

The elders of Grace Bible Church have prayerfully studied and discussed the biblical principles and practical realities that should guide how men and women participate in worship and leadership at our church. One outcome of these discussions is the following paper. Note that this position paper does not delve into related issues such as gender roles in marriage. It is limited to the particular question: what roles of service and ministry at Grace Bible Church are available to women and men? Also, in our opinion, while this is a very important matter for each church and every Christian to evaluate, faithful churches and godly Christians may reach differing conclusions and still remain in fellowship with one another.

We believe that from the beginning, God's design for men and women has been for them to both equally and uniquely rule over His creation, working together to fulfill His purposes and to glorify His name (Genesis 1:26-28). This principle continues in the New Testament which describes the exalted position of believing women and men as co-heirs of the grace of Christ and co-recipients of the gifts of the Holy Spirit to be used to serve the church and to participate in fulfilling the Great Commission. All believing women and men are therefore called to Christ-like maturity and significant kingdom leadership. We also believe that God has reserved certain roles and functions within the church for mature, believing men, namely the role of elder and the function of teaching/preaching when the gathered church worships. Our position therefore most closely aligns with a "Complementarian" interpretation of scripture (men and women have different but complementary roles in the church and home) rather than an "Egalitarian" interpretation of scripture (men and women have identical and equal roles in all societal structures, including the church and home). Both positions validate the moral and spiritual equality of men and women.

The following is our attempt to explain these conclusions and apply them to our church family at Grace. Other godly, Bible-believing churches have studied the same evidence and arrived at different conclusions and applications. Therefore, we can respectfully disagree with other churches on this issue, and yet celebrate our shared commitment to the Gospel of Christ.

As always, if you have questions about this statement, please do not hesitate to ask one of your elders. We desire to foster an environment of open communication for all issues, including this one.

Biblical and theological principles that guided our discussion:

1. The Bible is God's Word and is our authoritative guide on all matters it addresses, including the roles of men and women in ministry (2 Timothy 3:16-17; 2 Peter 1:20-21).
2. We must be careful not to create "man-made laws" or boundaries that go beyond scriptural guidance (Matthew 15:8-9; Colossians 2:20-21).
3. Women and men are both equally made in the image of God (Gen 1:26-27), receive salvation on the same terms (John 3:16), and are included within the church as equals (Galatians 3:28-29).
4. The genders are not interchangeable; each gender has been given unique roles and responsibilities by God (Genesis 1:27; 2:18,23-25; Ephesians 5:21-33).

5. All believers are expected to participate in the prayer, worship and fellowship of the church (Acts 2:42-47). Women should not be separated or excluded from worship services. Note in particular that in the early church women were allowed to publicly participate in the church worship service according to 1 Corinthians 11:5.
6. All believers, male and female, are gifted by the Spirit and expected to use their spiritual gifts for the edification of other believers (Romans 12:4-8; 16:1-7; 1 Corinthians 12). In the early church, this included women praying and prophesying to the gathered church (1 Corinthians 11:1-16; possibly Acts 21:9) and women helping to teach men on an individual basis (Acts 18:26).
7. The local church should be led by a group of elders who are mature, believing men (1 Corinthians 11:3; Titus 1:6; 1 Timothy 3:2). These men are responsible for the oversight, protection, and doctrine of the local church (Acts 20:28-31; 1 Corinthians 14:29-38; Titus 1:9; 1 Peter 5:1-4).
8. Authoritative teaching in the gathered worship service is the responsibility of appropriately gifted men as directed by the elders (1 Timothy 2:12).
9. Everyone who serves, leads or teaches in the church, whether male or female, is to do so in a humble spirit that seeks the unity and edification of the church rather than self-promotion (Philippians 2:3-4; 1 Peter 5:5-6).

Summary of our discussion:

Based on the principles above, we strongly believe that it is both biblically permissible and strategically crucial for mature, believing women to serve in leadership roles alongside of mature, believing men at Grace Bible Church, including our Sunday morning worship services and other important ministries. In the context of the church worship service, this includes participating in the planning of a service, singing, praying, presenting announcements, sharing a testimony or application, as well as serving alongside of men in the distribution of the communion elements and collecting the offering. We desire for everyone to experience mature, godly women and men actively participating in Sunday morning worship services at Grace.

We are also committed to maintaining the biblical principles of male elder governance and male teaching and preaching. This reserves for mature, godly men the position of elder and the roles of teaching and preaching within the church service. Additionally, in our church, our worship leaders regularly instruct and exhort as an integral part of our worship. Therefore, we reserve the position of worship leader in the gathered church service for men, and we welcome women to help lead as members of the worship team.

Finally, when anyone serves, whether male or female, we expect all to do so with an attitude of humility and submission to the leadership of our church. Therefore we, the elders and staff, are responsible to evaluate not only whether the task itself is profitably fulfilled by one gender or the other, but also the attitude and maturity of each and every person that stands in front of the church or represents the church in a public manner.