

At Harvest Christian Church, it is our desire to base our position on men and women's roles in the church – and all doctrinal matters – on our understanding of the Bible. The Bible teaches that God created male and female, to bear His image together (Gen. 1:27-28; Matt. 19:4; Mark 10:6). This distinction in gender represents an essential characteristic of personhood and reflects an essential part of being created in God's image. We believe that men and women are absolutely equal in essence, dignity and value and are interdependent by divine design. Gender does not merely represent a social construct but, instead, represents a reality present in every human from birth. Men and women are not interchangeable.

In light of His good created order, and the fact that men and women both share in divine image bearing, God intends for men and women to have different yet balancing roles and responsibilities in the church and home. These role distinctions do not arise from cultural definitions of masculinity and femininity but are an integral part of God's plan for humanity, as revealed in Scripture. Therefore, the elders of Harvest Christian Church have prayerfully studied the Scriptures to conclude that the Bible explicitly encourages and assumes that women will be involved in the ministry of the church, but the office of elder or overseer should be filled by qualified spiritual men. Roles and functions that are uniquely held by elders would be filled by those men, but all other roles and functions are open to any qualified people. Because our position is somewhat countercultural and can be controversial, we will seek below to explain our position in greater detail and articulate the reasons for these conclusions.

We at Harvest believe we must follow the direction in Scripture. When Paul gives the qualifications for overseers/elders in 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1 he lays out character qualities beginning with "above reproach" before moving to "husband of one wife" or "faithful to his wife." This shows the elder/overseer must be a man of exemplary character in every part of his life. Paul has the same qualification in the very different cultures of Ephesus and Crete, which shows the universality of the qualification. He continues the pattern of Jesus who picked 12 men to be Apostles (Mark 3:13-19) while having many women among His disciples (Luke 8:1-3).

We want to be obedient to Scripture, honor the Lord and give opportunities for women to flourish in their role(s) at Harvest Christian Church. We know that women have always played a valuable role in the Gospels and the early New Testament Church. The Bible says that the prophet Anna identified Jesus as the Messiah and spoke about him to all who would listen (Lk. 2:36-38). Christ had powerful women among his disciples and his ministry was financed in part by his female disciples (Lk. 8:2-3). Jesus treated women with dignity and respect when the surrounding culture treated them as property. In the early church women prayed (Acts 1:14; 1 Cor. 11:5), prophesied (Act 2:17; 21:9; 1 Cor. 11:5), and hosted church services in their homes (Acts 16:14-15). Both men and women contributed to the fellowship of the church (1 Cor. 14:26), speaking to strengthen, encourage, comfort, and edify the church (1 Cor. 14:3-4).

Some questions are raised about our position:

1. Isn't Paul's restriction of male elders a culturally specific command that is not relevant today?

No one really questions the general applicability of Paul's list of character qualifications other than their maleness. But the fact that this is applied in both Ephesus (1 Timothy) and Crete (Titus) rules out a response to a local situation. These two cities were as different culturally as Portland and Medford.

2. 1 Tim. 2:12 says a woman is not to teach or have authority over a man? Wouldn't that restrict the role of women more than just the office of elder?

If this were the only passage speaking to the issue, then Harvest would not allow women to teach or have authority over men. This would mean that a woman could not teach a man how to use the accounting program in the church office or be director over men volunteering in Vacation Bible School. But this is not the only passage we take into consideration. Since there are instances such as women teaching men (Acts 18:26) and speaking to strengthen, encourage, comfort, and edify the church (1 Cor. 14:3-4) and bringing a teaching to the gathering (1 Cor. 14:26), most Christians agree that there is a context to Paul's words. We at Harvest see that context as the authoritative teaching that comes with the office of elder in light of 1 Tim. 3 which speaks to qualifications of elders.

