



## **Position Paper – Pursuing Men and Women for Ministry at Fairfax Bible Church**

### **I. Introduction**

- a. We believe God's grace and beauty are reflected in his creation and salvation of all humanity—male and female. His church is meant to be the place where his redeeming work is demonstrated most powerfully and vividly. Many perspectives related to the roles and functions of men and women in the church have been proposed by those inside and outside the church. We desire to clarify what we believe with great conviction and compassion.
- b. We believe God has clearly revealed his intention for us in his perfect Word, the Bible, to teach us and equip us to fulfill his mission in this world. From its opening pages, the Bible teaches us that humanity was created in God's image. God determined that his image would be reflected in two distinct, yet complementary sexes—male and female.<sup>1</sup> We joyfully embrace God's good design of human sexual identity since he intends humans to flourish generally, and, more specifically, his design is essential for the church to effectively accomplish its mission.
- c. We do not presume that we have exhaustively treated the subject of the roles and functions of men and women in the church. However, we hope this document will provide clarity for our spiritual family at Fairfax Bible Church to be effective in our mission together. Our goal is not to list merely what is permissible for men and women in the church. Rather, we greatly desire to discover, embrace, and pursue God's design for men and women in order to enjoy greater fruitfulness for his kingdom.

### **II. Biblical Theological Foundation**

- a. God's original creation of human identity is good, and both male and female together bear the image of God.
  - i. God created humanity to bear his image—one image of God reflected in two distinct, yet complementary sexes. (Gen. 1:26–27)
  - ii. God created the first man, Adam, and then created the first woman, Eve, from him. The woman was created as the “helper fit”<sup>2</sup> for the man so they

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<sup>1</sup>“Complementarianism is the belief that God made men and women equal and distinctive: equal in value and dignity, and distinctive in certain responsibilities and roles.” Beynon, Graham; Tooher, Jane. *Embracing Complementarianism: Turning Biblical Convictions into Positive Church Culture* (p. 4). The Good Book Company. Kindle Edition.

<sup>2</sup> The phrase *helper fit* in Genesis 2:18, 20 suggests that the man and woman are mirrored in a sense, but distinct in a complementary way since one cannot accomplish God's purposes without the other. The Hebrew word for *helper* points to the man's need for woman in order to effectively accomplish God's purposes for humanity. It does not convey inferiority since the same word is used of God himself as the “Helper” to Israel (Cf. Gen. 2:18, 20; Ps.

may govern creation together. They were created as complementary companions—equal in value and dignity, yet correspondingly distinct to one another to accomplish God’s purposes for humanity. (Gen. 2:18–23)

- b. The corporate fall of humanity into sin is at the root of all our departures from God’s intended design for humanity. This departure is manifested in many forms that significantly impact the relationships between men and women (e.g., abuse, sexual immorality, misogyny, radical feminism, etc.).<sup>3</sup> (Gen. 3:16–19; Rom. 1:18–32)
- c. Through the gospel, God has redeemed and is renewing humanity in the church. All who are in Christ—male and female—have equal standing and privilege before God, and have been set free from bondage to sin to pursue God’s good design in his new creation. (2 Cor. 5:17; Gal. 3:28–29)

### III. Roles and Functions of Men and Women in the Church

- a. The Bible encourages and assumes that both believing men and women will be fully involved in the ministry of the church, except for serving in the office of elder.
  - i. Women had significant impacts on the growth and development of the early church. (e.g., Acts 18:26; Rom. 16:1–16; Phil. 4:2–3; 2 Tim. 1:5)
  - ii. Paul described culturally appropriate ways for both men and women to pray and prophesy publicly in early church gatherings, indicating that women had a vocal role in that space. (1 Cor. 11:4–5)
  - iii. All believers—men and women—are called to teach the Word of God to one another. (Col. 3:16)
  - iv. Men and women each have particular responsibilities in the church to help those of the same gender grow in their knowledge, love, and obedience to Jesus Christ in gender-specific ways and within their families. (Tit. 2:1–6)
- b. God calls qualified men to be elders (also referred to as pastors or overseers) in the church. Elders are to lead through sacrificial service and by Christlike example as they fulfill the specific responsibilities assigned to the office.
  - i. Elders are qualified by their character, ability, and sex—being male. (1 Tim. 3:1–7; Tit. 1:5–9)<sup>4</sup>
  - ii. Elders are called to fulfill specific functions in the church.

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115:9–11). The word for *fit* conveys the meanings of “in front of,” “that which is opposite to,” and “corresponding to” in the sense that two things stand before each other as corresponding counterparts.

<sup>3</sup> The fall of humanity into sin did not create or force the distinctions of roles between men and women. Sin is at the root of *the distortions and abuses* of the distinctions, but it is not the cause of the distinctions themselves.

<sup>4</sup> We believe 1 Timothy 3:1–7 and Titus 1:5–9 prescribe elders to be male and that the rest of the New Testament describes elders as male only. We believe the gender qualification for elders in the Bible is timeless and universal since Paul roots it in God’s order of creation (Cf. 1 Tim. 2:13).

