

SOUTH RIDGE COMMUNITY CHURCH

Statement of Position Related to Gender Roles

A. Abstract

The goal of this document is to articulate the position of South Ridge Community Church related to the role of both the male and female within the context of this local church. This will obviously include a broad look at a number of significant Scriptural passages that deal with this issue, a summary of the Scriptural principles drawn from these passages, and some specific applications drawn from the principles of Scripture. While we will touch on some broader issues of gender roles within culture and society, our specific focus will be the role of genders within the church. We understand that different communities of faith may have a different understanding of these issues, so it is our goal to hold this position with love and acceptance toward those who are convinced otherwise. While we believe it is important to articulate our understanding of Scripture as it relates to this topic, we do not see this issue as a major issue of faith and practice. It should also be added that the difficulty of the passages in Scripture which deal with gender roles moves us to hold our position rather loosely while maintaining the possibility of change in the future.

The Scripture clearly teaches that all people have equal value and significance before God. In the area of gender, the Bible specifically states, *“So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them”* (Genesis 1:27). This Scripture makes it clear that both male and female are equally created in God’s image. They are given equal value and standing before God as the apex of his created order.

The Bible also makes it clear that both male and female have equal standing in their relationship with Jesus Christ. *“You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus, for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham’s seed, and heirs according to the promise”* (Galatians 3:26-29). The Scripture clearly affirms that those who have faith in Christ are equal participants in the grace of God and equal heirs of the blessings of God. The gospel equally welcomes, transforms and blesses every person through Christ regardless of race or gender. There is no superior spiritual blessing granted to any person on the basis of race or gender.

B. Gender in Scripture and Society

While it is not the focus of this paper to outline the many distinctions between male and female, a brief mention must be made of this issue. While our culture attempts to erase all distinctions between male and female, it is very clear that male and female were intended by God to be different but complimentary. There are not only distinctions in physical make-up, but the physical distinctions are simply an external indication of other non-physical distinctions as well. While we may not be able to definitively classify all women as being more nurturing than all men, we can note that God has blessed the woman with physical attributes that clearly provide her with a priority role in bearing, sustaining and nurturing young children. While we may not be able to definitively classify all men as being physically stronger than all women, we can note that generally speaking God has blessed men with attributes of physical strength that equip him for more physically demanding tasks.

God’s creation of male and female is an indication of the creativity of His character, the depth of His being, and the breadth of His personality. There is something about the

dynamic nature, accompanying distinctions, and relationship between the two genders that somehow capture the depth of God's being that one gender alone is not able to capture. These distinctions, therefore, must be recognized and celebrated rather than ignored and erased. Differences do not mean deficiencies or inequality; they mean diversity. We must recognize and enjoy the diversity of God's creation and celebrate uniqueness as it points us to the unfathomable depths and beauty of God's person.

As it relates to God's person, the male and female relationship also illustrates God's nature as Trinity. While this is not explicitly stated in Scripture, the implications of a Trinitarian theology alongside the recognition of male headship point to a visible connection in this area. For one thing, both authority and submission are good things because both are exercised by God himself. The Father has authority over the Son and the Son submits to the Father. Nevertheless, within this structure of authority and submission the Father and Son possess the same nature. Neither is inherently better than the other; their roles are merely distinguished. In the same way, while man is given the primary responsibility for spiritual leadership and direction, he is equal with woman in being. In 1 Corinthians 11:3 Paul writes, *"Now I want you to realize that the head of every man is Christ, and the head of the woman is man, and the head of Christ is God."* This verse illustrates that headship occurs in both the relationship between God the Father and God the Son as well as between man and woman.

To begin the journey of developing an understanding of the roles and relationships between the genders, it is important to start with the creation account. In Genesis 2, which provides a greater detail of the summarized creation account outlined in Genesis 1, we find that God began his creation of humanity with the creation of Adam. *"The Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it"* (Genesis 2:20). While Adam was given the meaningful task of naming the animals, this task also highlighted that Adam was alone in the creation and that there was no suitable companion for him. *"But for Adam no suitable helper was found"* (Genesis 2:20).

