



THE ROLE OF MEN AND WOMEN IN THE LIFE AND MINISTRY OF VALLEY CENTER COMMUNITY CHURCH

Introduction

The Bible teaches that God created two complementary sexes of humans, male and female, to bear His image together (*Gen. 1:27-28; Matt. 19:4; Mark 10:6*). This distinction in gender represents an essential characteristic of personhood and reflects an essential part of being created in God's image.

As outlined in Scripture and in accordance with our Statement of Faith, we believe that men and women are absolutely equal in essence, dignity and value and are complementary by divine design. Gender does not merely represent a social construct but, instead, represents a reality present in every human from birth.

Male and female are not interchangeable. From the opening pages of Scripture, we find that God, in His wisdom and providence, created two complementary sexes for our good and His glory. In light of His good created order, and the fact that men and women both share in divine image-bearing, God intends for men and women to have different yet complementary roles and responsibilities in the church and home. These role distinctions do not arise from cultural definitions of masculinity and femininity but are an integral part of God's plan for humanity, as revealed in Scripture. We should recognize them as God's grace to men and women, protecting, preserving and practicing them for His glory, our joy and for the sake of human flourishing. (*Genesis 2:18-25; 1 Cor. 11:2-16, 14:33-35; Eph. 5:22-33; Col. 3:18-19; 1 Tim. 2:8-15; 1 Pet. 3:1-7*).

To reflect God's beautiful design at Valley Center Community Church (VCCC), we desire to articulate and embody a theological vision of complementarianism. This paper seeks to describe that vision by explaining what we believe Scripture

teaches about gender complementarity as it relates to men and women in ministry at VCCC.

Gender and the Role of Men and Women in Scripture

Our foundation for life and ministry starts with the understanding that the Bible is God's inspired and authoritative Word. We believe the Scriptures are true, authoritative and sufficient"(*Ps. 19:7-11; 2 Tim. 3:16; 2 Pet. 1:20-21*). Any attempt to understand personhood and gender must begin with divine revelation and God's created order. First, we believe that all Christians are charged with the Great Commission. All Christians, both men and women, participate in the ministry of the church. We believe the Bible explicitly encourages and assumes that women will be involved in the ministry of the church. Jesus welcomed women among His disciples, teaching them (*Luke 10:39*) and involving them in His ministry (*Luke 8:1-3*). Paul's words to Titus teach that older women teaching biblical wisdom to younger women is a noble, beautiful and necessary task (*Titus 2:3-5*). Phoebe, a patron and deacon of the church of Cenchreae, is commended by Paul and was likely the courier for Paul's epistle to the Romans, indicating her participation in gospel ministry (*Rom. 16:1-2*). Euodia and Syntyche labored with Paul "side-by-side" in the gospel (*Phil. 4:3*). Priscilla is described as "explaining the way of God more accurately" to Apollos (*Acts 18:26*). We celebrate the biblical picture of men and women serving the Church of the Lord Jesus Christ together. We rejoice in biblical examples of men and women using their gifts in the Church for the glory of God.

The Bible depicts a vision of men and women laboring alongside one another in the world and the Church for the sake of the kingdom of God (*1 Cor. 12:4-31*). When we don't empower both sexes to engage and use their gifts, in complementarian partnership, both genders suffer, and the mission

of the Church—to proclaim the gospel and make disciples of all nations—suffers.

Second, in light of the belief that male and female image bearers flourish in partnership, we expect that the primary relationship between Christian men and women is that of brotherly and sisterly love. We note that the Bible upholds the metaphor of siblinghood as the primary descriptor for male-female partnering in the Church. The concept that is taught in the New Testament is that the Church ought to have the kind of love for one another that is reserved for blood brothers and sisters. This uniquely Christian disposition reminds us that we ought to see each other as a family in a special sense. Therefore, the primary relationship in the local church between men and women is the relationship of brothers and sisters, united in Christ, not subordinates. We affirm that cultivating an environment of brotherly and sisterly love is at the heart of complementarianism. These relationships should be marked by honor, care and sacrifice for one another.

Third, we affirm that equal involvement in the Church between men and women does not entail interchangeable involvement. Although men and women are portrayed as equals throughout Scripture, we believe the Bible reserves the office of elder/pastor specifically for qualified men. Scripture calls elders to lead the church (*1 Tim. 5:17; Titus 1:7; 1 Pet. 5:1-2*), preach the Word (*1 Tim. 3:2; 2 Tim. 4:2; Titus 1:9*), protect the church from false teaching (*Acts 20:17, 28-31; Titus 1:9*) pray for and visit the sick (*Jas. 5:14; Acts 20:35*), equip the saints for ministry (*Eph. 4:11-12*) and use proper judgment in theological and doctrinal matters (*Acts 15*). In shepherding, overseeing, leading, caring for and praying for the local church, elders practice sacrificial male headship. Therefore, although we encourage all men and women to actively participate in the life of the church, we reserve the office of elder, and the responsibilities unique to it, for qualified men within the church. Apart from the role of pastor/elder, we believe the Bible explicitly encourages and assumes that women will be involved in the ministry of the church, including the ministry of the diaconate.

