

Church on a Mission
Releasing men and women
into ministry

PART 1

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1. Introduction

There are few more contentious areas in the evangelical church today than the roles of men and women. Historical widespread abuse by some men of authority positions together with the rise of radical feminism within society has rightly forced this issue onto the church's table.

There is no better time to teach into it and it is critical for the church that we do so. Undoubtedly, the enemy intends it to be an incredibly divisive issue but as we seek to interpret scripture with integrity and honesty and to then live by those scriptural principles we will see both our churches and our relationships in general flourish. There is a world to reach for Christ and it will take both men and women playing their part to reach it.

The scope of this paper is to teach into the area of men and women in ministry with then end of mobilising the church onto it's mission. It is not aimed to teach into the roles/relationships of husband and wife although there is some overlap.

It's important also that we understand that these issues have been debated and discussed in the church for generations. Differing views are held by those who all claim to love Jesus and be following scripture.

As Sam Storms says

"Are there <those> whose primary motivation is self-serving, who insist upon male headship in church and home as a way of compensating for their own insecurity and holding on to the power and resources of the church? Yes. Tragically. Are there <those> whose commitment is driven by a radical feminist political agenda and who bristle with resentment at the mere thought that men and women, by God's design, may be different? Yes. Tragically. I'm not so nave as to think that none of us is tainted by unbiblical and self-serving motives. I'm simply calling for mutual generosity and patience as we together explore God's best for those created in His image. "

There is much wisdom in these words. It is imperative that we don't allow this to become a divisive issue but one that unites us. Whatever view we finally arrive at we have to be careful to both respect and love those that disagree with us.

Having said that, the 'arms and legs' of any theology or doctrine have to be worked out in a local church. A 'position' has to be taken – you can't have female elders and not have them! Let us remember to pray for wisdom as we make and hold to these decisions.

1.1 A defining of terms.

How do you define the views held by different people concerning this issue? “I just believe what the bible says” won’t do the issue justice. Different views on complex issues require some degree of ‘labeling’ – however unhelpful that may be.

These labels are helpful to give us a ‘broad-brush’ definition – dialogue is critical to ensure that the ‘label’ is not misunderstood to become a ‘box’ (to bury you in!)

There are 3 main positions taken with evangelical thought (note I’m excluding feminism and extreme traditionalism as extremes not represented amongst evangelicals)

Egalitarian (liberal)	Complementarian (moderate)	Traditional/Hierarchical (conservative)
Men and women are partners together in every area of ministry. All ministries and offices in the church are open to all qualified men and women. Gender does not exclude any person from any church office	All church ministries are open to qualified men and women, with the singular exception of elder, which is only open to qualified men. This is not because men are superior or have greater value but because God has given this role to men. Women should be ministry leaders, teach, lead worship, prophesy and be in full-time paid ministry	Women and men are created to operate in different spheres of church ministry. Women cannot be ministry leaders or elders, teach men, lead worship or speak in the church service. Women can only build ministries for women and children
Priority Texts: Judges 4, acts 16-11 to 15. 18;26; Luke 8:1-3; Rom 16:1-3, 6-7, 12; Gal 3:28	Priority Texts: Same as hierarchical with an emphasis on 1 Tim 3:11 and Rom 16:1-2	Priority Texts: Gen 1:27; 3:16-17; 1 Cor 11:3, 8-9; 1 Tim 2:11-3:13
Taken by: Loren Cunningham, Vineyard, Pioneer, Bill Hybels (modified)	Taken by: Newfrontiers, Wayne Grudem, John Piper, Mark Driscoll, Saddleback	Taken by: David Pawsons, some Pentecostal churches

*adapted from Mark Driscoll Recollections of a Reformation Rev.

For the purpose of this paper, the Hierarchical view will not be considered as it is a decreasing viewpoint that is not widely represented in growing churches today. Overall, this paper will take a complementarian position but it will respond where appropriate to the egalitarian position.

1.2 What we agree on - complementarian and egalitarian.

Before we move on to look at areas of disagreement, it's important to take note of the areas that we do agree. We must eliminate 'straw men' – the tendency to distort another's position to make it easier to attack.