To bring relief to this condition of being alone and not having someone with whom to have a personal relationship, God caused Adam to fall asleep and took a rib from his body from which he created the woman Eve. *"Then the Lord God made a woman from the rib he had taken out of the man, and he brought her to the man. The man said, 'This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called woman, for she was taken out of man'"* (Genesis 2:22-23). Within this account there are several areas of interest. First, the woman is said to be a helpmate for the man. While this has numerous implications, the overriding theme is that Eve's creation makes Adam's own creation more complete. In the context, this most likely has particular reference to the bearing of children (which Adam could obviously not do alone). However, it certainly has other implications as well: Eve is a suitable mate for Adam emotionally; she assists in the fulfillment of the task of tending the garden. It is also interesting that the woman is presented to the man and that man calls her "woman." While we certainly cannot draw too much from this text, the general implication is that Adam had the leadership role in God's created order of male and female. The woman was created after the man and was created as Adam's companion.

In this same Genesis 1-3 account, we are told that after creating him, God gave specific instructions to Adam regarding the prohibition to eat from the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil (Genesis 2:15-17). Later on in Genesis 3 we are told that Satan – appearing in the form of a serpent – tempted Eve to eat of the very tree that God had forbidden. It is evident that Adam had passed God's prohibition on to Eve because Eve responded by telling the serpent of God's instructions (even though she recounts those instructions in a distorted form) (Genesis 3:1-3). In spite of knowing God's prohibition, Eve eats of the tree and provides the fruit to Adam her husband who also eats (Genesis 3:6-7).

In spite of the fact that it was the woman who was initially tempted and who first succumbed to that temptation, we are told in Romans that the man is the one who is culpable for the condition of sin in the human race. *“Therefore, just as sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all men, because all sinned . . . Nevertheless, death reigned from the time of Adam to the time of Moses, even over those who did not sin by breaking a command as did Adam, who was a pattern of the one to come”* (Romans 5:12, 14). Paul indicates that Adam is held responsible for the sinful condition of the human race. This is the case in spite of the fact that it was actually the woman who was tempted and first succumbed to that temptation in sin. This indicates a heightened level of spiritual accountability and responsibility that is bestowed upon the male.

These passages from Genesis and Romans provide the background from which distinctions in spiritual accountability, leadership, and responsibility and the uniqueness in roles between men and women are derived. These distinctions in roles relate to two areas.

The Home: While roles within the home are not the primary focus of this paper, we need to briefly address this issue. Paul states the following regarding the roles of husband and wife in Ephesians 5:23-27. *“For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the Savior . . . now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything. Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless.”*

This passage teaches that the husband is the one who is given the responsibility for the leadership of the home. The husband is to sacrifice his own interests for the sake of his wife in a way that parallels the way in which Christ literally gave his own life for the sake of the church. The passage also makes clear that providing spiritual leadership is the epitome of the husband’s responsibility. The husband is to be the spiritual leader of the home and is to seek to serve the needs of his wife with the goal of conformity to the character of Christ. This spiritual leadership is to serve as the hub from which all other activities of the home and family flow. It is the husband who receives the call to be the initiator in serving the needs of his wife.

The wife is to be responsive to this leadership and initiative of service in the same way that the bride of Christ is responsive to the sacrificial love of Jesus. The result of this relationship is that the husband and wife continually move forward in the realization of the redeeming grace of God in both of their lives. Their lives individually and their life as a family are to mirror the work being done by God’s Spirit in the church – *“ . . . a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless”*. This is to be the goal of the husband’s leadership in being the initiator of service in the home and the wife’s responsiveness to that initiative in service and leadership.

Due to the distortion of sin, this role of initiation in leadership and service is frequently distorted and mishandled. Rather than following the biblical teaching, the husband uses his leadership as an excuse to control, manipulate, demand, or make all the decisions. Such behaviors and attitudes are completely contradictory to the spirit of Christ who willingly left heaven and gave up all things for the sake of giving his life as a sacrifice for us. In addition, Proverbs 31 clearly portrays the wife as being industrious, managing the home, and making business decisions. An accurate form of leadership is for the husband to regard his wife as “better than himself” and to desire to serve and meet her needs before meeting his own.

There are also many situations where the husband cannot be the spiritual leader for the simple reason that he has not submitted himself to the point of becoming a follower of Jesus. Men also simply refuse or neglect this responsibility. In such situations, the wife needs to bear this responsibility with humility and respect for her husband. The Scripture is clear that God understands the complexities of life and that he will provide sufficient grace and strength.

