



Women in Ministry

**A Theological Position
Paper of Rogue Valley
Fellowship**

Rogue Valley Fellowship

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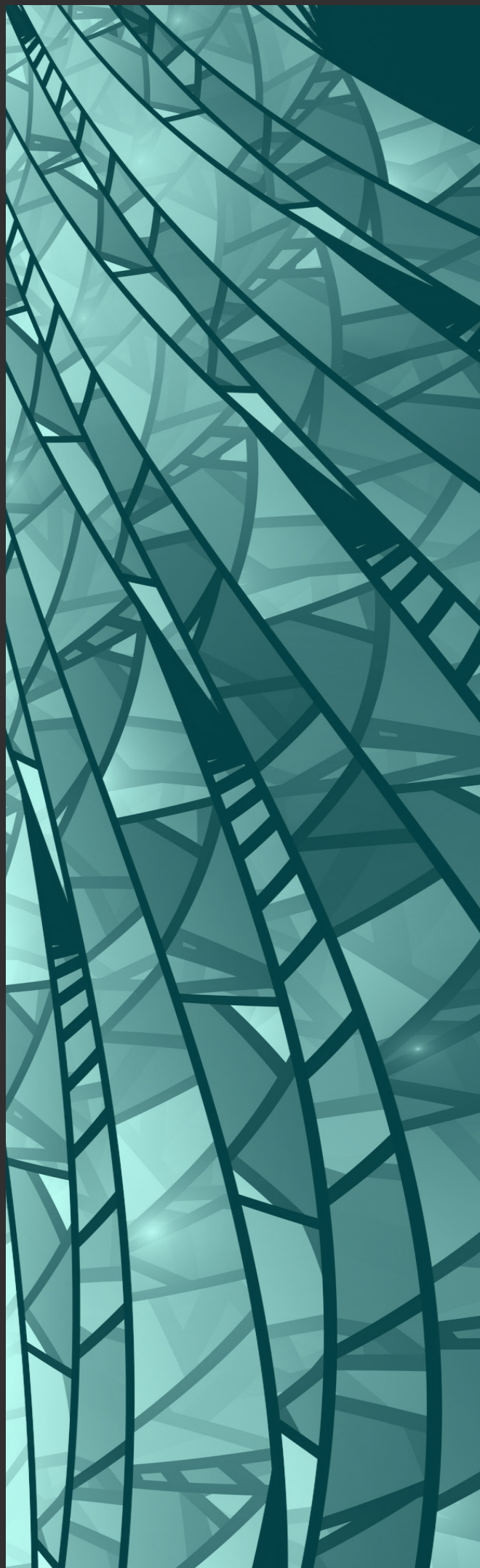


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This booklet is a reflection of our journey—prayerfully walked, biblically rooted, and lovingly shared. It begins with an invitation into the heart behind these pages, moves through the beauty of God’s design for men and women, and casts a vision for how we live this out together as a church family. Along the way, we engage with Scripture—not avoiding the hard questions, but welcoming them with humility and hope. We end with open hands, offering further reading and the voices that have shaped our thinking. May this serve as a guide, a comfort, and a catalyst for unity in the body of Christ.

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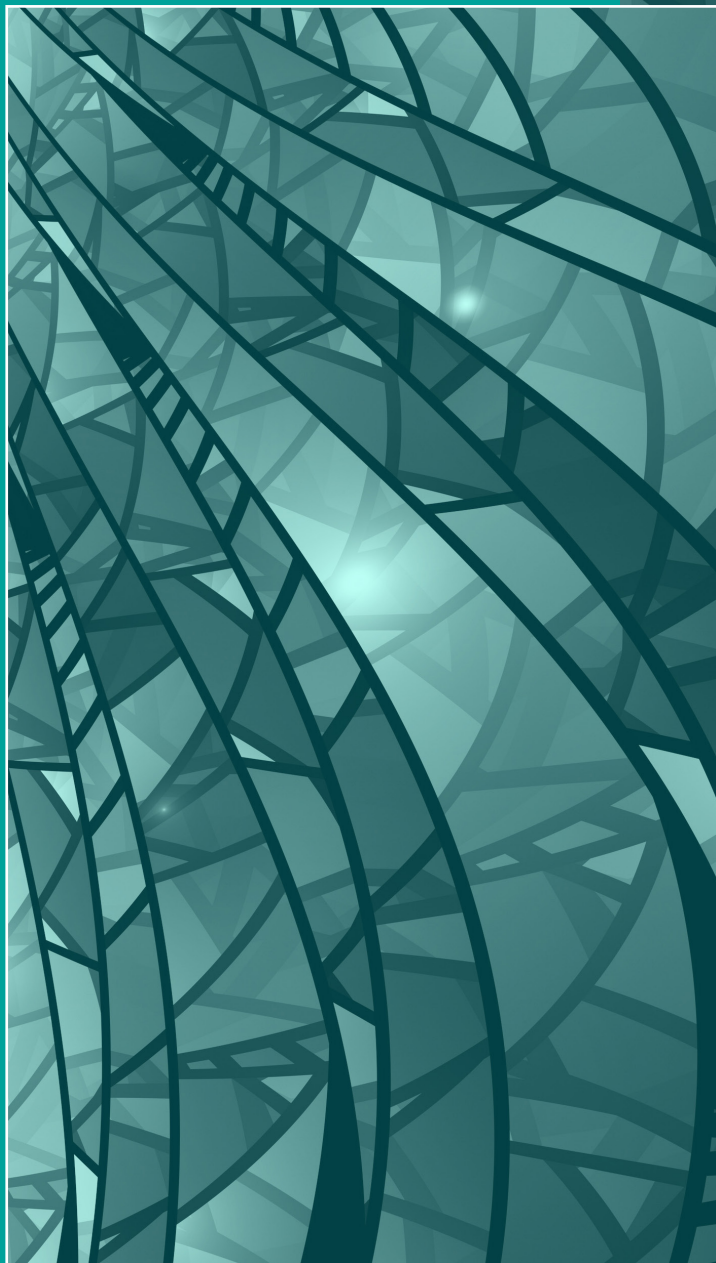
Introduction

Rogue Valley Fellowship seeks to be a community where all—men, women, and children—can connect deeply with Jesus and His church, develop their gifts, and use them freely for the good of the body, the glory of God, and the benefit of the world. We have experienced an increasing number of people finding freedom in their gifts and using them in various spaces in our church. In particular, women have come to more prominent places of leadership and are exercising their gifts in spaces and ways that have richly blessed our community; yet, this has also given rise to questions about the way our church understands and expresses ministry offices, roles, and functions for the women we so deeply value.

