In some cases there are faulty or biased translations. And in others there is evidence of localized situations that required special treatment that was not intended for general application.

We believe that God has progressively revealed in the Scriptures His purpose to call, equip and empower women for ministry in the church. Galatians 3:28 states that in the Christian era "There is neither . . . male, nor female." This is a general principle of Scripture. Any Scriptures that at first appear to contradict this general statement must be understood in light of the general principle of Galatians 3:28. Clearly the spiritual and heavenly identity proclaimed in Galatians 3:28 has precedence over the earthly, administrative identity.

## What We Know from Scripture

Scripture sets forth God's original plan and its redemptive renewal that provides equal standing to both men and women.

### *1. In the Beginning.*

The creation story reveals full equality of man and woman in God's original plan, as both were made in the image of God (Gen. 1:26-27), and the so-called "cultural mandate," giving them full authority over the earth and all earthly life-forms, was spoken to man and

woman (Gen. 1:28-30). This plan of equality was interrupted by the Fall as human sin brought the wife's submission to her husband (Gen. 3:16). But even at that point God spoke of His redemptive plan as He foretold that Eve's descendant would crush Satan beneath His heel (Gen. 3:15). The redemptive purpose and mission of Jesus is to redeem all humanity from the results of the fall, including the subjection of women. Jesus has provided equal forgiveness and redemption to both men and women.

## *2. In the Old Testament.*

God Himself initiated opportunities in the Old Testament period by His call to and use and blessing of women in ministry. God used Miriam as both a prophetess (Ex. 15:20) and a leader (Micah 6:4). He used Deborah as a prophetess and as a judge who led Israel; she directed Barak (later described as one of the heroes of the faith in Hebrews) as to how military victory was to be won and even accompanied him into battle (Judg. 4:4ff.). God used the prophetess Huldah (even though Jeremiah and Zephaniah were prophets at the time) to spark a great religious revival during the reign of King Josiah (2 Kings 22:14ff.; 2 Chron. 34:22ff.). And God predicted through an Old Testament prophet the coming of the long-expected Day of the Lord when the Holy Spirit would be poured out on both men and women and they and their sons and daughters would prophesy (Joel 2:28-29).

## *3. In the Ministry of Jesus.*

The New Testament shows that Jesus differed from the prevailing culture in a very positive openness to women as co-laborers. He ministered to men and women alike without distinction. He violated several cultural taboos to share the good news with the Samaritan woman who then evangelized her village (John 4:7ff.). He was accompanied by women who ministered to Him and His disciples (Mark 15:40-41; Luke 8:1-3). And Jesus chose women to be the first to see Him after His resurrection and to be the first to carry the message of the resurrection to the male disciples.

## *4. At Pentecost.*

Both men and women were awaiting the fulfillment of Jesus' promise that they would receive power for witnessing to the whole world when the Holy Spirit would come upon them (Acts 1:13-15). It was this group of men and women that was filled with the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost, and began to speak in many languages to the Jews assembled in Jerusalem for the festival (2:1-12). Peter took the occasion to declare that "this is that" which Joel had predicted: "Your sons and daughters will prophesy . . . and on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days, and they will prophesy" (2:17-18). So the birth of Christ's church was accompanied by the demonstration and announcement that men and women would both serve as God's voices to carry the message of Christ to the world.

## *The gift of prophesy*

It is clear from Acts 2 that both men and women will function as prophets in the church.

It is helpful to review Scriptures that describe the role of the prophet in the church.

- 1 Cor 14:1-4 NIV “everyone who prophesies speaks to men for their strengthening, encouragement and comfort”... “edifies the church”
- 1 Cor 14:24-25 AMP “...all prophesy [giving inspired testimony and interpreting the divine will and purpose] and an unbeliever and untaught outsiders comes in, he is told of his sin and reprov'd and convicted and convinced by all ...”
- 1 Cor 14:29-31 AMP “so let two or three prophets speak [those inspired to preach or teach] while the rest pay attention and weigh and discern what is said...so that all may be instructed and all may be stimulated and encouraged.”
- Eph 4:11-13 NIV “to prepare God’s people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up...”

Based on these Scriptures we believe that both men and women (as prophets) are to:

- Speak to others for their strengthening, encouragement and comfort
- Give inspired testimony and interpreting God’s will, including pointing out of sin
- Teach so that all may be stimulated and encouraged
- Prepare God’s people for works of service

## *5. In the Ministry of Paul.*

Paul reflected Jesus' openness to women as co-laborers. In what was probably the first epistle that he wrote, he declared that in Christ Jesus, "There is neither . . . male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus" (Gal. 3:28). In writing to the Corinthians, he recognized that women prophesied and prayed in public worship under the new order (1 Cor. 11:5). When closing his letter to the Romans, Paul mentions ten women in chapter 16, seven of whom he speaks of with detailed, high commendation, referring to one as a "deacon" (not deaconess) who had been a great help to many including Paul himself, referring to one as "outstanding among the apostles," referring to one as a "fellow worker," and referring to those who had worked hard "in the Lord" or for the Roman believers. In Philippians 4:2-3 he mentions two women who had "contended at my side in the cause of the gospel."

## *6. Misused Passages.*

Among Scripture passages frequently cited against women serving in the ministry, probably the most significant are 1 Corinthians 14:33b-35 ("women should remain silent

in the churches") and 1 Timothy 2:11-15 (women are not to teach or have authority over men).