Nick Chatrath gives two common straw men that we must oppose

- Those restricting governing roles to men advocate the devaluation and subordination of women and have an authoritarian approach to leadership (sometimes used by Egalitarians)
- Those advocating allowing women to govern churches have sacrificed the truthfulness of Scripture at the altar of current cultural trends (sometimes used by Complementarians)

Sam Storms gives 4 helpful areas of agreement and the main point of disagreement.

(1) Both Complementarians and Egalitarians agree that men and women are equally created in the image of God, and that neither is more or less the image of God than the other.

(2) Both Complementarians and Egalitarians agree that men and women are equal in personal dignity, that neither is more or less worthy or of more or less value as human beings.

(3) Both Complementarians and Egalitarians agree that men and women should treat each other with kindness and compassion and love, and that any and all forms of abuse or disrespect or dishonor must be denounced as sin and resisted.

(4) Both Complementarians and Egalitarians believe that women should be actively involved in ministry. Complementarians agree with Egalitarians and celebrate the fact that women, for example, served as "co-workers" with Paul and held the office of deacon.

(5) Where Complementarians and Egalitarians disagree is whether women can serve as the Senior Pastor or as an Elder in the local church, what I call senior governmental authority. Egalitarians believe the Bible permits women to hold such positions of leadership, while Complementarians do not.

2. Principles

How does this work out in the local church? 8 principles should guide us to a 'working model'

Foundation

1. Men and women are equal in value but differ in role.

Governing (Elder role)

2. Eldership (defined as senior governmental authority in the church) has the dual responsibilities of expounding the Scriptures and exercising final governmental oversight of the body of Christ. Elders should be male and operate as an eldership team. By implication, all other wider leadership roles in the church can be fulfilled by suitably qualified men and women.

3. Eldership decisions should be consultative in nature, well discussed and well communicated. The wider church (men and women) should be clearly involved (and seen to be involved) in the process. – (eg Ministry leaders team meeting, Coaches, LHG, wider church). It is particularly important that women are involved and seen to be involved in the process so that the role of women is not misunderstood.

However, church is not a democracy but a theocracy with delegated authority to the elders. Once consulted, the final decision and responsibility rests with the elders and they are accountable for those decisions to the overseeing apostolic team. The church should willingly submit to the leadership of the elders at this point.

4. Leading (Deacon role)

Both men and women can and should oversee ministry areas (King's kids, Youth, Events, Healing Prayer, Social Action, Worship etc) and Coach and lead Smallgroups, forming teams wherever possible. This should be done under the authority of the eldership with clear support, coaching and accountability of each leader to an individual elder. Ministry leaders team should meet together regularly with the eldership team to ensure that each ministry is well supported and resourced and playing its part in the overall vision of the church.

5. Decisions concerning specific ministries are made by those leading those ministries (in partnership with their team) using the principle of delegated authority. Important decisions can be discussed with the overseeing elder during regular coaching times. Obviously, the overseeing elder should not be 'overbearing' and the leader should not be 'rebellious'. Where there is disagreement or there is major impact on the wider church the rest of the eldership team should be consulted.

Public (Sunday) Contributions

6. Elders should do the bulk of the teaching. All teaching is of course subject to scripture and the wider accountability of the Newfrontiers apostolic team.

7. Non elders (male and female) can and should teach the church under the authority of the elders of the church.

8. It is particularly important that the roles of both men and women are visible on a Sunday so that our theology is not misrepresented by our practice. Due to the 'governing' aspect of the anchor person, anchoring should be done by the elders or those identified by the elders as being trained in the area of governing. Both women and men can and should contribute through worship leading, welcome, testimony, announcements, prayer, prophecy, songs, scripture reading, art etc. The testing of prophecy is part of the role of the prophets corporately together with the elders.