We are a church that seeks to be guided by a commitment to biblical faithfulness. Our goal is to couple our exegesis and understanding of Scripture with a heart of submission and humility to the authority of Christ. We also recognize the need to speak to current cultural contexts in ways that show the relevance of the gospel and biblical teaching in the midst of cultural movements. We do not find cultural movements to be inherently evil. Instead, they often spur us to think more clearly and holistically about the ways we choose to live out biblical conviction. These challenges have forced every generation of the Church to return to biblical scholarship and understanding in order to remain faithful and most fully express the character of God in whatever cultural context the Church might find herself.¹

As a result of our commitment to biblical faithfulness, the reality of cultural questions, and the increasing voice of female leadership, we are writing this paper as

¹ Examples include the Nicene Creed, written in response to the Arian controversy, and the Chalcedonian Creed, written in response to the controversy of Christ's two natures, which come together in one person.



an act of pastoral care, clarity, and guidance for those who seek to better understand the role of women in ministry at RVF. This paper is the culmination of a several-year process of Spirit-led discernment, which has included extensive prayer, study, contemplation, discourse, and experience. We aspire to establish a foundational framework for the trajectory of women within our congregation.

While this paper specifically addresses the role of women within the life of the church, we recognize that this issue impacts everyone. We only function well as a body when each part of the body is properly cared for and is moving toward God's intended design of all people as integral parts of the community.²

The issue of women in ministry has often caused debate and even division amongst the Church. RVF holds the views of this paper with humility. Therefore, those who disagree with the positions of this paper are still welcome to worship here. This theological stance on the role of women in ministry is not one to die for nor divide over. However, the inclusion, care, and development of women within the church certainly is a core tenet of a healthy church expression. Women must be equal contributors in caring for and developing the church, not just simply allowed to join in what has already been established. The leadership of RVF seeks to create a community where this is true.

This document contains four primary parts. Part One is the Theological Foundation, where relevant passages and theological trajectories are explored. Part Two is the Theological Vision, in which the theological foundation shapes how God's plan for men and women is worked out in the life of the church. Part Three is the Ministry Expression, which is the practical outworking of the Theological Foundation and Vision, including a description of roles, titles, and ministry functions. Part Four addresses passages of Scripture that often give rise to questions concerning the role of women in ministry.

The current position of RVF can be described as soft complementarianism.³ According to this position, "women are encouraged to minister in any office or ministry open to any other non-elder, assuming their qualifications and appropriate gifting. The office of elder is reserved for men."

For reference, hard complementarianism holds that "women are encouraged to minister in multiple ministries, but they should not exercise any ministry that includes public teaching to the corporate body, teaching Bible to men, or the exercising of authority over men in the church". Egalitarianism, or mutualism, holds that "men and women are partners together everywhere in life. All ministries and offices of the church are equally open to all qualified men and women. Gender is not a relevant distinction for excluding a person from any office"

² 1 Corinthians 12:12-26

³ For more information, read *Two Views on Women in Ministry*, contributed by Belleville, Blomberg, Keener, and Schreiner.

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THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATION

RVF's position of soft complementarianism is rooted in both theological truths and exegetical convictions. In order to understand how and why men and women function in the church, it is important to begin with the nature of God and His creational intent for humanity as His image bearers.

Trinitarian Pattern:

God is the source and center of all things, and from Him flows all of life in its design and vibrancy. Who He is determines who we are and how we function. Therefore, we begin with God's nature in order to properly understand our own. We know God's nature because of how He has revealed Himself in Scripture and His Son.

God is triune, meaning He eternally exists in three equally divine Persons—the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit—who know, love, and glorify one another. Yet, He is one God. God lives in perfect unity, yet each member of the God-head functions uniquely in their given roles. We see this implicitly throughout all of Scripture and explicitly in certain passages like the following:

"Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me? The words that I say to you I do not speak on my own authority, but the Father who dwells in me does his works. Believe me that I am in the Father and the Father is in me, or else believe on account of the works themselves." John 14:10, 11

Therefore, the Son and Spirit willingly and lovingly submit to the Father's authority, and the Father loves and sends the Son and Spirit into the world. In the Trinity there is equality in value, unity in purpose, and distinction in function and role. Therefore, it is from the trinity that we derive the concepts of diversity and unity and headship and submission. God has chosen this pattern to be reflected in both the family and the church. (John 10:30, 16:13; Ephesians 4:4-6; Philippians 2:6-11)

Imago Dei: Genesis 1-2

Just as God is a diverse unity, He created mankind in His image to be both diverse and unified. Therefore, He created both male and female with equal value and substance, yet diverse in their expression of His image. (Matthew 19:4; Mark 10:6)

In Genesis 1:26-28 we see that God created male and female in His image as co-regents over creation. Therefore, they equally reflect Him and are called to keep and cultivate God's good world together. It is necessary to have both genders to most fully express the image of God within creation.

In Genesis 2 we see that man and woman were also created to be distinct in role and function. Genesis 2:18 refers to the woman as the "helper." This word is most often used in Scripture to describe YHWH's relationship to Israel and carries with it the idea of "ally." (Exod. 18:4; Deut. 33:7, 26, 29; Ps. 33:20; 115:9-11; 124:8; 145:5) Within these contexts, "helper" has no implication of subordination, as YHWH is not subordinate to Israel but rather their ally. However, the word "helper" highlights the distinct and necessary role of the woman to partner with the man in order to fulfill the creation mandate to keep and cultivate. The distinction in role is clear and necessary and yet upholds equality and value between the genders.

As stated, the trinitarian pattern of God reveals to us the two dualities of unity/diversity and headship/submission. Just as it is in the Trinity, so should it be amongst men and women in the church. There should be equality in value, unity in purpose, and distinction in function and role. The concepts of unity and diversity are seen in the distribution of spiritual gifts and in the roles of men and women throughout Biblical history. The concepts of headship and

submission are reflected in two areas: family and the church.

