



## **Complementarian Church Position on Male Leadership**

Complementarianism is the biblical teaching that men and women are created equal in dignity, worth, and value before God, but have been designed with distinct and complementary roles. In the home, this means husbands are called to loving, servant leadership while wives are called to willing submission. In the church, this means the offices of pastor and elder (which involve teaching and governing authority over the congregation) are reserved for qualified men, while women are equally gifted by the Spirit and essential to every other aspect of church life and ministry.

As a church leadership team, we acknowledge that this subject on male leadership is very challenging in society, and that godly people may disagree. Our church's stance is a commitment to Biblical faithfulness. We believe this is what Scripture clearly teaches, and we want to honor God by following His Word, even when it's difficult to accept in our cultural moment in time. We pray this letter is helpful in understanding and honoring our Biblical position.

### **Main Scriptural Foundation**

**1 Timothy 2:11-14** - *"Let a woman learn quietly with all submissiveness. I do not permit a woman to teach or to exercise authority over a man; rather, she is to remain quiet. For Adam was formed first, then Eve; and Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and became a transgressor."*

- Paul explicitly restricts women from teaching or holding authority over men in the church, grounding this in the creation order (Adam formed first) and the Fall (Eve's deception).
- The appeal to creation order suggests a timeless principle and reflects a divinely ordained structure for church leadership (not a merely cultural or temporal restriction limited only to the first-century context).

**1 Corinthians 14:33-35** - *"As in all the churches of the saints, the women should keep silent in the churches. For they are not permitted to speak, but should be in submission, as the Law also says. If there is anything they desire to learn, let them ask their husbands at home."*

- Paul instructs women to remain silent in the context of official church gatherings, particularly in relation to authoritative speech (official prophesying or doctrinal teaching).
- The phrase "as in all the churches" suggests a universal practice for all churches, not a culturally specific one, supporting the idea that male teaching and authority is normative across Christian congregations.

**Titus 1:5-9 and 1 Timothy 3:1-7** - *"longer sections dealing with appointing elders"*

- The language in both passages clearly implies that elders should be male, as the qualifications use masculine terms and reference traits associated with male household leadership.
- Church leadership mirrors the household structure, where men are called to lead with humility and godliness, reflecting Christ's headship over the church.

**Eph 5:22-33** - *"this section deals with marriage as a 'picture of the church'"*

- This passage establishes a complementary structure in marriage, with husbands leading and wives submitting. The language of the entire section seems appropriate to extend this to church leadership as well, seeing male elders as reflecting Christ's headship.

- The analogy of Christ and the church underscores distinct roles for men and women, rooted in God's design for order and mutual flourishing.

### **Creation and Gender Roles (Genesis 1–3)**

- Genesis 2:18–25 describes Eve as Adam's "helper fit for him," and Genesis 3:16 notes consequences of the Fall, including tension in gender roles.
- Pre-Fall creation order establishes distinct roles, with Adam's primary responsibility and Eve's supportive role. The Fall distorts, but does not erase this structure.
- Gender roles reflect God's intentional design, not a result of sin, and the church's structure should align with this creational pattern.

### **Theological Framework**

- **Creation Order:** This isn't about capability, value, or worth - but about God's design from creation for order, harmony, and mutual flourishing in the church and family. The appeal to Adam being "formed first" suggests a principle of functional order rather than inherent superiority.
- **Church Authority Structure:** This is God's design for church governance and authority specifically, not a blanket statement about all aspects of life or ministry. There are only two spheres in life in which God has created a structure of female submission to male leadership: Marriage and the church. The restrictions on women teaching or holding authority in the church over men are seen as specific to roles involving doctrinal oversight and governance (e.g., pastor/elder), not a denial of women's gifts or value.
- **Historical Consistency:** There is a consistent practice going all the way back to the Levitical priesthood, then rabbis, then the apostolic church, the early church fathers', the medieval catholic ages, and the reformation period's understanding of these passages as unified that men are to lead and teach the church. Widespread questioning of this position is a relatively recent development in church history.