The Church: The second sphere of differentiation in role relates to the church. In addition to the general principles outlined in the Genesis passage, Paul's teaching in 1 Timothy 2:11-15 relates to this particular area. While there are clearly culturally bound applications to Paul's teaching regarding the role of women, we believe there is also a principle that transcends culture that arises out of the text.

It may be helpful to understand how this works by first considering the issue of modesty that Paul addresses in the previous verses. *"I also want women to dress modestly, with decency and propriety, not with braided hair or gold or pearls or expensive clothes, but with good deeds, appropriate for women who profess to worship God"* (1 Timothy 1:9, 10). In these verses (which are in the immediate context of the role of women that Paul addresses next) Paul articulates both a culturally transcendent principle as well as a culturally bound application. The culturally transcendent principle is that women are to dress modestly and be characterized by good deeds. The culturally bound application is that they are not to have braided hair, gold, pearls, or expensive clothes. Apparently, the adherence to the principle of modesty expressed itself in these particular behaviors in that culture. The paradigm for how Paul is addressing these issues, therefore, is that there is a culturally transcendent principle that is expressed in a culturally specific context.

The same dynamic is applicable in the verses dealing with the role and behavior of women in the church. *"A woman should learn in quietness and full submission. I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man; she must be silent. For Adam was formed first, then Eve. And Adam was not the one deceived; it was the woman who was deceived and became a sinner. But women will be saved through childbearing – if they continue in faith, love and holiness with propriety"* (1 Timothy 2:11-15).

In verses 11 and 12 Paul provides some very culturally specific applications related to women keeping silent and not permitting them to teach. However, these culturally bound applications are based on a principle which transcends culture and this principle is articulated by Paul in verses 13 and 14. Paul establishes the fact that the applications that he is prescribing are based on the divine order of creation. This order of creation designates the male as the one who has ultimate spiritual responsibility, leadership, and accountability because it was the male that was created first. *While the applications of this differentiation of role need to be applied to each cultural context uniquely and specifically, the governing transcendent principle is that the male has been designated by God as having the role of ultimate spiritual responsibility, leadership and accountability before God.*

We will next choose to deal with verse 14 that mentions the deception of the woman before we discuss verse 13 that mentions that the man was created first. Some would hold that this verse teaches that women should not be in leadership based on what they draw to be the implied teaching from this verse: that women are more easily deceived. They would reason that Paul brings up the deception of Eve as it related to the first sin for the reason that women should not serve in leadership because they are more easily deceived.

We believe, however, that this is not necessarily a proper interpretation. Verse 14 is highly debated and there are numerous differing interpretations of what Paul is saying in it.

In spite of the fact that we do not dogmatically assert that one particular interpretation is correct, it appears helpful to point out some potential options that have been proposed.

One line of arguing from verse 14 begins by pointing out that Paul's comment does not speak about all women, but only about Eve. Paul is pointing to a particular instance in the early chapters of Genesis: the temptation. At this instance in Genesis, Satan subverted male headship in the created order by tempting Eve rather than Adam. Thus in verse 14, Paul looks to Eve's yielding to Satan's subversion of this role. The deception of Eve brought damaging consequences to her relationship with Adam and to the couple's relationship to God. Such would also be the case in the Ephesian church if the women usurped male headship in their context.

Another line of reasoning from verse 14 claims that Paul is only addressing the Ephesian women who had been deceived by false teachers in the church. These women had been deceived because they lacked education and the tools to properly critique false teaching. Thus, Paul prohibited women from teaching or holding authority in the Ephesian context because they were incapable of properly doing so on account of their social position.

When Paul says in verse 13 that Adam was formed first, then Eve, he is rooting his argument in the Creation itself. He points to the priority of Adam's creation and argues that this serves as a foundation for man's spiritual leadership. His prohibition in the earlier verses is based on the creation of man before woman. Some would argue that Paul's statement in verse 13 is actually an appeal to the practice or primogeniture (rights of the firstborn) in the first century. However, this does not seem probable because Paul elsewhere disregards primogeniture and points out how God himself does not function within this system (Romans 9). It would be very odd for Paul to argue in one place that primogeniture is illegitimate and then to turn around and base another argument on it. Thus, we are not convinced by arguments which claim that verse 13 is a culturally relative appeal to primogeniture.

