

WOMEN IN MINISTRY

A Parkway Church Position Paper

Parkway Church believes Scripture presents men and women as equal image bearers who are equally gifted by the Holy Spirit for ministry. We affirm that women should be encouraged to exercise every spiritual gift God has entrusted to them for the building up of Christ's church while recognizing the New Testament's qualifications for the office of Senior Pastor or Elder.¹ This paper explains the biblical convictions, roles, and church structure that have shaped our practice for nearly thirty-five years.

EQUALLY CREATED

The foundation for any discussion of men and women in ministry begins with creation. Before Scripture addresses spiritual gifts, church leadership, or ministry roles, it establishes the value and dignity of every person. God created both male and female in His image. Neither bears more of God's likeness than the other. Both possess equal worth and equal responsibility before their Creator. "So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them." (Genesis 1:27)

God not only created men and women in His image, but He also entrusted them together with His blessing and His mission. "God blessed them and said to them, 'Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it.'" (Genesis 1:28) The image of God and the call of God were never reserved for men alone. From the beginning, God created men and women to share in His purposes and faithfully steward the responsibilities He entrusted to them.

The New Testament continues this same emphasis. "There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus." (Galatians 3:28) Paul is not erasing the distinctions between men and women. Rather, he is affirming their equal standing before God through Christ. Every believer receives the same salvation, the same Holy Spirit, the same inheritance, and the same invitation to participate in Christ's mission.

Because men and women equally bear God's image and share equally in His grace, Parkway Church believes they should be treated with equal honor, dignity, and opportunity to faithfully steward the gifts God has entrusted to them. That foundation shapes our understanding of ministry throughout the rest of the New Testament.

EQUALLY GIFTED

Women are called, gifted, and needed to lead and serve in the church. This can be seen in how God distributes gifts to women and men alike. When a person places their faith in Jesus Christ,

¹At Parkway, we are led by an Advisors Team that serves as the elders of the church. Each Advisor must meet the biblical qualifications for eldership and is entrusted with providing spiritual oversight, protecting sound doctrine, offering wise counsel, and helping shepherd the church in faithfulness to its mission. (1 Timothy 3:1–7; Titus 1:5–9)

the Holy Spirit graciously gives spiritual gifts for the building up of the church. "We have different gifts, according to the grace given to each of us." (Romans 12:6) Those gifts are not chosen by the believer, assigned by the church, or earned through maturity. They are given by God according to His sovereign will. 1 Corinthians 12 shows that it is God who gives the gifts and works, and that everyone uses their gifts. "There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit distributes them. There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord. There are different kinds of working, but in all of them and in everyone it is the same God at work." (1 Corinthians 12:4-6)

Some wrongly use teaching as a litmus test for the appropriate service of women within the church. In both 1 Corinthians 12 and Romans 12, teaching is listed as one of the spiritual gifts that God gives to believers (1 Corinthians 12:4-11; Romans 12:6-8). Scripture never suggests that certain spiritual gifts are reserved for men while others are reserved for women. The Holy Spirit distributes gifts "to each one, just as he determines" (1 Corinthians 12:11), without gender distinction.

Likewise, Peter writes, "Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others, as faithful stewards of God's grace in its various forms" (1 Peter 4:10). Every believer is responsible before God to faithfully steward the gifts He has entrusted to them for the good of the body of Christ. If God sovereignly gives the gift of teaching to both men and women, the church should encourage those gifts to be developed and exercised within the biblical framework established for the church.

Understanding this distinction helps clarify Parkway Church's philosophy of ministry. We believe God distributes spiritual gifts broadly throughout the body of Christ while calling certain individuals to the office of Senior Pastor or Elder within the church. Because spiritual gifts are given for the building up of the church, Parkway Church encourages women to faithfully exercise every gift God has entrusted to them, including teaching, leadership, encouragement, wisdom, mercy, evangelism, administration, discipleship, service, and more, while honoring the biblical qualifications for the office of Senior Pastor and Elders.²

EQUALLY CALLED TO SERVE

Throughout His earthly ministry, Jesus consistently affirmed and elevated the dignity of women, inviting them into faithful discipleship at a time when such opportunities were often denied by the surrounding culture. Women traveled with Him and supported His ministry (Luke 8:1-3). Mary sat at His feet as a disciple, assuming the posture of one who learns from a rabbi (Luke 10:39). After His resurrection, Jesus chose women to be the first witnesses and messengers of the greatest event in human history (Matthew 28:1-10; John 20:11-18). In each of these examples, Jesus affirmed the value of women and their significant role in advancing God's mission.

² The New Testament presents the office of elder as one of spiritual oversight, shepherding, teaching, and leadership within the local church. Scripture reserves the office of elder for qualified men who meet the biblical requirements established by the apostles (1 Timothy 2:12; 3:1-7; Titus 1:5-9). Those qualifications emphasize godly character, faithful leadership in the home, spiritual maturity, and the ability to teach sound doctrine (1 Timothy 3:1-7; Titus 1:5-9). Elders are also charged with shepherding God's people willingly and faithfully, exercising oversight as examples to the flock rather than for personal gain or power (Acts 20:28; 1 Peter 5:1-3). In Parkway's understanding, these passages define the qualifications and responsibilities of the office of elder while recognizing and encouraging the broad ministry, leadership, and spiritual gifts of both men and women throughout the life of the church.

