



WOMEN IN LEADERSHIP

THE APPROACH OF MARINERS CHURCH

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Throughout history, women have been a vital part of God's Church. God has used women to dispense His grace to others, advance the gospel, and serve His people and the world. Mariners Church values the gifting, voice, influence, and contributions of women in our church and in our communities. With awareness of the potential for any theological position to be weaponized, this document exists to lay out our position with sound theological reasoning, a posture of charity, and a deep commitment for both women and men to flourish and use their spiritual gifts in the context of the local church.

TWO GENERAL VIEWS ON WOMEN IN LEADERSHIP

The theological views of egalitarianism and complementarianism agree that men and women are equal in worth, dignity, and essence because both are created in God's image and are charged with responsibility to rule over His creation (Gen 1:26-27). The two views are also in agreement that gender is absolutely irrelevant regarding who may or may not be saved, that we are justified because of His grace regardless of gender (Gal 3:28). And the two views further agree that God gifts women and uses women in ministry to His people and the world. The views differ, however, on the God-given roles assigned to men and women, specifically in marriage and ministry.

1. Egalitarianism

Also known as "Biblical Equality," this view believes women and men are given equal authority, opportunity, and responsibility in service and leadership in the home and the Church.¹ This view would affirm the complementarity of the genders as being distinctly male and female, but as equals, who, "when in a relationship of mutual submission, function as equal to the task of co-dominion over creation and coworkers in the church."² Those who hold this view believe men and women are equal in function, including in marriage and ministry.³ Eve's description as "helper" means she who comes to complement and join in equal partnership, not in a subordinate relationship to the man (Gen 2:18, 22-24).⁴ Proponents view biblical examples of females in partnership with males in the Old and New Testament as evidence that God intends to establish equality in function and that any hierarchical disposition is a result of sin and this fallen world.⁵ The implication of this view for local church ministry is that men and women called and gifted by God can occupy any role in the Church.

2. Complementarianism

This view believes men and women hold distinct, though equally important, roles in marriage and ministry. God's design at creation⁶ has implications for marriage and ministry, calling men and women to exercise complementary roles and

responsibilities (1 Cor 11:3, 8), and therefore forbidding women from certain practices, such as “regularly teaching men and exercising authority over them.”⁷ Complementarians often assert that God assigned a primary headship role to men of exercising loving and sacrificial authority over women (Eph 5:21-33). Some interpret Eve being created from Adam’s side and being named by Adam as a sign of headship showing this was God’s intent before sin entered the world.

Complementarians affirm that while God calls men and women to the work of service in the Church, He set guidelines for order in worship and leadership (1 Tim 3:2, Tit 1:6). They cite the Apostle Paul’s letter to Timothy calling women not to assume authority over men (1 Tim 2:11-13, Tit 2:3-5). The implication of this view for local church ministry is that some roles in the church that are specifically reserved for men.

Complementarians differ on which roles are reserved for men. Some complementarians believe the title of elder, overseer, and pastor refer to the same office and are reserved for men. Some complementarians believe that only men in the role of elder/overseer/pastor should teach and preach. Other complementarians believe that “pastoring” and “teaching” is a gift given to both genders, and only the position of elder/overseer is reserved for men, differentiating gifts from office.⁸ These complementarians are often called “soft complementarians” by the broader evangelical world.

SO WHERE IS MARINERS?

Mariners Church has always adopted and operated from the complementarian position. The position of Mariners is what is commonly recognized as “soft complementarianism.” This position is adopted with a spirit of conviction and charity recognizing that every believer is a minister with a ministry, which is ultimately maximized under God’s gracious design for the Church’s flourishing and for both women and men who have been equally created in His image.

Spiritual headship is expressed at Mariners with an elder body consisting of men and a male senior pastor who also serves as an elder. While these roles are reserved for men, Mariners believes that all gifts are given to both genders and this is expressed with women serving in pastoral positions, including women on the highest levels of staff leadership, and women teaching.⁹

THEOLOGICAL CONTEXT FOR COMPLEMENTARY ROLES

1. Headship in marriage is in the Creation Account.

In the creation account, the woman is called “helper” (Heb: ezer) to the man, Adam (Gen 2:18). This term is not meant to be derogatory or diminishing since God uses ezer (Ps 54:4) for both male and female who are created in the image of God (Gen 1:27). God’s expectation for the man is to love and serve his wife sacrificially by stewarding his role rather than lording it over (Eph 5:25).¹⁰ A wife is to intelligently, voluntarily, and actively submit to her husband as the Church submits to Christ (Eph 5:24). These roles were not restructured after the Fall, and thus remain God’s primary design for male and female functions and unity in marriage.

