

Role of Women at IBC

(Adapted from The Village Church)

Introduction

The Bible teaches that God created two complementary sexes of humans, male and female, to bear His image together (Gen. 1:27-28; Matt. 19:4; Mark 10:6). This distinction in gender represents an essential characteristic of personhood and reflects an essential part of being created in God's image.

As outlined in Scripture, 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. Men and women are not interchangeable.

From the opening pages of Scripture, we find that God, in His wisdom and providence, created two complementary sexes for our good and for 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 cultural definitions of masculinity and femininity but are an integral part of God's plan for humanity. 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; Col. 3:18-19; 1 Tim. 2:8-15; 1 Pet. 3:1-7).

To reflect God's beautiful design at IBC, we desire to articulate and embody a theological position of complementarianism. Specifically, when it comes to the consideration of women in ministry, we want to be obedient to Scripture, honor the Lord and give opportunities for women to flourish in their role(s). The following is what we believe Scripture teaches about gender complementarity as it relates to women in ministry at IBC.

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 and authoritative Word. As affirmed in our Statement of Core Beliefs, "The Holy Scriptures, both Old and New Testament, is verbally inspired of God and is the eternal, immutable, supreme, authoritative, authentic and the infallible rule of faith and practice. (1 Cor. 2:13; 2 Tim. 3:16-17; 2 Peter 1:20-21; Matt. 5:18; John 5:39). Any attempt to understand personhood and gender must begin with divine revelation and God's created order.

First, we believe that all Christians are charged with the Great Commission (Matthew 28:18-20). All Christians, both men and women, participate in the ministry of the church. We believe the Bible explicitly encourages and assumes that women will be involved in the ministry of the church. Jesus welcomed women among His disciples, teaching them (Luke 10:39) and involving them in His ministry (Luke 8:1-3). Paul's words to Titus teach that older women teaching biblical wisdom to younger women is a noble, beautiful and necessary task (Titus 2:3-5). Phoebe, a patron and deacon of the church of Cenchreae, is commended by Paul and was likely the courier for Paul's epistle to the Romans, indicating her participation in gospel ministry (Rom. 16:1-2). Euodia and Syntyche labored with Paul "side-by-side" in the gospel (Phil. 4:3). Priscilla is described as "explaining the way of God more accurately" to Apollos (Acts 18:26). We celebrate the biblical picture of men and women serving the Church of the Lord Jesus Christ together. We rejoice in biblical examples of men and women using their gifts in the Church for the glory of God.

The Bible depicts a vision of men and women laboring alongside one another in the world and the Church for the sake of the kingdom of God (1 Cor. 12:4-31). If we don't empower both sexes to engage and use their gifts, in complementarian partnership, then both genders suffer, and the mission of the Church (to proclaim the gospel and make disciples of all nations) suffers.

Second, in light of the belief that male and female image bearers flourish in partnership, we expect that the primary relationship between Christian men and women is that of brotherly and sisterly love. We note that the Bible upholds the metaphor of siblinghood as the primary descriptor for male-female partnering in the Church. The concept that is taught in the New Testament is that the Church ought to have the kind of love for one another that is reserved for blood brothers and sisters. This uniquely Christian disposition reminds us that we ought to see each other as a family in a special sense. Therefore, the primary relationship in the local church between men and women is the relationship of brothers and sisters, united in Christ, not subordinates. We affirm that cultivating an environment of brotherly and sisterly love is at the heart of complementarianism. These relationships should be marked by honor, care and sacrifice for one another.

Third, we affirm that equal involvement in the church between men and women does not entail interchangeable involvement. Although men and women are portrayed as equals throughout Scripture, we believe the Bible reserves the office of elder/pastor specifically for qualified men. Scripture calls elders to lead the church (1 Tim. 5:17; Titus 1:7; 1 Pet. 5:1-2), preach the Word (1 Tim. 3:2; 2 Tim. 4:2; Titus 1:9), protect the church from false teaching (Acts 20:17, 28-31; Titus 1:9) pray for and visit the sick (Jas. 5:14; Acts 20:35), equip the saints for ministry (Eph. 4:11-12) and use proper judgment in theological and doctrinal matters (Acts 15). In shepherding, overseeing, leading, caring for and praying for the local church, elders practice sacrificial male headship. Therefore, although we encourage all men and women to actively participate in the life of the church, we reserve the office of elder for certain qualified men within the church. Apart from the role of pastor/elder, we believe the Bible explicitly encourages and assumes that women will be involved in the ministry of the church.

Affirmations and Denials

Based on the conclusions drawn from Scripture, a list of affirmations and denials that encompass our theological position on gender and the role of women in ministry is as follows:

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, exercising their diverse gifts for the good of the body.

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 role/function of elder is reserved for qualified men. Elders are distinctly responsible for overseeing the church (1 Tim. 5:17; Titus 1:7; 1 Pet. 5:1-2) and preaching the Word (1 Tim. 3:2; 2 Tim. 4:2; Titus 1:9).

We deny that the role of elder being withheld from women diminishes their importance or their influence in the church. The indispensable help women were created to give can and should be exercised in all manner of roles/offices in the church, excepting those reserved for qualified men.

We affirm that all members of the church should be in glad submission to the elder body, and that all should be in glad and sacrificial 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. Further, biblical submission is not indicative of subordination or inequality, as seen in the Son's submission to the Father (Phil. 2:1-11).

We affirm that complementarianism, rightly practiced, will lead to the recognizable 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 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 or show force, but rather should be the fruit of brotherly love, and vice versa.

What does this look like practically at IBC?

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 our position and practice on women in ministry far too progressive. We ask for 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. We are eager to work with brothers and sisters, churches and other ministries who view these issues differently than we do.

Professional/Organizational

The elders have designated the role of pastor as reserved for elders/pastors. The elders vet men for these roles and positions using a formal process. We seek to hire both men and 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 and includes women participating in every level of the organization (except for the role of elder/pastor).

The Gathering

Every member of the church body actively participates in our weekend worship services, not just those who are on the platform. Every role is open to both men and women, except the roles of preaching the Word of

God and officiating the ordinances (baptism/the Lord's Supper). Every member is invited to participate in baptisms and distribute the elements of communion, but the roles of preaching and officiating the ordinances are reserved for elders/pastors.

Various Teaching Environments

Adult mixed-gendered teaching environments are overseen by elders and will be led by qualified men. These men should seek out, equip and utilize gifted men and women to help lead, teach and shape these ministries. Adult gender-specific teaching environments are taught by a leader of the same gender. Men teach men and women teach women. Nonadult (younger than age 18) teaching environments can be led and taught by either gender.

Life Groups

Gender-specific groups will be led by a leader of the same gender. Men lead men's groups, and women lead women's groups. Mixed-gender groups will be led by a man or a man and woman team. In mixed-gender group leadership we expect for there to be a co-discipleship relationship between the man and the woman. Co-discipleship in the group does not mean that male and female leaders are interchangeable or lead in the exact same way, but as co-disciplers, the man and the woman operate in their roles according to their gifting. Both men and women may serve as group coaches and group leaders.