God not only creates men and women with equal dignity and gives them spiritual gifts according to His will, but He also calls every believer to participate in the work of His kingdom. Ministry is not reserved for pastors or church staff. It is the calling of every follower of Jesus Christ.

Paul describes the purpose of ministry leadership in Ephesians: "Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, to equip his people for works of service..."³(Ephesians 4:11–12) The primary responsibility of church leaders is not to perform all the ministry but to equip God's people for ministry.

Throughout the New Testament we find women faithfully answering that call. Priscilla and Aquila explained the way of God more accurately to Apollos (Acts 18:26).⁴ Older women were instructed to teach younger women (Titus 2:3–5). Phoebe faithfully served the church as a Deaconess at Cenchreae (Romans 16:1–2). Euodia and Syntyche labored alongside Paul in advancing the gospel (Philippians 4:2–3). Philip's four daughters prophesied (Acts 21:9).⁵ Their ministries were diverse, but each faithfully used the gifts God had given.

Because every believer is called to serve, Parkway Church seeks to help every man and every woman discover, use, and develop the gifts God has entrusted to them. We believe the church is strongest when every member is equipped, every gift is valued, and every believer is actively engaged in the work of ministry.

DISTINCT ROLES WITHIN THE CHURCH

The New Testament presents a beautiful balance. Every believer is created in God's image, gifted by the Holy Spirit, and called to serve in the work of Christ. At the same time, God has established specific offices to provide leadership, oversight, and care within the local church. These truths are complementary, not contradictory.

Because Scripture never contradicts itself, passages that appear restrictive must be interpreted alongside passages that clearly describe women praying, prophesying, teaching, serving, and laboring for the gospel. Likewise, examples of faithful women in the Old Testament should be

³ It is also significant that Paul distinguishes between the ministry of teaching and the office or function of pastor. Paul clearly recognizes teaching as a ministry within the church that extends beyond pastoring. Elsewhere, teaching is identified as a spiritual gift distributed by the Holy Spirit (Romans 12:6–7; 1 Corinthians 12:28), while the qualifications for the office of elder emphasize being "able to teach" as one of many characteristics (1 Timothy 3:2; Titus 1:9).

⁴ Priscilla and Aquila are consistently presented in the New Testament as a husband and wife co-workers in Christ who served together in advancing the Gospel (Acts 18:2, 18, 26; Romans 16:3–5). In several passages, Priscilla's name appears before Aquila's, an uncommon pattern in the ancient world that many scholars understand as reflecting her prominence, influence, or leadership within their shared ministry (Acts 18:18, 26; Romans 16:3). Together they took Apollos aside and "explained to him the way of God more accurately" (Acts 18:26), demonstrating that Priscilla actively participated in theological instruction alongside her husband.

⁵ In the New Testament, prophecy most often refers to speaking a message from God under the guidance of the Holy Spirit for the encouragement, strengthening, instruction, or warning of God's people (1 Corinthians 14:3). Its primary function was proclaiming God's truth to the church.

understood within the framework of God's unfolding plan rather than used as the primary basis for defining leadership in the New Testament church.

Throughout the Old Testament, God raised up remarkable women to accomplish His purposes. Deborah faithfully judged Israel (Judges 4–5), Esther courageously influenced the Persian government to save God's people (Esther 4–8), and Huldah faithfully proclaimed God's Word to King Josiah (2 Kings 22:14–20). These women deserve honor for their faith, courage, and obedience.

At the same time, they served under the Old Covenant in roles of national, governmental, and prophetic leadership rather than within the structure of the New Testament church. Their lives demonstrate that God powerfully uses women in positions of influence and leadership. They are not, however, the primary framework for understanding the offices and functions of leadership within the local church. For that, we look to the New Testament's teaching and practice.

THE PLURALITY OF ELDERS

Every healthy organization has structure. God has given His church structure. That structure exists to protect the church, preserve sound doctrine, and equip God's people.

The pattern of the New Testament is not a single individual bearing the full weight of spiritual leadership, but a team of qualified elders serving together to shepherd, protect, and guide the congregation. This plurality provides both accountability and shared spiritual leadership within the church. Peter writes, "Be shepherds of God's flock that is under your care, serving as overseers..." (1 Peter 5:1–2). Likewise, Paul instructed Titus to appoint elders in every town (Titus 1:5), and he called together the elders of the church at Ephesus, reminding them that the Holy Spirit had made them overseers to shepherd God's flock (Acts 20:17–28). The New Testament uses three closely related terms in describing church leadership. Elder emphasizes the office, overseer emphasizes the responsibility of spiritual oversight, and shepherd (pastor) emphasizes the ministry of caring for God's people. Churches may organize these responsibilities differently, but the New Testament consistently calls for qualified spiritual leadership that protects sound doctrine, shepherds God's people, and equips the church for ministry.

