



WOMEN IN LEADERSHIP AT THE RED DOOR COMMUNITY CHURCH

INTRODUCTION

The role of women within the local church is a subject that has created a significant amount of discussion and debate in recent times among the Christian community. While much of this discussion is healthy and conducted in an honouring manner this issue is one that has also proven to be divisive as people passionately seek to defend their theological and doctrinal turf. We recognise that there are many varied opinions based on theology, experience, interpretive decisions and tradition with Godly, wise, intelligent and educated men and women having come to differing conclusions on this matter. We also recognise that there are issues that are essential to the Christian faith; such as the divinity of Jesus and his death and resurrection, and that the issue of the role of women in the church is not one of these.

With that in mind our purpose in writing this position statement is to make clear what we at The Red Door Community Church believe on this issue and to do so in a way that would facilitate and encourage unity within the body of Christ. We believe that this Spirit of unity is fundamental to Jesus' desire for his Church. In John 17 we hear this prayer of Jesus for his church, "My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me. I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one - I in them and you in me - so that they may be brought to complete unity. Then the world will know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me." Unity within the church is how the world will see Jesus in us and it is of the utmost importance that we handle a potentially divisive issue such as this both prayerfully and with humility.

It is also important to keep in mind that belief in the authority and the infallibility of the Word of God is also an essential of the Christian faith and something we hold to as a church. We therefore take very seriously how we handle God's word and how we interpret and teach God's word. In addressing this issue, and others, our intent is always to be fully submitted to scripture, trusting that the Holy Spirit will illuminate and lead us into all truth.

THE QUESTION

Simply put the question being addressed in this document is, are women able to lead and preach at The Red Door Community Church?

THE ANSWER

We believe that women can occupy any role or position within the church so long as they do so in full recognition of and in submission to the authority of the Senior Pastor. Which of course is the requirement of any person fulfilling any role or position within the church regardless of gender.

WHY WE BELIEVE THIS

As stated before, there is much debate and much literature in relation to this topic. Some would say that our position is a theologically liberal position that is influenced by the “spirit of the age” or an accommodation of modern secular feminism. This couldn’t be further from the truth. We are not theologically liberal and as a church we hold to the biblical mandate of “male headship” in both the family and the church. We will now provide an explanation for our position.

SCRIPTURES THAT SUPPORT WOMEN LEADING & PREACHING

1. Spiritual Equality

Galatians 3:28 tells us that we are all one in Christ Jesus. That in Christ both men and women stand equally before God and share equally in the gift of the Holy Spirit and prophecy (Acts 2:17-18). It would seem reasonable that the truth of our spiritual standing be outworked and find expression in our physical reality which in this context is the church.

2. Examples in the Old Testament of Women in Leadership

Miriam, a prophetess, helped Moses lead Israel (Exodus 15:20, Micah 6:4)

Deborah who both lead and judged Israel

Huldah who advised national leaders concerning the book of the law (2 Kings 22:14-20)

3. Leadership Roles of Women in the New Testament

Co-worker

Romans 16:3 tells us that Paul considered Priscilla to be a co-worker with him in the Gospel. Priscilla also instructed Apollos concerning the ways of God (Acts 18:26). Paul also refers to the women Euodia and Syntyche as his co-workers (Phil 4:2-3).

Prophet

In Acts 2:17-18, Peter taught that women would prophesy and in 1 Cor 11:5 Paul gives guidelines for women who prophesy in church. Philip’s four daughters are noted as prophesying in Acts 21:8-9.

Deacon

In Romans 16:1-2 Paul refers to Phoebe as diakonos, which is variously translated deacon, servant or minister.

Apostle

While there is some dispute on the matter it is quite possible that a woman called Junia was an apostle. In Rom 16:7 Paul greets Andronicus and Junia and says they are “outstanding among the apostles”. Some translations refer to this person as Junias, which is a male name. However the early church fathers took these two people to be a husband and wife team and it is only in more recent history that some commentators have thought this person to be male.

House-church Leader

A woman is recognised in connection with five of the six house churches mentioned in the New Testament. Lydia (Acts 16), Priscilla (Romans 16 and 1 Corinthians 16), Nympha (Colossians 4:15) and Apphia (Philem 2).

SCRIPTURES THAT INDICATE LIMITING THE ROLE OF WOMEN IN THE CHURCH

Submission & Authority

1 Corinthians 14:34 (NIV)

Women should remain silent in the churches. They are not allowed to speak, but must be in submission, as the law says.

1 Timothy 2:11-15 (NIV)

A woman should learn in quietness and full submission. I do not permit a woman to teach or to assume authority over a man; she must be quiet. For Adam was formed first, then Eve. And Adam was not the one deceived; it was the woman who was deceived and became a sinner. But women will be saved through childbearing - if they continue in faith, love and holiness with propriety.

When addressing the following scriptures what needs to be determined is which principals and commands of Paul's are universally applicable and which are relevant to the particular culture and situation he is addressing in his letters. We know from previous writings of Paul that he is not banning women in all churches for all time from speaking. Rather, the main issue being addressed in these passages it would seem is one of authority and submission.

