



WHAT WE BELIEVE ABOUT: WOMEN IN LEADERSHIP

HERE'S THE DEAL

The heart of this conversation is about the availability (or unavailability) of leadership positions, activities and offices to women within the context of a local church. *Can a woman hold the office of elder? Can a woman be a pastor in the church? Can women serve in visible leadership capacities in Sunday gatherings (as preachers, worship leaders, facilitators of corporate prayer, etc)?*

Statistically, over half of those who follow Jesus in the United States are female. The implications of this conversation are great when we consider whether or not, or how much these women are to be empowered for leadership and mission.

DIFFERENT PERSPECTIVES

There are 2 common perspectives pertaining to women leaders within the church, which vary significantly in their content.

1. **The Complementarian View** — Asserts that men and women are of equal value and dignity in the eyes of God, but serve differing, complementary roles in the life of the church. The fundamental claim of complementarianism is that men are to have primary spiritual authority in the church. Although there are multiple variations beneath the complementation banner that manifest in tweaks to methodology, this fundamental concept remains as a common conviction.
2. **The Egalitarian View** — Asserts that men and women are equal when it comes to authority in all elements of a community's life following Jesus together. This includes leadership roles of all kinds in the church and the home, as well. A primary text for this perspective is Galatians 3:28 when it comes to public life, and Ephesians 5:21 in regard to life within the family household. Egalitarians consider gender entirely irrelevant in conversations attached to spiritual authority and church leadership.

There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. — Galatians 3:28

Give thanks always and for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ. — Ephesians 5:21

WHERE WE LAND

There is such vitriol and division within the greater conversation on this topic, which is tragic when one considers the tremendous unity there is among all orthodox parties regarding women in leadership.

First, there is the acknowledgment that both genders are created in the image of God and are of equal dignity, value, and worth. Second, there is the shared belief that all Christians — male and female —

have the Holy Spirit within them, all believers are gifted by God for ministry within the body of Christ. With this diversity of giftings comes numerous possible ministry callings. - Boyd & Eddy

Even with this common ground firmly established, it is still necessary to press forward to a more precisely articulated position, going as far as we believe the scriptures take us, and no further. Therefore we unite around and operate under the following assertions about women in leadership.

- **There is an office called “elder” that is reserved for qualified men.** We do not believe the requirements for eldership in 2 Timothy and Titus can be properly interpreted with room for women holding the office. Being a “one-woman man” is not a culturally specific concept — its implications are clear and lasting through the generations.
- **All other formalized positions of leadership are open to qualified women.** One of the more important responsibilities of those qualified male elders is to identify, encourage, equip, and empower female leaders to utilize their gifts in the context of church leadership positions. Among those positions open to qualified women is the role of “Pastor,” which means *shepherd*, and is a fitting title to give to any man or woman at Reach in a formalized shepherding role, as we do not consider *elder* and *pastor* to be synonymous, interchangeable words in the New Testament.
- **There is no ministry activity that is off-limits to women based solely upon gender.** Qualified women are permitted to lead times of prayer in worship gatherings, lead the congregation in song as worship leaders, teach in discipleship classes and in Sunday gatherings, and engage in any other leadership activity they feel compelled to pursue with the support of existing church leaders — the same standards for called, qualified men.

It is difficult to label Reach on this issue — although our male-eldership convictions would cause many to declare us complementarian, our culture of leadership and worship is quite egalitarian in feel and function. On the attached chart below, the “Male Elder” position described in the center column is a helpful guideline for how we interpret and implement the scriptures relevant to this topic.

SO WHAT?

Theology that is right leads to a life that is righteous, so how do these convictions about what it means for women to be in leadership naturally move us toward a loving response?

- **We encourage women consistently.** The women of Reach need to be told and reminded that they are not designed for the sidelines of community, discipleship and mission. They need to hear the heart of the scriptures, the heart of their elders, and the heart of their greater church community declare over them, “You are welcome, you are valued, and you are needed.”
- **We equip women diligently.** At every level of the church, extra care is taken to ensure discipleship environments exist to develop women into the disciples and leaders God is calling them to be. As female leaders are identified, they are provided specialized training to further tap into and utilize the spiritual gifts they possess.
- **We empower women intentionally.** We ensure that our empowerment of qualified female leaders is not merely hypothetical or well-intentioned rhetoric, but usher women personally into their opportunities to serve and to lead.

