

## Women, Men, and Gospel Ministry

### A Position Paper of West Shore Evangelical Free Church

#### **Purpose & Organization**

The purpose of this paper is to establish West Shore Evangelical Free Church's understanding of God's design of men and women and the resulting implications that design has for ministry in the local church. For the sake of simplicity and clarity we have divided it into three parts. In the first, we state the theological convictions which guide our thinking. In the second, our aim is to clarify how those convictions are worked out in ministry at WSEFC. The third section consists of an examination of several important biblical texts which serve as the foundation of our theological convictions and practices.

#### **Our Guiding Theological Convictions**

We believe that the center of human history is the redemptive narrative of God, climaxing in the death and resurrection of His Son Jesus and resolving in His second coming which is revealed in the Bible. Underlying this redemptive narrative is the foundational truth that God desires to make Himself known to human beings for His glory and our good. He has done this self-revealing work in many and varied ways but significant among them is God's choice to make people in His image and to make us male and female as a part of expressing that image. Men and Women are distinct from one another, by God's design, as a way of revealing different aspects of His nature.

We believe that when God created humanity as male and female, He displayed numerous aspects of His being but chief among them is His unity within diversity. He is one God in three Persons; each person co-equal in divine nature but distinct in role. As an expression of this reality, God has made women and men co-equal in value but distinct in role as divine image bearers.

Our co-equality is expressed and experienced in that we are equally made in God's image, equally loved by Him, equally the recipients of His reconciling and sanctifying work, equally invited into personal fellowship with Him, equally the recipients of the Spirit, equally called into gospel work and are all gifted and equipped for ministry.

Our distinction in role is expressed and experienced through male headship in the home and the church and women's submission to that headship. In the home, husbands are to be the head of their wives and wives are to submit to their husbands. Unmarried women have no call to submit to the headship of men generally but only to those men whom God establishes in governing authority in their local church. (This same submission to church leaders is expected of men in the church, whether single or married). Through this submission women display the submission of Jesus to the Father in His earthly life. Men display the headship of Christ over His Church through sacrificial leadership, love and service to their wives. Those men whom God appoints as governing authorities in the local church express the headship of the Father over the Son through this same kind of sacrificial leadership, love and service.

While we acknowledge that some expressions of masculinity and femininity differ across time and from one culture to the next, and some are unhelpful stereotypes not rooted in the truth of Scripture, we do not believe these culturally limited or unhelpful expressions invalidate the differences God intended in men and women or the roles He intends us to fill as an expression of those differences. Our understanding and practice of masculinity and femininity are not inconsequential but crucial to

the fulfillment of God's redemptive work in the world. We are most effective in gospel ministry and experience fullest joy when we delight in and practice this design of God together.

In our practice at West Shore Evangelical Free Church, it is our aim to glorify God by expressing co-equality and distinction of role for men and women. We believe it is important for churches to have practices which express both of these things, but recognize there will be variations in practice between churches faithfully seeking to serve God. In addition, while we believe these practices are right and good, we acknowledge that faithful followers of Christ may differ from our stance on these issues. As a result, we do not withhold membership at WSEFC from those who disagree but are willing to worship and serve at WSEFC within the following set of "Convictions in Practice" in a way that promotes unity within the body.

### **Convictions in Practice**

#### **Leadership & Governance:**

- **We reserve the role of elder for biblically qualified men.**  
The work of elders is to govern and guard the doctrine of the church. We believe the Scriptures make it clear that this work is reserved for men. As a result, any staff position which serves on the elder board will also be reserved for men.
- **Women and men may hold other leadership roles on staff or as volunteers in ministry.**  
We believe that the prohibitions against women leading men are best understood as a restriction of women taking up a governing role of the body, which we express through eldership, but do not prohibit women from leading men in other contexts. This includes women serving in non-Pastor Ministerial Staff positions and lay leadership roles in the church.

