

WOMEN IN MINISTRY – SUMMARY SHEET

Derek Sanford | Lead Pastor – Grace Church | September 2025

What is currently before us:

- Since 2005 Grace Church has had a variety of women serving in leadership roles in the church. Some of them were women preachers who have opened the Word of God to us at our weekend services. Some have been leaders serving at every level of leadership on our staff including our site pastor teams.
- On May 26, 2020 the Elders of Grace Church voted unanimously to affirm that women are welcomed to become licensed pastors at Grace Church. And on September 27, 2020, the congregation voted to uphold that recommendation by licensing Sarah Burttt as a Pastor.
- By way of broader context, our denomination, Converge Worldwide (Baptist General Conference), has a rich history of female pastors even though Grace Church specifically had never had a female pastor prior to 2020.
- Sarah remains as an unpaid volunteer member of our pastoral team. There is precedent for this as Grace licensed Jim Scarpitti as an unpaid volunteer pastor in 2016.

Why is this important now?

- We are preparing to bring our second female pastoral candidate, Kerrie Grande, for licensure at the 2025 Annual Meeting. In many respects, Kerrie has already been functioning in a pastoral role both at Grace Harborcreek, and in our community through her leadership of ServErie.
- We continue to believe in the importance of expanding the number of pastors in general at Grace, but female pastors specifically, so that, among other things, the women of Grace Church to have the option of seeking pastoral guidance from female pastors about confidential and personal issues.

Why is it controversial to some?

- A traditional view has often held that women are not permitted to teach men, or to hold offices of authority over men in the church. This point of view is based on the interpretation of some of Paul's comments on women's roles in the ancient church (see position paper).
- A **Complementarian View** says that men and women are equal before God as persons but maintains that there are gender distinctions when it comes to functional roles within the home and the church. An **Egalitarian View** says there are no gender-based distinctions when it comes to the home or to ministry.

A summary of Grace's position:

- Grace is maintaining a complementarian position that there are distinct roles for men and women, but that the role reserved for men is that of Elder. Any other leadership roles in the church including pastor or preacher may be held by both godly men and women.

A biblical summary:

- Maybe the most straightforward argument for women comes from Jesus himself. In John 20:14-18, Jesus commissioned the very first preacher of the gospel. Her name was Mary Magdalene. Notice Jesus didn't tell her to go get one of the male disciples to preach the gospel, he told her to do it.
- None of the passages on spiritual gifts in the church (Romans 12, 1 Corinthians 12, Ephesians 4) offer any restrictions for the use of the gifts (including teaching and leadership) based on gender.
- There are countless examples in the bible of women holding key culture-defying leadership roles.
- The two passages of Paul (1 Cor. 14:34-35, 1 Tim. 2:12) which seem to limit the ministry of women are directed at specific contextual circumstances and aren't meant to be applied to all women in all churches for all time. (See more detail in the attached "Women in Ministry – A Position Paper.")

WOMEN IN MINISTRY | A POSITION PAPER

Derek Sanford | Lead Pastor – Grace Church | updated August 24, 2020

Some introductory thoughts:

1. Traditionally it has been held that women are not permitted to teach men or hold offices of pastoral leadership within the church. This traditional view is based on two main passages which we will explore at the end of this paper.
2. Equally godly scholars who are equally committed to the inerrancy of the Bible come to different conclusions on the issue of women in ministry because of the complexity of the interpretive data in the key texts about the subject.
3. The gender roles issue is clearly an important one – but is not one of the foundational doctrines of Christianity – and should not be a matter of bitter divisiveness among believers.
4. My perspective is adapted from the position of several respected evangelical scholars including Craig Blomberg, John Stott, and Tim Keller. Craig Blomberg’s position as outlined in “Two Views on Women in Ministry” and Tim Keller’s position as outlined in “Women, Ministry, and Redeemer” are the foundational source materials for this paper.
5. This paper will not be an exhaustive survey of the topic but will hopefully provide enough Biblical support and evidence to be convincing that this is a viable position for Grace Church at this time.
6. I realize that for some – this position will not be conservative enough and for some it won’t be progressive enough. I think it’s a healthy balance to live in. Some will think that by inviting women to be pastors and preachers we have gone too far. Others will think that by restricting women from holding the office of Elder we haven’t gone far enough. I take comfort in the fact that Christianity has survived many centuries of sometimes unpopular views. Jesus’ sacrifice on the on the cross still works, his resurrection is still true, and he still draws people to himself. May God help us to be faithful in our handling of these matters.