Before we move on, we want to look at one final observation as it relates to the role of women from the final verse in the 1 Timothy 2 passage. *"But women will be saved through childbearing – if they continue in faith, love and holiness with propriety"* (1 Timothy 2:15). While this verse is difficult to understand there are several things that are evident. Clearly the role of women in bearing children is held in high esteem and honor. Ultimately, God has established the woman as the one who ensures the continued propagation of the human race. She has been given the role of giving birth to every human being.

As the ultimate fulfillment of the significance of this role, the Savior of the world came through the seed of the woman. While the sinful condition of the entire human race came through Adam, the opportunity for redemption and salvation came through the seed of the woman. While Jesus was without an earthly father and thus was not tainted with the sin nature, Jesus was born of an earthly mother. In the first signal of a coming redemption and the eventual defeat of sin, Genesis 3:15 explains, *"And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel."* It was through the offspring of the woman that the head of Satan would eventually be crushed. Consequently, while Adam has passed on the nature of sin to the human race, the woman has had a primary role in passing on redemption to the human race through the birth of Jesus.

The qualifications of overseers and deacons as outlined in 1 Timothy 3 also come into question in this area. Among other qualifications, Paul mentions that *"the overseer must be above reproach, the husband of but one wife"* (3:2). Likewise for a deacon Paul states that

“A deacon must be the husband of but one wife and must manage his household well” (3:12). Is this passage teaching that these leaders *must* be men and that these men *must* be married? (The issue of the implications for the divorce and remarriage of the leader is not the focus of this paper. This issue is covered in a separate position paper on our understanding of divorce and remarriage).

We do not believe that the 1 Timothy 3 passage teaches that these leaders must be married. It is evident from the life of Jesus, other biblical examples, and Paul’s other teachings regarding the preferential nature of singleness in serving the Lord that Paul is not stating that the leaders of the church must be married (1 Cor. 7:7-9, 32-40).

Is Paul saying they must be men and not women? Or was Paul simply recognizing the cultural reality of this particular setting (the setting very common in New Testament times) that those serving in leadership were men? While this is a worthy question and has many different facets to it, it is not wise to base one’s complete theology of gender roles solely on this text and whether a person holding a specific office with a specific title (overseer/bishop, deacon) can be a woman. Instead, this passage must be taken in sync with the transcendent principles that we already reviewed and that Paul outlined in 1 Timothy 2. The 1 Timothy 3 passage is relevant to the discussion of the role of women, but we do not believe that its primary function is to specifically define the titles of offices within the church (overseer/bishop, deacon) and whether a male or female can serve in those offices.

As a result, the church must understand the role of women according to the broad scope of biblical teaching rather than simply isolating its position based on one or two particular texts or verses. The church must do everything in its power to encourage women to exercise their God given gifts and abilities. The Bible has numerous examples of women who served in various capacities and in varying positions of leadership. These range from Deborah who served with Barak as one of the judges of Israel (Judges 4) to Priscilla who served with her husband Aquilla (Acts 18, Romans 16:3, 1 Cor. 16:19). In the Old Testament the examples of Rahab and Esther stand as illustrations of the ability of women to perform daring feats for the preservation of God’s people. Paul mentions numerous women in Romans 16 (v. 1-2, 12, 13,15). The gospels also teach that there was an entourage of women who followed Jesus to meet his needs (Luke 8:1-3), and it is clear that some of Jesus’ most passionate and devoted followers were women (Mark 14:3-9, Luke 7:36-50). Even at the cross women are identified as some of Jesus’ most loyal and trusted followers who continued to care for his needs (Matthew 27:55-56).

The gospels also record that it was women who first discovered the absence of Jesus’ body in the tomb after his resurrection. While women were not recognized to be credible witnesses in the Roman legal system during the times of the New Testament writings, the gospel writers affirm that it was women who first discovered the empty tomb; it was women who brought the news of Jesus’ resurrection to the cowering and fearful disciples (Matthew 28:1-8, Mark 16:1-11, Luke 24:1-12, John 20:1-8). Their testimony of the resurrection was deemed to be reliable and trustworthy – a very significant departure from the typical understanding of women during that time.