#### **Preaching & Teaching:**

- **We reserve the role of the primary teacher when the whole church is gathered (also referred to as "the pulpit" or "preaching) to elder-qualified men.**  
We believe the Bible calls for men who are Elders or Pastors to serve as those who provide authoritative doctrinal teaching in the church, therefore, when the whole church comes together for worship, we reserve the teaching ministry of the pulpit for men who are Elders or Pastors. We believe this is an appropriate and good expression of male headship because of the doctrinal authority represented by the context of the pulpit.
- **We expect and encourage women to minister to the whole body through other forms of ministry.**  
When the whole church comes together for worship, we do not believe the prohibition against women serving in an authoritative doctrinal teaching role prevents women from offering other types of ministries such as prayer, leading musical worship, encouragement, serving communion and Spirit-led speech.
- **We expect and encourage women to teach in other contexts.**  
We do not believe that the positions stated in this paper that prohibit women from serving in an authoritative doctrinal teaching role when the whole church comes together for worship restrict all teaching of men by women. Therefore, we believe it is appropriate and good to demonstrate the principle of male headship by reserving the ministry of the pulpit to men who

are Elders or Pastors, and it is also appropriate and good to demonstrate the co-equality of women and men by having women teach in other contexts.

### **Role of Pastor:**

- **We reserve the role of pastor for elder-qualified men.**  
We affirm that God gives shepherding gifts to both men and women and we desire to see both use these gifts for His glory. We also see a connection in the Scriptures between the role of pastor and elder. Therefore, we believe it is appropriate and good to demonstrate the principle of male headship by reserving the role of pastor for elder-qualified men.
- The role of pastor includes the following areas of authority and responsibility that are unique to the role (and are not permitted in any other WSEFC staff role or position):
  - Authoritative doctrinal teaching when the whole church comes together to worship.
  - Officiation of WSEFC-related weddings and funerals.
  - Determination of whether divorce and/or remarriage is permissible as detailed in *WSEFC's Marriage, Divorce and Remarriage Policy*.

### **Officiation of Weddings & Funerals:**

- **We reserve the officiation of weddings and funerals for elder-qualified men.**  
Since authoritative doctrinal teaching is an essential component of wedding and funeral ceremonies, we reserve the officiation of WSEFC-related weddings and funerals to elder-qualified men (including current and former WSEFC elders and pastors).

### **Discussion of Pertinent Biblical Texts**

Our discussion of the following texts is not intended to be a full examination of each but an explanation of how they inform our understanding of the partnership of women and men in gospel ministry.

#### **Genesis 1-3**

These chapters are important to our discussion because God's work in the creation of men and women communicates aspects of His intent for our shared gospel work. It is to these chapters which several New Testament texts refer in making their argument for the roles of men and women in marriage and the church. Three sections in Genesis 1-3 deserve special attention.

The first is chapter 1 verses 26-28. Here we are told that God determined to create humans in His image, and verse 27 specifically emphasizes men and women alike bear God's image and that it takes both men and women to display that nature in the way He intended. From these words, we derive our understanding of the co-equality of women and men before God as a representative display of the co-equality of the members of the godhead.

Our text then goes further than a statement about co-equality in being. In verse 28 God gives human beings a mandate to be fruitful and multiply and exercise dominion over the creation because they are His image bearers. What we can learn from this is that men and women together are to exercise dominion over the creation. In fact, we need each other to do so effectively, as is implied by the command to be fruitful and multiply. Men and women must partner together to obey God's command to rule His creation, and what is more, if God has called men to headship in the church and home this

headship cannot look like male domination of women. It can always and only be legitimate when it expresses careful and sacrificial leadership of women as co-equal image bearers of God.