Distribution of Spiritual Gifts

The nature of God as a diverse yet unified community, which is then reflected by men and women, is the basis for how God has chosen to give gifts to the church. Men and women have all been given a variety of spiritual gifts. All spiritual gifts come from the Holy Spirit and are meant for God's glory, which is achieved when these gifts are used for the common good of the body of Christ (1 Corinthians 12:1-11). Each gift is necessary for the church to function properly. Each member of the body is a vital part of the whole; and while the parts of the body are many and diverse, they form one unified body just as God is diverse and yet one in His nature. Therefore, each person should seek to discover, understand, and employ their gifts in a manner that most benefits the entire body. No gift should be elevated above others, and no gift should be diminished (1 Corinthians 12:12-31). We see this truth reiterated by Paul in Romans 12:3-8, that each person should use their gifts in accordance with the measure of faith given to them. The differences in gifting are God-intended for the sake of unity and health in the church. In Ephesians 4:7-16, we see that God gave gifts according to His gracious choice to each person, and they were given that the church might come to maturity together as each person uses whatever gift God gave them. 1 Peter 4:10-11 and 1 Corinthians 14:1-5 affirm these same principles.

In summary, God gives gifts to people based on His gracious choice, not according to a person's ability or deservedness. The gifts given are diverse in nature by God's intention so that through a diverse expression

of gifts the church may be unified as one body, built up and strengthened to attain to the fullness of Christ in all maturity. All gifts are to be honored as equally necessary, especially the ones that naturally garner less attention or public praise. Spiritual gifts are empowered by the Spirit and are to be humbly and lovingly discharged for God's glory and the building up of Christ's church. When the church functions in this way, we image the nature of God who, as the Trinitarian God, is a diverse yet unified community within Himself.

It is crucial to recognize that there are no spiritual gifts that are given only to men or only to women. This includes gifts of leadership, teaching, pastoring, and discernment. Gifts are given non-discriminately to both men and women by God's gracious gift and choice. Since this is the case men and women should be permitted and empowered to use those gifts as God intended and should not be prohibited to do so on the basis of gender.

We affirm that spiritual gifts are given impartially to all who follow Jesus; and all gifts should be used for the edification of the church.

We deny the idea that women are not gifted with teaching or leadership solely because they are women and affirm that women should be encouraged to use these gifts.

Prominent Roles of Women in the Biblical Story

Keeping our foundational theological concepts in view, we will now look to the scope of the biblical record to see how women have always played prominent roles in the life of God's people. The purpose of this is to demonstrate how our understanding of God's design and plan for women comes not only from a place of careful exegesis but furthermore can be traced throughout the biblical

narrative. It is not a modern innovation or deviation from God's pattern to have women exercising their gifts, including in realms of leadership and teaching. This will help to illuminate how God has gifted and included women throughout all of history.

Women in the Old Testament:

Women in the Old Testament functioned as both prophets and judges. Judges held not only governmental leadership but spiritual leadership as well. The clearest and most obvious example is Deborah the Judge. She played a very similar role within the life of God's people as Joshua. She was an adjudicator, keeping the people in line with the righteousness of Moses' law. She led Israel against the Caananites in battle. She also had a very similar spiritual influence over the people, as can be seen in her song in Judges 5. She is entrusted as a prophet and governor who can and should speak on behalf of God to the people. Nijay Gupta, New Testament scholar, in his book *Tell Her Story*, says, "For all intents and purposes, for a certain period of time, God called Deborah to be his people's executive, judicial, and spiritual leader. As 'mother' over Israel, she safeguarded Israel's life, not just physically, but also in relationship to God."⁴

However, Deborah is not the only example of prominent women in the Old Testament. Miriam was a prophetess and worship leader (Ex. 15:20). Huldah exercised a prophetic ministry (2 Kings 22). Esther held a prominent position and saved a nation through her courage. Ruth is included in the genealogy of Jesus Himself (Mat. 1:5).

It is true that most positions of leadership were held by men, but the Old Testament narrative intentionally highlights women in prominent positions and holds them up as people whom God values, speaks to, and uses in significant ways to accomplish his purposes.

⁴ Nijay Gupta, *Tell Her Story: How Women Led, Taught, and Ministered in the Early Church*, Downers Grove, IL: IVP Press, 2023.

Women in the Life of Jesus:

Jesus included and interacted with women in ways that were revolutionary for His own culture and time. He included women among His disciples, which was unheard of at the time for a Jewish rabbi. Mary, for example, sat at Jesus' feet, which was considered the posture of a disciple (Lk. 10:39). The longest recorded conversation between Jesus and another individual was with a woman—the Samaritan woman (Jn. 4:5-30). There were likely women amongst the 72 sent out and women present at the Great Commission, where they were given authority to make disciples. Jesus affirms women (Lk. 13:16), engaged in conversations with women (Jn. 4), taught them (Lk. 10:38-42), used women as examples of faith (Lk. 18:1-5), allowed them to travel with Him (Lk. 8:1-3), and commissioned them to serve as eyewitnesses to His resurrection (Matt. 28:10; Jn. 20:17).

The overwhelming evidence in the life of Jesus is that He did not draw a distinction between men and women in terms of value or access to discipleship. He was subversive to the cultural norms when it came to his care and inclusion of women amongst His disciples.

Women in the New Testament:

After the ascension of Jesus and the arrival of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, women took a prominent place in ministry opportunity and leadership roles in the church. Ephesians 4 tells us that God gave apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers to equip the church. Men and women served in all of these capacities.

Apostles:

In the book of Romans, Paul personally greets almost as many women as men; and of those nine women, he greets five of them as his ministry colleagues. Junia is mentioned as an apostle and is said to be “outstanding among the apostles” (Rom. 16:7). John Chrysostom, the revered early church father, confirms this, saying, “Greet Andronicus and

Junia . . . who are outstanding among the apostles’: To be an apostle is something great. But to be outstanding among the apostles— just think what a wonderful song of praise that is! They were outstanding on the basis of their works and virtuous actions. Indeed, how great the wisdom of this woman must have been that she was even deemed worthy of the title of apostle.”⁵

Prophets:

- Philip has four daughters that are referred to as prophets who ministered to the apostle Paul (Acts 21:8-9).
- Paul offers instruction to women who were actively prophesying in the church in 1 Cor. 11:5.

Evangelists:

- Euodia and Syntyche were leaders in the Philippian church and referred to as “contenders for the gospel.” They worked alongside Paul (Phil. 4:3).
- Nympha, Chloe, and Lydia were sent out by Paul for church planting (Col. 4:13; 1 Cor. 1:11; Acts 16:13-15).