Theology

3.0 Principle 1 - Equality in value

3.1 From the beginning of creation:

- ◆ Genesis 1:26-28 – we were created in the image of God as the crowning glory of creation. Equality of value of the sexes is clear to see, both man and women reflect Gods glory and both shall rule. **(note; generic term ‘man’ has caused problems but it is clear it refers to both male and female, it is what God calls the human race. Why? Hints at male headship which is explained on in the next chapter. Emphasis at creation is on equality and how both sexes bear the image of God.**
- ◆ So what of headship as defined at creation? Genesis 2:18-25. God created men and women equally with equal personal worth, dignity and value and this is what matters to Him and our expression of that in how we treat each other is of paramount importance. But within the dynamic of relationship He has created men to lead and women to ‘help’ or sustain. This means in practice that men are leading in seeking Gods purposes with the counsel of women and together they ensure the partnership fulfils its purpose. These roles do not make one more important than the other – God does not see it this way and therefore neither should we. He has designed us all with different gifting, strengths and limitations – we are not supposed to equal in sameness – finance, opportunity, talents – all different but not defining in value. We must be careful to avoid falling into this trap when it comes to male-female relationship. The Godhead is equal in glory but unequal in role. The Father leads, the Son submits to Him and the Holy Spirit submits to both but all three have equal divinity, power and glory.
- ◆ This Headship demonstrated at creation is eternal in the sense it how God has made us and the pattern of male headship is to be reflected in the Church. Just as male headship in marriage is about service and taking responsibility for the female fulfilling her potential so the responsibility of the Elder is to serve the Church and see the congregation fulfil who they are in Christ. This does not mean that women cannot lead anything, on the contrary the design should enable a freedom and safety in which to express the gifts freely given, but it does mean the responsibility lies with the Governing Elders who should be male according to the created order.

3.2 Throughout Biblical History

- ◆ Scripture makes the equality between men and women abundantly clear when it comes to distribution and use of spiritual gifts. (see 1 Cor 12:11 and 1 Cor 12:7). There are examples in both Old and New Testament of female leaders, most notably Deborah (Judges 4-5, judge of Israel, mediator, advisor and counsellor), Huldah (2 ki 22: 14-20, 2 Ch 34:14-28, highly regarded prophetess of her time) Lydia (Acts 16:13-15, an influential business woman) and Priscilla (Acts 18, partner with Paul in spreading the gospel). These women all held positions of leadership and influence and

are examples of how God will give gifts and call women into these roles – they are not excluded.

- ◆ Romans 16 is perhaps the most resounding endorsement of the contribution made by women to the early Church. Here Paul commends his sister Phoebe and describes her qualities and achievements. He goes on to greet a further 26 fellow workers, 9 of whom were women in relation to the part they played working with him to spread the gospel. This was remarkable considering the social, political and religious barriers that would have had to be overcome in order for women to participate in this manner.
- ◆ Jesus was revolutionary in how He met with women and moved the emphasis from God's holiness (exclusive) to God's mercy (inclusive) (Yancy 1995). Jesus associated freely with women and taught some as disciples. This was a powerful departure from the environment he was living in, where a Rabbinical citation was 'One should not talk with a woman in the street, not even his own wife and certainly not with somebody else's wife because of the gossip of men' and 'it is forbidden to give a woman any kind of greeting' (Milne, 1993). At synagogue services Jewish men prayed "Blessed art thou O Lord who hast not made me a woman". Women sat separately, were rarely taught the Torah and not counted in quorums. In social life few women would talk to men outside their family and could touch no man but their spouse (Yancy, 1995). Yet Jesus spent time with women, complimented them on their understanding of His message and their devotion to him. The Samaritan women he met he set up to lead a small revival after first asking for her help! Women travelled in his band of followers, they appeared in his parables and he did miracles on their behalf.

3.3 Eternal value

- ◆ Both men and women have eternal, equal value before God. (John 3:36) What we achieved, what gifts we have etc are not relevant to our eternal value, this goes back to what we said at the beginning of this section about our value and personal dignity before God - this is not dependant on the 'role' we had in our time on earth. These are cultural constraints and values that we place on each other which we must seek to root out and avoid otherwise we only entrench unbiblical thinking on what is of worth and importance.
- ◆ Feminine and Masculine imagery are used of God, who is eternal, as are we made in the image of God. E.g. . *the rock who fathered you* and *the God who gave you birth* are both found in Deut 32:18. Both men and women are called to represent God throughout creation.
- ◆ The key is to recognise that our eternal value and indeed the ministries we have on earth are not limited by our maleness or femaleness but enhanced by them. The Bible endorses inclusion through and through and we should take heart from this. The differences in role which in a practical sense in Church life are most obvious in the position of Male need to be seen to Biblical eyes with an understanding of how men and women will get the best out of each other whilst honouring who God has made us to

be. The issue of wanting 'equal rights' is a cultural battle, not a biblical argument.

