

ANTHEM CHURCH POSITION PAPER ON WOMEN IN MINISTRY

“Yes, I ask you also, true companion, help these women, who have labored side by side with me in the gospel together with Clement and the rest of my fellow workers, whose names are in the book of life.” (Philippians 4:3 ESV)

In the spirit of the apostle Paul, we, the elders of Anthem, affirm women in their role as our “fellow-workers.” They are not limited partners in this work, rather colleagues who are fully engaged with us, contending at our side for the cause of the gospel. It is our hope that “the company of women who proclaim (the Word)” will become a great host (Psalm 68:11). Nothing less will satisfy us.

Our desire in this matter, as in all matters, is to be controlled by God’s Word: what our Lord prohibits is prohibited; what He permits is permitted. But we want to limit our understanding of right and wrong to what is explicitly and clearly forbidden or permitted. To bind what God has not bound is legalism.

Some portions of His Word are difficult to interpret and are susceptible to various understandings. In such cases, where better students than we have admitted their uncertainty, we are forced to be reverently agnostic. We “know in part” as Paul said (1 Corinthians 3:9-10).

Furthermore, we are inclined to interpret difficult texts with leniency and grace. We would never knowingly hinder one of God’s workers by forbidding him or her to do anything that is good (Mark 9:38-50). When we stand before the Lord may it be said that we permitted his people to minister too much rather than too little.

The question for us then is this: What does the Bible teach about women in the Church? In what ways may they minister? The following facts seem reasonably unambiguous.

Both men and women are created in the image of God and are equal in both their standing before Him and in their capacity for discipleship. Women are not “disciplettes” or spiritual sub-sets of men but have an immediate (in contrast to mediated) relationship to God. They can consecrate themselves fully and can grow up to full maturity in Christ.

We believe the Holy Spirit imparts spiritual gifts to each and every believer, regardless of gender (1 Corinthians 12:4-11, Romans 12:4-8, Ephesians 4:11-16). Women, as well as men, are encouraged and commanded by the scriptures to exercise those gifts within the Body of Christ for the common good. Examples of mature, ministering women abound in scripture: Phoebe, Miriam, Hulda, Deborah, Phillip’s daughters, Priscilla, Tryphena, Tryphosa, Persis, Euodia, Syntyche and others are emblematic of the roles that women can and must play within this body (Romans 16:1, Exodus 15:20, 2 Kings 22:14, Judges 4:4, Acts 21:9, Acts 18:26, Romans 16:12, Philippians 4:2).

Scripture imposes a single restriction on the kind of ministries in which women can be engaged. 1 Timothy 2:8-15 indicates that the final authority in a local church is vested in the male eldership of that church. In this passage Paul instructs us that women should “learn in quietness (calmly) and full submission (in subjection to authority).” We assume that women in the city of Ephesus were challenging the legitimate authority of the church leadership there. Paul therefore states his policy as an inspired Apostle: “I do not permit a woman to teach or have authority over a man.”

It is unlikely that Paul is insisting that it is always inappropriate for a woman to instruct or edify a man. Scripture provides numerous examples of women who were commended for doing so. Furthermore, taking the text to that extreme forces us into numerous contradictions and inconsistencies. Should a man never listen to the counsel of his wife and other godly women? Should men not sing songs composed by women? Can men never read a book or commentary written by a woman? Will we discourage involvement in Precepts or Bible Study Fellowship because the study materials were written by women? Will we ask all adult males to leave the room when a woman teaches a children's class? At what age can our male children no longer sit under a woman's teaching? To say that women can never instruct a man would engage us in the rabbinic hair-splitting that characterized the Pharisees in Jesus' day. Such decision-making results in endless preoccupation with trivial distinctions that would cut the heart out of our freedom in Christ with which we minister. We could no longer legitimately claim we are all equals in Christ (Galatians 3:26-29). What then does Paul mean?

The word that Paul uses for "teach" in this text was used of rabbinic utterances and suggests an activity much more authoritative than mere instruction. We take it that Paul is referring to the formulation of biblical doctrine and policy. Furthermore, the word for "have authority" is an unusual word which occurs only here in the New Testament. In the original New Testament Greek text, this is a compound word formed by *autos* "self" and *entea* "arm" and properly means to unilaterally take up arms, i.e. acting as an *autocrat* – literally, *self-appointed*, acting without submission (Strong's Concordance 831). In extra-biblical contexts this word refers to one who with his or her own hands kills others, and this word also suggests "usurp authority." Therefore, we have concluded that Paul only prohibits the infringement, violation and/or invasion of male eldership in the church.