Pastors and Teachers:

A couple named Priscilla and Aquila are mentioned in Acts, Romans, and 2 Timothy. It is noteworthy that when they are called tentmakers, their names are listed with Aquila first, which is in line with the cultural custom of the time to list the man first. However, when their teaching and leadership ministry is in view, Priscilla is named first, suggesting her prominence in their ministry life together. In particular, Priscilla is named first when mentioning that they taught Apollos. This is significant

⁵ There is debate about whether Junia was an apostle. The argument is over whether the greek construction is to be translated “outstanding among the apostles” or “well known to the apostles”. Most scholars agree that while it is possible for it to mean “well known” it most probably is to be understood as “outstanding among” the apostles. There has also been an attempt to change the name to a male form of Junias, but this name has no evidence of use or existence in any literature of the time but Junia is a very common name always applied to women. The likely conclusion is that Junia is indeed a female and was considered by Paul and other apostles as an apostle herself.

because it infers that Priscilla taught biblical truth and apostolic tradition to a prominent man in the church in the same way that Peter and Paul did this in their own ministries. The same Greek word is used for Priscilla's work as when Peter explains his encounter with Cornelius to Jewish Christians, and Paul explains to Jews the beliefs and structure of the church. In this passage it says Paul "witnessed to them from morning till evening, explaining about the kingdom of God, and from the Law of Moses and from the Prophets he tried to persuade them about Jesus" (Acts 28:23). Priscilla's work with Apollos is described the same way. She clearly taught theology, apostolic tradition, and biblical truth to Apollos and likely many other women and men, alongside her husband Aquila but seemingly in a more prominent role than him.

Phoebe was enlisted to carry Paul's letter to the Romans. Paul promotes the character of the letter carriers, which also included Epaphroditus and Tychicus for other letters, because it was the job of the carrier to not just deliver but to explain the letter. This means they taught the contents of the letter to the church. In Romans, Paul refers to Phoebe as diakonos, which is often translated "deacon, servant, and minister." This a title of honor and at times authority. These examples show that women were teaching and offering instruction from Scripture in the early church to both men and women.

"The number and range of female ministry roles took a leap forward in the early church. Paul's greetings to the Roman church reflect this. No less than one out of every three individuals greeted is a woman. It is the same with the rest of the NT record. Women are singled out in the early church as apostles (Rom. 16:7), prophets (Acts 21:9; 1 Cor. 11:5), evangelists (Phil. 4:2-3), patrons (Rom. 16:2), teachers (Acts 18:24-26; Titus 2:3-5), deacons (Rom. 16:1; 1 Tim. 3:11), prayer leaders (1 Cor. 11:5), overseers of house churches (Acts 12:12;

16:14-15; Col. 4:15), prayer warriors (1 Tim. 5:5), and those who were known for their mercy and hospitality (5:10)."⁶

God is a diverse and unified community who made men and women to be diverse and unified in their capacity to image Him and in their use of the gracious spiritual gifts God gives to them. Throughout all of redemptive history God has used—and intends to continue to use—women in prominent places and ways amongst his people, alongside men, in order to be a clear expression of His nature and image.

Headship and Submission in the Family and the Church

God's unity in His nature is not just the basis for a unified approach to ministry but it is also the foundation for the necessary differences between men and women. God shows us how to find unity in diversity and he also models headship and submission, which He intends to be imaged in both the family and the church. So, while men and women have always worked together in ministry, there are also God-ordained differences between them and the roles they play in the family and church.

It is first helpful to look at 1 Corinthians 11:3, "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." What does this verse show us about the concept of headship?

First, we see that Christ, being the head of man, carries with it the idea of authority; yet we know that Christ used His authority over man for the sake of sacrificial love and service. We are told in Romans 15 that Christ did not please himself. The job of the head is to sacrifice self to benefit, meet needs, and serve others.

⁶ T Gundry, Stanley, N. and Beck, James, R. Two Views on Women in Ministry. Zondervan. Grand Rapids MI. 2005

We also see that “the head of Christ is God,” showing us that submission is voluntary and respectful. Submission does not imply superiority and inferiority but rather as the Father and Son are equal in value, dignity, worth, and power so man and woman are equals in value, dignity, worth, and power. Philippians 2:6 shows us exactly how willing submission works. Though Christ was equal to God He voluntarily took on a subordinate role in order to accomplish God’s plan of salvation and human thriving.

These two analogies of Christ as the head of man and God as the head of Christ show us that headship is given by one equal to another. The authority of headship is the responsibility before God to lovingly serve and benefit those for whom they are responsible. Submission is a willing and voluntary posture to partner with the head in order to accomplish God’s good design.

So when Scripture says the head of a woman is man, it does not mean that women are inferior or unfit for leadership. It does not imply that women should stay home or not have careers or should never be in positions of leadership over many in any sector of society. It also does not mean that all women are to submit to all men. A wife should submit to her own husband, believers should submit to the spiritual authority of their church, and all Christians should submit to Christ. Men and women are both given the mandate to rule the earth in Genesis, they are joint heirs of God’s grace in Peter and Galatians, and Paul points out that every male is born of a woman and therefore man is not independent of woman. Headship is not to be lorded over women but used to serve and uplift in all submission to God.

While this concept has been used to abuse power, it is also not a concept that can be abandoned or explained away. In 1 Corinthians 11:3, Paul grounds headship in the nature of the Trinity. In verse 8 of the same chapter, he ties

headship to the creation order of Adam and Eve. This means that headship is part of God’s good design for the flourishing of mankind. Headship should be used to benefit and serve, not to rule and dominate. Submission is not relegated to the wife alone. Both parties must submit to Christ and their God given role and in so doing honor one another. This is why Ephesians 5 begins the household code by calling us to submit to one another out of reverence for Christ.

This concept of distinct but equal roles is found in the Trinity, in creation, and is spelled out more explicitly in the household codes found in Ephesians 5:21-6:4, Colossians 3:18-21, and 1 Peter 3:1-7. In each of these passages we see Paul lay out clear roles for husband and wife: that the husband is the head of the wife and the wife is to submit to her husband. Headship and authority are to be used only for loving and sacrificial service; and submission is willing partnership in order to accomplish God’s good design.

This concept of headship plays out not only in the family but in the church as well. As we have clearly seen to this point, women are equal partners in ministry with men and play all kinds of roles in leadership and the prolific use of all gifts given by God for the edification of the church. There are no ministry gifts or ministries that women are incapable of performing, but Scripture does limit the office of elder to men only.