About Pastoring:

- The process of licensing and ordaining pastors as we practice it currently, is a man-made process, and historically a recent development. It is not bound by a biblical mandate. In some traditions to become a pastor is equivalent to becoming an elder, but this is not true in our structure.
- Additionally, there is no scripturally mandated method for church government, other than what I believe to be a strong and non-negotiable call to a plurality of leadership (more than one at the top).
- The bible uses a variety of words in the New Testament to describe church leaders; Elders, Pastors, Overseers, and Bishops. These terms are used interchangeably and without much specificity. Surprisingly the word we use most often, “pastor,” is only used once in the whole bible (Eph. 4:11). Our elected elders parallel most closely with this description of church leadership.
- Most of our staff (including our pastoral staff and volunteer staff) most closely resemble the biblical role of “Deacon” and “Deaconess.” They are the doers and equippers for ministry. In our church’s context they don’t fulfill the function of “overseer” which is an elder role. Which means that just because someone on our staff has the title of pastor, it doesn’t automatically make them an elder in our structure. Which would allow both men and women to pursue the role of pastor.

Summary of Position:

Men and women are equal in dignity, worth, and value. Women can lead, speak and teach the Bible to all audiences, should be actively encouraged to utilize every spiritual gift for the building up of the local church, and can hold positions of recognized leadership including Pastoral ordination. At the same time, the bible seems to indicate that the role of elder (including Lead Pastor) within the church is reserved for male leadership. This pattern is repeated throughout Scripture at every stage of redemption. We are a complementarian church with the line of men’s/women’s roles being drawn at the position of Elder.

The role of women in each stage of redemptive history

There is a pattern in redemptive history in the Scriptures. Women were given, in many cases shocking counter-cultural, positions of leadership. And yet there was always a role reserved for male leadership.

1. Creation.

In Genesis 1 we see both male and female made in God's image, and both being given 'dominion' over the earth (1:26-28). In Genesis 2 we see woman is created as a "helper". Careful study of the Hebrew word indicates that a 'helper' in each context comes to the aid of someone else who bears prime responsibility for the activity in question. This seems to indicate (among other scriptures) that *the husband has the primary spiritual responsibility for the family*. The context of Genesis 1-3, of course, is a husband and a wife, and therefore it should NOT be assumed that all women are to be helpers to all men.

2. Israel.

Without question the Old Testament is an account that was written in a highly patriarchal culture. However, even in this context women held a number of positions of authority.

- a. Miriam was a prophet - (Ex. 15:20-21)
- b. Huldah was a prophet (2 Kings 22:11-20)
- c. Deborah was a civil magistrate (Judges 4)
- d. Esther was a powerful and influential queen over Persia and rescued her people from the hand of Haman. (Esther)
- e. The noble Proverbs 31 woman had tremendous leadership power and influence in the community (Proverbs 31:10-31)
- f. The priesthood was reserved for men (Exodus 28; Leviticus 9.)

So here we see that women held very important public leadership roles even in a male dominated culture. And yet at one crucial point God reserves one leadership role, the priesthood, for only men. Again, there is no claim of the inherent inferiority of women, but neither is there a complete egalitarian interchangeability. Once again, God affirmed the value and leadership capability of women and still reserved one leadership role for men.

3. Jesus.

Again, and again Jesus affirmed the status and ministry of women.

- a. Five women (four of which were Gentiles) are listed in Jesus' genealogy (Matthew 1:1-17) – this was highly unusual.
- b. Jesus received Mary as a disciple, sitting at his feet (Luke 10:38-42)
- c. Women traveled as disciples along with the apostles, including Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Susanna, and "many others." (Luke 8:1-3.)
- d. Jesus allowed the woman who anointed his feet to remain and her act of devotion won higher praise from Jesus than any other act in the gospels (Matt. 26:6-13; Mark 14:3-9; Luke 7:36-50; John 12:1-8).
- e. Jesus' teaching on divorce was striking in that it treated men and women equally, at a time in which there was a cultural double standard for the genders (Mt 5:32; Mk 10:11-12.)
- f. When the disciples fled during Jesus' trial and crucifixion, the women remained with him (Matt. 27:55-56; Mark 15:40-41; Luke 23:49, 55).
- g. John records that Jesus' mother, his aunt, Mary "the wife of Clopas," and Mary Magdalene stood near the cross at his crucifixion.
- h. After his resurrection, Jesus appeared first to the women who came to mourn at his tomb (Matt. 28:1-10; Mark 16:1-11; Luke 24:1-10; John 20:1-18). Ultimately these women became the first authorized preachers of the gospel.

