

## **Women in Church Ministry**

The role of women in ministry has become a controversial issue in churches. First Christian Church holds to a “complementarian” position, which affirms that while equal in value and essence, men and women have different roles in the home and local church that are intended to complement each other. Complementarianism does not mean that women are inferior to men in any way. Rather, it emphasizes that God designed men and women to operate with a distinction in roles. Based on our understanding of Scripture, the following describes First Christian Church’s position on the issue.

From the authority of Scripture, we affirm that men and women are of equal value since both were specially created in the image of God (Genesis 1:26–27). It is to both men and women that God gives dominion over the earth. However, we believe that God has intended for the man to have a different role than the woman. This is evident in Genesis 1–4 as Adam, the man, is given the position of headship over the woman (she is created from his side; he gives her a name which is a sign of authority; she is created to be a helper to him). God declares that this is part of his “very good” creation. Even after the fall, God approaches Adam to call him to account for

Scripture quotes/references are from the ESV (English Standard Version).

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Some material adapted from [graceky.org](http://graceky.org)’s similar position paper.

the sin of eating from the tree since Adam was ultimately responsible before God for his marriage. Further, this idea of headship in marriage is seen throughout the Bible, with clear New Testament passages indicating loving, Christlike male leadership in marriage (Ephesians 5:22–33; Colossians 3:18–19). It is important to note that this distinction in roles is a reflection of the Trinity, where the Son submits to the Father (John 6:38; John 8:28), and yet is His equal (John 1:1; Colossians 1:19; Hebrews 1:3) and one with Him (John 10:30). Therefore, submission does not imply inferiority or secondary status, and so we condemn those who have used it as such throughout the history of the church. Admittedly, our understanding and application of this truth has been negatively impacted by the effects of the Fall and the Curse (Genesis 3). However, we affirm that Scripture calls for a husband to love his wife self-sacrificially for her ultimate good, just as Christ did for the church (Ephesians 5:25–27). Additionally, a husband ought to cherish his wife, just as he does his own body (Ephesians 5:28–32).

We also affirm with the Scriptures that there is no distinction between men and women regarding the benefits and application of salvation (Galatians 3:26–29). Since both men and women are sinners in Adam, their salvation is accomplished through the atonement of Christ alone and the benefits of a restored relationship with God are evident equally in both genders. In fact, after his resurrection, Jesus gave the honor of his first appearance to a woman (John 20:14; Mark 16:9). Both men and women are sealed and in-dwelt with the Holy Spirit and given spiritual gifts for the edification of the Church (Acts 2:1–4, 17–18; 1 Corinthians

12:7–11; Ephesians 4:7–16; 1 Peter 4:10). The responsibility of equipping both men and women so that they are empowered to use their God-given gifts and reach maturity in the faith falls on the leaders of the Church (Ephesians 4:11-13).

When it comes to roles in the Church, God has given us clear guidelines to which we submit ourselves. The offices of elder (also called pastor or overseer) and deacon are the two offices prescribed for the leading and service of the Church. Wherever these offices are mentioned with qualifications in the New Testament, they are always given with masculine nouns and always described with respect to their roles as husbands and fathers (Titus 1:5–9; 1 Timothy 3:1–13).

The Apostle Paul instructed Timothy, under the direction of the Holy Spirit, to establish order in the local church (I Tim 3:14-15). In I Timothy 2:12 Paul writes: *I do not permit a woman to teach or to exercise authority over a man; rather, she is to remain quiet.* Based on Paul's use of the word "teaching" in his letters, we believe he is referring to the official and authoritative instruction of Scripture within the local church (see I Tim 4:11; II Tim 4:2). Practically, this means the function of preaching, as well as any Bible or doctrinal teaching within the local church, is restricted to men. Therefore, the role of Pastor (Preacher/Minister) is reserved for men to exercise. Further, because elders are the ones given authority in the local church (I Tim 5:17 - *Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in preaching and teaching*) and are identified as men who can teach (I Tim 3:2 - *...the husband of*

*one wife...able to teach*), the office of Elder (Overseer) would also be restricted to men.

Deacons are also required to be the *husband of one wife* (I Tim 3:12). Some believe that I Timothy 3:11 (*Their wives likewise must be dignified, not slanderers, but sober-minded, faithful in all things*) refers to female Deaconesses, but it is best to understand this verse as referring to the wives of male Deacons. The actual word used is “women” or “wives.” Because the very next verse (12) continues the requirements for male Deacons, verse 11 would be out of place if it referred to Deaconesses. Additionally, some think Phoebe was called a Deaconess (*diakonos*) in Romans 16:1 (*I commend to you our sister Phoebe, a servant of the church at Cenchreae*). However, the word literally means “servant,” and is translated this way a few chapters earlier in Paul’s letter (e.g. Rom 13:4). Furthermore, nowhere else in the New Testament do we see a woman described as a Deaconess. And when the church set apart what appear to be the first Deacons in Acts 6, they chose only men. Finally, because the bylaws of First Christian Church require Deacons to be part of the larger board that makes decisions on behalf of the church, the office of Deacon is restricted to men.

Following these Scriptural guidelines, the office of Pastor (Minister), Elder and Deacon at First Christian Church are to be filled only by qualified men who have been called by the Holy Spirit, selected by the elders of the Church, and confirmed by the approval of the congregation.

As we affirmed earlier, women are gifted by the Spirit and given talents to exercise within the body, having beneficial wisdom and understanding to share with all. Titus 2:1–5 gives a clear prescription of how women can exercise those gifts within the local church, with a focus on teaching other women. This can be fulfilled in a wide variety of ministry areas at First Christian Church such as *re:generation recovery*, Care Team, Connections, Fellowship, Hospitality, Admin, Worship, AV, Publications, Outreach, Facilities, Youth & Children, Counseling, women's Life Groups and women's Bible studies. In these ministries, and others like them, it is appropriate for a woman to use her gifting to edify the church under the broader leadership of the elders.

(For a more thorough treatment of these topics, please see Wayne Grudem, *Evangelical Feminism & Biblical Truth*. Many of the points in this position paper are based on the content of this book. You may also find more guidance from *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood* and resources from the Council of Biblical Manhood and Womanhood at [CBMW.org](http://CBMW.org).)