

## WOMEN IN THE CHURCH: WHAT CAN THEY DO OR NOT DO?

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The issue of women's roles in the church is complicated and emotionally charged. These comments are only a brief synopsis of some of the issues. As elders, we affirm the rationale, purposes and affirmations of The Danvers Statement (see below, or go to: <http://www.cbmw.org/about/danvers.html>). Below are some specific questions and our understanding of how Scripture applies to each. Our goal is to honor God and His Word, while avoiding both a legalistic approach and compromise with the worldly influences threatening to undermine God's unchanging truth.

### 1. *Can women serve as elders or pastors over men?*

The clear biblical answer is, No. See 1 Tim. 3:1-7; Titus 1:5-9 (qualifications for elders, which clearly are framed with men in view: "husband of one wife," "manages his household well," etc.). Also, 1 Cor. 11:3-16 clearly presents the hierarchy: God, Christ, man, woman, which applies both to the church and the home. Since elders/pastors both teach and exercise authority, 1 Tim. 2:11-15 prohibits women from occupying this office (the reasons given in that text are not culturally determined). There are no NT examples of women elders or pastors serving over men.

### 2. *Can women serve as deacons, especially if their area of service puts them over men?*

Clearly, deacons serve under elders. If elders are male, then men are ultimately in authority. 1 Tim. 3:11 is ambiguous: Does it refer to elders' wives, deacons' wives, or to women deacons? We can't be dogmatic, but in light of Rom. 16:1 (Phoebe, a "deacon" [servant] of the church), it seems permissible for women to serve as deacons. It would seem best, generally, to have women deacons in ministries where they are leading other women. If they do serve over men, if questions requiring authority arise, they should be deferred to the elder(s) over the deacon.

### 3. *Can women serve as ushers?*

There is no NT reference to such a ministry. The question is, Does ushering involve any exercise of authority? We cannot see how it does, unless it comes to the function of being sergeant-at-arms in dealing with a disruptive person. But clearly, male ushers or other men present would take on that role. Passing the offering plate or communion elements is not exercising any authority. It could be argued that it models male passivity if there are not enough men to fill the job. But aside from that, we see no problem with women helping out.

### 4. *Can women lead the communion service or baptize?*

In our thinking, this involves a position of corporate leadership that should be reserved for men when men are present (1 Cor. 11).

### 5. *Can women take the lead in corporate worship services?*

We believe it is desirable for men to take the lead in public worship. This pictures the divinely instituted order (1 Cor. 11:3). There are not many examples of women leading in worship in Scripture (not all of the following apply, but are listed for study reference): Exod. 15:20, 21; Judges 5; Ps. 68:11; Luke 2:36-38; Acts 21:9; 1 Cor. 11:5; 14:26, 34; Eph. 5:19; Col. 3:16. We encourage women to participate in worship services (testimony, praise, music, etc.) as long as they are not usurping authority or behaving in a domineering manner. We also see no violation of Scripture to have a woman (or women) planning the order of worship as long as she is submissive to male leadership and doesn't plan anything that violates the biblical emphasis.

Since our worship style requires some musical ability, if there is no man with such ability to provide leadership, we recommend finding a man who can at least lead in vocals and give verbal direction to the overall process, even if he can't play the instruments. This models male leadership, which seems to be clearly the biblical picture.

6. *Can women teach men in situations like Precept, adult Sunday School, Agape Families? Could a woman fill the pulpit for a single Sunday morning? What about women teaching boys in Sunday School?*

The biblical intent and standard is clearly male leadership in the church. We recognize that there are exceptional cases, both in Scripture (Deborah, Huldah, etc.) and in church history (women missionaries, visionary leaders like Henrietta Mears, etc.). But exceptions are exceptions, not the rule. God's plan is for male leadership in the church and home. This includes the role of teaching Scripture when men are present.

In the NT, most of the church meetings took place in homes. Thus there wasn't a distinction between Sunday morning worship (when the whole body gathered) and Sunday School, Sunday evening, mid-week, home fellowships, etc. Thus, as we would apply the NT emphasis on women not being permitted to teach men (1 Tim. 2:12), it would seem to apply to these situations as well. Can a woman, in a home fellowship or adult S.S. class, share an insight from Scripture the Lord has given her? We don't see any problem with this. But formally teaching Scripture or doctrine to a class that includes men would seem to violate this text.

Teaching various methods (such as how to witness, do Bible study, teach, counsel, etc.), seems to be a gray area, since often there are pertinent doctrinal issues related to such methods. Also, we should derive our methods from the Bible, so to teach any method properly it's necessary to teach the Bible, which women are prohibited from doing with men. We would be comfortable with a couple team-teaching some of these things, with the husband taking the lead in explaining doctrinal issues, and the wife contributing her insights into methods or people-skills.

As far as women teaching boys in Sunday School, the problem seems to grow in proportion to the age of the boys. We would prefer men teaching in the older classes (jr. high and up), since it better models masculine spirituality and leadership for our children. Even in the younger ages, it would be good if a couple could work together. Otherwise we send the non-verbal message to kids that religion is for women. So our goal ought to be to encourage men to be involved in teaching our kids at every level.

## **The Danvers Statement**

The "Danvers Statement" summarizes the need for the Council on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood (CBMW) and serves as an overview of our core beliefs. This statement was prepared by several evangelical leaders at a CBMW meeting in Danvers, Massachusetts, in December of 1987. It was first published in final form by the CBMW in Wheaton, Illinois in November of 1988.

