

The Role of Women in the Church Assembly

Hardin Valley Church of Christ

Affirmations and Denials

We affirm that there is but one valid method of Bible interpretation, the historical-grammatical method. This method recognizes the fact that the authors of Scripture meant what they said as they were moved by the Holy Spirit (2 Pet. 1:20-21). Therefore, we consistently apply the rules of grammar, literature, history, and culture to Scripture to unlock and understand the author's meaning. **We deny** the 'enlightenment' hermeneutic that interprets the Bible through 'current' or 'more modern' beliefs and cultural norms. In other words, we are to take our values and ideals from the Bible, not read the Bible through them (2 Tim. 3:16-17, Gal. 5:7-10, Phil. 3:15-16).

We affirm that both men and women are created in the image of God (Gen. 1:26-27).

We affirm that this incarnation of the image is in 'male' and 'female' and that both play critical roles in its expression. **We affirm** that men and women are equal in Creation.

We deny that this makes men and women identical.

We affirm that just as there is an order of authority within the Godhead, God has placed an order of authority in marriage which places the husband in a position of authority over his wife (1 Cor. 11:3, Eph. 5:22-24). **We deny** that this makes men superior or women inferior. **We affirm** that this position of authority is a position of service rather than a position of dominance (Eph. 5:21; 25-28).

We affirm that both men and women have fallen into sin and separated from God (Rom. 3:23). **We affirm** that although Eve sinned first (Gen. 3:6, 1 Tim. 2:14), because of Adam's position of leadership and responsibility, sin was reckoned to humanity through Adam (Rom. 5:21). **We deny** that one gender is more responsible for sin than the other.

We affirm that both men and women are redeemed by the sacrifice of Christ through individual faith (Eph. 2:4-8; Rom. 10:9-13). **We deny** that there is any distinction between the sexes in regard to redeeming grace (1 Pet. 3:7).

We affirm that both men and women, upon conversion and baptism, become members of the Body of Christ, the Church (1 Cor. 12:13, 27; Gal. 3:27-28). **We affirm** that both genders have equal access to God. **We deny** that there is a 'preferred' gender.

We affirm that both men and women, upon the indwelling of the Holy Spirit and the admission to the Church that follows baptism, are given spiritual gifts, each by the will and decision of the Holy Spirit (Rom. 12:4-8; 1 Cor. 12:4-7, 11). **We affirm** that

spiritual gifts are given to both men and women for the good of the Church, the Body of Christ, and the building up of its members (1 Cor. 12:7).

We affirm that the example of the New Testament Church shows that women prayed (Acts 1:14; 1 Cor. 11:4, 13), taught (Acts 18:24-26; Titus 2:3-5), hosted assemblies (Acts 12:12; Rom. 6:5; 1 Cor 16:19; Col. 4:15), were servant leaders (deacons) (Rom. 16:1-2; 1 Tim. 3:11), and proclaimed God's Word (prophesied) (Acts 2:3, 16-18; 21:7-9; 1 Cor. 11:11-16).

We affirm that the sole authority within the Church is the Risen Lord Jesus (Eph. 5:23).

We affirm that the visible authority of Jesus within the Church structure is represented by a group of elders (1 Tim. 3:4-5). It is the responsibility of these elders to give authoritative teaching and guard the teaching of truth in the church by rebuking those who contradict it (Tit. 1:9).

We affirm that the position of elder in the church is to be limited to men (1 Tim. 3:2).

We affirm that other instances of authoritative teaching, such as regular preaching, are also limited to men (2 Tim. 4:2, 1 Tim. 2:12-13).

Summation

Men and women were created by God to reflect, in gendered ways, the nature and character of God in the world. There is no distinction between men and women within the Body of Christ regarding standing, importance, membership, privilege, or gifting. In the church, men and women serve as partners in the use of their gifts in ministry while seeking to uphold the Biblical norms for roles. There are Biblical role distinctions between men and women within the Body of Christ with regard to office and authority. The distinctions are made because of God's order of authority and not based on gifting, ability, or a superior gender. The Bible view is an equal partnership on men and women in creation, in marriage, in salvation, in the gifts of the Spirit, and in ministries of the church but exercised in ways that honor gender as described in the Bible.