We also believe Paul is assuming that the men whom Timothy and Titus would be considering for eldership would have been married according to the cultural norms at the time of his writing, and thus he demands that they be faithful to their wives. We do not believe Paul is explicitly prescribing that an elder must be married, since this would be inconsistent with Paul’s perspective on singleness as an advantage for undistracted devotion to the Lord (1 Cor. 7:25–40). We also find it inconsistent that Paul would hypothetically disqualify the Lord Jesus and himself—both single men—from consideration for this role by prescribing marriage as an elder qualification.

1. Elders are called to be the primary leaders of the church. (Acts 20:28; 1 Pet. 5:1–3)
2. Elders are called to equip members of the church for the work of ministry. Therefore, elders should invite and encourage all members—men and women—to use their wisdom, talents, and spiritual gifts in significant ways for the overall health and growth of the church. (Eph. 4:11–12)
3. The authoritative teaching of God’s Word during corporate worship gatherings is a function of elders as an expression of their biblically assigned responsibility to lead the church. Therefore, preaching and teaching the Word of God during corporate worship gatherings should be performed by elder quality men only. (1 Tim. 2:11–12; 5:17; 2 Tim. 4:1–2)<sup>5,6</sup>
  - iii. All members of the church, regardless of gender, are commanded to follow the biblically faithful leadership of the elders so that elders may lead with joy and the whole church would benefit. (Heb. 13:17)
- c. God calls qualified men and women to serve as deacons in the church.<sup>7,8</sup> (Rom. 16:1–2; 1 Tim. 3:8–13)<sup>9</sup>

#### IV. Affirmations and Denials<sup>10</sup>

- a. We affirm that both men and women have been created in the image of God and are entitled to the privileges and held accountable to the responsibilities that come with reflecting our Creator in the family, the church, and the world.
- b. We deny the belief that the created order dictates that all women are inherently subject to the authority of all men. Furthermore, we deny that biblical submission is indicative of subordination or inequality. Jesus Christ’s willing

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<sup>5</sup> On 1 Timothy 2:12, Andreas Köstenberger writes, “Such authoritative teaching is typically a function of the elders/overseers (1 Tim. 3:2; 5:17), and it is likely that Paul is thinking of them here. Thus, women are proscribed from functioning as pastors/elders/overseers, but...this verse also prohibits them from the public and authoritative teaching of men. Working this out in practice doesn’t mean that women are always prohibited from addressing a mixed audience of men and women. There are certainly contexts where this is appropriate. Women should not, however, ever serve as pastors and elders.” Andreas J. Köstenberger and Thomas R. Schreiner, ed., *Women in the Church: An Interpretation and Application of 1 Timothy 2:9–15* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2016), 192–193.

<sup>6</sup> For another helpful treatment of the meaning and application of 1 Timothy 2:11–12, see: Douglas Moo, “What Does It Mean Not to Teach or Have Authority Over Men? 1 Timothy 2:11–15,” in *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood: A Response to Evangelical Feminism*, ed. John Piper and Wayne Grudem (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2021), 233–252.

<sup>7</sup> For a helpful treatment of the role of women in diaconal roles, see: Sharon James, *God’s Design for Women in an Age of Gender Confusion* (Darlington, CO: Evangelical Press, 2019), 198–204.

<sup>8</sup> Currently, Fairfax Bible Church does not have officially designated deacons. However, many of our leaders serve in capacities that fit well with the role of deacons in the New Testament. We joyfully embrace and affirm men and women who meet the character qualifications of 1 Timothy 3:8–13 to serve in these functionally diaconal roles.

<sup>9</sup> The NIV (2011) and NASB (95) translate γυναικας (*gunaikas*) in 1 Timothy 3:11 as “women” rather than “their wives” (Cf. ESV, NKJV). We believe the translation of γυναικας as “women” is more accurate and, therefore, we believe this verse is referring to women deacons.

<sup>10</sup> Many of the listed affirmations and denials were inspired by, and language taken from, *The Role of Women at The Village Church*: [https://www.thevillagechurch.net/content/externalsite/about/The%20Role%20of%20Women\\_Condensed%20Version.pdf](https://www.thevillagechurch.net/content/externalsite/about/The%20Role%20of%20Women_Condensed%20Version.pdf).

submission to God the Father is the prime example of biblical submission within equality.