There is much, much more that we could say about Jesus' affirmation of women. However, in spite of all this remarkable affirmation, Jesus did not choose a woman as one of the twelve apostles. In short, we see again a parallel to former stages of redemptive history. There is a striking openness and affirmation to women despite the surrounding patriarchal culture, yet Jesus reserved the leadership role of apostle for men.

4. The church.

Women were full members of the covenant community and held a variety of different leadership roles in the early church including teaching and prophecy (an equivalent to modern preaching).

- a. The 120 disciples who gathered together for prayer in the upper room were both men and women. (Acts 1)
- b. Tabitha (Acts 9:30) was a leader of mercy ministry to the poor
- c. Mary held a prayer meeting in her house, and Rhoda, a maid, kept the door and informed the Christians of Peter's arrival (Acts 12:12-16).
- d. Lydia was a leader and founder of the church at Philippi. Because of her conversion, her whole house was baptized (Acts 16:11-15).
- e. Priscilla and Aquilla worked with Paul both at Corinth and at Ephesus. Priscilla (the wife) is generally mentioned first of the two. Both partners of this team went to Apollos to teach him correctly about baptism (Acts 18:18-28). Like co-pastors, they hosted a church in their home (1 Corinthians 16:19).
- f. Philip had four daughters who prophesied (Acts 21:8-10). In the early church this was not merely a role but a position or a category of ministry. There are more examples of female prophets than male prophets in the New Testament. Early Christians considered prophecy one of the highest—some argue that it was *the* highest—positions in the church.
- g. Phoebe was a "deaconess" or "minister" (Romans 16:1-2).
- h. "Mary worked hard among you" in ministry (Romans 16:16).
- i. Women were expected to pray and prophesy in the assembly (1 Corinthians 11:5-16).
- j. Euodia and Syntyche "contended at my side in the cause of the gospel," says Paul, and calls them "fellow workers" (Philippians 4:2, 3).
- k. Nympha had a church in her home (Colossians 4:15). As did a number of the women mentioned in Romans 16:1-15. Of the 29 names, 9 are female; of the 9 specially commended, 6 are women.
- l. Women were included the leadership instructions of 1 Timothy 3:1-13 (cf. v. 11). These are either deacons, deaconesses, or screened-and-appointed deaconing wives.
- m. Women who had served the church well could be eligible for support (1 Timothy 5:4-10).
- n. Women were to rule their households well (1 Timothy 5:14; cf. Proverbs 31:10-31).
- o. Older women were instructed to teach younger women how to live a godly and exemplary life (Titus 2:3-5).
- p. In the early centuries of the church age, not all Christians were tortured. Generally it was only the church leaders who were persecuted. Given the number of women martyrs, we can ascertain that women held considerable positions of influence in the early persecuted church.

Despite the incredible leadership roles entrusted to women in the early church, there was not a complete inter-changeability between men and women. *Paul is clear that in the early church elders were to be men (1 Tim 3:1-3).*

Conclusion: There is a consistent pattern. In Genesis there was an indication of both female equality and male leadership in marriage. In Israel, women had many roles of leadership, but the role of priest was reserved for men. In the gospels, Jesus cultivated women in ministry in many remarkable ways, but the role of apostle was reserved for men. In the early church women played many significant roles but they never appear as elder/bishops.

In light of these truths, and in Grace Church's context we believe that the role of Elder should be reserved for godly men, while women can function in every other ministry and leadership role in the church including licensed pastor and preacher/teacher.

