

POSITION PAPER
MEN AND WOMEN IN CHURCH LEADERSHIP

PARADISE MENNONITE CHURCH

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INTRO

Contemporary developments in the area of male/female relationships are impacting both the Christian home and Church. Decreasing distinction between manhood and womanhood, the disintegration of sound marital relationships, the increasing acceptance of homosexual practice as normative, the insistence on equality while ignoring or downplaying Biblical submissiveness and authoritative order (with its accompanying departure from clear commitment to Biblical authority), clearly concern us. These observations raise the question if we may be more committed to accommodating our belief and practice to the spirit of this present age, than we are to the Holy Spirit of this age and of the Age to Come.

PREAMBLE

"We affirm our commitment to a high view of Scripture as the written Word of God. We believe that the Scriptures of both the Old and New Testaments have been inspired, i.e. "breathed out," by God and thus bear the character of the God Who breathed them." (Alliance of Mennonite Evangelical Congregations, Article VI, Section 1)

Furthermore, in the interpretation of "all scripture", we choose to regard each and every passage as "inerrant" (without error) as it appeared in its original form, interpreting them in their immediate and larger context in order to best understand the full will of God for us today.

MAN AND WOMAN

We believe man and woman, Adam and Eve, were created in the image of God, equal before God as persons, distinct in their manhood and womanhood, and that He intends for that distinction to continue today.

We believe man's role of headship was ordained of God as part of His original creative order, and continues to reflect His perfect will for today, both in the Christian home and the Church. (Gen. 2:18, 3:16)

MEN AND WOMEN IN MINISTRY

We desire to help both men and women realize their full ministry potential through a true understand and practice of their God-given roles. Many scriptures ply on this question, most of which cannot be exhaustively processed in this document. We believe one of the most crucial passages to come to terms with is the "prohibition" passage in 1 Timothy 2: 12-14.

WHAT THE PASSAGE SAYS

Women are not permitted to *teach* or to *exercise authority* over men. It must be said that in the pure sense, *teaching* is more than just posing questions or imparting information. Teaching, in the full Biblical context, is an authoritative and didactic explaining of Scriptural Truth. It anticipates that the learner will accept and comply with the truth being expounded and that the teacher bears an authority and responsibility to correct those who disagree or disregard it. Consequently, this function, being a governing function, is reserved for men, when the person or group needing correction includes men.

It is reserved for men because of the two reasons cited: 1) man was created first, 2) the woman was deceived, not the man. Both are historical events, not cultural perspectives. The consequence of the first event is further borne out by passages such as 1 Cor. 11:3-8 where headship clearly is based in the creative origin and order, the woman proceeding from and being preceded by the man. The rationale is the same as that in which the Son proceeds from the Father and consequently is subject to while equal with the Father, maintaining a divine and appropriate order within the Trinity itself. (Eph. 5:22-23)

The admonition to “Be silent” and “learn in quietness and full submission” further expands on the central statement, prescribing in more specific terms proper behavior for women with reference to men. That this silence simply denotes a quiet demeanor, is evident in passages where the word is used elsewhere such as Acts 22:2 and II Thes. 3:12.

WHAT THE PASSAGE DOES NOT SAY

- That teaching by women is ruled out in every setting. Women can and must exercise directive authority in appropriate settings.
- That women may not use their voices in worship and life of the congregation. Examples abound showing women’s involvement in congregational life in the early church. Women clearly receive, like men, spiritual gifts which are always intended for the edification of the body of Christ.
- That any or every man is automatically qualified to exercise teaching authority simply because he is male. Qualifications are specifically narrow for Elders (1 Timothy 3), teaching and ruling being prominent and required qualities.
- That only women who usurp authority should not be permitted to teach/exercise authority. This passage was not included by Paul here simply to combat possible false teaching, a subject he covers elsewhere.

WHERE DOES THE PASSAGE FOCUS?

It seems apparent that this passage expressly specifies men for the office of Elder or Pastor-Teacher because the specified duties of the office require authoritative teaching and the application & implementation of that teaching. These roles, according to the Scriptures, are reserved for men who are qualified and chosen to exercise them in the context of the church.

ARE THERE OTHER PRESCRIBED CRITERIA FOR MINISTRY, BY WOMEN OR MEN?

Beyond this, the scriptures apparently spell out no specific prohibitions. We are left therefore, to apply the general principles and tenor of passages which reflect on such subjects as order, authority, submission, and expediency. Consideration of women serving as Sunday School Superintendents, Song Leaders, Teaching or Team-teaching of men or of mixed youth or adult classes, must be measured by what appears to be appropriate to these scriptural passages and to what is generally acceptable within a given congregation. As with the spirit of New Testament decisions, (“it seemed good to us and to the Holy Spirit”), we will need to continue to find our way in harmony with our primary commitment to obedience to the explicit Word of God.

We affirm the scriptural equality of men and women in their relationship to Christ (Gal. 3:28) and believe that we need to avoid any “sexist” or demeaning connotations on both sides with regard to our conversation and practice.

We, on the other hand, affirm the clear scriptural distinctions between the sexes and respect and applaud the uniqueness formed by God in the male and female counterparts of His crowning creation.

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