Elders:

In all passages that give instruction to elders—how they are qualified, and called—we see that only men are permitted to be elders. However, it is also clear that the requirements for eldership as found in 1 Timothy 3:1-13, 1 Peter 5:1-3, and Titus 1:5-9 make it so that most men are also not qualified to be elders. Aside from the requirement to be a one-woman man, we also look to

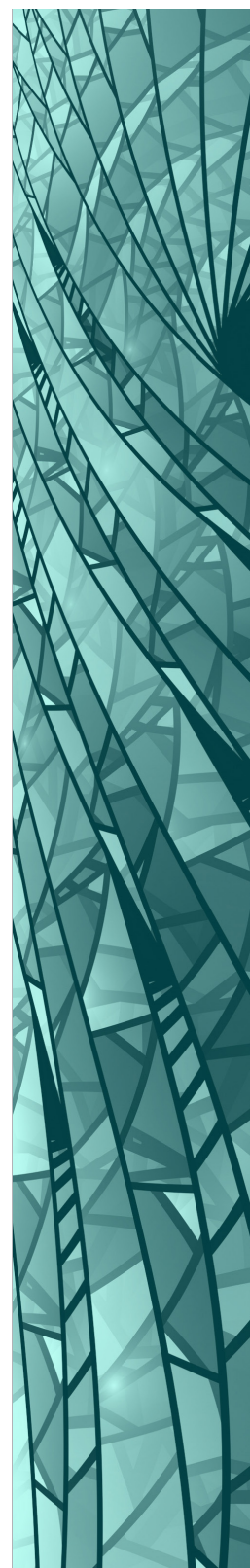
the whole history of the Bible and recognize that while women play every other significant role in the history of Israel and the church, there was never a female priest or a female elder named or mentioned anywhere. Yet, there are women named and given every other office or title that exists in Scripture. These things, coupled with the Trinitarian pattern and creational order of headship, leads us to the conclusion that the office of elder is reserved for men.

Eldership is not the most important or superior office in the church. Rather, it is the office given the responsibility to sacrificially serve and protect the body of Christ. Elders are not superior. They willingly choose to lower themselves for the good of the church, yet they carry the heavy responsibility of serving and protecting well. Elders will answer to God for how they serve and care for the people of God.

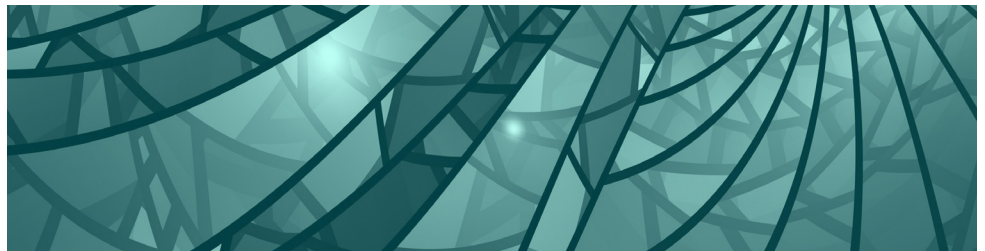
We affirm that the office of elder is reserved for men and is to be executed through sacrificial service.

We deny that this implies the superiority of men over women or elevates elders as superior to anyone else.

In light of these theological realities and biblical conclusions, we hold that while the office of elder is reserved for men, women should be permitted and encouraged to use their God-given gifts in all capacities that any non-elder is permitted and encouraged to use their gifts. It is from this understanding that we now turn to Theological Vision.



02 THEOLOGICAL VISION



RVF desires to be a place that thrives in unity and love as all people—men, women and children—realize their God-given value and giftings so that they can offer their unique expression of God’s image to the church, according to God’s design. The body of Christ flourishes when all people are given space to share their gifts within the life of the church.

Therefore, RVF highly values the participation of women within the life of the church and views their involvement as crucial to our faithfulness to God and the health of the body. This participation includes every space other than the office of elder, which we do believe is reserved for men. However, even though the office of elder is reserved for men, women will continue to have significant and meaningful influence in leadership, as well as regular input with the elders so that the whole body of Christ is cared for in the best way possible. We continue to build a culture where women are valued and contribute within all levels of leadership; where humility, consideration, transparency, and love create an environment of mutuality and reciprocity as we seek Jesus and His kingdom together.

03 MINISTRY EXPRESSION

Based on these theological convictions and biblical exegesis, the following is how the vision of women in ministry is expressed within RVF. Also included are some potential areas of development, though this is not intended to be an exhaustive list.

Elder

The office of elder is reserved for qualified men at RVF. The unique functions of elders are doctrinal oversight and official church discipline.⁷ Although elders are ultimately responsible and accountable for these within the church, they do not execute them in isolation from the community but in appropriate collaboration with the Body, including women.

Deacon

This is a biblical office that can be held by men or women. Though RVF does not currently function with official deacons, this is an office that has potential to be developed in the future.

Pastor

At RVF the term “pastor” is used to describe function, gifting, and responsibility—not office. Though all elders perform pastoral duties, not all people who have the title of “pastor” hold the office of elder. Per RVF’s Constitution, the lead pastor must also be an elder; therefore, the lead pastor at RVF will be male. However, all other pastoral positions are open to both men and women.

Staff Leadership

Staff and lay leadership positions are crucial for the well-being and edification of the Body and are open to men and women. These positions include ministry directors, council members, assistants, and Missional Community leaders.

Women’s Council

The Women’s Council consists of a multi-generational group of women who come from several different walks of life. It exists to provide pastoral care for the women within our community. The Women’s Council seeks to ground women in the transformational love of Jesus and the truth of who they are as God’s image bearers in such a way that they are freed and equipped to participate in the advancement of the Kingdom through the faithful Spirit-led offering of themselves.

Sunday Gathering

Sunday morning worship is a key part of church life. Therefore, this is where the participation of women is most visible. At RVF all Sunday morning ministries can be performed by non-elders and therefore are open to any gifted and qualified man or woman. This includes preaching, teaching, and administering the sacraments. All of these are done under the oversight of the elders.

⁷ For specific information on elder qualifications and responsibilities, see RVF Church Constitution.

04 PROBLEM PASSAGES

Thus far a theological foundation, vision, and ministry expression have been articulated to bring clarity to our position and how we strive to function at RVF. We hold this position with humility and grace, knowing that there are those who view this differently. We also recognize that certain passages of Scripture are points of contention and confusion. We will now turn to address some of the more difficult passages. It is wise to recognize the reason for the contention and confusion that exists around these passages is because they are not simple or clear but rather complicated and nuanced.

