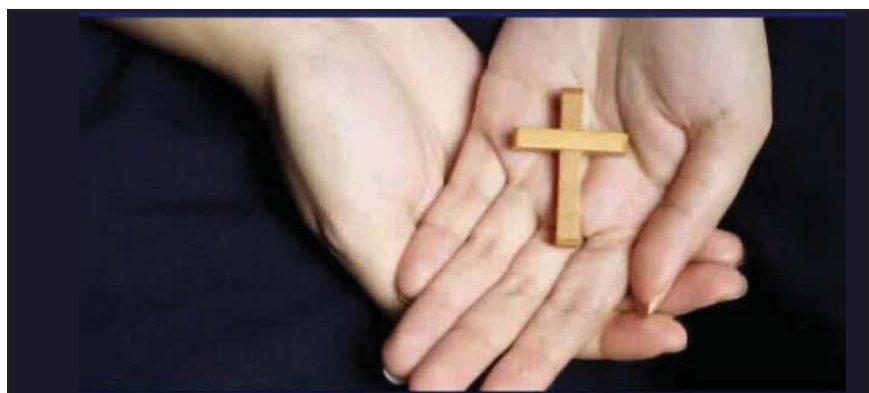


THEOLOGY ROUNDTABLE



Women in Ministry

Peninsula Bible Church
June 2012



Introduction

Since the beginning of the church, followers of Christ have wrestled with the issue of how this new community should be led. Many of the New Testament letters address issues of leadership: How are leaders selected? Should leaders be compensated? What happens when leaders make mistakes? How does the church protect against bad leaders? What responsibilities do leaders need to address? These issues, along with others, are discussed in detail throughout the New Testament.

One of the most controversial questions of leadership is the availability of certain responsibilities and positions to women within the community of faith. Traditionally, positions of leadership in the church (as well as culture) were limited to men. With dramatic changes in culture over the past century, those restrictions have been called into question. Are they restrictions based on God's original design for men and women that must stay in place even as culture changes around the church? Or are those restrictions capitulations to a traditional culture which God desires to be changed in his church?

These are difficult questions to ask and to answer. The purpose of this booklet is to provide a guide to how these questions are addressed and answered by believers sincerely seeking God's purpose for the church. Three common approaches will be detailed, along with a spectrum of how these approaches are implemented in the day-to-day decisions of a church community. Common arguments and responses will be explained. Finally, the practice of Peninsula Bible Church will be articulated.

Before continuing, several introductory comments are helpful to guide this discussion:

Each of these positions is held by believers claiming to hold to biblical inerrancy. The discussion presented in this booklet centers on those positions argued by people who are trying to follow the Bible as an error-free guide to faith and life. Positions of those who consider the Bible to be misogynistic, old-fashioned, or irrelevant are not being considered. The question is not whether to follow the Bible as the source of truth but how to apply the Bible.

It is important not to allow this issue to become divisive and personal.

Discussing these questions often results in argumentative debates that do not serve God's purposes. Motives are often questioned. Those holding to more restrictions for women are sometimes accused of being sexist. Those holding to less restrictions for women are sometimes accused of simply conforming to culture. Note Paul's admonition against divisive arguing in 1 Timothy 1:3-7 just prior to a major passage on women in ministry.

Separating culture from interpretation is difficult. Everyone approaches the biblical text with cultural assumptions that influence his or her interpretation. The goal of biblical study is to lay aside those assumptions as much as possible, but this is a complicated process. Acknowledging this is part of the humility of studying the Bible.

Everyone agrees that certain commands are culturally specific. The question is not whether culture affects instructions given in the New Testament but how culture comes into play. There are four direct commands in the New Testament that believers should kiss as a greeting. Very few people interpret those commands literally; most understand those commands to be advocating whatever form of hospitality is appropriate within culture.

The position on women in ministry is not a doctrinal issue. This issue often becomes divisive because of its public nature. However, none of the ancient church creeds addresses this issue. No systematic theology books include it as part of their doctrine. Very few churches or Christian organizations include it in their statement of faith. For example, Dallas Theological Seminary requires their professors to sign a doctrinal statement every year that includes 21 articles of detailed theology. The role of women in ministry is not mentioned in any of the articles.

With these ideas in mind, you are invited to join the discussion and consider some of the various ways believers understand this complicated issue. May God bless your study.

—Paul Taylor

Selected Passages

This list is not a comprehensive list of the passages relating to the question of women in ministry. Rather, it is a selection of some of the most commonly discussed passages. It is important to keep in mind that this question is not one of interpreting a single verse, or even a collection of verses, but one of understanding the biblical and theological point of view created by the entire Scripture when taken together.