### **Rationale:**

We have been moved in our purpose by the following contemporary developments which we observe with deep concern:

1. The widespread uncertainty and confusion in our culture regarding the complementary differences between masculinity and femininity;
2. The tragic effects of this confusion in unraveling the fabric of marriage woven by God out of the beautiful and diverse strands of manhood and womanhood;
3. The increasing promotion given to feminist egalitarianism with accompanying distortions or neglect of the glad harmony portrayed in Scripture between the loving, humble leadership of redeemed husbands and the intelligent, willing support of that leadership by redeemed wives;
4. The widespread ambivalence regarding the values of motherhood, vocational homemaking, and the many ministries historically performed by women;
5. The growing claims of legitimacy for sexual relationships which have Biblically and histori-

cally been considered illicit or perverse, and the increase in pornographic portrayal of human sexuality;

6. The upsurge of physical and emotional abuse in the family;
7. The emergence of roles for men and women in church leadership that do not conform to Biblical teaching but backfire in the crippling of Biblically faithful witness;
8. The increasing prevalence and acceptance of hermeneutical oddities devised to reinterpret apparently plain meanings of Biblical texts;
9. The consequent threat to Biblical authority as the clarity of Scripture is jeopardized and the accessibility of its meaning to ordinary people is withdrawn into the restricted realm of technical ingenuity;
10. And behind all this the apparent accommodation of some within the church to the spirit of the age at the expense of winsome, radical Biblical authenticity which in the power of the Holy Spirit may reform rather than reflect our ailing culture.

### Purposes:

Recognizing our own abiding sinfulness and fallibility, and acknowledging the genuine evangelical standing of many who do not agree with all of our convictions, nevertheless, moved by the preceding observations and by the hope that the noble Biblical vision of sexual complementarity may yet win the mind and heart of Christ's church, we engage to pursue the following purposes:

1. To study and set forth the Biblical view of the relationship between men and women, especially in the home and in the church.
2. To promote the publication of scholarly and popular materials representing this view.
3. To encourage the confidence of lay people to study and understand for themselves the teaching of Scripture, especially on the issue of relationships between men and women.
4. To encourage the considered and sensitive application of this Biblical view in the appropriate spheres of life.
5. And thereby
  - to bring healing to persons and relationships injured by an inadequate grasp of God's will concerning manhood and womanhood,
  - to help both men and women realize their full ministry potential through a true understanding and practice of their God-given roles,
  - and to promote the spread of the gospel among all peoples by fostering a Biblical wholeness in relationships that will attract a fractured world.

### Affirmations:

Based on our understanding of Biblical teachings, we affirm the following:

1. Both Adam and Eve were created in God's image, equal before God as persons and distinct in their manhood and womanhood (Gen 1:26-27, 2:18).
2. Distinctions in masculine and feminine roles are ordained by God as part of the created order, and should find an echo in every human heart (Gen 2:18, 21-24; 1 Cor 11:7-9; 1 Tim 2:12-14).
3. Adam's headship in marriage was established by God before the Fall, and was not a result of sin (Gen 2:16-18, 21-24, 3:1-13; 1 Cor 11:7-9).
4. The Fall introduced distortions into the relationships between men and women (Gen 3:1-7, 12, 16).

- In the home, the husband's loving, humble headship tends to be replaced by domination or passivity; the wife's intelligent, willing submission tends to be replaced by usurpation or servility.
  - In the church, sin inclines men toward a worldly love of power or an abdication of spiritual responsibility, and inclines women to resist limitations on their roles or to neglect the use of their gifts in appropriate ministries.
5. The Old Testament, as well as the New Testament, manifests the equally high value and dignity which God attached to the roles of both men and women (Gen 1:26-27, 2:18; Gal 3:28). Both Old and New Testaments also affirm the principle of male headship in the family and in the covenant community (Gen 2:18; Eph 5:21-33; Col 3:18-19; 1 Tim 2:11-15).
  6. Redemption in Christ aims at removing the distortions introduced by the curse.
    - In the family, husbands should forsake harsh or selfish leadership and grow in love and care for their wives; wives should forsake resistance to their husbands' authority and grow in willing, joyful submission to their husbands' leadership (Eph 5:21-33; Col 3:18-19; Tit 2:3-5; 1 Pet 3:1-7).
    - In the church, redemption in Christ gives men and women an equal share in the blessings of salvation; nevertheless, some governing and teaching roles within the church are restricted to men (Gal 3:28; 1 Cor 11:2-16; 1 Tim 2:11-15).
  7. In all of life Christ is the supreme authority and guide for men and women, so that no earthly submission-domestic, religious, or civil-ever implies a mandate to follow a human authority into sin (Dan 3:10-18; Acts 4:19-20, 5:27-29; 1 Pet 3:1-2).
  8. In both men and women a heartfelt sense of call to ministry should never be used to set aside Biblical criteria for particular ministries (1 Tim 2:11-15, 3:1-13; Tit 1:5-9). Rather, Biblical teaching should remain the authority for testing our subjective discernment of God's will.
  9. With half the world's population outside the reach of indigenous evangelism; with countless other lost people in those societies that have heard the gospel; with the stresses and miseries of sickness, malnutrition, homelessness, illiteracy, ignorance, aging, addiction, crime, incarceration, neuroses, and loneliness, no man or woman who feels a passion from God to make His grace known in word and deed need ever live without a fulfilling ministry for the glory of Christ and the good of this fallen world (1 Cor 12:7-21).
  10. We are convinced that a denial or neglect of these principles will lead to increasingly destructive consequences in our families, our churches, and the culture at large.

*We grant permission and encourage interested persons to use, reproduce, and distribute the Danvers Statement.*