3,4. The central ideas of Complementarity introduced

The Complementarian view is simply that men and women are equal but not identical.

Men and women are called to partnership not lording it over or subservience. Within that partnership, roles differ but value does not.

This is similar to how we view the Trinity – Father, Son and Spirit are equal yet their roles clearly differ. Does the Father's headship make him self centred and unwilling to lay down personal pleasure for others? Does the Son's servant heart make him a doormat? Equality of value but difference in role are not truths opposed to each other.

As Grudem puts it "The equality and difference between male and female reflects the Trinity. The idea of headship and submission....never began. It has always existed in the relationships within the Godhead"

It is notable that Paul twice draws parallels between the relationship in the Godhead and that between a husband and wife (1 Cor 11:3 and Eph 5:23)

Complementarians are accused of placing men 'above' women. However, when we look at Christ's example of headship in the church – giving up his life, sacrifice, toil, many tears – we see that 'above' has no place in the Kingdom of God where above is in fact below!

4.0 Principle 2 & 3- Eldership

Before we can discuss the role of eldership and the more contentious view of who can and should be an elder, 2 terms need careful definition – authority and submission.

4.1. Authority

Authority is not about control, power, authoritarianism, domineering and subjugation of others. It is not for the purposes of self satisfaction or self exaltation. It is not given to the superior over the inferior and it is not about the issuing of commands. The holder(s) of authority do not make every decision. Peter gives us a good overview of biblical authority in practice.

1 Peter 5:2-3 Shepherd the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight, not under compulsion, but willingly, as God would have you; not for shameful gain, but eagerly; **(3)** not domineering over those in your charge, but being examples to the flock.

- shepherding (remembering Christ's model of the servant shepherd who feeds, cares for and lays down his life for the sheep)
- willingly (not because of ought or should but out of love)
- not for shameful gain
- not domineering (or controlling)
- as an example (or service, godliness, Christ centeredness)

There are many abuses of authority and those in authority will never be perfect. However, Godly authority needs to be modelled in the church.

4.2 Submission and Subordination compared

Submission in our culture is largely seen as a negative word. It speaks of weakness, failure, inferiority, giving up. Biblically it does not have those connotations. Through Christ's teaching and example, submission becomes a positive NT concept.

SUBOR'DINATE, - from the latin – meaning a sub (lower) – order (rank).

1. Inferior in order, in nature, in dignity, in power, importance, &c.; as subordinate officers.

Submission is not subordination

SUBMISSION - the act of submitting; the act of yielding to power or authority; surrender of the person and power to the government of another.

Submission cannot be forced – it is a choice. Submission does not mean

- putting one submitted to in the place of Christ
- giving up independent thought
- giving in to every demand
- being fearful or timid

For a more extensive discussion of biblical submission see Grudem Biblical Man and Womanhood pg 196-200

(note the issue of mutual submission will be dealt with in part 2 of this paper)

4.3. Eldership

4.3.1 The biblical pattern for leadership in the NT is a plurality (or group) of elders. This is seen most clearly in Paul's church planting model (acts 15:23, acts 20:17), apostolic direct instruction (1 Tim 5:17, 1 Pet 5:1) and a simple word study of scripture which finds that the word elders appears 36 times from Acts to Revelation whereas the singular elder only appears 4 times (A simple study of those 4 times gives clear indication as to why the singular is used). Paul's instruction to Titus is a helpful summary;

Tit 1:5 "This is why I left you in Crete, so that you might put what remained into order, and appoint elders in every town as I directed you"

4.3.2 The primary role of elders is governing and teaching

1 Peter 5:2 shepherd the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight, not under compulsion, but willingly, as God would have you; not for shameful gain, but eagerly;

1 Timothy 5:17 Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honour, especially those who labour in preaching and teaching.