1 Corinthians 14:34-35 (ESV)

34 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. 35 If there is anything they desire to learn, let them ask their husbands at home. For it is shameful for a woman to speak in church.

1 Timothy 2:9-15 (ESV)

9 Likewise also that women should adorn themselves in respectable apparel, with modesty and self-control, not with braided hair and gold or pearls or costly attire, 10 but with what is proper for women who profess godliness—with good works. 11 Let a woman learn quietly with all submissiveness. 12 I do not permit a woman to teach or to exercise authority over a man; rather, she is to remain quiet. 13 For Adam was formed first, then Eve; 14 and Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and became a transgressor. 15 Yet she will be saved through childbearing—if they continue in faith and love and holiness, with self-control.

1 Corinthians 11:1-16 (ESV)

11 Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ. 2 Now I commend you because you remember me in everything and maintain the traditions even as I delivered them to you. 3 But I want you to understand that the head of every man is Christ, the head of a wife is her husband, and the head of Christ is God. 4 Every man who prays or prophesies with his head covered dishonors his head, 5 but every wife who prays or prophesies with her head uncovered dishonors her head—it is the same as if her head were shaven. 6 For if a wife will not cover her head, then she should cut her

hair short. But since it is disgraceful for a wife to cut off her hair or shave her head, let her cover her head. 7 For a man ought not to cover his head, since he is the image and glory of God, but woman is the glory of man. 8 For man was not made from woman, but woman from man. 9 Neither was man created for woman, but woman for man. 10 That is why a wife ought to have a symbol of authority on her head, because of the angels. 11 Nevertheless, in the Lord woman is not independent of man nor man of woman; 12 for as woman was made from man, so man is now born of woman. And all things are from God. 13 Judge for yourselves: is it proper for a wife to pray to God with her head uncovered? 14 Does not nature itself teach you that if a man wears long hair it is a disgrace for him, 15 but if a woman has long hair, it is her glory? For her hair is given to her for a covering. 16 If anyone is inclined to be contentious, we have no such practice, nor do the churches of God.

Galatians 3:28 (ESV)

There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.

1 Corinthians 14:26 (ESV)

26 What then, brothers? When you come together, each one has a hymn, a lesson, a revelation, a tongue, or an interpretation. Let all things be done for building up.