2. Church Headship was patterned after God’s transcultural design.

While the previous example is rooted in events prior to the Fall in Genesis 3, the shaping of church leadership according to the writings of the New Testament are written after the Fall. However, Paul roots his reasoning in the original Edenic design of

headship (1 Tim 2:13) and the timeless example of the triune God (1 Cor 11:3), rather than the changing cultural narratives of his day. This is also harmonious with the historical pattern of God in choosing men to fulfill the primary role of spiritual headship from Old Testament priests to the twelve Apostles of Jesus.

3. Headship is in the role of Elder/Overseer.

The terms “elders” or “overseers” are interchangeable and designate the primary spiritual leaders of the Church (Tit 1:5, 7; Acts 20:17, 28). God has designated men as elders/overseers.

In the first-century church, male elders were selected by the original church planters (Acts 14:23) or by other elders (Tit 1:5), with recognition from the congregation for its leaders (Acts 6:3; 15:22-23).

On one hand, elders are responsible for the whole flock. On the other hand, these men are not the only ones who shepherd. The gift of pastor (Eph 4:11), which is distinguished from the office of elder/overseer, involves shepherding the body of Christ. Therefore, the term “pastor” is utilized for some leaders, whether men or women, to designate those who direct specific ministries. They shepherd a part of the flock under the elders’ authority. Elders are “pastors” (1 Pet 5:1-2), but their office is distinguished by the term “elder” or “overseer.”

The designated office of elder comes with great responsibility. While the term “elder” emphasizes maturity, the “overseer” term emphasizes leadership responsibility. They have final responsibility before God for prayer ministry (Jas 5:14), ministry of the Word (Acts 6:4) including teaching and guarding the church’s doctrine (Acts 20:27-31; 1 Tim 5:17; Tit 1:9), the administration of the Church (1 Tim 3:5), and shepherding the flock (1 Pet 5:2).

Furthermore, the office of Elder comes with high standards. Elders must be blameless in character (1 Tim 3:1-7; Tit 1:5-9), able to teach Scripture (1 Tim 3:2; 5:17), and answer those who contradict it (Tit 1:9). An elder must be the “husband of one wife” (1 Tim 3:2; 3:12). This qualification does not exclude an unmarried person, someone remarried after the death of a spouse, nor necessarily one who has divorced and remarried. The phrase describes a reputation as a “faithful” husband or a “one-wife kind of man” describing character, not circumstance. Elders are also public leaders. Therefore, a valid accusation of blame should only be accepted by two or three witnesses and result in public rebuke (1 Tim 5:19-20).

Ideally, the local church has a plurality of elders (Acts 14:23; 20:17; Phil 1:1; 1 Tim 4:14; 5:17; Tit 1:5; Jas 5:14). Their authority is to be expressed in loving leadership and not lording over the flock (1 Pet 5:3; Heb 13:17). Apart from this, Scripture does not describe how elders should organize themselves, and so should be determined by church size, cultural context, and specific needs of the body.

WHAT THIS MEANS (AND DOESN'T MEAN) FOR MARINERS CHURCH

1. This does not mean Mariners views men as more important than women in the life of the Church, because women are just as indispensable and invaluable to God’s Church.

There are 100 “one anothers” in the New Testament with 59 of these directly tied to a commandment. There are many more “all-inclusive” references and commandments in the New Testament than gender-specific ones. The tone of the New

Testament is one that calls for the necessary presence and participation of both women and men in the life of the Church for one another's spiritual well-being.¹¹

This also means that qualified and selected men (elders/overseers) are instructed to carry the spiritual responsibility and burden of sacrificial oversight for the flourishing of the Church (1 Tim 2:12-15; 1 Cor 11:2-12) in accordance with God's transcultural design of headship.

2. This does not mean only men can exercise their gifts in the life of the Church. Both men and women are invited to orderly participation and expression of spiritual gifts under the leadership of the elders.

Christ's gifts are given equally to men and women to strengthen the Church (Eph 4:12; 1 Cor 12:1-11; Rom 12:3-8). Spiritual gifts are not given with gender specificity but gender neutrality. They're given to different people, in different measure, according to God's wisdom through His Spirit. The New Testament invites the entire body of Christ, as the priesthood of God, to utilize their gifts to build up one another.

For example, Eph 4:11 talks about the gift of pastoring ("poimen") or shepherding. The Church is strengthened when men and women shepherd and care for others through a variety of ministry contexts. Furthermore, the gift of teaching ("didasko") is given without gender specificity (Rom 12:7).