### **Explaining examples where women appear to lead or teach:**

1. **Priscilla "teaching" Apollos** - Priscilla taught privately with her husband (they "took him aside"), not in an official public church setting (Acts 18:24-26). Aquila and Priscilla's joint effort reflects teamwork (not independent female authority), with Aquila likely taking the lead, consistent with complementarian views of male headship. This example shows women's valuable role in informal instruction or personal discipleship, especially alongside their husbands, but it doesn't equate to the authoritative teaching role of a pastor/elder over a congregation.
2. **Phoebe as a "Deacon"** - The term "diakonos" in Romans 16:1 is often translated "servant" or "minister" and likely refers to a servant or helper role, not necessarily the formal office of deacon as defined in 1 Timothy 3:8–13, which assumes male leadership ("husband of one wife"). Further, deacons in Acts 6 were chosen for practical service, not teaching or governing functions. We affirm women as deaconesses (servants) in non-authoritative, service-oriented roles. Phoebe shows how women can serve powerfully in the church, leading in service roles that meet practical and spiritual needs, reflecting Christ's heart as a servant.
3. **Junia as an "Apostle"** - The Greek name could be "Junias" (masculine) rather than "Junia" (feminine) - early manuscripts lack accent marks. Also, the language: "well known among the apostles" could just as easily mean "well known TO the apostles" rather than being apostles themselves. Further, the phrase "outstanding among the apostles" (Romans 16:7) likely means Junia and Andronicus were well-regarded by the apostles or served as "missionaries/messengers" (a broader use of "apostolos," as in Philippians 2:25). It does not indicate they held the authoritative office of an apostle like Paul or the Twelve, which was clearly only reserved for men (Acts 1:21–26). Junia's recognition highlights how women's faithful evangelism and missional witness efforts are celebrated in the church.
4. **Deborah as a "Judge"** - Deborah's role as a judge in Judges 4-5 is not equivalent to the New Testament office of pastor/elder. Her position was unique in Israel's pre-monarchical period (it was

temporary and transitional, pointing toward the eventual establishment of the Davidic monarchy). Her leadership was primarily civil and prophetic, not priestly or ecclesiastical as an elder, and she worked alongside Barak, who led the military (Judges 4:6–9). The text also seems to suggest this was an unusual (not normative) time for Israel, as seen in Barak's reluctance and Israel's condition as being spiritually desperate. Descriptive passages don't necessarily establish prescriptive patterns for church structure. Deborah's example shows God's use of women in extraordinary circumstances, but the New Testament establishes male eldership as the norm for the church.

5. **Women “prophesying” in Acts 2 and 1 Cor 11** - Prophecy and teaching are distinct in the New Testament. Prophecy involves spontaneous, Spirit-led utterances (1 Corinthians 14:3), often for encouragement or revelation, while teaching involves authoritative exposition of Scripture (1 Timothy 2:12). Women prophesying (e.g., Philip's daughters in Acts 21:9) is affirmed, but it doesn't equate to the pastoral role of preaching or eldership. 1 Corinthians 11:5 assumes women prophesy under proper authority and with head coverings, reflecting submission to God's order, while 1 Timothy 2:12 restricts authoritative teaching over men. At the same time - women prophesying show the Spirit's power at work through them, encouraging us to value their voices in prayer, worship, and Spirit-led ministry within the church.

The above examples, each have a valid response and are not enough to establish a pattern that overrules the clear didactic passages about church order and leadership being that of male. In addition, Scripture can record something a person did without prescribing it as normative for all times. Lastly, we see these biblical examples as affirming women's vital roles in God's plan, but the specific roles of pastor and elder (and the doctrinal teaching and authoritative responsibilities that come with that) are reserved for men based on Paul's clear teaching, which points to creation order, not cultural adjustments.

Because of these principles, and our desire to be faithful to what we see in the Scriptures, at Selah Hills Church, we reserve any ecclesiastical settings that include adult males to be led and taught by men, as appointed by the leadership of the church. This would include preaching from the pulpit, as well as smaller group settings.

### **Pastoral Encouragement**

This is God's loving design that protects both men and women by providing clear structure, rather than as a goal of limitation imposed on women. This theological understanding reflects functional roles, not ontological worth. Women are equally image-bearers, equally gifted by the Spirit, and equally essential to the church's mission. Phoebe, Priscilla, Mary Magdalene (and other women who supported Jesus' ministry) are wonderful examples of women who loved and indispensably served God's kingdom. Women are encouraged to serve in numerous other capacities, such as: teaching other women and children, hospitality, mercy ministries, evangelism, general serving, sharing words of prophecy, and praying, etc.

We understand this is difficult to wrestle with. Please know that our position comes from our deep commitment to Scripture, not from any belief that women are less capable or valuable. God has designed the church with specific roles that reflect His character and purposes. While women are not called to the office of pastor/elder with its teaching authority over mixed adult gatherings, their voices, wisdom, spiritual insights, and teaching gifts are desperately needed in so many other areas of our church life. Women's gifts are so needed in our church - whether it's mentoring younger women, serving in mercy ministries, or using their voice to encourage others in faith, as well as many other opportunities. We want to help the blessed women of our congregation discover and flourish in the ministries God has specifically called them to. All for His glory!