There are two possible interpretations for Paul's motivation for restricting women's participation in the church. His directives are either to guard man's place of headship thereby preserving the biblical order as demonstrated in Genesis, or because women were uneducated in the early church (and men were) he was addressing the need for qualified teaching in the church. Further passages of scripture need to be taken into consideration before choosing between these two interpretations.

Church Leadership

1 Timothy 3:2 (NIV)

Now the overseer is to be above reproach, faithful to his wife, temperate, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach,

This scripture seems to indicate that a church leader must be male because only a male can take a wife. However, we wouldn't conclude that a wife could not be a disciple because Jesus doesn't use the word husband in Luke 14:26 (If anyone comes to me and does not hate father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters -yes, even their own life - such a person cannot be my disciple). As the Bible often describes things that apply to both genders in terms of men only we need to take this into consideration with this passage also.

Headship

1 Corinthians 11:3 (NIV)

But I want you to realise that the head of every man is Christ, and the head of the woman is man, and the head of Christ is God.

Ephesians 5:22-24 (NIV)

Wives, submit yourselves to your own husbands as you do to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the Saviour. Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything.

These passages speak of the headship of man in marriage. The headship of the man in the home would seem to be relevant to a discussion of women in leadership in the church. It is unlikely that the Spirit of God would teach male headship in the home but then not carry that over to the context of the church. When we view these passages in conjunction with 1 Corinthians 14 and 1 Tim 2 it would seem that scripture teaches male headship as a universal principle.

WHAT DOES THE BIBLE MEAN BY HEADSHIP?

The meaning of head in the New Testament must be defined from within the New Testament itself. It cannot be assumed that the value of head in the English language as authority, leader or master carries over automatically into the New Testament's use of the same word head.

Fortunately, the meaning of head can be easily determined within its scriptural use with reference to the headship of Christ in relation to the church, his body. Whatever function the head of the church performs in connection to the body defines the meaning of the term head in the New Testament.

The word head is used five times in the New Testament to define the relationship of Christ to the church. As will be shown below, the use of head is consistent in all of those texts.

Ephesians 1:22-23 (NIV)

And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way.

Ephesians 4:15-16 (NIV)

Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will grow to become in every respect the mature body of him who is the head, that is, Christ. From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work.

Ephesians 5:23 (NIV)

For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the Savior.

Colossians 1:18-19 (NIV)

And he is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy. For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him,

Colossians 2:19 (NIV)

They have lost connection with the head, from whom the whole body, supported and held together by its ligaments and sinews, grows as God causes it to grow.

These verses suggest that head, biblically defined, doesn't mean boss or leader but instead describes the servant function of provider of life, growth and development. This function is not one of top-down oversight but of bottom-up support and nurture and

Christ is the source of growth for believers just as He is the source of the life of powers and authorities that he has created.

It is also worth noting that within the Trinity God is the head of Christ (1 Corinthians 11:3). How does God exercise headship? He raises Christ to the right hand of this throne and in so doing helps him to exercise the authority that belongs to the head. And Christ exercises headship over the church in the same way. He gives the church gifts to nurture and grow it. As the head of the church he serves those in his charge to bring them into his “fullness” so they can enter into what he has already attained thereby working toward the church being able to reign with him (2 Timothy 2:12, Revelation 5:10; 22:5).

BRINGING ALL THIS TOGETHER

What are the implications of all of the above for women leading and preaching in the church? Is it possible for the mandate of male headship to be honoured in the church if women are leading and preaching to both men and women? If we understand headship in the biblical context as demonstrated above then absolutely.

In light of the scriptures we have just reviewed how would a woman in the church, who is gifted to lead and preach, be treated by a male church leader who, as Christ, gives everything possible to the one “under” him, to enable that one to grow to be able to share in his authority? She would be nurtured and equipped and encouraged in the same way Christ nurtures and equips and strengthens all who are his.

In Genesis 1:27-28 God calls both men and women to exercise dominion over the earth. This is God’s creation mandate given to Adam and Eve that now echoes down through the centuries to the church today. A mandate where men and women are intended to function together as the body of Christ, as the Church. Complimenting each other, contributing from our uniqueness’s, not limited in role and responsibility by gender but instead having role and responsibility determined by gifting and character.

ADDITIONAL NOTE: WOMAN AS MAN’S HELPER

In Genesis 2:18 we see God making a ‘helper’ for Adam. The Hebrew words used here to describe woman as a helper are 'ezer kenegdo. The word 'ezer means “helper” and is never used in the Old Testament to refer to an inferior or to a subordinate. In fact, the word is used in reference to God as our helper (Psalm 10:14; 30:10; 54:4; 70:5; 72:12; 121:2). Clearly God is not our subordinate. 'Ezer is a sign of strength and power. Kenegdo is a Hebrew preposition and adverb meaning “corresponding to” or “face to face,” so it is best understood as meaning that Eve was a fitting partner for Adam, for she was like him. It would seem that God’s original intention was for man and woman together to rule and have authority together.

For Further Study

- “Why Not Women” by Loren Cunningham & David Joel Hamilton
- “Women in the Church” by Stanley J. Grenz & Denise Muir Kjesbo
- “Two Views on Women in Ministry” by James R. Beck