

Grace Fellowship Church Position on Women in Ministry Leadership

The role of women in various ministry functions has become a controversial issue in evangelical circles. Based on our understanding of Scripture, the following describes Grace Fellowship Church's position on the issue.

Based on the authority of Scripture, we affirm that men and women are of equal value since both were specially created in the image of God (Genesis 1:26–27). It is to both men and women that God gives dominion over the earth. However, we believe that God has intended for the man to have a different role than the woman. This is evident in Genesis 1–4 as Adam, the man, is given the position of headship over the woman (she is created from his side; he gives her a name which is a sign of authority; she is created to be a helper to him). Further, God approaches Adam to call him to account for the sin of eating from the tree since Adam was ultimately responsible before God for his marriage. This idea of headship in marriage is seen throughout the Bible, with clear New Testament passages indicating loving, Christ-like male leadership in marriage (Ephesians 5:22–33; Colossians 3:18–19). Further, this distinction in roles is a reflection of the roles within the Trinity and is a part of God's "very good" creation, though it has surely been negatively impacted by the effects of the Fall and the Curse (Genesis 3).

We also affirm with the Scriptures that there is no distinction between men and women regarding the benefits and application of salvation (Galatians 3:26–29). Since both men and women are sinners in Adam, their salvation is accomplished through the atonement of Christ alone and the benefits of a restored relationship with God are evident equally in both genders. Both are sealed and indwelt with the Holy Spirit and given spiritual gifts for the edification of the Church (Acts 2:1–4, 17–18; 1 Corinthians 12:7–11; Ephesians 4:7–16; 1 Peter 4:10).

When it comes to roles in the Church, God has given us clear guidelines to which we submit ourselves. The offices of elder (also called pastor or bishop) and deacon are the two offices prescribed for the leading and service of the Church. Wherever these offices are mentioned with qualifications in the New Testament, they are always given with masculine nouns and always described with respect to their roles as husbands and fathers (Titus 1:5–9; 1 Timothy 3:1–13). With these clear prescriptions, the office of Elder/Pastor or Deacon are to be filled only by men who have been called to that service by the Holy Spirit and confirmation of the elders of the Church and confirmation of the congregation.

The most relevant passage to the discussion of women in ministry roles comes from the Apostle Paul as he instructs Timothy, under the direction of the Holy Spirit, to establish order in the Church. As Paul writes instructions to Timothy, he clearly has the local church in mind, as is evident from the context of the epistle. In 1 Timothy 2:12–14 we read:

And I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man, but to be in silence. For Adam was formed first, then Eve. And Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived, fell into transgression. (NKJV)

With this prescription in view, women are not to 1) teach men nor 2) exercise authority over men within the local church. This would preclude women from having roles within Grace Fellowship Church where they would be teaching men from Scripture or having any type of spiritual authority over men. Biblically, those roles are reserved for men to exercise.

As we affirmed earlier, women are gifted by the Spirit and given talents to exercise within the body, having beneficial wisdom and understanding to share with all. Titus 2:1–5 gives a clear prescription of how women can exercise those gifts within the local church. Women are instructed to teach other women as well as their children, and this can be fulfilled in areas such as Sunday school and women’s Bible studies. In these ministries, it is appropriate for a woman to teach and lead under the broader leadership of the elders.

It would be expected and appropriate for a man to lead or teach a class where there was a mixture of males and females present in the context of the local church. However, 1 Tim 2 is found within a letter to a church elder about the local church in which he served. As such, when the Apostle Paul was teaching, he had in mind the functions of that local church and the leaders holding offices within it, and the local church gathered together for corporate worship. Since Paul doesn’t speak to “extension” ministries and events (conferences, children’s & student ministries, etc.), we acknowledge there may very well be times where a godly woman of the faith would be called upon to serve in a teaching capacity if that is what best suits the occasion, with appropriate review and under the authority of the elders.

(For a more thorough treatment of these topics, please see Wayne Grudem, *Evangelical Feminism & Biblical Truth*. Many of the points in this position paper are based on the content of this book. You may also find more guidance from *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood* and resources from the Council of Biblical Manhood and Womanhood at CBMW.org.)

[position paper_edited 9/19/16]