The next section of our text which deserves attention is chapter 2 verses 7 and 18-25. Here we find a more detailed description of the creation of man and woman. In it, we see that the man was made first and then the woman from man as a perfectly suited partner and helper to him. Later, biblical authors will tell us that God's order of creation here is meaningful and intended to convey a distinction in role for men and women (1 Timothy 2:13-14, 1 Corinthians 11:7-9). Namely that men are intended by God to be the head of their wives and the head of His church. We also see the unique fit of women and men in this text. They are distinct from one another and that uniqueness is complementary, meaning that they are uniquely suited for close relationship and partnership with one another because they are not the same. While the context of this passage is marriage, where we find ourselves better able to serve the Lord because of our different designs, this passage also teaches us that men and women are better in service together, because of our different designs, broadly, not just within marriage. Finally, when we put this section of Genesis 1-3 together with the previous one discussed, we see that in God's economy there is no connection between role and worth. It is human thinking to believe the leader of a group has greater value than any of its other members. God ascribes no such connection between the role we play and the value we possess. By making clear that women and men are equally made in His image and therefore equally valuable, but prescribing different roles to each, God shows us that our value and our role are not related to one another. Lastly, it is important to recognize that these statements about co-equality and distinction in role were given before sin entered the world. That implies that both the equal value we possess and the distinct roles we fill are by God's design, not something brought about by the presence of sin in the world.

The last section of these chapters that needs attention is the entirety of chapter 3. Here we find the aforementioned entrance of sin into the world and a description of its' devastating consequences. In the first seven verses, we are told about Satan's deception of Eve and then Adam's sin in disobeying God and failing to lead his wife. The New Testament authors point to the reversal of role between the man and the woman as part of what enabled sin to come into the world (1 Timothy 2:11-14). Adam and Eve's failure to take up the roles God had prescribed for them as husband and wife led them to sin.

Verses 8-24 record the consequences of our rebellion against God. In them we learn that our ability to trust and complement one another as men and women has been compromised by sin. Adam blames Eve rather than taking responsibility for his own failure of leadership. Eve will now not be content to come under her husband's headship but will chafe under it. That which God called good has been deeply fractured by sin. As significant as this disruption of the relational fabric between men and women is, it is also telling that God does not overturn His intention in the creation order as a result. We could argue that sin has so damaged the ability of men and women to take up their roles of head and helper that the roles themselves need to be dismissed. Yet God does not do this. The effects of sin on our relationships with one another will cause men to seek to dominate or passively abdicate their leadership responsibility towards women rather than lead sacrificially. In the same way those effects cause women to undermine men rather than submit in trust to them, yet God's intention in the created order stands and thereby the roles prescribed by that created order stand as well.

We can summarize our conclusions as it relates to women, men and gospel ministry from Genesis 1-3 as follows: God's work in creation shows us women and men are both made in His image and equally valuable to Him. Men and women are both called to rule over creation and need each other to do so

well. Through the lens of the New Testament, we see that the order and way in which God made men and women conveyed His intent that men display His nature through headship and women through submission in the home and the church. Sin has made the work and the roles God has given us difficult but no less important or valid.

### **I Timothy 2:8-16**

Our discussion of this passage must begin with an understanding of its context. Paul writes to Timothy with an eye towards evangelism, which is made evident from the content of verses 1-7. He wants the people of the church at Ephesus to live in a godly way so that others might believe the gospel of Christ. His instructions to men and women about what is godly behavior are given so that people might see that behavior and believe in Jesus. This context helps us understand that the instructions given here are not merely for the sake of appearances or a bowing to cultural norms of the day but rather that living in God's design for us is critical to the fulfillment of God's mission in the world. Specifically, His design of us as male or female.

Verses 8-10 are where Paul begins to lay out his expectations for the behavior of godly men and women. He begins this section with an admonition to men to pray rather than fight. He quickly follows with instructions for women to be more concerned with modesty and good works than with an ornamented outward appearance. The fact that Paul addresses temptations for men and women which we still recognize today as particularly pertinent to each is our first hint that Paul is addressing not just a specific problem in Ephesus but one which is more universal in nature. Our second, more direct clue is that Paul uses the phrase "in every place" in verse 8 telling us that the stated principles apply across contexts just as they apply across time.

The final, and most important, piece of evidence that Paul teaches, something which is applicable across time and context, is his appeal back to Genesis 1-3 in verses 13 and 14. There he appeals to the order in which men and women were created and the reversal of that intended order when Eve, and not Adam, assumed relational headship, necessitating the commands of verses 11-12. This appeal to God's intention in creation tells us that these instructions are not culturally limited but apply today.

