

WOMEN IN LEADERSHIP

AT THE RED DOOR COMMUNITY CHURCH

WHAT WE BELIEVE

We believe that God has established His people as the Church, His bride, the priesthood of all believers, who are empowered by the Holy Spirit through the impartation of spiritual gifts, who are called to proclaim the gospel, and live out His Kingdom life on earth.

INTRODUCTION

Our hope, as The Red Door Leadership Team, is that this document would help clarify our convictions on the often-contentious topic within the church of Women in Leadership. We also hope that it will provide space for grace and love to abound, even where there might be disagreement on this topic. We have come to our position based on Scripture, and we are convicted to show our faithfulness in following Jesus by seeking after His ideal. May His Kingdom come!

The Question

Do the teachings of Scripture permit women to operate in positions of leadership and authority within the church?

Our Conviction

We believe that women can occupy any role or position within the church so long as they meet the requirements outlined in Scripture (1 Timothy 3; Titus 1:5-9; 1 Peter 5:1-4).

We as a Leadership Team take a position that you could refer to as “Evangelical Egalitarians”. In saying this, we must also acknowledge that we value unity within the church above all else and even if this is not the same position you hold you are more than welcome to be part of our Red Door family. We do not consider this to be a matter of first importance and therefore we do not believe this should be a matter that Christians divide over. Division within the body definitely does not align with Jesus’ ideal for his church.

Our Approach

We have adopted a two-pronged approach to support our position, answering the questions:

- What is God’s ideal for men and women regarding roles within church as revealed in Scripture?
- What does Scripture record women doing regarding roles within church?

DEFINITION OF TERMS

Egalitarian

Generally speaking, egalitarians believe that men and women are equal in both value and role, and therefore women may occupy any position of ministry leadership.

Complementarian

Usually, complementarians advocate that God made human beings equal in worth but distinct in role, with leadership roles assigned specifically to men only.

Patriarchal/Patriarch

A system of society or government controlled by men - “a patriarchal society”.

Accommodation

A term used in the interpretation of scripture, generally having one of two meanings: (1) a reference to some meaning other than the literal meaning, which is given to Scripture; (2) the recognition of the necessity that was God's to reveal Himself in terms of man's understanding.

WHAT IS GOD'S IDEAL?

We believe the Bible is an undivided story leading to Jesus - united in its mission and cohesive in its ideals. However, along the path of this story are many accommodations and moments of New Creation ideals shining through. This story is given to us by a perfect God but delivered to us through the lives of imperfect people. It's a beautiful display of God's willingness to incarnate (embody) into our human story. Our mission as students of Scripture is to learn the mission of God, to capture His ideals and have the wisdom to see where God has accommodated in scripture to human sinfulness.

Thankfully, through Christ's life and ministry, we see the revealing of God's ideals. The questions around men's and women's inclusion or exclusion must start with Christ. To understand Genesis or to make sense of St Paul's writings, we must begin with The Ideal Himself, our Lord and King.

What Jesus Christ lived and preached unifies the whole story of God. He fulfils the Torah, Law and Prophets (Mat 5:17; Rom 10:4; 13:8; Gal 3:24). Being the creator of all things (Jh 1:3; 1 Cor 8:6; Col 1:16) He doesn't just know what the ideal is but He lived the ideal. God's project of reclaiming His creation from sin and death, renewing all things under His reign has been perfectly demonstrated by Jesus.

We recognise that Jesus lived in a particular time and culture, however He lived a perfect life void of sin within this context. Having some understanding of His cultural, social, and historical context is helpful in this conversation.

In relation to the topic at hand, in the time of Jesus women were generally not considered equal in role or even at times worth. This culture and its history were generally patriarchal, where men had the power and final say on matters of family, society, and government. However, gender roles in the greater Roman empire at the time were not identical to the Jewish gender roles. In the greater Roman empire, there are historical examples of women holding positions of priestess in some temples. Whereas, in Jewish society, women were forbidden to become disciples of a Rabbi. In the wider culture while there were diverse views on gender roles, at the same time an overarching patriarchy existed. It was a complex time. Like in our culture today, confusion and uncertainty seemed to reign. It was in this broken and confusing cultural moment that Jesus came and ministered.

Two striking stories of Jesus that give us clarity around His view of gender roles and worth are:

- Mary and Martha (Luke 10:38-41)
- The Samaritan Woman (John 4)

First, the story of Mary and Martha is so very important because it clarifies to us what Jesus believed about the inclusion or exclusion of women as disciples. This may seem uneventful for us modern readers but in context, it was radical. As mentioned above, generally women were forbidden to sit at the feet of a Rabbi as a disciple. We have little historical evidence of women being disciples of Rabbis. Therefore, for Jesus to not just allow but also defend Mary sitting at His feet, is remarkable. Jesus elevated Mary into a

position of equality with the male disciples. He reveals His beliefs around gender value and role in this story, dismantling the cultural and religiously adopted gender roles in His simple response to Martha.

Secondly, Jesus's interaction with the Samaritan Women at the well in John 4 is also remarkable. "The Samaritan woman said to him, "You are a Jew, and I am a Samaritan woman. How can you ask me for a drink?" His mere speaking with a Samaritan, let alone a woman, is counter-cultural, and then the content of His conversation with this woman is even more surprising. Jesus reveals His Messiahship for the first time in the gospel of St John to this woman! So, a woman is the first person to receive the gospel of Christ, and that woman is the first to λέγω - "lego" (teach, announce, herald, share) the gospel of Jesus to others. The men in her town heard the Good News from her and believed in Jesus. The very first person to preach the gospel was a woman!