DIG DEEPER

Here are a few resources to help you investigate and study for yourself.

- *Two Views on Women in Ministry* | Craig Blomberg & James Beck
 - Blomberg's perspective presented in chapter 2 (p. 123) is a robust, biblical presentation of Reach's position.
- *How I Changed My Mind About Women in Leadership* | Alan F. Johnson
 - A collaborative work from writers holding an egalitarian position
- *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood* | John Piper & Wayne Grudem
 - An exhaustive work from two prominent voices in the traditional complementarian camp

COMPARING POSITIONS ON WOMEN IN LEADERSHIP
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The following chart is an attempt to show the similarities and differences of the positions in brief form. The statements are typical and certainly do not represent the views of everyone who might fall into the particular category. Adrian Warnock's [summary](#) is helpful. Authoritarian or patriarchal is a view to the right of these three can be summarized as "Women should always function under male authority and be in submission in the God-ordained authority structure that is central to Christian life." Bill Gothard is a long time advocate. Christian Feminism, a view to the left of these three can be summarized as "Women have been an oppressed group for too long. As Christians, we must follow the example of God in the Exodus and liberate oppressed people. We must make up for wrongs of the male dominated past. We must promote women at every opportunity."

COMPARISON	EGALITARIAN	MALE ELDER COMPLEMENTARIAN	MALE LEADER COMPLEMENTARIAN
Descriptive phrase	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.	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.	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.
Authority in creation Genesis 1 & 2	None. Full equality at creation.	Equal in essence, partnership in work. Hints of male headship in the complementary partnership of marriage.	Equal in essence with ordered roles with male headship defined as a pattern of family life.

Effect of Fall Genesis 3	Created illegitimate hierarchical system. Man becomes ruler because of sin.	Woman's desire is for oneness with her husband (cf. Gen. 2:23-24). Husband's rule instituted which lasts as long as it hurts to have babies. "Desire" and "rule" may be positive or negative.	Painful distortion of the creation order. Woman's desire is to overthrow God's pattern of male headship. Men exercise legitimate authority in domineering way.
Restoration in Christ	Abolished hierarchy as redemption is achieved.	Christlike roles in ordered relationship	Proper creational role relationships restored.
1 Cor. 11	Shows women active in ministry in the local church but must use freedom in Christ properly.	Shows women active in speaking ministry in the local church but must use freedom in Christ properly. Male headship is tied to Genesis 2 & 3.	Shows pattern of male headship in creation. Women speaking is outside the assembly of the church. Male headship is tied to Genesis 1-2.
1 Cor. 14	Paul bans some kind of disruptive speech.	Paul bans some kind of disruptive speech.	Women are to be silent in the judging of prophecies, a role for elders only.
Gal. 3:28	Magna Charta of freedom. No gender distinctions in Christ or Christ's body.	No gender distinctions in being part of Abraham's seed.	No gender distinctions in being part of Abraham's seed.

1 Tim. 2:11-15	Corrects a first century problem in Ephesus and is not universally normative.	Limits women from eldership and the elder exclusive roles as defined by a local church.	Limits women from teaching or having authority over men in the gatherings of the church.
Biblical Offices	All offices including senior pastor open to qualified women and men.	Elder office and functions for qualified men only; Deacon office open to qualified women and men.	Both elder and deacon offices closed to women.
Gifts	All gifts given apart from gender distinctions.	All gifts given apart from gender distinctions. Used in biblically appropriate roles and offices.	All gifts given apart from gender distinctions. The gifted persons of Eph. 4:11 are males only.
Ministry	All ministries open to qualified women and men.	All non-elder ministries open to qualified women and men.	All ministries involving authority over or teaching men reserved for men.
Some Proponents (though there will be significant differences in the specific points above)	Millard Erickson, Gordon Fee, Walt Kaiser, Craig Keener, Mimi Haddad, <i>Christians for Biblical Equality</i>	Tim Keller, Craig Blomberg, Rick McKinley, Dan Jarrell, Debbie Dodd, Gerry Breshears	Tom Schreiner, Bruce Ware, Beth Moore, John Piper, John MacArthur, many at <i>Council for Biblical Manhood and Womanhood</i>