This brings us to the two commands Paul gives in verse 12. The first is that women not teach men, and the second that they not hold authority over men. We do not find these to be absolute prohibitions against women teaching or leading men in any context but a restriction against women teaching as the authoritative voice on historical orthodox doctrine in the context of the gathered church and exercising governing authority in the church. There are several reasons we think this is the best understanding of teaching and holding authority in this text. The first is that this is the typical way the New Testament uses the term teaching. It is most frequently understood to refer to the handing down of the historical doctrine of the church in a way that communicates authority to verify it as true. What is more, we see places like Acts 18:26 where a woman (Priscilla) gives instruction to a man (Apollos) which clearly seems to be of a doctrinal nature. It would seem the reason this is not a violation of the male headship Paul calls for here is that this instruction, while theological, does not put Priscilla in the position of verifying doctrine as true or false, and part of the reason it does not put her in this position is that her teaching is not done where the whole church is gathered. Connected with this understanding of teaching, we see the kind of authority being spoken of here as governing authority. That is the authority to have the final say as it relates to God's people in the local church. That authority is reserved for the men God calls to shepherd the church as elders. Again, none of these

restrictions imply lesser ability, giftedness or wisdom in women. God has put them in place to display His nature through two co-equal beings who function in different roles.

Some have argued that the only restriction in this passage is that women not teach men in a domineering way (understanding the term for “to exercise authority” as “to dominate”). This, of course, would mean there is no restriction regarding either the context in which women may teach or what authority positions they may hold (at least not in this passage). We find this understanding of the text unconvincing for numerous reasons. The first is that, while not impossible, it seems grammatically more likely that there are two prohibitions here not just one. The second is that the command for women to learn submissively in verse 11 and to remain quiet at the end of verse 12 don't make any sense if the restriction is only that they not teach in a domineering way. Third, while it is possible that the reference to the creation order in verses 13 and 14 is simply there to remind women who were thinking too highly of themselves that they were not better than men, this seems like a stretch. It seems far more likely that Paul is offering a reason why men are intended by God to serve as the head of the church and to hold authority over doctrine and direction. Finally, it seems unlikely that women would be the only ones teaching in this fashion. We would expect to see men included in this sort of instruction if Paul was intending to guide how people taught rather than who should teach.

Having examined the text, we can state our conclusions this way: Paul teaches us here that God reserves certain teaching and governing roles in the church for men as a way of establishing different roles among co-equal people to display His nature. This does not preclude women from leading and teaching in all contexts but from exercising final governing authority and final authority on matters of doctrine.

### **I Corinthians 14:33b-40**

Again, let's begin with context. In this chapter, Paul is giving instruction for the use of spiritual gifts, specifically prophecy and tongues, when the church gathers for worship. Apparently, there was disorder and competition in the Corinthian's worship and Paul points them to an orderly and deferential worship which better honors God.

In this context, Paul offers an injunction that women should be silent when the church comes together. This begs the question, what does he mean by silence? Is this an absolute prohibition which should still be applied today? Was it an absolute prohibition but addressing a situation unique to the Corinthian church which we no longer need apply? We think the answer is no to the latter two questions.

As it relates to this instruction only being for the Corinthian church and no longer applying today, we can certainly recognize that this was a church with numerous troubles. Some of these are addressed in this letter and, while we draw principles for our own lives and practice from them, we find the specific instructions to be unique to the cultural setting of the Corinthian's place and time. (The instruction for women to wear head coverings in Chapter 11 serves as an example, which will be addressed in our final text for examination). Having acknowledged that, there is a simple reason we think the instructions in I Corinthians 14:33b-40 extend beyond the Corinthians to all churches: the words of verse 33b. Paul begins this paragraph by stating that what he is about to say is the practice in all the churches of the saints. If this is the case, then the instructions cannot be given simply to resolve an issue in Corinth. Rather, they represent a principle to be applied in all churches, including ours.