The ordering of these gifts, however, is to be maximized for the wellbeing of the Church under the leadership of the elders. For example, while Paul's words in 1 Tim 2:12 ("I do not permit a woman to teach or have authority over a man") is often interpreted as being two distinct activities which are timeless rather than time-bound,¹² "teaching" and "authority" can also be interpreted as being grammatically combined to communicate a concept of "authoritative teaching," which is teaching with the authority of the elders, who determine the church's doctrine.¹³ So while women are invited to publicly exercise the gift of teaching, this is to be maximized under the leadership of and in submission to the "doctrinal authority" set forth by the elders.¹⁴

A WORD TO THOSE WHO DISAGREE

We acknowledge that some complementarians and egalitarians disagree with the position of Mariners.

For complementarians who hold to a more conservative view, we ask you to consider what scholar Craig Blomberg asked: "If those who do not allow women to teach or shepherd are wrong, half the body of Christ is eliminated from serving in certain ways. If those who do allow women to teach and shepherd are wrong, what damage is done?" Our position releases the full gifts of the Body, rather than half while also holding tightly to biblical headship.

For egalitarians who find this position wanting, this position is held with confidence that God's design is intended to maximize both the gifts of the Body and the flourishing of women and men alike. God's order and structure is not designed to stifle humanity, but to release humanity into the fullness of Spirit-empowered potential.

ENDNOTES

- 1 Padgett, Alan G. "What is Biblical Equality". Priscilla Papers. The academic journal of CBE international. (2002)
<https://www.cbeinternational.org/resource/article/priscilla-papers-academic-journal/what-biblical-equality>
- 2 Zondervan, Beck, R. James (General Editor), Gundry, Stanley N. (Series Editor). *Two Views on Women and Leadership*, pg 103. This is the View of Linda L. Belleville, "An Egalitarian Perspective."
- 3 Those who hold to this view would cite Galatians 3:28 as proof that patriarchal distinctions, classes, or hierarchy were abolished by Christ.
- 4 *Two Views on Women and Leadership*, 25-30.
- 5 Linda Belleville gives examples of this in *Two Views on Women and Leadership*. She points out women who were given ministries as judges, prophets, worship leaders and mourners in the Old Testament, 35. She also cites New Testament examples of women who "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 Timothy 3:11)....", 36.
- 6 Danver's Statement Distinctions in masculine and feminine roles are ordained by God as part of the created order, and should find an echo in every human heart (Gen 2:18, 21-24; 1 Cor 11:7-9; 1 Tim 2:12-14). <https://cbmw.org/about/danvers-statement/>
- 7 *Two Views on Women and Leadership*. This is the View of Thomas R. Schreiner, "Another Complementarian Position," 322.
- 8 *Two Views on Women and Leadership*. This is the view of Craig Blomberg in "A Complementarian Position," 180-181.
- 9 Stott, John. *Issues Facing Christians Today. 4th Edition*, 345-352. See also John Dickson, *Hearing Her Voice: A Case For Women Giving Sermons* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2013).
- 10 "It is significant that Paul pictures the husband as engaged in traditionally feminine tasks like washing, cleaning, and ironing here: Paul is knowingly and deliberately subverting the Greco-Roman picture of what male headship looks like." Wilson, Andrew. Beautiful Difference: The (Whole-Bible) Complementarity of Male and Female. <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/beautiful-complementarity-male-female/>
- 11 Andrew Wilson regarding Romans 16: "...Phoebe, a deacon who is a patron of many; Prisca, who risked her neck for Paul's life, and co-host of a house church; Mary, "who has worked hard for you"; Junia, a fellow prisoner of Paul's and noteworthy among the apostles; Tryphaena and Tryphosa, workers in the Lord; Rufus's mother, "who has been a mother to me as well"; and several others. Women compose nearly half of the named individuals in this chapter."
- 12 Köstenberger, Andreas J. "A Complex Sentence Structure in 1 Timothy 2:12," in *Women in the Church: A Fresh Analysis*, 81-103. See also Schreiner, Thomas R. "Women Prohibited from Teaching Men: 1 Timothy 2:11-15" in *Two Views on Women in Ministry*, 307-316.
- 13 Blomberg, Craig. "First Timothy 2:8-15" in *Two Views on Women in Ministry*, 165-172.
- 14 Stott, John. "The Implications of Headship for Ministry" in *Issues Facing Christians Today*, 345-352.