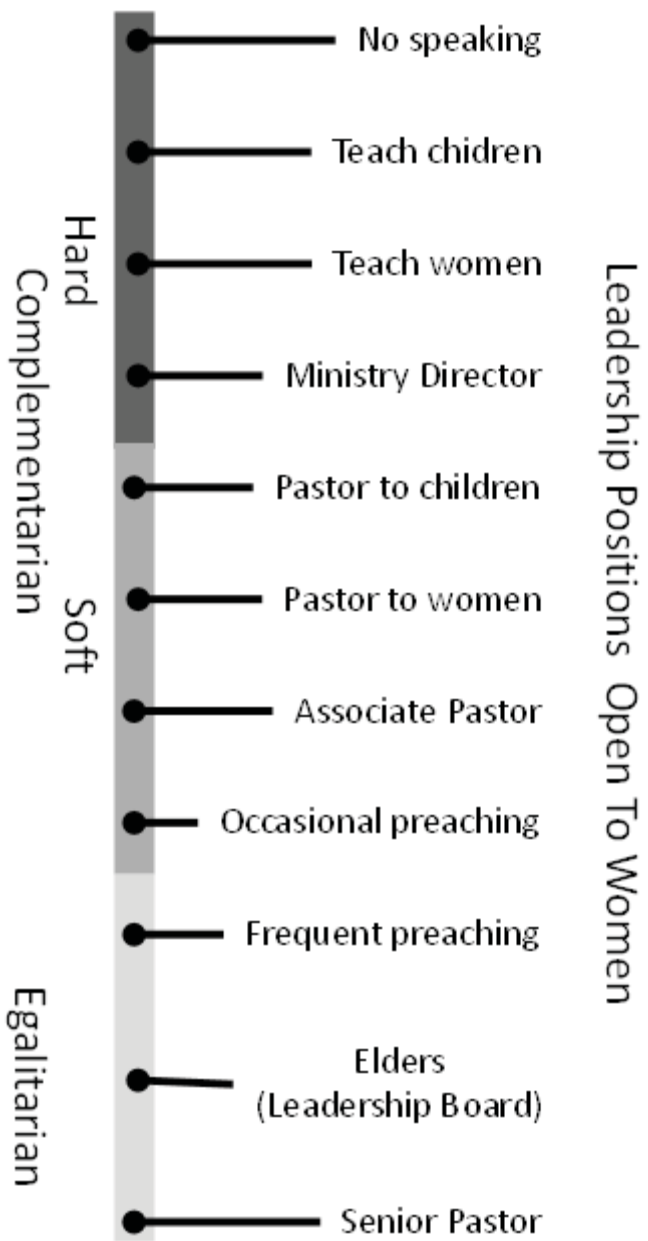
Three Positions

There are two basic positions that most people acknowledge in the discussion around women in ministry. The more traditional, more restrictive position has been referred to as *traditionalist*, and *hierarchical* and now most often goes by the term *complementarian*. The less restrictive position has been referred to as *Christian feminism* but now most often goes by the title *egalitarian*. In broad strokes, the complementarian position defends the essential equality of men and women but limits the leadership roles that a women is eligible to serve in. The egalitarian position allows both women and men to serve in any leadership role.

Within these two perspectives, however, are shades of understanding and implementation. For that reason, this booklet will outline three positions. The complementarian position can be divided into two different implementations. The more restrictive, or “*hard complementarian*,” would traditionally prohibit the ordination of women or the title of pastor for women. The somewhat less restrictive, or “*soft complementarian*,” would allow women to serve as pastors, but still place limits on the leadership roles available to them.

The following chart (p8) presents a spectrum of roles available to women within specific churches. These roles and categories are generalizations. Churches, denominations, and organizations all vary in the particular way they implement their practice concerning women in ministry.

Finally, it is important to realize that some churches or organizations have practices that don't fully express their theological convictions. For instance, a denomination that permits women to serve as pastors may have many congregations without women pastors for reasons of availability. Likewise, a church planting organization that permits women to serve in leadership may not allow their leadership in cultures where such leadership would be a hindrance to the furthering of the gospel. It is not always obvious to identify an organization's position from their practice.



Hard Complementarian

Summary of Position

- Men and women are created equally, but with different and complementary roles, especially in marriage and church leadership. Men are uniquely created with the biblical responsibility of leadership at church and in the home.
- Because of sin, the different roles that God intended have been disrupted. In particular, sin causes men to dominate in their role as leader and women to attempt to usurp the role of leader from men.
- Redemption through Christ offers the opportunity for men and women to properly fulfill their designated roles.

Practical Implementation

- Churches following this position restrict most leadership positions to men.
- Women are usually not allowed to teach or preach in a mixed adult setting. Women are usually allowed to teach other women and children.
- Women are sometimes given title of pastor to children or other women; more often, women have “Director of Ministry” title.

Reading of Scripture

- Understands complementary nature of men and women to exist at time of creation. Supporting arguments include the order of creation (men first), Adam’s reception of instructions from God (Gen 2:16-17), Eve created as “helper” to Adam, Adam’s naming of Eve, implying authority.
- Understands male leadership as a universal pattern in Scripture: Israel’s tribes were led by men; Israel only had male monarchs; Jesus was male; disciples were male; argues that apostles were all male.
- Biblical passages that include prohibitions for women (1 Tim 2:12, 1 Cor 14:34) are understood to teach transcultural restrictions for women in church functioning.
- New Testament restrictions on women refer to creation for support (1 Tim 2:13-14, 1 Cor 11:8-9), indicating transcultural nature of command.

Soft Complementarian

Summary of Position

- Men and women are created equally but with some aspect of complementary function. This complementary nature sometimes corresponds to roles in church and at home but has a less authoritarian and hierarchical expression than that of hard complementarians.
- Because of sin, relationships between men and women are broken and difficult.
- Redemption in Christ offers opportunities for men and women to relate to each other as equals while fulfilling some different responsibilities at church and in the home.

Practical Implementation

- Women are ordained and/or given the title of pastor. Women are allowed to teach mixed gender groups and hold positions of pastor over men and women (associate pastor).
- Women are restricted from occupying the highest levels of church leadership, such as elder or senior pastor.

Reading of Scripture

- Varies on understanding complementary roles as designed by God at creation, resulting from disruption of sin or cultural factors.
- Recognizes examples of female leadership throughout Scripture alongside pattern of men occupying highest positions of authority.
- Recognizes that culture contributes significantly to current understanding of gender relationships. Sometime argues that biblical wisdom informs behavior within a cultural paradigm but doesn't always attempt to create a new paradigm.
- Understands restrictions on women in New Testament (1 Tim 2:13-14, 1 Cor 11:8-9) to either be culturally specific or to only prohibit highest level of church authority.
- Understands the complexity of strong biblical emphasis on equality with unique commands given to men and women throughout Scripture as leading to some gender distinctions with minimal hierarchy.
- Interprets 1 Cor 14:26 as giving broad permission for anyone in the congregation to share a teaching.
- Understands pastor biblically to be more of a gifting than an office.