Application

The elders at HVCOC have studied relevant scriptures relating to the role of women in the church assembly carefully and have developed a guide discussing them and the basis for our interpretation of them (available for study upon request). Our application of them comes out of that study. We find in the scriptures some basic principles that are relevant for all time and become absolutes for us in our application. However, there are also principles that should be applied relative to cultural norms and practice.

When seeking to implement the Lord's truth into action, there is constant tension in how we integrate what we know to be true into our culture. Paul makes clear and irrefutable concessions in order to win others around Him to Christ, becoming like a Jew to Jews and a Greek to Greeks. Paul calls Christians to not worry about eating meat sacrificed to idols if it does not violate their conscience and to do whatever is necessary to build the faith of the brothers. If our freedom in a cultural context impinges on another brother or sister from growing out of a conflict of conscience, then we should limit ourselves out of love until the issue can be discussed and instruction can be provided to bring us to where we can glorify God with one voice (Rom. 15:5-6).

With these guidelines in mind, we believe the relevant issues in the 1 Cor. 11, 1 Cor. 14, and 1 Tim. 2 passages can be understood as absolute principles and cultural practices as follows:

The Absolutes (regardless of cultural context):

1. Church authority in the New Testament is reserved for qualified men serving as Elders.
2. The order of authority between man and woman from creation exists to magnify the Trinity and is an 'above culture' issue.
3. Christ, while overturning many cultural and religious values of the day, did not, even while radically engaging women for His time, culture, and context, overturn or reinterpret the male-female paradigm.
4. A wife is under the authority of her husband, who is under the authority of Christ, who is under the authority of the Father. In the church, all are to demonstrate submission to the authority of the Elders, who are under the headship authority of Christ.
5. Teaching is a gift of the Holy Spirit delivered sovereignly to believers as the Spirit chooses. There is no 'denial' of the gift to women.
6. Women are commanded to teach in the New Testament.
7. All believers are called to edify the Church with the gifts they have been given.

The Relative (to be culturally applied):

1. The understanding of the point at which women teaching or performing other aspects of leadership becomes synonymous with 'exercising authority.'
2. The understanding of what actions, in our traditions and church culture, would be considered an 'exercise of authority.'

Current Position for The Role of Women at HVCOC

Considering all these factors (the created order, church order and authority, and cultural concerns and implementation), we suggest the following as the appropriate understanding of 1 Timothy 2:12, the roles of women in the church and Biblical manhood and womanhood.

1. Ultimate leadership within the church, responsibility for authoritative teaching, and establishment of HVCOC's doctrinal positions reside with qualified men serving as Elders. These Elders exercise oversight, following the instructions of Christ and His inspired servants, like Paul.
2. Men will routinely preach in our Sunday morning assemblies. This consistency will help prevent any confusion regarding HVCOC's position on the complementary nature of gender roles from creation. When variations occur, it will be with oversight from the elders.
3. Women who possess the gift of teaching should vigorously pursue opportunities to edify the body by teaching in non-authoritative settings.

While some practices may be allowed by scripture, not all of them would be readily received by our congregation and are, therefore, not expedient (1 Corinthians 6:12). Because of our varied traditions and the diversity of how "exercising authority" may be understood by members of HVCOC, the Elders are committed to following our current tradition of only using males for leading roles in our Sunday worship assembly (such as directing worship, leading singing, leading prayers, leading communion thoughts) until, through study of the scriptures, we can reach a common understanding of which roles qualify as authoritative.

The elders at HVCOC understand that there is a diversity of interpretations and implementations in these matters. We must, given the charge to shepherd the flock, make the best interpretive attempt possible, institute working structures accordingly, and press on with the primary work of the church - the making of disciples. We would call believers who have made HVCOC home to submit themselves to this paradigm, limiting what they would consider their freedom in some ways or allowing others freedom they would not optimally embrace in other ways. This is not a call to blind obedience but to humble submission to one another for the peace and growth of HVCOC.