

WOMEN IN MINISTRY

Introduction

We know that many of our historic Christian beliefs are currently being questioned in our culture and even in our churches. To create clarity for our church and those who are deciding if this is the church for them, we have outlined our beliefs on this issue here. We would love to talk with you if you have questions so we can give further reasoning, clarity, and resources to study. We would love to talk further on the subject for those who have questions.

We believe that men and women are absolutely equal in essence, dignity, and value and are complementary by divine design. Gender does not merely represent a social construct but instead represents a reality present in every human from birth.

From the opening pages of Scripture, we find that God, in His wisdom and providence, created two complementary sexes for our good and His glory. 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 complementary roles and responsibilities in the church and home. These role distinctions do not arise from traditional or cultural definitions of masculinity and femininity but are an integral part of God's plan for humanity, as revealed in Scripture. We should recognize them as God's grace to men and women, protecting, preserving and practicing them for His glory, our joy, and for the sake of human flourishing (Gen. 2:18-25; 1 Cor. 11:2-16; 14:33-35; Eph. 5:22-33; 1 Tim. 2:8-15; 1 Pet. 3:1-7).

To reflect God's beautiful and effective design as Real Life Ministries, we desire to articulate and embody a theological vision of complementarianism. Specifically, when it comes to the consideration of women in ministry, we want to be obedient to Scripture, honor the Lord, honor women, and give opportunities for women to flourish in their role(s) at Real Life.

Gender and the Role of Women in Scripture

Our foundation for life and ministry starts with the understanding that the Bible is God's inspired, inerrant, and authoritative Word. Any attempt to understand personhood and gender must begin with divine revelation and God's created order.

First, we believe the Bible clearly teaches that all Christians, both men and women, will be involved in the ministry of the church. Jesus welcomed women among His followers, teaching them (Luke 10:39) and involving them in His ministry (Luke 8:1-3). In the other inspired New Testament Scriptures, Phoebe, a supporter and servant of the church of Cenchreae, is commended by Paul and was likely the courier for Paul's epistle to the Romans (Rom. 16:1-2). Euodia and Syntyche labored with Paul "side-by-side" in the gospel (Phil. 4:3). Priscilla and Aquila (wife and husband) are described as "*explaining the way of God more accurately*" to Apollos (Acts 18:26). Romans 16 is especially enlightening with its many women honored and credited by Paul as co-workers in the ministry of the gospel. We celebrate the biblical picture of men and women serving the Church of the Lord Jesus Christ together. When we don't empower both sexes to engage and use their God-given gifts, in complementarian partnership, both genders suffer, and the mission of the Church—to proclaim the gospel and make disciples of all nations—suffers.

Second, we believe that the primary relationship in the local church between men and women is the relationship of siblinghood: brothers and sisters united in Christ. These relationships should be marked by honor, care, and sacrifice for one another.

Third, we affirm that equal involvement of men and women in the church does not necessitate interchangeable involvement. Although men and women are described and established as equals

throughout Scripture, we believe the Bible reserves the office of Elder/Pastor/Overseer (interchangeable words) specifically for qualified men (1 Tim. 3:1-7; Tit. 1:5-9). By office, we mean the formally titled and ongoing designated role of leader of the church. Others may perform some of the same functions as an Elder/Pastor/Overseer; however, the designated leadership role is an office appointed by already existing Eldership in the church.

(1 Tim. 5:17; Titus 1:5-7; 1 Pet. 5:1-2).

Often, people make the distinction between Pastors and Elders in their organizational structure, but Scripture reveals that Pastor and Elder are interchangeable words. So in our church, we have Elders that oversee the pastoral staff. The Elders are unpaid, but the Pastors are paid. Each role is filled by men (if they have the designation as ordained Pastor or ordained and unpaid Elder). Scripture designates that Elders and Pastors are to be male. This responsibility includes overseeing the pastoral staff and all the members of the church to be unleashed in all the ministries of the church. In shepherding, overseeing, caring for, and praying for the local church, Elders/Pastors practice sacrificial male headship. Leadership is not a privilege to be used but a responsibility to take on. The primary role of leadership in the church is one of leading like Jesus did—sacrificially, lovingly, empowering leadership.