Unfortunately, sinfulness has resulted in the distortion of the roles that God originally established. The differentiation of roles has often been disfigured and abused. Women have not been properly respected and given opportunities and frequently their leadership gifts are unrecognized. The church must do everything in its power to counteract this disfigurement that the sinful condition of humanity has produced. While the record of the church has not always been perfect in how it relates to women, the church and God’s people have historically led the way in providing for the protection of women and asserting

the equal value of women within society. It was within the community of God's people Israel that adultery first became a sin that could be committed by the male and not just by the female. In general, the people of God have been the strongest liberating forces for women in cultures where they otherwise faced devaluing and limited opportunity.

C. Summary and Application

Now that we have provided a summary of Biblical passages and thought, we want to provide several summarizing principles.

1. All people – both men and women – are created equally before God.
2. God places the responsibility for primary leadership and spiritual accountability on the male in the spheres of home and church.
3. The body of Christ needs to bring God's redemption to a world that distorts and disfigures the roles of God's created order.

The applications of these principles within the context of South Ridge Community Church need to be continually evaluated and reviewed. While we can make a few summary statements regarding specific applications, we must seek the direction of God's Spirit as various situations and new opportunities present themselves. We must act with wisdom in applying the culturally transcendent teaching of Scripture to the culture of South Ridge Community Church and the surrounding culture within which we minister.

While once again emphasizing that each opportunity will need to be individually considered, we can outline the following specific applications of the principles stated above to our ministry at this time.

1. Men and women may participate as ushers and greeters.
2. Women and men may participate in serving communion.
3. Men and women may serve as part of a teaching team in a community group and either may be the primary and lead teacher of any small group setting. However, a partnership with a male in forming a teaching team is encouraged.
4. Men and women may serve on all Elder Leadership teams including the following: Finance Leadership Team, Crossroads Christian Academy Leadership Team, Congregational Care Team.
5. Women and men may lead the congregation in Sunday morning worship.
6. A man would only be designated as the "Senior Pastor."
7. While a man would have the role as the primary message giver and teacher of the congregation, a woman may provide the "message" for a periodic Sunday service.
8. Men would serve on the leadership team that provides ultimate spiritual accountability for the church and that is ultimately responsible for the fulfillment of the church's vision and mission.

After stating the above, we once again need to affirm that the distinction of roles in no way implies superiority or inferiority of gifts and abilities. Women who demonstrate leadership and teaching gifts need to be encouraged to utilize these gifts. The differentiation of roles is not based on skills but on an order that is engrained in creation by the Creator. In many instances, women are more skilled in areas of leadership and teaching than men.

We also, however, desire to be a church that fosters the roles and responsibilities given to the male. Too often males quickly abdicate spiritual leadership and responsibility. Cultivating a heart for God and living a disciplined life of prayer and spiritual exercise is too infrequently pursued by males. Too often, males get caught up in the dominant cultural

trend that tends to view spiritual interest and commitment as a primarily feminine endeavor and encourages males to achieve prestige and power and to accumulate possessions and status. Our goal is to challenge males to counter their spiritual insecurities and take the risk of becoming fully devoted followers of Jesus who respond to the words of Jesus who said, "Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it." We desire to be a church where males model this abandonment of self and pursue the great call of Jesus to be his followers and to lead others toward him.

D. Recommended Resources

-The Danvers Statement on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood:

<http://www.cbmw.org/Danvers> (complementarian)

France, R.T. *Women in the Church's Ministry: A Test Case for Biblical interpretation.* (egalitarian)

-Grenz, Stanley and Denise Kjesbo. *Women in the Church: A Biblical Theology of Women in Ministry.* (egalitarian)

-Köstenberger, Andreas and Thomas Schreiner. *Women in the Church: An Analysis and Application of 1 Timothy 2:9-15.* (complementarian)

-Piper, John and Wayne Grudem. *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood.*(complementarian)

-Webb, William. *Slaves, Woman, and Homosexuals.* (egalitarian)

Complementarian authors take the position of male headship both in the home and church. They also assert that women should not serve in particular ministry roles usually associated with teaching and preaching.

Egalitarian authors take the position of male and female equality in church and possibly in the home. They often encourage women to serve in roles which may include responsibilities of teaching and preaching.