Affirmation and Denials

Based on the conclusions drawn from Scripture, we have created a list of affirmations and denials that encompass our beliefs on gender and the role of men and women in the life and ministry of the church.

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.

We deny that either gender has been given or is entitled to greater dignity in society, the home, the church or the kingdom of God.

We affirm that both men and women are needed and necessary for the health and ministry of the church. Godly men and women should be visible partners in the corporate life of the church, deploying their diverse gifts for the good of the body. Simply put, all Christians contribute to the ministry of the church.

We deny that the church can flourish without brotherly/sisterly partnership. We deny that a church can exist in which the men flourish and the women do not, or vice versa.

We affirm that all men and women have been created in the image of God, whether single or married.

We deny that single men and women must be married to be meaningful participants in the corporate life of the church. We deny that single men possess any authority over single women. The way that they love and serve their sisters should not patronize, victimize or show force, but rather should be the fruit of brotherly love, and vice versa.

We affirm that the role/function of elder/pastor is reserved for qualified men. Elders are distinctly responsible for overseeing the church (*1 Tim. 5:17; Titus 1:7; 1 Pet. 5:1-2*) and preaching the Word (*1 Tim. 3:2; 2 Tim. 4:2; Titus 1:9*).

We deny that the role of elder/pastor being withheld from women diminishes their importance or their influence in the church.

We affirm that all members of the church should be in glad submission to the elders, and that all should be in glad and sacrificial submission to the Lordship of Jesus Christ, the Head of the Church.

We deny that all women are subject to the leadership and authority of all men. Further, biblical submission is not indicative of subordination or inequality, as seen in the incarnate Son's submission to the Father (*Phil. 2:1-11*).

We affirm that complementarianism, rightly practiced, will lead to the recognizable flourishing of both sexes.

We deny any version of complementarianism or theological position that leads to the subjugation, abuse or neglect of any man or woman. We strongly denounce any distorted view of Scripture that contributes to the belief that biblical manhood or womanhood includes or permits practices such as marginalization, subjugation, intimidation, neglect or any form of abuse.

Ministry at Valley Center Community Church

In light of our conclusions and our implementation of them, we recognize that some may find our position and practice of women in ministry too conservative. We also recognize that others may find our position and practice of women in ministry too progressive. We ask for charity from both as we focus on the primary task of making disciples of Jesus Christ.

Professional/Organizational

The elders have designated the role of elder/pastor as reserved only for qualified men. Those looking to fulfill this role go through a formal examination before being presented to the church. For all other positions in the church, we seek to hire and promote qualified men and women. This gives both men and women opportunities to advance and grow.

Sunday Worship

Every member of the church body actively participates in our weekend worship services, not just those who are on the platform. Every role is open to both men and women, except the roles of preaching the Word of God and officiating the ordinances (baptism/the Lord's Supper). Every member is invited to distribute the elements of communion, but the roles of preaching and officiating the ordinances are reserved for elders/pastors.

Teaching Environments in Adult Sunday School, Youth Ministry, and Workshops

Mixed-gender teaching environments and the content of the teaching are overseen by elders. Both women and men can teach in these environments as directed by the elders.

Connection Groups, Overcomers Outreach, Bible Study

Gender-specific groups are to be led by a leader of the same gender, and mixed-gender groups are to have male leadership.



VCCC Position Paper on Female Deacons

In establishing his church and providing for its care and oversight, God created two very distinct offices or roles, elder and deacon. God calls those who serve in the role of elder to exercise spiritual oversight of the congregation. This spiritual oversight is accomplished through the ministry of prayer, the teaching of the Word and overall governance of the church (Acts 6:4; 1 Tim 3:2; Heb 13:17; 1 Peter 5:1-4). There are very specific qualifications for those who would serve as elders (1 Tim 3:1-7; Titus 1:5-9) and the Bible teaches that only men can serve in the role of an elder (1 Tim 2:11-12).

As elders seek to shepherd the church, deacons are called by God to serve the church by overseeing and engaging in ministry that frees up the elders to devote themselves to equipping the saints for the work of the ministry (Acts 6:1-4). Like elders, there are moral qualifications that deacons are to hold to and be evaluated by (1 Tim 3:8-13) and while deacons serve in wide-ranging ways, they ultimately do not have teaching, disciplining, or leadership authority in the church.