SPIRITUAL GIFTS AND THE OFFICE OF THE ELDER

While every elder must be "able to teach" (1 Timothy 3:2), teaching itself is not exclusive to the office of elder. The New Testament consistently identifies teaching as a spiritual gift that the Holy Spirit distributes according to His will (Romans 12:6–8; 1 Corinthians 12:28), while also presenting elders as men whose character, doctrine, and shepherding qualify them for spiritual oversight (1 Timothy 3:1–7; Titus 1:5–9).

Teaching is an essential qualification for elders, but it is not synonymous with the office of elder. Not every believer with the gift of teaching is called to the office of elder, and not every elder's ministry is primarily expressed through public teaching. The office of elder encompasses shepherding, oversight, the protection of sound doctrine, and the equipping of God's people for ministry. Teaching is one essential qualification, but it is only one aspect of that broader calling.

James adds an important perspective on the ministry of teaching: "Not many of you should become teachers, my fellow believers, because you know that we who teach will be judged more strictly." (James 3:1)

James does not limit who may teach; he emphasizes the weight of teaching. His concern is not access to ministry but accountability in ministry. Teaching is not presented as a position to be sought for recognition or influence but as a sacred stewardship that carries greater accountability before God. Whether teaching publicly or privately, formally or informally, every teacher, whether male or female, is responsible to faithfully handle God's Word with humility, integrity, and submission to the authority of Scripture.

Recognizing this distinction is central to Parkway Church's philosophy of ministry. We believe God distributes spiritual gifts broadly throughout the body of Christ while calling qualified men to serve in the office of Senior Pastor and Elder. Those convictions are not in conflict. Rather, they allow us to encourage every believer to faithfully discover, develop, and exercise the gifts God has entrusted to them while honoring the biblical qualifications for the office of Senior Pastor and Elder.

MUTUAL SUBMISSION AND ORDER IN THE CHURCH

While equally created, called, and gifted, every believer is called to live under spiritual authority and serve with humility. Submission is not a command given only to women. The New Testament consistently calls every believer to submit first to Christ, then to one another, and to the spiritual leaders God has appointed within the church.

Submission is a defining characteristic of every follower of Jesus Christ. Paul writes, "Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ." (Ephesians 5:21) Likewise, the writer of Hebrews instructs believers, "Have confidence in your leaders and submit to their authority, because they keep watch over you as those who must give an account." (Hebrews 13:17)

The pattern of the New Testament is clear. Christ is the head of the church. Elders are entrusted with the spiritual oversight of the congregation. Believers willingly submit to godly leadership, and all members of the body are called to serve one another with humility, love, and mutual respect. No believer is called to minister independently or to pursue influence apart from the health and unity of the church.

This broader biblical principle provides the framework for understanding Paul's instructions in Corinth and Ephesus. In both churches, Paul was addressing disorder, conflict, and the misuse of spiritual influence rather than limiting the faithful ministry of women.

In Corinth, Paul instructed women to "remain silent" (1 Corinthians 14:34), but within the same chapter he also instructed those speaking in tongues to remain silent if there was no interpreter (1 Corinthians 14:28) and prophets to remain silent when another received a revelation (1 Corinthians 14:30). Earlier in the letter, Paul acknowledged that women prayed and prophesied in the gathered church (1 Corinthians 11:5). The issue was not whether women could speak, but whether every believer would participate in worship in a way that promoted peace, order, and the building up of the church.

The same principle appears in 1 Timothy. Paul first corrects the men, calling them to pray without anger or quarreling (1 Timothy 2:8). He then addresses women whose conduct and learning were contributing to disorder within the church. Throughout the letter, Paul's primary concern is the spread of false teaching and the protection of sound doctrine (1 Timothy 1:3–7). His instructions call both men and women to reject self-promotion, false teaching, and the misuse of authority in favor of humility, sound doctrine, and orderly worship.

At Parkway Church, we believe every believer is called to use the gifts God has given while serving under the authority of Christ, within the leadership He has established, and alongside fellow believers in a spirit of humility and mutual submission. Healthy ministry is never about seeking position or power. It is about faithfully serving others for the glory of God and the building up of His church.

CONCLUSION

Parkway Church believes that God delights in using ordinary people to accomplish extraordinary purposes. From the beginning, He created men and women in His image. Through Christ, He redeems them equally by His grace. Through the Holy Spirit, He gifts them according to His will. Through the church, He calls them into ministry. And through faithful leadership, He equips them for lives of service.

We therefore celebrate the ministry of women because Scripture celebrates the ministry of women. We encourage women to faithfully discover, use, and strengthen every spiritual gift God has entrusted to them for the building up of Christ's church. At the same time, we joyfully affirm the biblical qualifications for men to fulfill the office of Senior Pastor and Elder and the pattern of leadership established in the New Testament.

Our desire is not simply to answer a theological question but to faithfully steward the people God has entrusted to Parkway Church. We believe the church is strongest when every believer is encouraged to discover, develop, and faithfully use the gifts God has given them. As men and women serve together in humility, under the authority of Christ and within the order He has established, the body of Christ is strengthened, the gospel advances, and God is glorified.