And thus the term governmental authority is used of elders – with the emphasis on a biblical definition and use of authority. Governing should be done with **consultation** and **good communication**, the church **led** (not dragged), and a clear understanding that where there is strong **disagreement** in the body God is probably speaking to both parties. Good authority accepts **questioning** (from good hearted people), **debate** and seeks **unity** wherever possible.

It must be stated that this also does not mean that **all** elders have to teach or that **only** elders can teach – simply that the weight of the responsibility for teaching rests with the elders.

4.4 Elders should be male because

1. Male headship defined in creation
2. Male headship affirmed in the family
3. Male headship affirmed in the church
4. Jesus' model of appointing male senior leadership

4.4.1. Male headship defined in creation

There is not enough space here to look fully into this issue but Nick Chatrath outlines 5 summary definitions;

Order: Adam was created first then Eve where God could easily have created them at the same time.

Representation: Adam not eve represents all of mankind repeatedly in Scripture.

Naming: Adam named Eve which is an indication of authority in ancient thinking.

Accountability: Eve sinned first yet God held Adam primarily responsible.

Curse: the curse brought distortions onto previous roles not the introduction of new ones. Woman's desire and Man's 'ruling' were not part of God's design but a consequence of sin. The general NT teaching is that the curse has been undone and relationships restored – eg Col 3:18 (wives submit, husbands love)

Egalitarians would respond to these points in the following ways.

Order: Phyllis Trible argues that the original creation was not 'man' but 'earth creature' and that man and woman were formed from this being. However, this is clearly disputed by Paul in 1 Tim 2:13 where Paul says that Adam was formed first.

Naming: Grenz and Kjesbo assert 'in calling the woman, man is not establishing power over her but rejoicing in their mutuality. It is not until after the fall that Adam calls her Eve.' However, we're not saying that Eve was inferior because she was named – merely underlining the significance of the fact that she was named.

Curse: Martin Scott quoting Phyllis Trible states that these verses indicate 'that the woman desires the original unity between male and female but that the man will not reciprocate'. However, even he later has to admit that because the same word 'desire' is used in the parallel Cain passage (Gen 4:7) 'Eve's desire is less pure than <Trible> indicates'

4.4.2 Male headship affirmed in the family

The headship principle is taught throughout the NT – it is nowhere denied. It is taught in 3 main passages of scripture (Eph 5:12-33; Col 3:18-19; 1 Cor 11:3-16). A careful study of these scriptures will help outline biblical authority and submission – roles and not value being at stake.

This is not to say that male headship in the family has not been abused. Critics of complementarianism will often cite examples of abusive domineering males who ruin the lives of their 'doormat' wives and children while putting on a 'good show' outside of the home.

It's tragic and true – it happens. We can't deny it. However, there are also many stories of controlling and manipulative mothers who have ruined people's lives. The opposite of a-buse is not no-use but right-use and it's critical in our society that we model biblical authority and biblical submission as defined earlier .

4.4.3 Male headship affirmed in the church.

The three strongest arguments are

1. Elders are those who govern and hold the primary teaching responsibility in the church. Since Paul restricts teaching with authority to men (1 Tim 2:11-15) it follows that the office of Elder is restricted to men.
2. The qualifications of Elder are found in 1 Tim 3 “If anyone aspires to the office of overseer, **he** desires a noble task.” And Titus 1:7 For an overseer, as God's steward, must be above reproach. **He** must not be..” and are clearly directed to men.
3. There is no reference anywhere in the NT to a female Elder. Some would object saying that this is an argument from silence – yes but it is a deafening silence. The fact is there is no biblical precedent to female elders.

