

Women in Ministry

by Pastor Ryan Mobley

There's probably not a more holy debated subject in the church today than gender roles in regards to ministry. Can women be pastors? Can women teach? Can women lead? What does this mean for home relationships as husband and wife and father and mother? It is these issues that we seek to respond to from an informed, biblical position.

Generally, there are 4 positions that one could begin with:

1. Chauvinism. Chauvinism is basically men believing that they have the sole voice and power to lead and women should basically be quiet, cook food, and make babies.
2. Feminism. Feminism is the female side of the chauvinism coin. Feminists do not seek equality with men, but instead seek superiority to men.
3. Egalitarianism. Egalitarianism teaches the men and women are equal in every way and this equality includes roles.
4. Complementarianism. Complementarianism teaches that men and women are equal, but that there are distinct roles that each gender fulfills.

Delta Church holds the complementarian position. I won't even bother to address the chauvinism or feminism arguments, as they are clearly unbiblical positions.

Egalitarians look to 3 main sources to defend their position. First, they will quote Galatians 3:28 *"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."* This is a tremendous scriptural truth. But the problem lies in how it is attempted to be applied. This verse is talking about our spiritual equality before God; His salvation is available to all no matter your ethnic or social background or position, or your gender. But this verse is wrongly applied to roles. For example, I am a Christian, but I am still of Irish-English decent, I am still an employee, and I am still a male. But I have the same spiritual standing as a Christian who happens to be an African-American business owner who is a female. Equality doesn't negate role. Secondly, an egalitarian might point to the scriptural examples of women in high positions of leadership like Deborah or Esther. Deborah (Judges 4) was a judge for Israel (a political position) and did not hold the office of priest (a spiritual position which was reserved for men out of the tribe of Levi). Esther was Queen of Persia, also a political position. Neither held the

highest office in the church. Lastly, an egalitarian would point to Romans 12 or 1 Corinthians 12 where it talks about the spiritual gift of leadership. One would make the argument that a woman who has the gift of leadership and a great track record of leading shouldn't be denied the title of "pastor" or "elder" in the church because of her gifting. The problem with this argument is that it is very self-focused rather than God-focused, and it also ignores the other teaching of scripture and boils it down to a cultural argument; meaning, that we are so much more advanced than people were 2000 years ago, so gender roles should be redefined to suit us rather than us bending to scripture. Once you begin to travel down the slippery slope of culture to interpret scripture, you never know where to draw the line. You can redefine anything in the name of culture, even going so far as to say that Christians shouldn't gather together for church since we have the internet and can do church "virtually". Egalitarianism is a popular view, but not because it is a scriptural view, but rather because it is a convenient view, and it's not as extreme as feminism.

Complementarianism, both in teaching and practice, is where scripture most strongly points. Generally, this position says that yes, both men and women are equal, but each has distinct roles to fulfill in the home and in the church. Our primary example of this is found in the Trinity itself. God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit are all equal in power, but we clearly see different roles played by each part of the Godhead. This equality, with distinction, is seen in the creation of Man and Woman. Genesis 1:27 says, "*So God created man in his image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.*" Mankind (men and women) is made in the image of God (equality); and yet mankind is distinct with their being those who are male and those who are female. In the detailed account of Genesis 2, we see Adam created first and then Eve created from his side (inferring equality) to be his helper – the only one who completes him and enables him to fulfill his God-given role of caring for the Garden. Conversely, Eve also finds her completeness and fulfillment in Adam. In the New Testament, Paul gives the clearest teaching on male and female home roles in Ephesians 5:22-33. The interesting thing about this passage is that Paul compares the marriage relationship to the relationship between Christ and the Church. Husbands are to be the "head" of their wives as Christ is the "head" of the church. Headship is hotly debated, and there's an argument over whether the Greek word means "authority" or simply, "source". Physically speaking, we would die if our head was cut off. Because in the head lies both the source and the authority for the rest of the body's functions. So I believe that both arguments ultimately point

back to the same place. But the heart of being the "head" lies in Ephesians 5:25 saying in regards to Christ and the Church, he "gave himself up for her." Being a good head always involves selflessness and sacrifice. It has nothing to do with "lording over", but has everything to do with putting each other first (cf. Ephesians 5:21-22).

As this relates to leadership in the church, we have the entirety of scripture to draw on. God established His people through the call of Abraham, delivered His people through Moses, had male Levites intercede for His people, and sent male prophets to teach and correct His people. Jesus, a man who is God incarnate, came to earth and called out 12 male disciples. One would think that if God was going to re-establish male and female roles that it would have been with Jesus, who showed tremendous value and care to women in a society that valued them a little more than dogs. But Jesus didn't do that; Jesus treated women with honor and dignity as a valuable part of God's Kingdom with many gifts to offer, but he reserved the highest position of leadership for men.

There are three main offices of the church: Elders (or overseers, pastors, bishops), Deacons, and Members (saints) (Philippians 1:1). Out of these, only the highest office of Elder is reserved for male leadership. This is clearly seen in the language Paul uses in 1 Timothy 3:1-7, where there is constant use of the pronoun "he" and the phrase "a husband of one wife" (or a "one woman man"). The primary responsibilities of being an Elder lie in preaching/teaching the body, setting direction and vision for the church, disciplining wayward members, and training and raising up leaders on all levels within the church. When Paul writes in 2 Timothy 2:12 "*I do not permit a woman to teach or to exercise authority over a man*" he is writing in the context of the office of Elder, which he extrapolates on three verses later. The office of Deacon is open for both men and women to exercise leadership. Deacons/deaconesses do many up front and behind the scenes jobs in the church, and each church defines those responsibilities differently. Some of these include leading worship, administration, teaching classes, mentoring, and directing life-stage or felt-need ministries. Members fulfill their role of serving in ministry, gathering together for worship, giving their resources, loving each other, and being missionaries to their culture. So we see both men and women standing equally before God, serving equally as Members and Deacons, yet men being able to have the sole position of Elder. It also must be said that as Elders lead the church, it is done following the servant-leadership example of Christ (as He gave Himself up for the Church) which coincides with the servant-leadership the husband

provides for the home. Elders are specifically prohibited from abusing their leadership (Titus 1:7).

In closing, men could never be the men God has called them to be without godly women in their lives. Also, women could never be the women God has called them to be without godly men in their lives. We need to keep going back to scripture, with an open mind and heart with God reveals to us, and not just react to the misuse and abuse of positions of power that are so rampant in our world.