We will not ordain any woman for a role that is reserved for an Elder/Pastor in Scripture. If a role in our church requires that an Elder/Pastor be given the responsibility, then it must be filled by a qualified male.

Fourth, we believe that 1 Timothy 2:11-12 teaches that women should not serve in a position of ongoing and primary Teacher in the gender-combined worship services. However, when Paul says in 1 Timothy 2:12, “*I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man, but must remain silent,*” there are several important things to point out.

(A) The word silent is not the word for “*mute,*” but simply means a “*quiet, submissive, teachable spirit.*”

The verb tense for “*teach*” is present indicative, depicting the “*ongoing action of Teacher/teaching*” in front of the organized gathering of combined male and female believers. Therefore, we see this command as applying to the position of the main or primary Teachers in the worship service (think Lead Pastor, Campus Pastor, or assigned Teaching Pastors). We do see times (special occasions) for the entire gathered church where there may be an appropriate time for women to teach in combined gender settings. In such cases, it would be made clear that a testimony or teaching was for a specific and special purpose (such as Mother’s Day message, a teaching designed for those married or single women in the congregation, or when we preach on a specific subject a woman has expertise in).

Some would say that Paul was forbidding women from ever speaking in the organized church service, but if Paul was forbidding women from speaking whatsoever, this would contradict other Scriptures advocating for women doing this in the worship service (1 Cor. 11:5; 14:26; Col. 3:16).

(B) The Greek word for “*authority over*” can often depict the attempt to “*usurp authority over,*” presumably over the Elders and Lead Pastor, an action not permitted by Scripture. However, we believe that staff positions where spiritual and pastoral oversight of males is normative for the role, male leadership should lead that ministry. If there are roles where a woman is in leadership of males, special conditions will be set to include male leadership in the areas that concern pastoral leadership.

(C) We believe God has set the conditions for leadership for several important reasons. Ongoing, honest, transparent relationship with the opposite sex creates conditions that can be dangerous for people of the opposite sex. So often, transparent yet innocent relationships begin from a positive place and end up in dangerous territory when people become intimate about spiritual and relational matters. We here at Real Life believe in transparent, honest relationships as a condition for good leadership on

every team. However, because of mixed company environments, we believe there needs to be special care taken to make sure the enemy does not have room to cause inappropriate relationships to form.

- (D) We believe that the church in America is primarily populated by women (60% in some studies). The reason, in part, has been because male leadership has been absent. Godly women have had to step in, or there would be little left in many cases. This often has occurred because men have made sinful decisions to abdicate their God-given responsibility. In other cases, men were not taught they had a place to play on God's team. The result is that much of what is done in the church is attractive to women rather than men. By continuing to embrace women, but also reinstating the role of men here at Real Life, we have been blessed with many more men involved—men who become mature in Christ because they are being discipled and play the role in their homes that God intended them to play. Mature men who lead as Christ would have them (love sacrificially), will create healthy churches that will in turn create healthier homes where women and children thrive in the faith. Therefore, we seek to be a church that shows men that they are to lead and then shows them how.
- (E) We believe the church is to be the place where people are discipled so they can reproduce what they see in church in their homes. In the book of Ephesians, we see a particular order of Paul's teachings. He starts out speaking about salvation and what the Holy Spirit does in us. He then moves to the church where he spends a majority of his time. He then moves to the home and then to the work environment (slaves and masters). Why does he talk about church rather than home first? The answer is because the Ephesian people had come from pagan homes where the design God had for the home (and everything else) has been lost. A disciple of Jesus has been born again into a new relationship with the Father and a new relationship with the Father's family: the church. In the Family of God, people learn what it looks like to be a father (they see spiritual fathers in the spiritual family). They also see what it looks like to be a mother, a child, etc. In the spiritual family, you see what submission and love look like so you can lead change from whatever position you have in the home by reproducing what you have seen in the church. When we confuse the language and the roles in the church, it leads to confused roles in the home. Scripture tells us that the husband and father is to be the head of the home, but if we take away the right roles within the church, where do they learn what that looks like in the home? Because of the lack of true spiritual male leadership, men and boys have become confused and passive or abusive and angry. We desire young men and boys to see what a godly male servant leader looks like in the church. In the same way, we desire godly women to set the example for our young women. We have gender-specific ministries that help to reinforce the differences.