Another passage of scripture that is often referenced in regard to women's roles in church is found in 1 Corinthians 14. In his letter to the church of Corinth, Paul devotes several chapters to the topic of proper and orderly worship (as opposed to self-centered and disorganized worship). Near the end of this section, Paul states in 1 Corinthians 14:33-35: "As in all the churches of the saints, 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. 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."

Was Paul issuing an injunction upon all women for all time from ever speaking in worship gatherings? Certainly not! Earlier, in chapter 11, Paul had endorsed women in public prayer and prophesy during worship gatherings. What then is Paul referring to? The original Greek word for "talk" that Paul used does not refer to a formal leading/speaking role, but rather to general, informal talking. In extra-biblical usage of the same period this word often meant "chatter."

Interestingly, women are not the only segment of the body commanded to silence in 1 Corinthians 14. In verse 28 persons speaking in tongues without interpreters are commanded to silence, as well as in verse 30 where persons prophesying are commanded to silence if revelation is made to another while the first is still speaking. In both instances Paul is calling for a temporary silence, not a complete and permanent prohibition of speech. Again, the larger context of this passage is focused on orderly, God-honoring worship gatherings where one voice at a time is allowed to teach, pray, prophesy, and speak in tongues. "For God is not a god of confusion but of peace" (verse 33). When Paul's commands to women are viewed in the proper context, it becomes clear that Paul is not

silencing all women from both informal and formal speech in church, but rather that Paul is extinguishing irritating chatter and interruptive inquiries from disrupting the church's worship. To avoid the ignominy associated with rudely interrupting worship with questions and/or comments, Paul directs women to consult their husbands at an appropriate time and place. (The authority structure of the church reflects the biblical structure of the Christian home)

We believe that God has placed the headship of the church in the hands of male elders who are called to formulate doctrine and policy and exercise authority over the body which they oversee. We believe therefore it would be inappropriate for a woman to be an elder at Anthem.

We believe that scripture is clear regarding the distinction between pastor and elder. The English word pastor evolved from the original Greek word for shepherd: *poimen* ("pastor" in Latin). This word figuratively is defined as "someone who the Lord raises up to care for the total well-being of His flock, i.e. the people of the Lord (HELPS Word-studies, 4166)." This word is never translated as pastor in the ESV translation, and only translated as "pastor" once in the NASB and NIV translations in Ephesians 4:11. As stated above, the original text naming these spiritual gifts is not gender exclusive to males in any way. Therefore, the elders at Anthem recognize that women may be spiritually gifted as pastors and celebrate that women may serve in the office of pastor in their local body, under the care and supervision of the elders.

In summary, it is the position of Anthem Hayden Church that the only restriction placed on women in ministry at Anthem is that they may not be elders of the church. (Since the office of lead pastor/primary teaching pastor is by definition an eldering role, it is our scriptural understanding that it would be inappropriate for a woman to fill this position) In the same spirit of Acts 15:28, "It seems good to the Holy Spirit and to us not to burden (women) with any other requirement." They may serve on the ministry teams of churches; they may be heads of sub-divisions and departments of the church and instruct in those departments; they may fully participate in the worship and instruction of the church when it gathers; they may engage in any ministry for which they are gifted and called by the Holy Spirit and for which they are authorized by the elders. There are no other limitations.

We want to be wise in the way in which we administer and apply this decision. As Paul says, though "all things are lawful, not all things are expedient." (1 Corinthians 10:23). Some activities, by their nature, are not expedient, e.g., women counseling men. Furthermore, it is always unloving to run rough-shod over people's sensitivities. However, we believe that as the church grows in maturity and as women's gifts are affirmed, unnecessary fears will be alleviated, and women will be increasingly acknowledged in their spheres of giftedness and ministry within this body of believers.

A very special thanks to our brothers and sisters in Cole Community Church, whose wisdom and encouragement in this matter have been irreplaceable. May God continue to richly bless you as you faithfully and wisely engage with our dear Savior in His mission for Boise and our entire world. God bless you.