Egalitarian Objections

Sam Storms rebuts the most common objections to male eldership;

- (1) Some egalitarians have argued that since Euodia and Syntyche (Phil. 4:2-3) were “co-workers” with Paul, women were in positions of leadership and should thus be considered as viable candidates for the office of Elder. But the Greek word *sunergos* (“co-worker” or “fellow-worker”) is used of numerous individuals (e.g., Romans 16:9; Phil. 2:25; Col. 4:10-11; Philemon 24; etc.), as well as anyone who supports traveling missionaries (3 John 8). But this in no way implies that such people exercised ruling authority in the local church. Whereas all Elders would certainly qualify as “co-workers,” not all “co-workers” would qualify as Elders
- (2) Contrary to what some egalitarians have suggested, the reference to “older women” in Titus 2:3 does not support the notion of female Elders.
- (3) Hebrews 11:2 uses the plural of *presbuteros* and applies it to such women of the OT as Sarah, the mother of Moses, Rahab, and others. But clearly the author of Hebrews is using the word to refer to “a person who lived long ago,” i.e., “ancestor” or “ancient” (it is translated “people of old” in the ESV). There is not the slightest indication that the author is thinking of ecclesiastical office in the NT.
- (4) The epistle of 2 John is addressed to “the elect lady and her children” (v. 1). Some have seen here a reference to a woman who exercised authority in the body of Christ. However, it is far more likely that “elect lady and her children” is a metaphorical way of saying “the church and its members
- (5) Finally, what about those women in whose homes churches would meet, such as Mary (Acts 12:12), Lydia (Acts 16:15), Prisca (Romans 16:5),

Chloe (1 Cor. 1:11), and Nympha (Col. 4:15)? Does this imply that they exercised spiritual authority over the congregation in their midst? Of course not. Hosting a church in one's home does not justify ignoring the qualifications for elders (1 Timothy 3; Titus 1). Are we actually to believe that Lydia, a new convert, was appointed as a local church Elder simply because she opened her home to Paul and his associates?

4.4.4 Jesus' model of appointing males to senior leadership positions

Jesus did more than any before him to value, include and right the wrongs of ungodly sexual discrimination in the culture of his day. He also chose 12 male apostles.

Some have argued that it would have been culturally difficult for Jesus to chose female apostles – women would not be accepted as witnesses, women could not travel safely alone, women could not represent the 12 tribes of Israel. However, these same will also often argue (incorrectly I believe) that Junia was a female apostle.

As Thomas Schreiner states

“If Jesus did bow to cultural pressure it makes him even more blameworthy if the church later appointed Junia as a female apostle – not 30 years later.”

In addition, when was safe travelling a major issue in this key decision? Nowhere else does Jesus bow to cultural pressure when a moral issue was at stake. No, Jesus who broke social taboos by healing on the Sabbath, claiming he was God, speaking with women and allowing a prostitute to touch him, freely chose to appoint 12 male apostles.

Equally Jesus established for the church a model of equal value for women, ability to be a witness, pray, learn, give and ask in faith. He didn't dominate women or exclude them but allowed and encouraged them to be a major part of his ministry.

4.5 Summary

In my opinion, the weight of biblical evidence points to male eldership. It must however be emphasised that this is not because men are superior, wiser, less likely to be deceived or in any other way better than women. It is simply that that is the way that God has prescribed it – giving men and women different roles.

If I were to not own a bible and were asked to state my opinion, I would be an egalitarian – allowing male and female elders. I do not by nature like defining roles according to gender. I don't like being accused of being a chauvinist, bigoted, arrogant male. I'd much rather avoid it.

However, having studied the scriptures and read the counter arguments, I see no other option than godly headship as seen in the church by male eldership being the God given prescription for a healthy church. I love the Vineyard, I

respect Loren Cunningham (of YWAM). I've learned a lot from them but I can't agree with them on this issue.

It must also be made clear that male eldership means by implication **that all other wider leadership roles in the church are open to and should be filled by qualified men and women.**

Often I think that women see the fact that only men can be elders as **very restrictive**. But do we have to see it that way? Only a **very small area** of ministry is restricted with the **vast majority of ministry areas open** to called and qualified men and women. There is **freedom** for everyone to have a fulfilling and effective ministry within the safety of a Godly authority structure.

It's time for us to repent from the abuse of the past, forgive where necessary and move on together as men and women called on a mission to reach a lost world with the gospel.

In Part 2 we'll continue by discussing the wider leadership roles in the church, how we should operate in our Sunday services and look in detail at some of the more difficult texts.