

Gender Roles at LVCC

A Position Paper

OUR GOAL

As LVCC seeks to raise up and train our own leaders, the question that is often raised is whether or not a woman can serve as a Pastor or Elder within the local church. In order to answer that question, we must first define what the biblical offices are, according to the New Testament. Since we believe the bible is our sole source of authority, it is our goal to be biblically based in all we do. We believe that as we align with scriptures, each person will be better positioned to flourish, bear fruit and find ultimate contentment as they serve the body of Christ.

DEFINITIONS

There are two primary offices described in the New Testament:

1. Elder/ Pastor/Overseer

The New Testament authors used three different Greek words interchangeably to describe one singular office:

poimen translated “pastor” or “shepherd” (Eph 4:11-13, 1 Pe 5:1-3)

presbuteros translated “elder” (1 Tim 5:17, Jas 5:14, 1 Pe 5:1-3)

episkopos translated “overseer” (Acts 20:28-32, Phil 1:1, 1 Tim 3:1, 1 Pe 5:13)

The primary responsibilities of this office was to provide overall leadership for the local church (1 Tim. 5:17; Titus 1:7; 1 Pet. 5:1-2), preach and teach the Scriptures (1 Tim. 3:2; 2 Tim. 4:2; Titus 1:9), protect the church from false teachers (Acts 20:17, 28-31; Titus 1:9), pray for the sick (Jas. 5:14), equip church members for ministry (Eph. 4:11-12), and establish key doctrines (Acts 15). Paul gives the highest of character standards that an Elder/Pastor/Overseer must have in order to be selected (1 Tim 3:1-7, Titus 1:5-9). At LVCC, this position is fulfilled by our team of Elders and Pastors.

2. Deacon

The second office described in the New Testament is that of Deacon (Phil 1:1, 1 Tim 3:8), which comes from the Greek word *diakonos*. This word is used as both a noun, “a servant” and a verb, “to serve.” While the bible calls all Christians “servants,” there seems to have been “lead servants” or formal offices of Deacons (Phil 1:1, Rom 16:1, Acts 6:1-7) in the first century church who were charged with organizing and implementing the ministry activities of the church, under the authority of the Elders/Pastors/Overseers. When the Deacons worked in conjunction with the Elders/Pastors/Overseers, God’s word spread, and the church grew in health and

influence (Acts 6:1-7). Just as Paul gave formal qualifications for Elders/Pastors/Overseers, he does so for Deacons (1 Tim 3:8-13). At LVCC, this position is fulfilled by our Staff which is comprised of Ministers, Directors, Coordinators, Leaders, Interns, Administrative Assistants and Team members.

While the bible is clear about the function of these two offices, it is less clear about which titles to use. The churches in Jewish towns used the current structure found in Judaism, calling their primary leaders *presbuterous*, or Elders. Those churches in Greek or Roman populations tended to call their leaders *episkopos*, or Overseers. Because the New Testament authors used these titles interchangeably, we believe we have permission to use titles that best reflect our cultural context, as long as we adhere to the two primary functions that describe those offices.

GENDERS IN THE BIBLE

The question is whether or not scripture allows a woman to serve or function as an Elder/Pastor/Overseer or does it limit that office to only men.

First of all, we believe the bible affirms that gender is not a social or individual construct based on subjective feelings or a person's understanding of reality but is assigned to each person by God (Gen 1:27) and is biologically rooted in the essence of the person at the moment of conception (Psa 139:13).

Secondly, we believe the bible is clear that both genders, male and female, are made in God's image (Gen. 1:27-28; Matt. 19:4; Mark 10:6) and are equally charged with the Great Commission (Matt 28:18-20). Church is at its best when men and women labor alongside one another, exercising their gifts for the glory of Christ, and fulfilling Christ's Great Commission. The primary way the two genders are to refer to each other is as "brother" or "sister" in Christ (Matt 12:48-50), equals within God's family (Gal 3:28).

Finally, we believe the bible is clear that, as adopted sons and daughters in Christ, we are to extend familial love toward one another (John 13:34-35) as we partner together for the cause of Christ.

HEADSHIP AND AUTHORITY IN THE BIBLE

When the bible speaks of headship or authority, it seems to link it with the interpretation and communication of God's word within the local church (1 Tim 2:12). Authority can include directing people, overseeing the ministries of the church, but it seems to us that the primary way authority is exercised in the church is in the responsibility of rightly dividing the word of God so that the church is equipped with God's truth and can refute false teaching (Acts 20:28-31). This is what Moses did in Exodus 18, Ezra did after the walls of Jerusalem were rebuilt in Nehemiah 8:1-3, and what the Elders in Ephesus were charged with in Acts 20:27-30. The task of teaching is also the only function or task listed in 1 Timothy 3 and

Titus 1 in giving us the requirements for men who aspire to become an Elder/Pastor/Overseer.

While scripture is clear both male and female are equals within the Body of Christ and co-laborers for the cause of Christ, we believe it also describes clear roles assigned to both males and females that are designed to complement each other.

Paul did not want women to hold the highest positions of authority or preach within the church (1 Tim 2:12-14, 3:2, 1 Cor 11:3), but that those positions were to be reserved for qualified, godly men that measured up to 1 Timothy 3:1-7 and Titus 1:5-9. He taught that the church be modeled after marriage and that nurturing the family is to be a training ground for Elders/Pastors/Overseers (1 Tim 3:4-5).

According to Paul, for a woman to have this type of authority, would be to invert the God-ordained order of the Creation narrative in Genesis (Gen 1-3). Paul points to the fact that God created Adam first before Eve (Gen 2:7) and gave to him the commands so he could teach them to Eve (Gen 2:16). When Eve ate the fruit first, not only did she violate God's prohibition of eating the forbidden fruit, but she usurped the natural headship Adam was to have over her.

The curse that God pronounced over the first couple included a perpetual power struggle in male-female roles; Eve will "desire" or usurp Adam's authority, while Adam will now want "rule" or dominate her in an unloving, selfish way (Gen 3:16). The antidote to this aspect of the curse is found in the husband-wife returning back to the natural order God had established before the fall, a wife's glad submission to her husband and a husband's Christ-like, sacrificial love for his wife (Eph 5:22-27).

We see this pattern of Christlike love and glad submission to be consistent within the Trinity and the Church (1 Cor 11:3). While in Christ we are all equal in value and standing (Gal. 3:28) and all need to learn how to mutually submit to one another (Eph. 5:21), there is, however, the God-ordained order within the male-female relationships that is modeled for us in the marriage union and even in the very Trinity itself.

Therefore, we believe the bible affirms that the gender roles are not interchangeable based on gifts, passion, education, or experience (egalitarianism) but assigned by God to each gender (complementarianism). We believe if rightly practiced, each gender flourishes and compliments one another, not leading to subjugation, domineering or elitism.

GENDER ROLES AT LVCC

In order to align our church with these scriptures, we desire to articulate and embody a theological vision of complementarianism in which both genders flourish and work together. Our Elders and Pastors are made up of men who have been

vetted, trained and called by the church membership. They handle the preaching, teaching, theology, leadership, vision, and finances of the church.

Since we have examples of female Deacons in the New Testament (Rom 16:1, 1 Cor 16:19, Acts 18:26), we do have women that serve at all levels on the “deacon” side of ministry, which we refer to as “Staff” and is comprised of Ministers, Directors, Coordinators, Leaders and Assistants. They are directly in charge of the ministries under the authority of the Elders and direct supervision of the Pastors.

We understand that there are a variety of opinions regarding these definitions, and what ministry roles women can serve in, so we ask for grace in our understanding and application of scriptures.