These two short but powerful examples give insight into Christ's desire for the true equality of women. His practical rejection of religious norms and beliefs about women are profound and require us to stop and think carefully through the ideals of God. Along with Jesus's inclusion of women within His disciples - Mary Magdalene, Joanne, Susanna, and others - we see a desire of Christ to change the status quo.

It's through this lens we now look back into Genesis, and forward to interpreting St Paul's letters.

The reason we at Red Door have adopted an egalitarian position is because we believe that this more closely aligns to God's ideal. We are convicted that equality in worth and role is what God desires to bring humans back to the project first started in Eden - image bearers both male and female, co-ruling over creation (Gen 1:27-28).

In the first chapter of Genesis, we have no order of creation for humans. The main point here is that they (both man and woman) are "blessed" to "subdue" the earth. God's ideal is absent of hierarchy but instead an equality of role and worth is plainly stated.

Moving into Genesis 2, we see an order to creation that gives insight into the incredibly beautiful picture of male and female being more fully able to perform their image bearing together. Again, no mention of hierarchy exists here.

Man was created first but was lacking - "it's not good for the man to be alone". He was unable on his own to fulfill the creation mandate to be fruitful and subdue the earth so a woman, an image bearer of God, a "helper", was created to co-rule with man. This word "helper" is important. The only other person granted this title in Scripture is God Himself. Therefore, we can determine that her work is a priestly work both for and with man.

We only see a distinction of roles between the sexes after the fall occurs in Chapter 3. As a result of sinful acts, God's wrath is unleashed upon the man and woman, but for different reasons. Adam's sin was a different type of sin to Eve's. Adam was the one clearly commanded by God to not eat of the fruit in 2:16. At this stage Eve was not yet created, and it's clear Adam hadn't communicated this commandment to Eve.

So, while Eve is deceived into eating the fruit, Adam is acting in direct disobedience to God's explicit commandments. In God's judgment of Eve, He curses the serpent. Whereas His judgement over Adam results in Him cursing the land because of Adam. This is a directed rebuke for Adam but not for Eve.

The curse that falls on them both mirrors their sin. Adam abdicates, so now he must rule over her. Eve was deceived, so now she must be faithful to the abdicator, Adam.

This introduction of man ruling over woman (patriarchy) is an accommodation of God and not the ideal. It is in tension with Chapters 1 and 2, rather than flowing on from there.

Further on in the Bible, during the life and ministry of Jesus, we see His acts and words to women that reflect God's ideal represented in Genesis 1 and 2.

WHAT DID WOMEN DO IN THE BIBLE? (WDWD)

Looking forward to the New Testament writings, a helpful question to first ask is what do we see women doing? This approach to women's roles in the church is from New Testament Scholar Scot McKnight from his book *The Blue Parakeet*. Let's just quickly look at some New Testament examples:

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 translated as deacon, servant, or minister.

Apostle

While there is some dispute on the matter, a woman called Junia is referred to as an apostle. In Romans 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. Current New Testament scholars now are overwhelmingly supportive of the thought that Junia was a woman. A plain reading of the Greek text, as supported by scholars like Richard Bauckham, have suggested it makes more sense reading it as referring to a woman apostle, and is also consistent with the consensus of the church prior to the 13th century.

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). In addition, the letter of 2 John is addressed to "elect lady and her children". A possible way of translating this could be "to the chosen female lord and her followers". This chosen lady is acting in some form of leadership over this group of people, something that today we may call a pastor. Agreed by scholars like Ben Witherington III and Scot McKnight, those who hosted a House Church were the leaders of the gathering also. We could rightly call them pastors or overseers (elders) and therefore teachers of God's word.

CONCLUSION

As mentioned at the start of this document, we are not attempting to be exhaustive, but our desire is to call all people into faithful living in Christ. We practice equality of role and worth because we wholeheartedly believe this is God's intent and design. And in doing so, we are partnering with Him, welcoming His kingdom and rule.

Further reading

If you wish to read more and gain further understanding of the disputed passages, then we would recommend the following readings:

- Bird, Michael F. *Bourgeois Babes, Bossy Wives, and Bobby Haircuts (Fresh Perspectives on Women in Ministry)* Zondervan. 2012.
- McKnight, Scot. *The Blue Parakeet (Rethinking How You Read The Bible)*. Zondervan. 2010.
- Barr, Beth A. *The Making of Biblical Womanhood (How the Subjugation of Women become Gospel Truth)* Brazos. 2021.
- Byrd, Aimee. *Recovering from Biblical Manhood and Womanhood (How the Church Needs to Rediscover Her Purpose)* Zondervan. 2020.
- Westfall, Cynthia L. *Paul and Gender (Reclaiming the Apostle's Vision for Men and Women in Christ)* Baker Academic. 2016.
- Du Mez, Kristin K. *Jesus and John Wayne (How White Evangelicals Corrupted a Faith and Fractured a Nation)* Liveright. 2020
- Payne, Philip B. *The Bible vs Biblical Womanhood (How God's Word Consistently Affirms Gender Equality)* Thomas Nelson. 2023

Need to talk

As always if you would like to discuss any of the above, please make a time with one of our pastoral staff by emailing us at enter@thereddoor.cc

APPENDIX A

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).

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.

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