1 Corinthians 14:26-3

26 What then, brothers? When you come together, each one has a hymn, a lesson, a revelation, a tongue, or an interpretation. Let all things be done for building up. 27 If any speak in a tongue, let there be only two or at most three, and each in turn, and let someone interpret. 28 But if there is no one to interpret, let each of them keep silent in church and speak to himself and to God. 29 Let two or three prophets speak, and let the others weigh what is said. 30 If a revelation is made to another sitting there, let the first be silent. 31 For you can all prophesy one by one, so that all may learn and all be encouraged, 32 and the spirits of prophets are subject to prophets. 33 For God is not a God of confusion but of peace.

As in all the churches of the saints, 34 the women should keep silent in the churches. For they are not permitted to speak, but should be in submission, as the Law also says. 35 If there is anything they desire to learn, let them

ask their husbands at home. For it is shameful for a woman to speak in church.

36 Or was it from you that the word of God came? Or are you the only ones it has reached? 37 If anyone thinks that he is a prophet, or spiritual, he should acknowledge that the things I am writing to you are a command of the Lord. 38 If anyone does not recognize this, he is not recognized.

The most relevant part of this passage is verses 34-35. The rest of the passage is included to help with context. The point of this passage overall is orderly worship, so Paul addresses many people and tells them to remain silent in the church. He is sure to tell those who have tongues but no interpreter to be silent and also tells people to be silent so as to not interrupt a prophecy. Paul is seeking to target anyone who compromises the edification of the whole church and the witness of the church to outsiders based on their conduct within the worship gathering.

It is helpful to know that questions were common in the less formal setting of a Corinthian house church and were a part of the teaching portion of the gathering. These churches were smaller groups who met in homes, and the church experience was much more interactive as a result. It is also important to note that three chapters earlier Paul told women to pray and prophesy in the church gathering. Since this is the case, we now ask why Paul forbids married women from speaking?

There are at least two possibilities for what is happening here. First, there is evidence that culturally at the time it would have been inappropriate for a woman to address a man unrelated to her and therefore, Paul was prohibiting women from speaking to men unrelated to them for the sake of the witness of the church externally, which is within Paul's overall point of view in this passage. Secondly, there is a possibility that some of the questions being asked were not beneficial to the whole gathering because the one asking lacked fundamental knowledge on what was being taught, since women were uneducated in this culture. This would have hindered the edification of the church, which is also in Paul's view in this passage.

While the particular cultural nuances may be difficult to fully ascertain, it seems that Paul's intention here is not to silence women at all times in all ways within the life of the church but rather to help create a space where all people can be edified and learn. His instruction allows those in the gathering to be edified while opening the door for the uneducated to be more educated in a more conducive setting. This was an opportunity not normally afforded the uneducated in this culture. While this text may seem repressive in our culture, it was liberating in theirs.

1 Corinthians 11:2-16

2 Now I commend you because you remember me in everything and maintain the traditions even as I delivered them to you. 3 But I want you to understand that the head of every man is Christ, the head of a wife[a] is her husband,[b] and the head of Christ is God. 4 Every man who prays or prophesies with his head covered dishonors his head, 5 but every wife[c] who prays or prophesies with her head uncovered dishonors her head, since it is the same as if her head were shaven. 6 For if a wife will not cover her head, then she should cut her hair short. But since it is disgraceful for a wife to cut off

her hair or shave her head, let her cover her head.⁷ For a man ought not to cover his head, since he is the image and glory of God, but woman is the glory of man. 8 For man was not made from woman, but woman from man. 9 Neither was man created for woman, but woman for man. 10 That is why a wife ought to have a symbol of authority on her head, because of the angels.[d] 11 Nevertheless, in the Lord woman is not independent of man nor man of woman; 12 for as woman was made from man, so man is now born of woman. And all things are from God. 13 Judge for yourselves: is it proper for a wife to pray to God with her head uncovered? 14 Does not nature itself teach you that if a man wears long hair it is a disgrace for him, 15 but if a woman has long hair, it is her glory? For her hair is given to her for a covering. 16 If anyone is inclined to be contentious, we have no such practice, nor do the churches of God.

This passage is very strange for us, but with proper context and cultural knowledge it becomes a bit more clear. Once again it is helpful to realize that what Paul is addressing in this larger section of Scripture is proper worship in the context of the Corinthian church, which found itself in the midst of the Roman culture of the day.

Paul begins this passage by commending them for trying to maintain the traditions he gave them; but he starts with a compliment because he is about to confront several things that need to be addressed in their worship gatherings.

In verse 3 Paul calls us back to the Trinitarian pattern and creation order of headship and submission as discussed above. Christ is the head of man, man the head of his wife, God the head of Christ. Therefore, headship and submission is dictated by the way the Father and Son interact. To be head of your wife is to treat your wife as the Father treats the Son, and submission means to act as Christ does toward the Father—nothing more and nothing less. This means that men and women are equal

in value and essence, as are Father and Son. Yet they play unique roles as God's good plan unfolds through His own character and the world. This pattern and creational structure undergirds what Paul will say about worship from here on out.

In the culture that the Corinthian church found itself, the priests of the pagan religion always had their head covered; so a man who prayed with his head covered would be seemingly praying to a false god and therefore dishonoring Christ, who is his head. It was also thought in this culture that long hair made you fertile, and to display your hair was to display a desire to be impregnated, making uncovered long hair explicitly sexual. It is this belief that drove temple prostitutes of the time to shave their heads so as to avoid becoming pregnant when engaging in sexual rituals. In this culture, if a woman were to display her long hair, it would be to communicate the desire to be impregnated; and to have her hair short would be to imply she was a temple prostitute. It is these cultural beliefs that motivated Paul's instruction to men and women regarding head coverings so as to prevent them from distracting one another with immodesty or associating themselves with pagan ritual and worship. Sexual acts as worship in the gathering was pagan and had no place in the Christian church. Therefore, men in that culture were not to cover their heads as a way to honor Christ. Women, on the other hand, were to cover their heads as a way to show honor to their husband as their head; and in so doing they honored God as the head of all things.

In verse 10 Paul reiterates that a woman should seek to honor her husband by not bringing sexuality into the worship gathering "because of the angels." Paul is referencing when the sons of God had relations with the daughters of men in Genesis. When sexual immorality is mixed with worship, it creates evil outcomes. So women and men should come to worship with the intent of modesty and exclusive worship of the one true God. Paul makes it clear in verses 11 and 12 that though man

is the head of his wife, that all men are born of women and therefore not superior to them. Men and women are interdependent with one another and equal in value and worth, as all of us have our being in God himself.