3. Doesn't 1 Cor. 14:34-35 say women should not speak in the gathering?

Again, if this were the only passage we looked at, Harvest would not allow women to speak. But just three chapters earlier, Paul describes women praying and prophesying in the gathering (1 Cor. 11:4) so there has to be some unknown context to this instruction. Further this is the only time in Scripture where such a limitation is stated which heightens the conclusion that this is a situation specific limitation.

4. If women have gifts of teaching and leadership why won't you allow them to be used for the kingdom?

Harvest teaches that all gifts are given to both men and women as the Spirit wills. We do not restrict women from teaching or leading. In fact we support women teaching and leading. The office of elder is not a spiritual gift but it is an office with qualifications (1 Tim. 3:1-7; Tit. 1:6-9).

5. Doesn't Galatians 3:28 eliminate racial, economic and gender discriminations in the church?

This magnificent passage does indeed eliminate these discriminations as to membership in the body of Christ, as Abraham's seed. So Jews and Greeks, slaves and masters, women and men could enjoy table fellowship (Gal. 2:12ff). However, this passage does not speak to leadership or the office of elder.

As we look at the spiritual gifts, we have determined that they are given by the Spirit, as the Spirit desires, without attention to gender, status or any other distinction. The office of elder is

not a spiritual gift but it is an office with qualifications as explained in 1 Timothy 3:1-7 and Titus 1:6-9.

Therefore, the elders of Harvest Christian Church have decided that the office of elder will be filled by adult males who have the spiritual qualifications necessary to lead the church. Women in our church hold a variety of leadership roles. Roles such as committee chairpersons, worship leader, and others, are open to qualified men and women. In our worship services, women are encouraged to pray, sing, share testimonies and speak. Any woman, who heads a ministry, teaches a study group, works in an administrative capacity, participates in worship service does so under the guidance and oversight of the elders. It is the responsibility of the elders to oversee the delivery of the Word and to make sure that the flock is cared for. As elders, we are responsible to make sure the flock is not led astray according to our understanding of the Word and the leading of the Holy Spirit. Thus, any presentation, by men or women that is done in the name of Christ at Harvest Christian Church, comes under the spiritual direction and evaluation of the elders. We recognize that some will find our position on women in ministry to be too conservative, while others will find it too progressive. We ask for grace from both as we focus on the primary task of making disciples of Jesus Christ.

We do not require our members to agree with the elders' conclusions regarding women's role in the church. However, we do ask that our members respect the elders' directives and submit to their conclusions, recognizing that these are difficult decisions to make. We continue to seek God's guidance and grow in our understanding of God's Word in this and all doctrinal matters.

Based on the conclusions we have drawn from the Bible, we have created a list of affirmations and denials that encompass our beliefs on the role of women in ministry.

We affirm that both men and women have been created in the image of God and are entitled to the privileges and held accountable to the responsibilities that come with reflecting our Creator.

We deny that either gender has been given or is entitled to greater dignity in society, the home, the church or the kingdom of God.

We affirm that both men and women are needed and necessary for the health and ministry of the church. Godly men and women should be visible partners in the corporate life of the church, deploying their diverse gifts for the good of the body. Simply put, all Christians contribute to the ministry of the church.

We deny that a church can exist in which the men flourish and the women do not, or vice versa.

We affirm that the role/function of elder is reserved for qualified men. Elders are distinctly responsible for overseeing the church, guarding and guiding the life and teaching of the body. (Acts 20:28-35; 1 Tim. 5:17; Titus 1:7; 1 Pet. 5:1-2)

We deny that the role of elder being withheld from women diminishes their importance or their influence in the church. The indispensable help women were created to give can and should be exercised in all manner of other roles/offices in the church.

We affirm that complementarianism, rightly practiced, will lead to the recognizable flourishing of both sexes.

We deny any version of complementarianism or theological position that leads to the subjugation, abuse or neglect of any man or woman. We strongly denounce any distorted view of Scripture that contributes to the belief that biblical manhood or womanhood includes or permits practices such as marginalization, subjugation, intimidation, neglect or any form of abuse.