



Women In Ministry At CBC

The topic of women in ministry has long been debated. We acknowledge this is a controversial subject and good people have differed in their conclusions. The following is written to communicate how the Elders of CBC understand the Bible as it addresses the role of women in ministry in the church.

This is a summary of our understanding of the scripture's intent for women in ministry:

It is our consensus that women are called to lead confidently expressing their spiritual gifts in all areas of ministry, with the only limit being the role of elder.

Before we begin...

God's word is foundational truth and the elders want to clearly state our commitment to the inerrancy of Scripture. We have carefully studied the Bible regarding this topic and have arrived at our position from Scripture.

At Crossroads we hold that there are essential beliefs that require unity (Jesus' resurrection, deity, salvation by grace, etc.), liberty or freedom in the non-essentials doctrine (different kinds of communion, baptisms, theology on drinking, dancing, etc.), and in all things charity. We want to be true to the Scriptures while also understanding there is space for different views in some areas of theology.

The issue of gender and leadership in the church falls under the liberty category. It does not change the nature or character of God, nor does it change the salvific truths of the Scriptures. While we believe it is important, we hold our position with grace and in love and we call others to live out their views on this topic in the same way.

We affirm the equality of men and women.

The Bible begins with the equality of both men and women. In Genesis 1:27 God declares that man is created in his image. The word "man" is used in a universal sense, including both men and women. God then reiterates, stating that both men and women are made as image-bearers of God. They are given the shared responsibility of joint dominion over the earth. They are called to fill the earth, subdue the earth and rule it together. But as the human race comes from the hand of the Creator, it comes divided into male and female. Both are made in the image of God. One is not superior and the other inferior. But they are different.

The Scriptures go on to demonstrate both men and women are equal in God's image, equal in their responsibility for sin, equal in their need for God, and equal in the family of God as followers of Jesus (Romans 3:23, Romans 6:23, Galatians 3:28).

We affirm God's use of both men and women for leadership in ministry.

Throughout the Scriptures, women are used in positions of leadership. Both the Old and New Testaments operated in extremely patriarchal societies, so the specific and purposeful use of women to proclaim the message of the gospel and to lead the early church is informative and important. The consistent use of women in the Old and New Testaments, as well as the increasing occurrences of leadership with Jesus and in the early church, shows a counter-cultural ethic of women not only as inheritors of God's gospel, but as leaders in the gospel efforts.

In the Old Testament

Prophets spoke to God and spoke for God in the Old Testament. There was no higher spiritual calling, and there are several examples of God using women as his mouthpiece in the Old Testament. (Exodus 15:20, Judges 4-5, 2 Kings 22:11-23:35) Not only did women serve as prophets, they also served as civic leaders, in the temple services, and as examples of people God chooses and charges with furthering His redemptive story. (Exodus 38:8; 1 Samuel 2:22, Proverbs 31, Nehemiah 7:66-67, Psalm 68:11, Joel 2:28-29).

Jesus' inclusion of Women

Jesus set a new precedent by including women among his disciples. (Luke 8:1-3, John 4:39-42, and Matthew 28:1-10.) His inclusion of women in this way was previously unimagined in Jewish culture. Jesus included many women in his itinerant preaching ministry (Luke 8:3). They were taught, trained in ministry, and sent out to preach the Kingdom. After the resurrection, while the eleven remaining apostles were in hiding, it was the female disciples that Jesus sent to announce the good news (Matthew 28:7-10; John 20:17). Such a commission defied Jewish convention that viewed women as unreliable and invalid witnesses in courts and legal matters. Yet Jesus entrusted them with the most crucial testimony of all: "I have seen the Lord" (John 20:18).

(See also Luke 1:46-55, Luke 2:36-38, Matthew 27:55, Mark 15:41, Luke 13:13, Mark 16:9, Luke 10:38-42)

In the Early Church

Women's leadership roles didn't end when Jesus left but continued in the early church as they served, suffered, and were sent out to build the church in the first century world. (Acts 1:14, Acts 2:1-4,17,18, Acts 12:12, Acts 9:36-42, Acts 16:11-15,40, Philippians 4:2-3, Acts 21:8-9, Romans 16:1-2,7,12, 1 Corinthians 11:5)

We affirm women are called to lead as prophets, pastors, deacons, teachers, church planters, and missionaries taking the gospel into other cultures.

Throughout the New Testament, we see women lead the church in positions of leadership and teaching. Below are the different positions of leadership in the church as seen in the New Testament.

Prophet and Teacher

Ephesians 2:20 tells us the household of God is built on "the apostles and prophets." These Christian prophets fulfilled an important role in the church. Among those prophesying were women. (Luke 2:36, Acts 21:8-9, 1 Corinthians 11:5) Women were also found teaching, and even instructing men in the New Covenant community. (Acts 18:24-28)

Pastor and Deacon

The biblical gift of pastoring is not the same as elder. The Greek word for pastor simply means 'shepherd'. In the New Testament, the work of shepherding-pastoring, was done by men and women. (Acts 18)

In Romans 16:1-2, Phoebe is called a deacon (diakonos).

Church Planter and Missionary

In Romans, Paul refers to a man and woman named Andronicus and Junia as apostles. The word apostle in this context is not used to designate the original twelve apostles, but a person 'sent out' to take the gospel in a new place as a missionary or a church planter. (Romans 16:7) In a similar way we see Lydia help start the church in Philippi in Acts 16.

We affirm the Bible designates the office of elder to be held by men.

Distinction Between Ministry and Office

Ministry is what we all do when serving the mission of the church using our God-given spiritual gifts. Spiritual gifts were without reference to gender and are given by God to all Christians. (Romans 12:3--8, 1 Corinthians 12:3--11 & 28--30, Ephesians 4:7--13, and 1 Peter 4:7--11).

An Office is a scripturally defined role of governance formally affirmed by the church. The New Testament describes two offices: Deacons and Elders.

Deacon: Deacons assisted elders carrying out specific duties to advance the mission of the church. In the New Testament, both men and women are identified as deacons. (Acts 6, Romans 16)

Elder: The New Testament uses two words for elder: Elders (Presbuteros) and Bishops, or overseers (Episkopos). The elders are responsible for the spiritual direction and guidance of the church, and are said to be the husband of one wife (1 Timothy 3:1-5 and Titus 1:5-9)

When the qualifications for the office of deacon are presented in the New Testament, both men and women are included. When the qualifications for the office of elder are described in the Bible only men are mentioned. While the Apostle Paul affirmed and called women into significant leadership roles, he also limited the role of elder to men.