But what about our first question? If the command is not one that can be limited to the Corinthian context then should we see it as an absolute prohibition of women speaking when the church gathers which still applies today? Again, we don't find this to be the meaning here. The first reason is that Paul both assumes and affirms that women are praying and prophesying when the church comes together in chapter 11. If this is the case, the call for silence cannot be absolute. It must be a certain kind of speaking that is prohibited, and to understand what that kind of speaking is we are best served to look to the immediate context of these verses. We think it is most likely that Paul is prohibiting women from speaking as those who discern and decide whether a prophecy is from God. This would be to exercise a kind of authority reserved for elders which God has prescribed as a role for men. While we can't say with certainty that this is the kind of speech being limited, it makes the most sense of the options in light of the immediate context. The passage is about orderly worship where prophecy and tongues were being brought forward. We are told in verse 32 that prophecy needed to be judged to discern if it was from the Lord. Finally, Paul's allusion to women being in submission takes us back to God's design for male headship in the home and church which implies that whatever speaking was being done was disregarding this reality. Therefore, we believe that the injunction against women speaking cannot be absolute in light of I Corinthians 11. We equally believe the injunction cannot be dismissed as unique to the Corinthians' time and place.

In addition to what we see in verses 33b-34, we should also note that verse 35 makes a connection between male headship in the home and in the church. Along with the call for submission in verse 34, this strengthens the argument that what Paul is addressing here is not simple speech but a type of speech that inappropriately exercises authority. This is further reinforced by the strong indictment that the speech being uttered is shameful.

In conclusion, we believe I Corinthians 14:33b-40 does not restrict women from speaking in church but rather that there is a certain kind of authority, which we would call governing authority, which is reserved for men in the church. Both women and men should embrace God's role design as a way of displaying His own nature and for our own good and joy.

### **I Corinthians 11:2-16**

Our next text for examination is I Corinthians 11:2-16, where we find Paul again arguing for male headship in the home and church by addressing the cultural issue of women wearing head coverings while praying or prophesying in the gathered body.

After a brief but warm commendation in verse 2, we come to one of the key verses for understanding the meaning of this passage in verse 3. Here Paul lays the foundation for why, in the Corinthian cultural context, women should wear head coverings. Namely they are a display of the distinction in role God intends in the home and the church to display His nature (as we have seen in our other passages). This becomes apparent by the fact that Paul places the statement that husbands are the head of their wives in between the truths that Christ is the head of men and God is the head of Christ. We learn two important things from this order. First, when men operate as the heads in the home and the church, they must always remember they are under Christ's authority. Second, submission to authority does not convey less value between two people, nor is it something to be avoided. If Christ submits to the Father, and the two are co-equal, then submission cannot inherently indicate lesser worth.

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Some have suggested that verse 3 does not intend to convey a call to authoritative headship and submission but to support and empowerment. One possible definition for the word head (*kephale*) is supply or support. If that is the case, this verse could be conveying not an expectation that women wear a head covering as an indicator of submission to authority, but that women draw their support from husbands in a culture where women were less able to provide for themselves. There are a few reasons we find this interpretation to be unconvincing. The first is that the verses that follow fit far better with an understanding of head meaning a type of authority here rather than supply. The shame and dishonor language of verses 4-6 make much more sense if the issue at hand is submission, rather than acknowledging someone who is your supply. Second, verse 10 identifies head coverings as a symbol of being under authority for the women in the church. Third, Paul would most readily draw on the Old Testament for his understanding of headship and there we find the term head is used almost exclusively to convey authority, not supply. Finally, Paul points to the order of creation in verses 9 and 10 as a reason why women should cover their head. Namely, that men were created first and women from men, and in this order God intended to convey a distinction in role between the two. It is hard to see how this appeal squares with an understanding of head as supply rather than authority. For these reasons we think the best understanding of head in this passage is authority rather than supply.

While the discussion of headship and head coverings do clearly teach us the distinction in role God intends for men and women, we should also note the ways this passage speaks to the co-equality of women and men. First, we are told that women are praying and prophesying when the church comes together. This clearly implies strong gifting, calling and spiritual maturity which is used for the benefit of the entire body. Second, Paul makes sure to point out that men and women are dependent on one another. Men may have been made first, but in verses 11 and 12, Paul points out that men now come from women and neither of us are independent from one another. Rather than advocate for male headship alone, he clearly communicates a vision for male/female relationships in the body that, while not precluding headship, involves mutuality, care and service for one another.

