

The Role of Women at Pathway Community 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 and in accordance with our Statement of Faith, we believe that men and women are equal in essence, dignity and value and are complementary by divine design. Gender represents a reality present in every human from birth and does not merely represent a social construct. Men and women are not interchangeable.

When one opens the pages of Scripture, we find that in the beginning of all things, God created two complementary sexes for our good and His glory. In view 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 live out their 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, 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; Col. 3:18-19; 1 Tim. 2:8-15; 1 Pet. 3:1-7).

To reflect God's beautiful design as Pathway Community Church, we desire to articulate and embody a theological vision of complementarianism. Specifically, when it comes to the consideration of women in ministry, we

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want to be obedient to Scripture, honor the Lord and give opportunities for women to flourish in their role(s) at Pathway Community Church.

This paper seeks to describe that vision by explaining what we believe Scripture teaches about complementarity genders as it relates to women in ministry at Pathway Community Church.

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 Basic Beliefs, "We believe the Scriptures are true, authoritative and sufficient" (Ps. 19:7-11; 2 Tim. 3:16; 2 Pet. 1:20-21).

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.

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 say 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.

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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). When we don't empower both sexes to engage and use their gifts, in complementarian partnership, both genders suffer, and the mission of the Church—to help those far from God come to know life in Christ—suffers.

Second, 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 family 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 distinctive 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 equal brothers and sisters, united in Christ. 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 equal in value and gifting throughout Scripture, we believe the Bible reserves the office of elder/pastor specifically for qualified men.¹ 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

¹ A qualified man is a man who has been trained, has been vetted and meets all the specific qualifications of an elder at Pathway Community Church. However, not all qualified men hold the office of elder. There are men on staff and in the congregation who meet the qualifications of elder but do not hold the office. Though they are not currently in the office of elder (and may never be), we believe these men are trustworthy to teach the Word of God at Pathway Community. If a non-elder has been vetted and trained and meets the qualifications of elder, we do not want to restrict his ability to teach and preach at Pathway Community by restricting preaching/teaching to only those who hold the office of elder.

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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, and the responsibilities unique to it, 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, 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 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.

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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 willing submission to the elder body, and that all should be in 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.