Verses 13-16 Paul drives home the point that they are well aware of the implications of the hair and head coverings so they should know that women should cover their heads and men should not. There should not be contention over this clear principle.

Since this is what was happening in the Corinthian culture and church, two things are necessary for us to draw from this passage: First, head coverings are not a binding practice for all cultures; but worship that is clearly disconnected from false gods and sexual impropriety is binding on all churches of all time. We must strive to have a worship expression in which men play their role as priest to their families and serve Jesus only, and women must honor their husbands and Christ with modesty as is appropriate for the worship setting.

Second, we should take note that Paul clearly expects and anticipates women to pray and prophesy publicly, which is what makes it necessary for women to do so in ways that honor their role with their husband and Christ. This passage clearly allows for women to pray and prophesy in the gathered church service.

1 Timothy 2:8-15

I desire then that in every place the men should pray, lifting holy hands without anger or quarreling; 9 likewise also that women should adorn themselves in respectable apparel, with modesty and self-control, not with braided hair and gold or pearls or costly attire, 10 but with what is proper for women who profess godliness—with good works. 11 Let a woman learn quietly with all submissiveness. 12 I do not permit a woman to teach or to exercise authority over a man; rather, she is to remain

quiet. 13 For Adam was formed first, then Eve; 14 and Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and became a transgressor. 15 Yet she will be saved through childbearing—if they continue in faith and love and holiness, with self-control.

This passage has several difficulties even though verses 11 and 12 tend to get the most attention. To understand this passage it is helpful to understand the larger context of the book and the cultural context into which Paul is writing.

The larger context of the book is Paul writing to Timothy, asking him to stay at the church in Ephesus in order to help navigate some problems that had arisen in the church. The primary concern for Paul is false teaching that has been proliferated by untrustworthy teachers who have come to Ephesus and were targeting wealthy single women in the community for financial gain. This is the primary problem Paul is addressing.

The cultural context has at least two significant factors. First, there was Jewish influence in the culture that shaped the way women were seen and taught. In Jewish culture women were not considered smart enough to be educated theologically and so they often stood in the back of the synagogue and talked to one another while men were educated. Secondly, Ephesus was home to the cult of Artemis; and in this cult women were viewed as superior to men, as Artemis was a female goddess and protector of women. These two cultural realities help us to understand why Paul says the things he says to Timothy about women in this passage.

Paul's overall point in 1 Timothy 2:8-15 is to instruct men and women about how they are to embrace their own responsibility to be disciples of Jesus and learn his ways. Men in the context of chapter 2 are being instructed to fulfill their priestly role (which goes back to the garden of Eden) of bringing others to God, this time

particularly in prayer. Men are to pray for their leaders (vs 1 and 2) without anger or quarreling. It seems they had been caught up in anger and arguing about the political power brokers of the time, and they needed to shift their attitudes. So while men should follow Christ as priest figures in prayer as their role, women should also take hold of their responsibility to follow Christ.

Paul tells the Ephesians that women should adorn themselves with modesty and self-control rather than in expensive and ostentatious clothing. This was not about needing to look homely to be godly but rather Paul was pushing against the cult influence of Artemis. To dress in these ways was to associate oneself with the cult of Artemis and possibly even cult prostitutes. It was a move of power and significance in this culture, and Paul is calling them to humble Jesus-following.

In verse 11 Paul addresses women who have been influenced by Jewish culture. Rather than standing in the back gossiping, as was the custom in that culture, women were invited into the gathering and instruction time. Therefore, they should stop talking to one another and begin taking hold of the theological instruction being offered to them for the first time.

In the same way, in verse 12 Paul instructs these women who were influenced by false teaching and the ways of the cult of Artemis that had infiltrated the church to seek to live in humble community alongside men rather than domineer them through false teaching. Paul is not banning women from all teaching or authority. He is addressing a particular problem of these rich women, having been influenced by the cult and false teaching, who were then coming into the church and trying to teach in domineering ways as if superior to men. This was something they learned from the cult of Artemis and other false teachers. In fact, the Greek word used here for authority is *authentein*, which means, "assume authority," and it is incredibly rare. It is a different word than Paul

uses any other place in his writings to describe biblical authority. It is best understood as meaning to dominate or domineer. Paul is instructing women to take responsibility for following Christ. This means that either because of non-education in the Jewish culture or false education in the cult of Artemis, women should be quiet and take the time to learn good doctrine rather than ignore their new opportunity or try to use this inclusion as an opportunity to grab power.

Paul's explanation of this goes back to Adam and Eve. This has often been used to say women may not teach because they were created second, and they are inherently more susceptible to deception. That is not what Paul is saying and is easily disproved. Many women are much more discerning, wise, and capable than many men. Paul goes back to Adam and Eve to reiterate his overall point. Adam was created first, and Eve was not around for God's instruction about the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil. It was Adam's role as the priest of Eden to communicate God's instruction to Eve. He failed to do so, was deceived, and then willfully participated. Paul is not saying men are more trustworthy or capable; he is pointing out Adam's failure in his role. He is explaining why Eve was deceived as an analogy for why the women in Ephesus are once again deceived—not because they are more susceptible but because the truth of God was not communicated adequately to them by man, the same thing that caused the problem in the garden. Paul is not saying women should never teach because they are inferior. He is saying that the women who have received false teaching should stop teaching and dominating. Instead, they should receive proper theological education. They have an equal responsibility to follow Jesus instead of remaining uneducated or wrongly educated.

Paul goes on to explain that even though Eve was deceived and transgressed, she will be saved through childbearing. This is a reference to Genesis 3:15. She is not eternally damned because she transgressed but rather she will be saved through childbearing when the second Eve, Mary, bears the child that will save all people, men and women:

Jesus himself. Since women are saved through Jesus, the same way men are, they must continue in faith, love, holiness, and self control. This is the same way a man is expected to find salvation in Christ and live accordingly.

This passage does not forbid women to teach, and it does not forbid them from all leadership. Rather, it is a call for men and women to both take hold of their call to Jesus and take responsibility for their spiritual growth together. Since this is the case, we do not believe women should be prohibited from teaching or leading, including preaching on a Sunday morning. The passage addresses a particular problem in Ephesus and the application for our own time and culture is to ensure that all people are being properly taught and instructed so that they can fulfill their God-given roles in the life of the church.

