

Exploring God's Design for Gender Roles in Church Leadership

Summary Document



Are Women Free to Preach and Teach in Any Church Venue at Grace Gathering?

It is the position of Grace Gathering that women are free to preach and teach (and use any spiritual gift) in any church venue as long as it is under the accountability and doctrinal authority established by the Elders.

We find this on the basis of the following reasons:

- Even in the NT patriarchal society, while husbands exercised headship in the home and while male elders exercised authority and all teaching that established sound doctrine in the church, women were free to lead in the church through prayer, prophecy, instruction, and the use of all spiritual gifts to lead and equip both men and women in the church (I Cor. 11:5). Prophecy, for example, has many different NT forms and “pastoral preaching” is one of them (see expanded doctrinal position).
- Priscilla, the wife of Aquila, played a key role in the doctrinal instruction of Apollos in Acts 18:24-26, and, in partnership with her husband Aquila, was one of the most gifted church leaders that both taught and helped lead the first Gentile churches (Acts 18:1-3, 18:18-26, Romans 16:3-5, I Cor. 16:19, 2 Tim. 4:19)
- The “teaching” restriction on women over men in I Timothy 2:11 within the context of I Timothy is a certain type of teaching and not a general prohibition. Most teaching in the church setting is helping people understand and put into practice the word of God. However, the prohibition in I Timothy, is on teaching that has the authority of establishing sound doctrine, not a restriction from using the gift of teaching. When the NT was written the canon of Scripture was not established, and therefore, much teaching was not simply exposition of existing doctrine but of establishing doctrine. This is the context of I Tim. 2 within an environment of false doctrine within the church of Ephesus. Teaching that establishes sound doctrine is the responsibility of the elders and this is why the context of elder qualifications are given in the very next passage in I Timothy 3.
- Similarly, the restriction of women from weighing prophecy and “remaining silent” in the church in I Cor. 14:29, 34-35 are understood within the context of weighing the authority of prophecy and the establishment of sound doctrine. Therefore, the restriction of women “teaching” in I Tm. 2:11 and “being silent” in I Cor. 14:34 must be understood within the biblical context of the passage (establishing doctrine) and not simply applied as general statements stripped of that context.
- In I Cor. 12-14, Paul elevates the gift of prophecy as the “greatest” of all spiritual gifts (I Cor. 14:1) and of all Paul’s teaching on the Spiritual Gifts (Rom 12; 1 Cor 12; Eph 4), no gift is ever limited by gender, including the gift of teaching.



- Exercising spiritual gifts is distinct from the role and exercise of authority in the church. Both men and women are equally gifted and entrusted with all the spiritual gifts to lead and equip the church (including the gift of teaching) and are always accountable and function underneath the oversight of the elders (Acts 20:28-31, I Peter 5:1-5).

Can Women Serve as Elders at Grace Gathering?

It is the position of Grace Gathering that the role of elder must be reserved for qualified men in the congregation. Many of the passages and comments above support this. Here are a few additional reasons:

- Paul's principle in 1 Tim 2:11-12 is a prohibition against women serving as the ultimate doctrinal or governmental authority in the local church. This is based on creation order and the reversal of that order in the events of The Fall. These reasons are not cultural.
- It is no coincidence that, immediately after this controversial text, Paul outlines qualifications for the offices of Elder and Deacon. While Deaconesses are permitted (1 Tim 3:11), the elders are to be men who meet the qualifications.
- One of the qualifications of elders is that they have exercised their leadership and headship well in their homes (Eph. 5:21-33) as this will be similar to leading the family of the church (1 Tim. 3:4).
- In 1 Cor 11:2-16, Paul instructs women to pray and prophesy (which includes exhortation and pastoral preaching) in a manner that does not violate male headship in the home and church. Head coverings and length of hair were the cultural applications of that principle. While there may be cultural differences today on how that is applied, the principle of headship is rooted in the Godhead himself and therefore applies in all timeframes.

What If I Don't Agree with the Position of Grace Gathering on This Issue?

Foundational doctrines within the church are positions that should require unity and agreement within the body. Things like the nature of God (his eternality, triunity, omni-presence, etc.), the nature of salvation (Jesus as the only way to the Father, death, burial, resurrection, salvation by faith, etc.), godly morality (sexual purity, honesty, racial equality, dignity of all life, etc. as moral absolutes), and the authority of God's word (original manuscripts without error, historical and grammatical approach to interpretation, etc.) are all among the areas that believers should defend against those who oppose.

However, there are a number of doctrinal positions of which biblical believers can disagree and yet can still function and partner together. It is important for the church to allow people to have differing convictions on issues like this. How gender roles function together is one of those areas.



There is a reason healthy, biblical churches have different views on this issue. There is a certain level of humility that must be maintained when the level of difficulty is high in the pursuit of maintaining hermeneutical consistency within a theological viewpoint outside of those foundational doctrines. Theology is not an exact science, and therefore, grace and love must permeate differences of opinion and conviction.

While the above position is the best attempt by the Grace Gathering elders to be true to the whole council of God and Scripture with the subject at hand, the elders are fallible men. The authority of God comes from his word. It is the interpretation of his word that is prone to human error. In this regard the issue is always “degrees” of certainty. Members at Grace are completely free to have personal positions that give more or less freedom for women in these roles, and the elders welcome challenge as they desire the church to be Berean (Acts 17:11)

The only thing the elders expect is that within these discussions and debate that love and grace permeate the dialogue. Church members are not called to always agree with their leaders but they are called to follow and respect them (I Peter 5:5-7, Heb. 13:17).

The elders will continue to come back to Scripture and seek God in all aspects of doctrinal purity and encourage members within the congregation to do the same as we follow Jesus who is the head and ultimate authority of his church.