The last question that remains for us to answer is whether women should still wear head coverings while ministering in the church today. We would answer no, seeing head coverings as a culturally important way to express the principle of male headship in the home and church in that day but not in ours. Our reason for taking this approach is that this passage makes clear that male headship is rooted in the creation order and therefore is a principle which applies across time and cultures. Hair styles and dress, however, change from culture to culture. While we do see a mandate here that men and women should present an outward appearance which communicates gladness for their God-given gender in a way appropriate to their cultural context, we do not see the specific command for head coverings as one which makes sense across different cultures.

In conclusion, I Corinthians 11:2-16 emphasizes the co-equality of men and women as ministers of the gospel and in relationship with one another, while also calling for a distinction in role for men and women where men serve as the head of the home and the local church.

### **The Title “Pastor”**

We reserve the title “pastor” for elder-qualified men for two reasons. The first is the connection we see in Scripture between the role of pastor and elder. The second is the common understanding of the pastoral role in our modern context.



The Greek term for pastor in the Bible is *poimen*. It occurs 18 times in the New Testament and refers to someone who is a shepherd. Because of this term's limited use, we cannot say definitively that pastor and elder are inextricably tied together. (Many of the New Testament's uses of this term are references to those who held the occupation of shepherd.) We respect those who do not see a strong connection between the roles of elder and pastor and, therefore, choose to apply the term more broadly than we do. That said, we do think the evidence points in the direction of linking the two roles. The expectation of Scripture is that elders are those who do the work of shepherding/pastoring. As we saw above, passages like I Timothy 2:8-16 (as well as I Timothy 3:1-7 and Titus 1:5-9 where the qualifications for elders are laid out) make it clear that the role of elder is one God has reserved for men in the local church, and if the role of elder is connected to that of pastor, it is then appropriate and good to reserve that title for elder-qualified men.

Three texts are worth noting here related to the connection between pastor and elder. The first is Ephesians 4:11. In this verse Paul lists a number of roles in the church that exist to build up the body. The grammatical construction of the verse suggests a close connection between the last two roles, pastor and teacher. Many scholars suggest the grammar calls for the two roles to be translated as one (i.e. pastor-teacher, rather than pastor and teacher). Whichever is correct, the roles are clearly linked, and given the call in Scripture for elders to be those men who govern and hold responsibility for imparting sound doctrine, it is likely Paul has in mind elders when he uses the terms pastor and teacher.

The second passage to make note of is I Peter 5:2. Here Peter is addressing elders and uses the verbal form of the word for pastor (*poimaino*) to describe what they should be doing. As elders these men are called to pastor or shepherd God's people. This represents a direct tie between the role of pastor and elder.

Our final section of text to make note of is Acts 20:17, 28. In this chapter, Paul has called together the elders from the church at Ephesus for prayer, fellowship and instruction. In the midst of those instructions, Paul tells these elders that they are to be attentive to their own behavior and to that of their flock, because they are overseers. The word for flock here is a noun (*poimnion*) related to our original noun for pastor (*poimen*). The word overseer is synonymous with elder. These elders are being instructed to pastor/shepherd a flock precisely because they are elders.

In addition to the connection between the role of pastor and elder that cause us to reserve the title pastor for elder-qualified men, we also give consideration to the common understanding of this title in our modern context. While people's perceptions do not weigh equally with the authority of Scripture in our decision making, we do recognize the necessity of understanding what the words we use communicate to others. In our common vernacular, the term pastor is understood, not just to mean a person who cares for and guides others, but one who exercises authority in a church. We believe this further weighs in favor of reserving the title pastor for elder-qualified men.

### **Concluding Remarks**

As stated at the outset, the purpose of this paper is to establish West Shore Evangelical Free Church's understanding of God's design of men and women and the implications and applications of that



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design for ministry at WSEFC. It is by no means an exhaustive discussion of the subject and we hope it invites you into further dialogue and theological reflection. What is more, we hope everything written here clearly conveys our conviction that God has determined to display His own nature through the creation of humans as male and female, that this intention led Him to create beings co-equal in value but distinct in role and that He is glorified and we are filled with joy and fullness when we live out His design.

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