Galatians 3:25-29

25 But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a guardian, 26 for in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith. 27 For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. 28 There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave[a] nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. 29 And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise.

The scope of questioning related to women in ministry in this passage is centered in verse 28, "there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus." The core of the debate is whether this phrase is referring specifically to spiritual status—such as justification, access to grace, initiation through baptism, union in Christ, and ultimate salvation—or if the intention of the author was to remove religious and social disadvantages as well as all boundaries in racial, social, and gender power relationships. Is

this passage speaking about spiritual status, or is it endeavoring to remove any gender roles that exist in the life of church leadership?

It is obvious in reading the passage that the book as a whole, and the immediate context of the passage, does not explicitly mention church leadership and polity. As a result, we must then decide whether there is sufficient context to extend the meaning of this passage to include the implication that this could possibly have on church polity and gender roles within leadership structures in the church.

The clear context of the passage is speaking to how one inherits the promises of Abraham. It is not through the law but through faith that we are justified and become heirs of the promise in Christ. Paul's argument about the law is a complex one, but the main question in scope is how one is included in the family of God, i.e. the promises of Abraham. There is nothing in the context of the immediate passage or the book as a whole that would make it clear that Paul is intending to make statements about whether there are appropriate gender roles in church leadership. Paul is saying that whether you find yourself in a controlling dominant group (Jew, free, man) or part of a group who in that time and culture were considered less-than (Gentiles, slaves, women), the gospel upsets those social structures by giving equal and full access to anyone who comes by faith to the person of Jesus.

To say there is no hierarchy or second class when it comes to the benefits of being in Christ is not to say that there are no divinely intended gender roles in the family and the church. The truth of equality in Christ deeply impacts and shapes how we see and execute different roles in the family and church; but equality in Christ does not necessitate an abolition of all gender roles or authority structures.

This passage taken in its own context and then considered within the corpus of teaching on the roles of men and women in ministry in the church does not explicitly or implicitly communicate that no gender roles exist in the church. We are assured that all have equal access to grace, justification, forgiveness, etc. Therefore, men and women carry the same worth and value. The question of how that equality plays out in ministry roles and leadership is not addressed in this passage but is addressed in many others. Our conclusion on gender roles in church leadership is not impacted by this passage other than to ensure that as we seek to embody biblical gender roles, there should be no sense of pride or superiority but rather sacrificial love and service of all people because all are equally valued by God. While this passage is essential to forming our value of all people, it does not speak to women in leadership. Because of this, we form our theology of women in ministry when it comes to practical outworkings of gender roles from the theological concepts and passages above rather than from this passage.

05

CONCLUSION

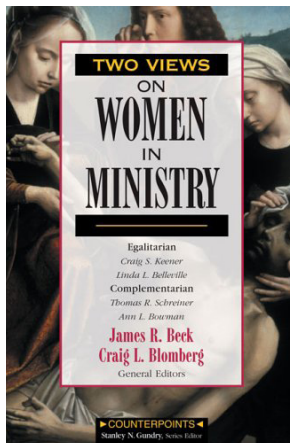
Our prayer is that this paper brings clarity and direction for the health and well-being of the church and ultimately brings glory to God. We pray that women find freedom to develop and employ their gifts; and that women and men can work together in humility and love through the Spirit. We are committed to an on-going posture of submission to the truth of Scripture and the leading of the Spirit. May the Lord grant us the desire of our hearts to have a vibrant and healthy community centered on Jesus, where all can find belonging, value, and freedom. This paper is not a final word but an invitation to conversation and exploration of the way of Jesus.

06

RECOMMENDED READING

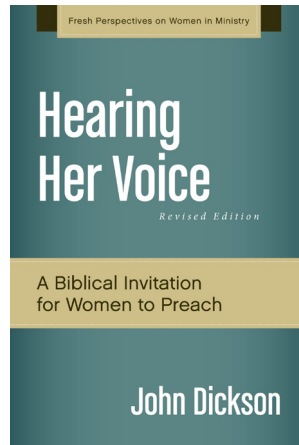
For those interested in learning more on this subject, this short list of books is helpful to read. They will help you explore the issue from multiple angles. Not all material will espouse the position you have read in this paper, but it will give context to how this position became the one that we believe faithfully adheres to the Biblical text

to the best of our understanding. You can also explore any of the resources in the following section, which is an exhaustive list of works consulted for the writing of this paper.



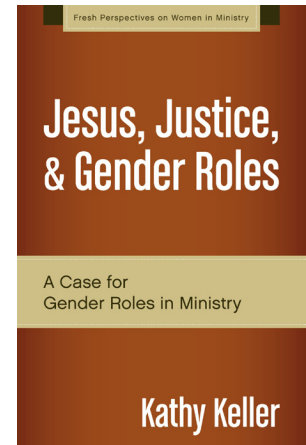
Two Views on Women in Ministry

(edited by Stanley Gundry and James Beck) features four theologians—Belleville, Blomberg, Keener, and Schreiner—presenting contrasting biblical arguments for and against women in church leadership, offering a respectful, scholarly debate on the issue.



Hearing Her Voice: A Biblical Invitation for Women to Preach

by John Dickson argues that the New Testament restrictions on women teaching in church have been misunderstood, and makes a compelling biblical case for why women should be encouraged to preach and teach in Christian communities today.



Jesus, Justice, and Gender Roles: A Case for Gender Roles in Ministry

by Kathy Keller provides a concise defense of complementarian theology, asserting that gender distinctions in ministry roles reflect God's design and uphold both justice and the example of Christ.

WORKS CONSULTED

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Articles

- [Bridgetown Church Position Statement](#)
- [Village Church Position Statement](#)
- [Tim and Kathy Keller Position Statement](#)
- [Gerry Brashears Comparison of Views](#)
- [Craig Blomberg: Women in the Pulpit](#)

Podcasts

- [The Whole Counsel of God: 1 Timothy 2:1-15](#)
- [The Whole Counsel of God: 1 Corinthians 11](#)
- [The Whole Counsel of God: 1 Corinthians 14 Continued](#)
- [The Whole Counsel of God: Galatians 3 Concluded](#)
- [Theology in the Raw: Are Husbands the Head of their Wife? Part 1](#)
- [Theology in the Raw: Are Husbands the Head of their Wife? Part 2](#)