The Key New Testament Texts

- The traditional view of limiting the teaching and leadership of women in the church is usually based on these two passages which seem to suggest at face value that women should not teach or lead within the church. But we must understand some important context before rendering our verdict.
- Some would argue that we simply have to take the Bible's words at face value. And obviously, I agree with the inerrant authority of the bible. But it is also important to note that interpretive methods are used when applying any text – including weighing the full counsel of scripture and discerning underlying principles when there are passages with strong cultural biases. For example, reading literally, Jesus said to rip out our eyeballs when they cause us to lust. Leviticus 19:19 commands people to not wear clothes made from two different kinds of material. Jesus told his disciples not to preach to the Gentiles. We violate these "literal" commands all the time. There is interpretive work that must be done in all culturally bound texts.
- Even in the two passages we will look at now, just before Paul forbids women from teaching or having authority over men in 1 Timothy 2, he also forbids them from braiding their hair, wearing jewelry, and wearing expensive clothes. Before he tells women to keep silent in church in 1 Corinthians 14, Paul says that women should never pray unless their head is covered. These passages are rarely applied "literally" in modern churches – however, the principle that people should not be distracting or drawing attention to themselves and should be praying in humility still stands. So, while we maintain a literal view of the bible, we still must do interpretive work to determine what is culturally bound and what is universal.

1 Corinthians 14:34-35

...the women should keep silent in the churches. For they are not permitted to speak, but should be in submission, as the Law also says. 35 If there is anything they desire to learn, let them ask their husbands at home. For it is shameful for a woman to speak in church.

- The call for women to be completely silent in church cannot mean literal verbal 'wordlessness' based on many other examples of women having leadership and speaking roles in the early church (outlined above in #4 The Church). Paul is obviously addressing a specific problem in this specific church. It also can't refer to women teaching. Just three chapters earlier (1 Corinthians 11:5), Paul gave instructions for women who are praying and prophesying (preaching).
- Paul's statement, "the women should keep silent in churches," is in the midst of a prolonged discussion about the lack of decorum and order in the Corinthian church. The Corinthians evidently had a very severe problem controlling their gatherings. In fact, he concludes the chapter by saying everything should be done decently and in order. The statement in :34 seems to be a rebuke to the women for the part they were playing in the general atmosphere of confusion and hostility. In essence what Paul is saying is, "There is enough confusion going on in your services, so tell the women to shut up and stop contributing to the confusion as well, and just be quiet!"
- Again, Paul is giving specific instructions to a specific church that is struggling. We need to be careful about universalizing his commands. For example, in this same section (:26-40) Paul makes other

declarative statements to this church. He says there can be no more than three people speaking in tongues. He also says there can be no more than three prophets that speak. We don't universalize these rules and apply them to churches worldwide. If we were allowed no more than three people per week to speak in church, then we are currently violating Paul's commands every week at Grace!

- However, it seems that there is something specific going on here as it relates to women's' roles. In the previous verses Paul is describing the confusion surrounding church's evaluation or "weighing" of what is being preached or prophesied. He says, "let two or three prophets speak, and let others weigh what was said." It seems some of the women in the church were jumping in and interrupting what was almost certainly a function of the elders and overseers of the church. What is Paul forbidding then? I believe it is the ultimate evaluation of what is spoken in the gathered church.
- Paul is not telling women to be silent all the time, but only when they are causing confusion and when the prophets are being judged. This final doctrinal evaluation was reserved for male elders and not women or non-elder men. This final authority and evaluation of our teaching ministry at Grace also rests in the hands of our elders.

1 Timothy 2:11-15

Let a woman learn quietly with all submissiveness. 12 I do not permit a woman to teach or to exercise authority over a man; rather, she is to remain quiet. 13 For Adam was formed first, then Eve; 14 and Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and became a transgressor. 15 Yet she will be saved through childbearing—if they continue in faith and love and holiness, with self-control.

