

Men and Women Serving Together at Grace

A Grace Community Church Position Paper



We Seek a Robust and Nuanced Biblical View

In today's cultural climate, where views regarding men and women are highly contested and complex, Christians need a robust *and* nuanced biblical understanding of gender. Some approaches have not been biblically robust, overlooking clear scriptural prohibitions against homosexuality. Other approaches have aimed to be robust but have not always been nuanced. For example, some might argue for women's absolute silence in the church by citing 1 Corinthians 14, but miss the fact that just three chapters earlier, Paul gives instructions for how both men and women should prophecy and pray appropriately in the church. This document is meant to outline how both genders are able to serve in the body of Christ at Grace Community Church. It reflects our understanding of biblical truth and God's design for us as Christ-followers.

God Created Both Men and Women in His Image and Equal Before Him

The first chapter of the Bible explicitly states that God created men *and* women to bear his image and have dominion over the earth: "*male and female he created them*" (Genesis 1:26-28). Genesis 2 accentuates the essential need for men and women to work together. When God saw that it was not good for Adam to tend the earth alone, he had Adam name all the animals. Among the numerous animals however, no suitable helper was found. Only when God made woman did Adam finally burst into joyful poetry saying, "*This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh,*" (2:23). When woman was made, she was like Adam, a fellow bearer of God's image, and one fit to help him tend the earth.

God Made Men and Women to be Different From Each Other

Though men and women share a "sameness" as fellow bearers of God's image, they are not identical. Throughout Genesis 1, God beautifully created pairs that, though different, function together as a united whole: the heavens and the earth, light and dark, land and sea, etc. God always saw that these united pairs were "good." When God made man and woman, he created two people who had the same value and worth, but who were different. Their differences were intended to work together for the sake of wholeness and goodness, and upon their creation, God saw that it was "very good." God clearly makes humans who are different from each other. For example, only women can be mothers. But he has designed those who are different to work together to accomplish purposes that they could not achieve alone.

God Calls and Gives Ministry Gifts to Both Men and Women

How should these differences impact the life of the church? At Grace, we believe that the office of elder is reserved for *qualified* men (1 Timothy 3:2; see The Office of Elder below). Yet we also believe that from the Old Testament into the New, a strong thread makes it clear that God calls both men and women to serve important roles among his people. In the Old Testament, God used both prophets and prophetesses (e.g., Miriam, Deborah, Huldah, etc.). In the book of Joel, God promised to pour out his Spirit on “all flesh,” adding that “...*your sons and your daughters shall prophesy....*” (2:28) As a result, we should not be surprised that Paul instructs both men and women how to appropriately prophesy in the church (1 Corinthians 11). Similarly, the woman of Proverbs 31 is not only praised for providing food and clothing for her household (Proverbs 31:15 and 31:21-22) but also for managing resources to buy a field and plant a vineyard (31:16). Likewise, in Romans 16, Paul commends Phoebe, a wealthy woman who helped him as a patron (and who most likely carried Paul's letter to the church in Rome). God not only saves sinners but calls and equips us for ministry and service, and it is up to the church to equip and empower those whom God has called, both men and women.

The Office of Elder

At Grace Community Church the office of elder is reserved for *qualified* men. We also use the terms pastor and elder interchangeably (all pastors are elders, and all elders are pastors). In 1 Timothy 3:1-7 when Paul lists the qualifications of an elder, he includes qualifications that indicate that only men were recognized as pastors in the early church. This and other examples in the Old and New Testaments lead us to believe this is the design of God for the good of the whole church. For further reading on this topic, see the resources section at the bottom of this document.

At Grace, elders are responsible for the overarching theology, shepherding, and vision of the local church. Elders have the burden of responsibility to faithfully care for God's people and give oversight to the church in ways that honor God. Elders are responsible to God to care for his people. Elders do the following:

- Provide the primary teaching from the pulpit
- Lead and shepherd the staff and lay leaders
- Officiate weddings and funerals
- Develop and guard the vision of the church
- Hold one another, and the church, accountable through shepherding and, when necessary, church discipline.

Non-Elder Roles

All roles held and responsibilities conducted by staff, volunteers, and the church body at-large are under the authority of the elders. As a guiding principle this means that if a role is not restricted to the office of elder, any *qualified* person can serve in that role, whether male or female.

Roles open to both genders include the following:

(NOTE: This is not an exhaustive list of all roles which can be occupied by any qualified person.)

- Ministry Director (a staff position)
- Leading musical worship from the stage during Sunday service
- Leading the church in prayer from the stage during Sunday service
- Sharing updates and other information from the stage during Sunday service
- Facilitating a Community Group discussion
- Teaching equipping classes
- Teaching in children's and youth ministries
- Serving on the following teams: communion, security, offering counting, usher
- Serving on committees such as the Financial Review Committee, Building Committee, etc.
- Serving as a biblical counselor

Additionally, for the roles below, our best practice is that a person of each gender serves together as a paired group:

- Premarital and marriage counseling
- Community group leadership
- Community group coaching

What is a Qualified Person?

A person who is deemed *qualified* for the role they seek meets the standards, skills, and processes set forth for that role. These processes and standards vary by the responsibilities of the role, and some roles have qualifications specifically stated in the Bible. For example, the process and standards for serving as an elder are different from serving as an usher.

Recommended Resources for Further Reading

- 1 Timothy 3:1-7
- Romans 16:1
- Ephesians 4:1-16
- Proverbs 31
- whitehorseinn.org/2020/01/is-there-a-place-for-priscilla-in-our-churches
- *Two Views on Women in Ministry*, ed. Gundry and Beck, with contributions by Belleville, Blomberg, Keener, and Schreiner
- *Women in Ministry: Four Views*, Clouse and Clouse