

THE ROLE OF MEN & WOMEN IN THE CHURCH

Introduction

The Bible teaches that God created two complementary genders of humans, male and female, to bear His image together (*Gen. 1:27-28; Matt. 19:4; Mark 10:6*). This distinction in gender represents an essential characteristic of personhood and reflects the triune image of God. As outlined in Scripture and in accordance with our Distinctive Beliefs, we believe that both men and women are equal in dignity as co-image bearers of God, and that God has assigned men and women unique and complementary roles within the church and the home. Gender does not merely represent a social construct but, instead, represents a reality present in every human from birth – *men and women are not interchangeable*.

From the opening pages of Scripture, we find that God, in His wisdom and providence, created two complementary sexes for our good and His glory. In light of His good, created order, and the fact that men and women both share in divine image bearing, God intends for men and women to have different yet complementary roles and duties. These role distinctions do not arise from cultural definitions of masculinity and femininity but are an integral part of God's plan for humanity. We should recognize them as God's grace to men and women – protecting, preserving, and practicing them for His glory, our joy, and for the sake of human flourishing (*Gen. 2:18-25; 1 Cor. 11:2-16, 14:33-35; Eph. 5:22-33; Col. 3:18-19; 1 Tim. 2:8-15; 1 Pet. 3:1-7*).

To reflect God's beautiful design, we desire to articulate and embody a theological vision of complementarianism. Specifically, when it comes to the consideration of women in ministry, we want to honor the Lord, and give opportunities for women to flourish in their role(s) in the church. This paper seeks to describe that vision by explaining what we believe Scripture teaches about gender complementarity as it relates to women in ministry.

Gender and the Role of Women in Scripture

Our foundation for life and ministry starts with the understanding that the Bible is God's inspired and authoritative Word. As affirmed in our Core Beliefs, we believe the Scriptures are true, authoritative and sufficient (*Deut. 29:29, Acts 17:11, 2 Tim. 3:16-17, James 1:22, 2 Pet 1:16-21, Rev. 22:18-19*). Any attempt to understand personhood and gender must begin with divine revelation and God's created order.

First, we believe that all Christians are charged with the Great Commission. All Christians, both men and women, participate in the ministry of the church. We believe the Bible explicitly encourages and assumes that women will be involved in the ministry of the church. Jesus welcomed women among His disciples (*Luke 10:39*) and involving them in His ministry (*Luke 8:1-3*). Paul's words to Titus teach that older women teaching biblical wisdom to younger women is a noble and necessary task (*Titus 2:3-5*). Phoebe, a patron and deacon of the church of Cenchreae, is commended by Paul and was possibly the courier for Paul's epistle to the Romans, indicating her participation in gospel ministry (*Rom. 16:1-2*). Euodia and Syntyche labored closely with Paul in the gospel (*Phil. 4:3*). Priscilla is described as "explaining the way of God more accurately" to Apollos (*Acts 18:26*). We celebrate the biblical picture of men and women serving the Church of the Lord Jesus Christ together. We rejoice in biblical examples of men and women using their gifts in the Church for the glory of God.

The Bible depicts a vision of men and women laboring alongside one another for the sake of the kingdom of God (*1 Cor. 12:4-31*). When we don't empower both genders to engage and use their gifts, in complementarian partnership, both genders suffer, and the mission of the Church—*to proclaim the gospel and make disciples of all nations*—suffers.

Second, in light of the belief that male and female image bearers flourish in partnership, we expect that the primary relationship between Christian men and women is that of brotherly and sisterly love. We note that the Bible upholds the metaphor of siblinghood as the primary descriptor for male-female partnering in the Church. The concept that is taught in the New Testament is that the Church ought to have the kind of love for one another that is reserved for blood brothers and sisters. This uniquely Christian disposition reminds us that we ought to see each other as a family in a special sense. Therefore, the primary relationship in the local church between men and women is the relationship of brothers and sisters, united in Christ, not subordinates. We affirm that cultivating an environment of brotherly and sisterly love is at the very heart of complementarianism. These relationships should be marked by mutual honor, care, and sacrifice for one another.

Third, we affirm that equal involvement in the church between men and women does not entail interchangeable involvement. Although men and women are portrayed as equals throughout Scripture, we believe the Bible reserves the office of elder/pastor specifically for qualified men.¹ Scripture calls elders to lead the church (*1 Tim. 5:17; Titus 1:7; 1 Pet. 5:1-2*), teach and preach the Word² (*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 (*James. 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*). 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 it, 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 thoroughly involved in the ministry of the church.

Affirmations & 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.

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.

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*).

¹ A qualified man meets the biblical qualifications as seen by the elder(s) at TMCC.

² A qualified man may teach, even if He does not hold the office, as such an opportunity may further prepare such men to join the eldership while serving the body with their gifts in the meantime.

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, except 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 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 healthy complementarianism leads to the flourishing of both genders.

We deny any version of distorted view of complementarianism leading to the subjugation, abuse or neglect of anyone – man or woman.

We affirm that all 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.

Ministry at TMCC

In coming to these conclusions and considering how to implement them, we recognize that some will find our position and practice on women in ministry too conservative, while others will find our position and practice on women in ministry too progressive. We ask for charity from both as we focus on the primary task of making disciples of Jesus Christ, while remaining subject to the authority of God's Word.

And we believe it's important to note that even a well-supported and clear theological confession of complementarianism does not necessarily result in uniform complementarian practice. We are eager to work with brothers and sisters, churches and other ministries who view these issues differently than we do.

Professional/Organizational

The Elders and the Leadership Team (which includes women leaders) have designated that the role of lead pastor and subsequent pastoral roles are reserved for elders/pastors/qualified men. All other ministry area minister, coordinator, or director roles are open to the right (*called, gifted, qualified*) man or woman, based on the needs of the ministry. This gives equal opportunity to advance and grow in leadership in a wide variety of roles.

The Gathering

Every member of the church body actively participates in our worship services. With the exception of preaching the Word of God in the pulpit, every role is open to both men and women, including exhortation, praise, singing, music ministry, sharing announcements, prayer, and testifying to the congregation.

Teaching Environments

Gender-specific teaching environments are taught by a leader of the same gender. Mixed-gender groups are best led a mutual co-leadership relationship with the man and the woman. Co-leadership does not mean that male and female leaders are interchangeable or serve in the exact same way, but that the man and the woman operate in their roles according to gifting. For example, even in the case where the woman is a more vocal leader, the qualified man bears a unique responsibility for the direction of the conversation and group-life.