- According to the male-only view, this passage is teaching that women are disallowed to teach or lead in the church, and the reasoning from this interpretation, is that they are too easily deceived.
- Again, it is difficult to draw this universal conclusion and seems inconsistent in Paul's own teaching since he suggests elsewhere that it's important for women to teach (Titus 2:3-4). He also praises women and encourages them to prophecy in public (1 Corinthians 11:5). Prophecy is one of the "greater gifts" that Paul describes in 1 Corinthians 14:5 because the church is "built up" by its usage. He certainly wouldn't encourage these things if it was universally true that women were to remain totally silent because they were more prone to deception than men.
- We must remember that false teaching was clearly Paul's primary concern in writing the letter of 1 Timothy. He immediately addresses the issue at the beginning of the letter instead of giving his normal thanksgiving, and it remains his main concern throughout the remainder of the letter. We get indications from other texts that some of the women in the church were contributing to this deceptive environment. He describes these women later in 1 Timothy 5:12-15 as "having abandoned their former faith. Besides that, they learn to be idlers, going about from house to house, and not only idlers, but also gossips and busybodies, saying what they should not... some have already strayed after Satan."
- So, a proper interpretation is key. Here in :12, women are forbidden to "teach or exercise authority." The critical question about this text is—is Paul forbidding two distinct, separate things to women (teaching and exercising authority) or is this phrase a 'hendiadys.' A *hendiadys* is a literary construct where one idea is presented using two phrases. If it is a *hendiadys*, it means Paul is forbidding 'teaching with authority,' and not necessarily all teaching or all leadership. The evidence is that this is a *hendiadys* for the following reasons: a) The first clue is the conjunction 'oude' (which joins 'teach' and 'have authority'). This conjunction often joins together expressions that are mutually defining. b) The second reason is the full counsel of scripture. There are many other Scriptural examples of women doing public teaching/speaking (as outlined above) which are not forbidden. It seems to be the exercising of authority or 'ruling over' that Paul is taking issue with.
- If 2:12 is not a *hendiadys* one has to do a lot of interpretive gymnastics to avoid denying almost any public ministry function by women since the corresponding command for women is to "remain quiet." If this is what Paul meant, there should be no women worship leaders, or scripture readers

or testimony givers in church. But as we discovered above, there is overwhelming evidence that women did public ministry including teaching and preaching. So, the 'teaching' that is forbidden in 1 Tim 2:11 cannot be all public speaking or instruction. It must be a certain kind of teaching, namely, that which carries with it 'ruling authority' which is an action reserved for an elder. One who has the both the authority to teach and the ability to enact authoritative discipline within the church.

- Some may wonder if the reference to the creation order (:13-15) makes this a universal principle. And is Paul suggesting that the Genesis 3 account means that women are inherently too easily deceived to be leaders? But, Paul's reference to Genesis 3 seems to be part of a larger commentary on the origins of gender roles. In Genesis, we see two facts which, when combined, issued in God's punishment of the woman in Genesis 3:16 which says, *I will greatly multiply your pain in childbirth, in pain you shall bring forth children; Yet your desire shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you. (Gen. 3:16b)*
- The two facts that led to God's decree were: 1) Adam was created first, and 2) Eve was deceived. Either one of these facts alone would not have resulted in God making the statement He did. It was the combination of the two that led to the verdict. Therefore, Paul would reasonably bring up both of these events in connection with the issue of women domineering over men in this church. Since God said, "...he shall rule over you," we see a theological basis for headship within marriage. Therefore, it would be inappropriate for the women to usurp authority, and thus reverse in the church what has been established in the home. What Adam had was chronological priority and not superiority. It was because of his prior creation that God put man in authority in Genesis 3. It was not because man was somehow superior or because woman was universally more easily deceived. The priority of Adam and the deception of Eve are mentioned not because they illustrate the true nature of women, but because these were the two factors that led God to decree, "...he shall rule over you." It is also the reason for Paul's somewhat awkward inclusion of the detail on childbirth which doesn't make sense unless we understand that he is giving an overall summary of Genesis 3.
- We conclude that the issue specifically of women teaching only came up in 1 Timothy because teaching was being used as a forum for those women who were trying to usurp authority in the church. If so, the rule against women teaching in vs. 12 was related to the strategic needs of the hour, rather than eternal theological principles, or the innate nature of women.
- At the same time, we also see later in 1 Timothy 3, that women are excluded from the office of elder. Men and women both do "deaconing" together, but, there seems to be no scriptural provision for female elders.

Conclusion:

- With the above considerations, we believe that it is allowable for women to teach in the church, including from the pulpit, and to be licensed and ordained as pastors, all under the oversight of the Church Elders.
- Throughout the Bible there is a balance (not a contradiction) between two themes with regard to women. On the one hand, the Bible teaches the full equality of women with men (Galatians 3:28) and denounces any abuse or oppression of women. It allows for a full and robust leadership expression of women in the church including preaching and pastoring. The Bible also recognizes some role differentiation which in the church reserves the role of elders for godly male leadership.