To summarize, we believe the primary and normative leader/teacher role in the main worship service is an Elder/Pastor role, and consequently, not a position that women should hold. However, we do not believe this prohibition forbids women from sharing the Word in a supportive role. Hence, in our church and local context, we define this supportive role as assisting the Lead/Campus Pastor/Teaching Pastor in the worship service by helping to lead worship, pray, give testimony, and share Scripture, as well as on special occasions participating in the teaching time. Therefore, we believe the Bible supports the fact that women will be involved in all ministries of the church, apart from the position of Elder/Pastor, Lead/Campus Pastor, or positions of Pastor over mixed genders.

Other Key Scriptures

Galatians 3:28 - While this verse has been used to teach equal "*roles*" for women in all areas of life, including the home and church, the context is not "*roles*" but clearly "*salvation*." It is simply teaching that we are all one in Christ and totally equal in personhood as recipients and members of God's salvation. Equality in personhood doesn't have to mean "*sameness*" in roles or positions. For example, a parent and a child are both "*equals*" in personhood, value, and importance, but not in roles or position. There are

many other examples of this distinction (boss/employee, police/citizen, military officer/soldier, coach/player, etc.). All are equals in personhood but distinct in role/position.

1 Corinthians 11:3-16 - We believe this teaches at least four core and timeless biblical principles:

1. Women are to show modesty in dress/appearance. In that culture, for a woman to have an unveiled head and/or short hair was a sign of immodesty, "*availability*," or outright rebellion to authority. This would have brought shame on herself and her husband and ultimately to her Lord.
2. It shows the importance of God-given gender distinction and complementarian ideals. For a husband to abdicate his God-given headship in his marriage and family, symbolized in that culture by covering his head, would have brought dishonor to himself and the Lord.
3. It shows the importance of God-given gender equality, value, and mutuality.
4. It shows the importance of a wife's respect for her husband's biblical headship and Elder headship. (We believe that the words "*men/women*" in this passage are best interpreted as "*husband/wife*.") Her participation ("*prayer and prophecy*") in the church gathering should respectfully fall under this headship.

In this text, we believe the behavior of the Corinthian women, based on the cultural context of what those actions meant at the time, suggests disobedience to God in these four biblical principles that are ultimately rooted in Creation (v.8-10). Paul did not make an argument based on his cultural context; he made his argument based on the creation account in Genesis. He also makes it clear that his words came from God and were to be read in every church, not just Corinth.

1 Corinthians 14:26-40 - The phrase "*women should remain silent in the churches*" can't mean absolute silence of women in the church since this would contradict verses where women do speak and share the word in the church (1 Cor. 11:5; 14:26; Col 3:16).

1 Corinthians 11:5 points to the fact that speaking a prophetic message was to be done with her head covered. The word prophecy has some nuances to it. It can mean to forth-tell or to foretell. In one sense, that would mean a preacher is one who prophesies when he preaches, or it can mean that a person is giving a divine message of prophecy from the Lord. When the Lord gave a message from Himself through a woman (which He did from time to time in the Old Testament [Deborah or Huldah] and also in the New Testament [the seven daughters of Philip]), it did not mean that they were to be the teacher in the organized setting of the church by teaching about the prophecies that were given.

Remember that in this sense, the word prophecy was a divine message given by the Holy Spirit. They did not have the New Testament as we do now, so the Holy Spirit would use people in the church to deliver a message. In this sense, it would not be a teaching to the congregation about Scripture but a teaching directly from the Spirit of God.