### *The 1 Corinthians 14:33b - 38 Passage*

“...As in all the congregation of the saints, women should remain silent in the churches. They are not allowed to speak, but must be in submission, as the Law says. If they want to inquire about something, they should ask their own husbands at home; for it is disgraceful for a woman to speak in the church.”

While a face value of just this passage seems to state women should literally “be quiet”, “not talk” there are several issues that must be resolved.

1. Paul would be contradicting himself from 11:4-5, and 14:26-31 where it is clear both men and women were praying and prophesying in the assembly and Paul asks that it be done in an orderly manner. Paul doesn't tell the women not to prophesy; he tells them the manner in which to prophesy.
2. Appealing to the OT law to justify Christian practice was part of the Judaizer's legalism that Paul consistently fought against.
3. There is no OT law prohibiting women speaking in the assembly; such verbiage is from the Talmud, or Jewish rabbinical teachings accumulated after the Babylonian captivity.

We believe that Paul is either quoting common thinking in Corinth as he has numerous times in 1 Corinthians (1:12;3:4, 6:12; 10:23, 6:13, 6:18, 7:1, 8:1, 8:4, 8:8) or dealing with a specific cultural situation that we do not know the details.

### *The 1 Timothy 2:11-15 Passage*

1 Tim 2:11-12 reads “A woman should learn in quietness and in full submission. I do not permit a woman to teach or have authority over a man; she must be silent.”

This passage also at face value reads like a simple command for all times. This view raises difficult issues. If the passage is literally binding for us, then the immediate passages around it should be binding as well (no braided hair, no gold, no pearls, no expensive clothes). We believe that, given the culture Paul is addressing, this entire section of scripture is addressing a culturally specific issue, namely, that unlearned women were teaching false doctrines and were told to stop and learn.

## *7. Summary of Biblical Passages.*

One rule of scriptural interpretation is that passages that are unclear are to be interpreted in the light of clear ones. We are left with the clear examples of Jesus and Paul, the clear statements of Joel, Peter and Paul as our scriptural mandate. Just as the Lord provided opportunities for Old Testament women to lead, and just as the examples of Jesus and

Paul in the New Testament provided increasing opportunities for women to lead, so we are called to enact this redemptive action. To live within the teachings of Scripture, we must work counter-culturally to provide women with increasing opportunities to answer the call of God.

## **What We Know about the Character of God**

Throughout the Scriptures we see that it is like God to work in ways contrary to traditional human systems of authority. God has never limited revelation to kings, rulers, or government officials. To the contrary, we see God divinely empowering the poor, the prostitute, the virgin, and the widow. Even Jesus came to earth as a poor carpenter. God has always worked counter-culturally to bring about the revolutionary Kingdom of God (1 Cor. 1:26-31). It is in keeping with the character of God that women are called to ministry.

We also recognize that it is essential that anyone serving in the ministry must be chosen by God—man or woman. Men and women both must testify to such a call and confirm it through their holy outworking of this mission.

Furthermore, we recognize that women are also called to "go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing . . . and teaching them" (Matt. 28:19-20). If a woman's call to fulfill the Great Commission is in the form of ministerial leadership, then it is not only her privilege, but her obligation to obey the Holy Spirit.

## **Conclusion**

There are numerous examples of God using woman throughout the Bible. We believe that God is the one that arranges the parts of the body for His glory and we encourage each person to use his or her gifts for His glory.

We do not believe there is scriptural reason to prohibit women from any ministry of the church. We embrace the God-given freedom that comes through Jesus Christ and reaffirm that we are a family growing in God, reaching out to others, accepting them, while celebrating God every day and expressing His love through action.

## **Sources**

*Prepared by the leadership of The Colony Church of Christ. Sources used listed below:*

Women in the Church, Mike Cope, Highland Church of Christ, Abilene, TX  
Women, Gifts and the Body of Christ, Mike Cope and Sara Barton, 2002 Zoe Conference

"I permit not a woman . . . to remain shackled", Robert H. Rowland, MA from Harding University, served as an elder at Quail Springs Church of Christ.

Community without Barriers, Thomas Robinson, M.A., M.Div., Ph.D., Manhattan Church of Christ

Two Churches, Two Journeys, Mac Dauphin, Emily Jones Rushing, and Kathy Pulley; Cahaba Valley Church (Birmingham, AL) Brookline Church of Christ (Brookline, MA)

Neither Male nor Female, Dale Pauls, Stamford Church of Christ

Man and Woman in Genesis 1-3, Lance Pape, West Islip Church of Christ on Long Island, NY

God, Gender, Leadership, Kyle Degge

Women in the Church: A Biblical Survey, F.F. Bruce

Beyond Sex Roles, Dr. Bilezikian

Men and Women in Christian Ministry, Kenneth Radant

Bible Knowledge Commentary

A Fresh Perspective on Submission and Authority in Marriage, Dennis Preato

Man and Woman in Biblical Unity, Dr. Joy Elasky Fleming

Called & Gifted, Sharon Cairns Mann

Equality with and without innocence: Genesis 1-3, Richard S. Hess, PhD from Hebrew Union College.

From Old Testament Law to New Testament Gospel, Ronald W. Pierce, PhD from Fuller Theological Seminary

Praying and prophesying in the Assemblies: 1 Corinthians 11:2-6, Gordon D. Fee, PhD, professor of NT Studies, Regent College

Learning in the Assemblies: 1 Corinthians 14:34-35, Craig S. Keener

Studies on Biblical Equality, Alvera Mickelsen, MA from Wheaton College

Task Force on Women in the Ministry, appointed by the General Board of The Wesleyan Church

Plus more than 20 other sources...