Egalitarian

Summary of Position

- Men and women were created by God as equals in all respects.
- Because of sin, relationships between men and women become marked by hierarchy involving superiority and inferiority. In particular, men usually assume a role of supremacy over women while women assume a role of subservience.
- Redemption in Christ offers men and women the opportunity to enjoy God-intended equality among genders, free from distinction or hierarchy.

Practical Implementation

- Women are usually allowed to occupy any role of church leadership.
- Occasionally some churches with egalitarian viewpoints will restrict leadership opportunities for cultural or practical reasons.

Reading of Scripture

- Understands men and women to be created without functional distinction. Equality of being is evident from both being in image of God. Equality of function is evident from both being given the responsibility to rule over creation.
- Highlights examples of female leadership throughout Scripture: Miriam (Exod 15) and Huldah (2 Kings 22) served as prophetesses; Deborah (Judges 4-5) served as judge; significant counter-cultural treatment of women by Jesus (Samaritan woman as first evangelist, first resurrection appearance to women, women held out as example of faith); women allowed to prophesy in church (1 Cor 11:5). Argues for Priscilla as leading house-church (Acts 18:26); sometimes argues Junia (Rom 16:7) was an apostle.
- Views central result of redemption as a community without ethnic or gender distinctions (Gal 3:28).
- Understands restrictions on women (1 Tim 2:13-14, 1 Cor 11:8-9) as applying to specific cultural setting rather than teaching universal truth.
- Sometimes uses progressive hermeneutic to understand Scripture: Early church began a process of changing cultural norms (slavery, treatment of women) that is meant to continue throughout church history, eventually exceeding explicit commands in Scripture. Slavery is often cited as clearest example of this.

PBC Practice

The current practice of Peninsula Bible Church is for women to serve as pastors, deacons, and volunteers in any aspect of ministry. Women are permitted to, and do occasionally, preach in the main service on Sunday morning. The only role restricted from women is the position of elder. The practice of PBC is most in line with the “soft complementarian” position as articulated in this booklet.

PBC places great value on the unity of the body (Eph. 4: 1-6). The position on women in ministry is not considered as one of highest priority. Convictions are held with great humility and in dependence on the Spirit. All of the elders at PBC are in unanimous agreement with the current practice of the church. However, each elder may understand that practice as arising from different theological and biblical convictions. Therefore, there is no one single defense of PBC’s practice. People wanting to discuss the issue further are encouraged to speak to individual elders about their personal understanding.

Additional Resources

Web Resources:

- **Christians for Biblical Equality** (www.cbeinternational.org): An egalitarian organization with the following motto, “Advancing a biblical foundation for gift-based rather than gender-based ministry and service.”
- **Council on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood** (www.cbmw.org): A hard complementarian organization with the following motto: “Proclaiming God’s glorious Design for Men and Women”

Print Resources:

- **Recovering Biblical Manhood & Womanhood** (2006), Edited by John Piper and Wayne Grudem: The standard and comprehensive defense of the hard complementarian position consisting of articles from various theologians and church leaders.
- **Discovering Biblical Equality** (2005), Edited by Ronald W. Pierce, Rebecca Merrill Groothuis, and Gordon D. Fee: The standard and comprehensive defense of the egalitarian position.
- **How I Changed My Mind About Women In Leadership** (2010), Edited by Alan F. Johnson: Stories from prominent evangelicals who hold to or have moved to a more egalitarian understanding of women in leadership.
- **Women in Ministry: Four Views** (1989), Edited by Bonnidell Clouse and Robert G. Clouse: Four different perspectives on women in leadership with defense and response from each author.
- **Slaves, Women, and Homosexuals** (2001), by William J. Webb: A careful consideration of how various commands in scripture relate to changes in culture that concludes with what the author describes as “ultra-soft patricarchy.”

This image shows a full page of blank primary-ruled paper. It features multiple sets of horizontal lines designed for handwriting practice. Each set consists of three lines: a solid top line, a dashed middle line, and a solid bottom line. These sets are repeated vertically down the entire page, providing ample space for practicing letter formation and alignment. The paper is otherwise completely blank, with no margins, text, or other markings.

Notes

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