Bible-believing Christians disagree on whether women can serve as deacons. Valley Center Community Church's position is that God's word allows women to serve as deacons and gives examples of them doing so. Our position is summarized below.

I. Affirming Women as Deacons from the Scriptures:

1 Timothy 3:11

In 1 Timothy 3:8–13, Paul lists the qualifications needed for a man to become a deacon. In verse 11, however, he introduces the requirements needed for “women.” According to the NRSV, Paul states, “Women likewise must be...” The ESV, on the other hand, reads, “Their wives likewise must be...” The question is whether Paul is speaking of the requirements for the wife of a deacon or for a woman deacon. The following arguments suggest that Paul has the latter in mind.

(1) The Greek term *gunaikas* (from the word *gunē*) can either refer to “women” or more specifically to “wives”—the distinction can only be determined by the context. If Paul was referring to the wives of the deacons, he could have indicated his intention by adding the word “their” (“*Their* wives likewise...”). Because the Greek does not contain the word “their” (although it is included in many English translations), it is best to translate the original text simply as “women.” In this case, Paul is introducing another office and is not merely referring to the wives of deacons.

(2) Paul begins verse 11 in a manner similar to verse 8, which introduces a new office. In verses 1–7, Paul identifies the qualification needed for anyone aspiring to the office of overseer/elder. When Paul begins the next section which introduces the office of deacon, he states, “Likewise deacons...” (v. 8). The point to be made is that verse 11 begins in the same manner which suggests that another office (deaconess) is being introduced. The flow of Paul’s writing then becomes evident: “...an overseer must be (v.2)...deacons likewise must be (v. 8)...women [deacons] likewise must be (v. 11)....” In verses 12 and 13, which refer again to qualifications for male deacons, is additional information that Paul adds as an afterthought, causing a disjointed unit.

(3) Another reason which suggests that Paul is not speaking about deacons’ wives, but rather about women deacons, is that the qualifications for overseers do not include any reference to their wives. It does not seem likely that Paul would add a special requirement for the wife of a deacon when the primary office of overseer has no such requirement. Thus, it does not seem likely that Paul would have stricter requirements for deacons than he does for elders.

1 Timothy 2:12

Many Christians are opposed to allowing women to become deacons because, according to 1 Timothy 2:12, Paul forbids a woman “to teach or exercise authority over a man.” And because all offices in the church, including the office of deacon, possess an inherent authority, women are not permitted to hold such offices. There are two main responses to this dilemma which would still allow women to be deacons.

First, Paul’s prohibition could be limited due to cultural reasons. That is, Paul prohibits women from teaching and having authority over men because the women of Ephesus were either uneducated or were teaching false doctrine (or both). Therefore, in the case where women are educated and are not teaching false doctrine, Paul’s prohibition does not apply.

A second response is that the ministry of deacons is by nature of ministry of service which does not require women to teach or exercise authority over men and would thus not violate Paul’s prohibition. Unlike the elders, deacons do not need to be “able to teach” (1 Tim 3:2) because their ministry does not involve teaching. Furthermore, it could be argued that the office of deacon is not an authoritative office due to the nature of their service-oriented ministry. Deacons are not called to lead the church, but to serve the church. Therefore, the two prohibitions given by Paul in 1 Timothy 2:11 are not violated by allowing women to become deacons.

Romans 16:1–2

In this text, Paul commends Phoebe to the church at Rome and calls her a *diakonos* “of the church at Cenchreae.” There are at least three reasons which support the view that this

reference of *diakonos* should be translated “deacon,” referring to an office-holder and not merely one who is a “servant.”

(1) Paul uses the masculine form *diakonos* to refer to a woman. Thus, it can be argued that Paul is not using the term generally referring to one who is a servant, but has a specific “office” in mind. The masculine form of *diakonos* used of a woman, suggests that the term became standardized when referring to an office. Paul could have used either *diakoneō* or *diakonia* if he simply wanted to communicate that she served the church and did not hold an office.

(2) When the generic meaning of *diakonos* (i.e., “servant”) is intended, the text usually reads, “servant of the Lord” or something similar. This is the only place Paul speaks of someone being a *diakonos* of a local church. Tychicus is called a “servant in the Lord” (Eph 6:21), Epaphras is named a “servant of Christ” (Cor 1:7), and Timothy is labeled “a servant of Christ Jesus” (1 Tim 4:6). Because only Phoebe is specifically said to be a servant of a local congregation (the church at Cenchreae), it is likely that she was a “deacon” of her church.

(3) Phoebe is sent to perform an official task on behalf of the Apostle Paul and her church. Paul commends her to the church at Rome and urges the Roman Christians to aid her since she is about the important business of the church. He asks that they “welcome her in the Lord in a way worthy of the saints, and help her in whatever she may need..., for she has been a patron of many and of myself as well” (Rom 16:2). Thus, it is argued that such an official task requires an official office.