So, this "*remain silent*" statement must be forbidding a certain kind of speaking. We only need to look at the context for clarification, which is unmistakably maintaining order in the organized church service. The examples given in this context are speaking in tongues, speaking words of prophecy, and women inappropriately disrupting the service. "*Absolute silence*" for all tongues-speakers, or for all words of prophecy, was not what Paul was teaching, since he advocates for both in v. 26-32. The passage simply teaches that an appropriate order for this participation is what matters. So concerning women, the best interpretation given the context, is not that women should always stay silent in the church service, but that they shouldn't disrupt and talk out of turn. In the context, we also see that the Elders/Pastors role in the context was to test and approve what was being said by the one prophesying (supernaturally) in the church service. In that case, the Elders were to decide if what was said came from the Spirit of God or

not. They would have had understood what was taught in the past (by the Apostles and approved teachers) well enough to have recognized a deviation. Women, like the “*out of order*” prophecy and tongues speakers, are commanded, like the men, to stop disrupting the service, and in the case of women, to talk to their husbands about it later (v.35).

Affirmations and Denials

Based on the conclusions drawn from Scripture, we have created a list of affirmations and denials that encompass our beliefs on gender and 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 **affirm** that some women (just like some men) have the gift of teaching and preaching, as well as leadership giftings and callings. These should be used in the right biblical contexts—the older women (meaning age or wisdom) are to teach the younger women. Those with these gifts also have the authority to teach youth and children. Those with leadership abilities should be consulted and listened to in every area of the church if we are to receive the full wisdom of God given through His people. Just as a husband facilitates the use of his wife’s gifts, listens to her counsel, and makes wise decisions as a result, so it is within the church.
- We **deny** that the church can flourish without brotherly/sisterly partnership. We deny that a church can exist in which the men flourish and the women do not, or vice versa.
- We **affirm** that the roles of Elder, Lead/Campus Pastor, pastoral roles with leadership of both sexes, along with the ongoing, primary Teacher in the worship services, are reserved for qualified men. Elders are distinctly responsible for overseeing the church (1 Tim. 5:17; Titus 1:7; 1 Pet. 5:1-2; 1 Tim. 3:2; 2 Tim. 4:2; Titus 1:9; 1 Tim. 2:11,12).
- We **deny** that the role of Elder or Pastor being withheld from women diminishes their importance in the church. The indispensable help women were created to give can and should be exercised in membership and co-partnership on the church staff and in all manner of roles/offices in the church, except in those reserved for qualified men.
- We **affirm** that all members of the church should be in glad submission to the Elders, and ultimately, in glad submission to the Lordship of Jesus Christ, the Head of the Church.
- We **deny** that all women are subject to the leadership and authority of all men. A woman is to submit to the authority of her husband, but both men and women are to submit to the authority of the leadership of their church as well as to human authority (Hebrews 13:17, 1 Peter 5:5, Romans 13:1, 1 Peter 2:13). Further, biblical submission is not indicative of subordination or inequality, as seen in the Son’s submission to the Father (Phil. 2:1-11; 1 Cor. 11:3). Humility is a growing characteristic of every believer.
- We **affirm** that submission to authority has its biblical limitations. If those in authority ask you to sin (a clear issue of what the Bible defines as sin and not just something you prefer not to do), then we must obey the Lord and His Word rather than disobey God. The heart of a mature believer is one of humility, and there is a desire to be a peace-maker. Scripture tells us that wisdom that comes from above is peace-loving (James 3:15-17). As believers, even if we must decide to resist a specific command from a leader, it is done in a spirit of peace, and there is a desire to work things out and

restore relationship. We do not fight like the devil for the things of God.