- c. We affirm that both men and women are necessary for the health and effectiveness of the ministry of the church and that brotherly/sisterly partnership is vital for the church to flourish.
- d. We deny any theological position that leads to the subjugation, abuse, or neglect of any man or woman.
- e. We affirm the particular value of gender-specific discipleship relationships—spiritually mature men discipling less mature men and spiritually mature women discipling less mature women.
- f. We deny that men and women must be married to be meaningful participants in the corporate life of the church.
- g. We affirm that the role and functions of elders are reserved only for qualified men. Elders are distinctly and primarily responsible for shepherding and overseeing the church, guarding the church from false teachers and doctrine, and authoritatively preaching the Word of God in our corporate weekly gathering.
- h. We deny that our position regarding the role of elder being reserved only for qualified men diminishes the value of women or their influence in the church. The indispensable gifts, talents, and abilities of women should be exercised in all manners of roles and tasks in the church, except the role of elder.<sup>11</sup>

#### V. **Men and Women in Ministry at Fairfax Bible Church**

- a. Sunday Corporate Gatherings
  - i. Every member of the church body actively participates in our corporate worship gatherings, not just those who are on stage.
  - ii. Our on-stage tasks (e.g., call to worship, Bible readings, testimonies, announcements, etc.) during corporate worship gatherings may be performed by any believer (male or female), except the following functions which are reserved for elders and elder-qualified men:
    1. Preaching
    2. Installing new elders
  - iii. The Lord's Supper
    1. While the Lord's Supper at corporate gatherings will be overseen by the elders, the distribution of the elements may be performed by any believer (male or female) at Fairfax Bible Church.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> "Recognizing these roles...does not lead us to believe that women can only serve in a secondary or diminutive capacity in the church. Nor do the distinct ministry roles that God outlines need create a dichotomy between those who do 'real ministry' (the men) and those who merely support the ministry (the women). Women are expected to exercise the spiritual gifts of teaching, leading, and prophecy, just as men are." The Summit Church, *One in Christ Jesus: The Role of Women at The Summit Church*, accessed December 7, 2023, <https://summitchurch.com/Content/ExternalWebsite/Documents/one-in-christ-role-of-women-in-ministry.pdf>.

<sup>12</sup> In 1 Corinthians 11:17–34, Paul requires the church to celebrate the Lord's Supper with discernment and self-evaluation to avoid God's judgment and discipline for taking it in an unworthy manner. In light of this, we believe

## iv. Baptism

1. While the spiritual readiness and preparation of a person for baptism at Fairfax Bible Church will be overseen by the elders, the act of dipping someone under the water may be performed by any believer (male or female) at Fairfax Bible Church.<sup>13</sup>
- b. Small Groups and Other Shepherding Environments (e.g., student ministry, one-on-one discipleship)
- i. Small Groups and other similar ministry environments are overseen by the elders, but should be led specifically as follows:
    1. Single-gender environments should be led by one or more leaders of that same gender.
    2. Mixed-gender environments should be co-led by at least one man and one woman.
      - a. When evaluating candidates for leadership, character and gifting are more highly valued than gender or marital status.
      - b. The male and female leaders should function according to gifting, not gender. For example, the female leader might facilitate a Bible study more frequently if she is more gifted in that area.
      - c. The male and female leaders are not required to be married to each other or married at all. A group co-led by a married couple may be ideal—assuming both are qualified and desire to lead. However, being married is not required.
      - d. If the male and female co-leaders are not married to each other, their interactions must be above reproach, and they must submit to loving accountability from the elders to support their sexual integrity.
      - e. Co-leaders share equal responsibility for their group.
      - f. The female leader should bear the primary shepherding responsibilities for the women in the group, and the male leader should bear the primary shepherding responsibilities for the men.
      - g. Both male and female leaders should aim to have apprentices for future group multiplication.
    3. A leadership coaching structure will provide opportunities for same-gender coaching.

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leading the observance of this ordinance during our corporate worship gatherings requires exercising authority in a manner that is consistent specifically with the role and functions of elders.

<sup>13</sup> For example, a discipling mentor—male or female—baptizing someone whom they have discipled is a beautiful picture of gospel multiplication.

- c. Teaching environments (e.g., learning cohorts, training sessions, topical classes, non-small-group Bible studies, kids' ministry) are overseen by the elders, but may be led specifically as follows:
  - i. Single-gender environments should be led by one or more leaders of that same gender.
  - ii. Mixed-gender environments may be led by men and/or women.
- d. Ministry Leadership and Service
  - i. All ministry team leadership and participation roles are open to qualified men and women.

## VI. Conclusion

- a. We believe God, in his infinitely good wisdom, has designed his church to reflect his multifaceted glory to the world through the character, gifts, talents, abilities, and efforts of both men and women. At Fairfax Bible Church, we desire to foster a church culture where godly men and women are pursued to serve in ministry rather than merely permitted to serve. "A culture of permission can communicate passivity and dismissiveness to our women. They long to be pursued."<sup>14</sup> Therefore, our hope is that this document will provide clarity and courage for our congregation to take new steps toward making our church a place where men and women are pursued to flourish as God has designed and equipped them.
- b. "Men and women together are needed, in partnership for the fulfilling of the Great Commission. God's design for church is for every member ministry. We are all united with Christ, all members of his body, and all to be active in serving him for the good of the church and the extension of the kingdom."<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Jen Wilkin, "The Complementarian Woman: Permitted or Pursued," *The Gospel Coalition*, April 25, 2013, <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/the-complementarian-woman-permitted-or-pursued/>.

<sup>15</sup> Sharon James, *God's Design*, 95.