II. Affirming Women as Deacons from Church History:

Within the first one hundred years of the establishment of the church we find examples of women serving as deacons. In A.D. 111 Pliny, Governor of Bithynia, reported questioning, under torture, two women who called themselves deaconesses concerning Christian rites. He arrested them as Christians, they said they were deaconesses, and he tortured them.[1]

Evidence of female deacons also exists in the second, third, and fourth centuries.

Here is a quote from the third century from the Constitutions of the Holy Apostles, a guidebook written for church plants, based on the teaching of the apostles.

Let the deacons be in all things unspotted, as the elders himself is to be, only more active; in number according to the largeness of the Church, that they may minister to the infirm as workmen that are not ashamed. And let the deaconess be diligent in taking care of the women; but both of them ready to carry messages, to travel about, to minister, and to

serve...Let every one therefore know his proper place, and discharge it diligently with one consent, with one mind, as knowing the reward of their ministration.”[2]

And again:

Ordain also a deaconess who is faithful and holy, for the ministrations towards women. For sometimes he cannot send a deacon, who is a man, to the women, on account of unbelievers. Thou shalt therefore send a woman, a deaconess, on account of the imaginations of the bad. For we stand in need of a woman, a deaconess, for many necessities; and first in the baptism of women...”[3]

Here we have those who were discipled by the Apostles, installing women deacons in the local church. They even wrote a prayer for the installation of women deacons:

O Eternal God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Creator of man and of woman, who didst replenish with the Spirit Miriam, and Deborah, and Anna, and Huldah; who didst not disdain that Thy only begotten Son should be born of a woman; who also in the tabernacle of the testimony, and in the temple, didst ordain women to be keepers of Thy holy gates,—do Thou now also look down upon this Thy servant, who is to be ordained to the office of a deaconess, and grant her Thy Holy Spirit, and “cleanse her from all filthiness of flesh and spirit,” that she may worthily discharge the work which is committed to her to Thy glory, and the praise of Thy Christ, with whom glory and adoration be to Thee and the Holy Spirit forever. Amen.”[4]

Greg Allison, professor of Historical Theology at Southern Seminary, in his book, Historical Theology, writes about a generous deaconesses at the church in Constantinople.

“Olympias, a widowed deaconess of the church in Constantinople, leveraged her immense wealth to become a generous patron of the church. She donated many of her estates to the church, supported the ministries of such church leaders as John Chrysostom and Gregory of Nazianzus, ransomed exiled captives, sustained a community of 250 virgins, and cared for the poor.”[5]

And a woman named Salvina, Jerome tells us, served as a deaconess under Chrysostom’s ministry. “Salvina, however, consecrated her life to deeds of piety, and became one of Chrysostom’s deaconesses.”[6]

More recently the Reformer John Calvin said...

For deaconesses were appointed, not to soothe God by chantings or unintelligible murmurs, and spend the rest of their time in idleness; but to perform a public ministry of

the Church toward the poor, and to labour with all zeal, assiduity, and diligence, in offices of charity.”[7]

SUMMARY:

The debate on the issue of female deacons is complex. Based on the evidence of the Scriptures and church history it is our conclusion that while the Bible is clear that women are not permitted to serve in the role of elder, they are permitted to serve in the role of deacon.

1. Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson, and A. Cleveland Coxe, eds., “Constitutions of the Holy Apostles,” in *Fathers of the Third and Fourth Centuries: Lactantius, Venantius, Asterius, Victorinus, Dionysius, Apostolic Teaching and Constitutions, Homily, and Liturgies*, trans. James Donaldson, vol. 7, *The Ante-Nicene Fathers* (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Company, 1886), 432.

2. *Ibid*, 431.

3. *Ibid*, 492.

4. Gregg R. Allison, *Historical Theology: An Introduction to Christian Doctrine* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011), 25–26.

5. Jerome, “The Letters of St. Jerome,” in *St. Jerome: Letters and Select Works*, ed. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace, trans. W. H. Fremantle, G. Lewis, and W. G. Martley, vol. 6, *A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church, Second Series* (New York: Christian Literature Company, 1893), 163.

6. John Chrysostom, “Homilies of St. John Chrysostom, Archbishop of Constantinople, on the First Epistle of St. Paul the Apostle to Timothy,” in *Saint Chrysostom: Homilies on Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, Thessalonians, Timothy, Titus, and Philemon*, ed. Philip Schaff, trans. James Tweed and Philip Schaff, vol. 13, *A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church, First Series* (New York: Christian Literature Company, 1889), 441.

7. John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 1997).