- We **affirm** that complementarianism, rightly practiced, will lead to the 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.
- We **affirm** that biblical headship applies to husbands in the home, Elders and Pastors in the church, and not in other spheres of society such as businesses, universities, etc. Biblical headship is a compassionate, sacrificial, servant leadership like Christ exhibited. This headship is a God-given, delegated “*authority*” role, but must include ultimate submission and accountability to God, and mutual submission to others (Eph. 5:21).
- We **deny** any version of headship as being a license to be domineering, inconsiderate, abusive, or selfish in any way. Tragically, great harm has been done in the misunderstanding of headship that lacks a servant’s heart by husbands and Elders. Husbands and Elders bear the greater responsibility before God for the home and church, respectively (Hebrews 13:17, James 3:1).
- We **affirm** that all men and women have been created in the image of God, whether single or married.
- We **deny** that single men and women must be married to be meaningful participants in the corporate life of the church. We deny that single men possess any authority over single women. The way that they love and serve their sisters should not patronize, victimize, nor show force, but rather it should be the fruit of brotherly love, and vice versa.

Ministry at Real Life

In coming to these conclusions and how to implement them, we recognize that some will find our position and practice on women in ministry far too conservative. We also recognize that others will find it far too progressive. We ask for grace and charity from both as we focus on the primary task of making disciples of Jesus Christ. Additionally, we believe it is important to note that a theological confession of complementarianism does not necessarily result in uniform complementarian practice. In fact, most complementarian churches do not align completely in all areas of scriptural interpretation, ministry titles, ministry roles, and positions. Consequently, we are eager to work with brothers and sisters, churches, and other ministries who view complementarian issues differently than we do.

Professional/Organizational

Here at Real Life, the Elders have designated the roles of Lead Pastor and Campus Pastor as reserved for Elders/Pastors/qualified men. We will also designate ordination to qualified men who lead mixed gender ministries. We seek to hire men for roles that shepherd both men and women collectively. We do hire women for every other role, for the health of the church within the framework outlined below. This gives both men and women opportunities to advance and grow in leadership in appropriate levels of our organization.

The Worship Services

Every member of the church body actively participates in our weekend worship services—not just those who are on the platform. Every platform role in our worship service is open to both men and women, except the role of ongoing, primary Teacher, or aspects of the service that are geared towards teaching about communion or baptism. We desire to have both men and women on stage so that those who come to the church can see that worship is something both sexes participate in. Every qualified member, under the direction and oversight of the Lead/Campus Pastor, is invited to distribute the elements of communion and host (i.e. give announcements and celebrate what God has done that week). Baptisms

will be performed by those approved by the pastoral staff member in charge of baptisms at each campus.

- We desire that men baptize men, but in cases where a wife has played a key role in the salvation journey of their husband, then they will partner with a man to perform the baptism.
- In cases of baptism for women and children, women are free to perform the baptism.
- Qualified men will lead the directed prayer and communion meditation time, as those are considered sacerdotal duties and therefore require ordination.
- All other elements of platform ministry (prayer, worship leading, testimony, supportive teaching on special occasions, etc.) in the worship service are open to qualified men and women.

Other Ministries and Groups at Real Life

Mixed-gender small group environments (Life Group, Specialty Life Groups, Student Ministries) should be led (or at least co-led) by men. Our ultimate goal is a male/female team approach to the discipleship of men and women in the group/ministry. Co-discipleship in the group doesn't mean that male and female leaders are interchangeable or lead in the exact same way, but as co-disciple-makers, the man and the woman operate in their roles according to gifting. A man will be the primary facilitator/teacher in this team approach, however.

Mixed-gender classes, conference speaking, and seminars that exist outside of a formal gathering of the church, may be taught/facilitated by both men and women if approved by Executive Team and/or Elders. (Examples: leadership training, classes, specific skills training, etc.)

Gender-specific teaching and group environments are taught by a leader of the same gender. Men teach men's groups/environments, and women teach women's groups/environments.

We believe the officiating of weddings at Real Life should be led by a male Pastor (or an Elder approved/licensed qualified man) in order to best represent complementarian marriage and biblical headship in the home. This is also considered a sacerdotal duty and therefore requires ordination, which is reserved for men. Qualified women may participate in officiating weddings when assisting a male Pastor.

We believe the officiating of funerals at Real Life should involve a male Pastor presence in order to best model biblical Elder headship and shepherding in that mixed-gender audience. Qualified women may participate in officiating funerals when assisting a male Pastor.