



Women in Ministry

There is no question that women have various God-given speaking and leadership gifts. However, the question of whether or not women are authorized in the New Testament to teach and lead men is not easily answered. Evangelical theologians are divided into four schools of thought regarding this question:

- The Traditional View holds that women may teach and hold positions of leadership in coed settings except among children and youth.
- The Male Eldership View states that women may teach and hold positions of leadership in coed settings but should not serve as elders or overseers who exercise final authority in a local church.
- The Plural Ministry View contends that women may teach and hold any position in the church except in societies where female leadership would be so offensive that the gospel would be hindered by it.
- The Egalitarian View asserts that women may teach and hold any position of church leadership including that of an elder/overseer who exercises final authority in a local congregation.

The Male Eldership View best describes the position held by MVCC Council of Elders. Below is our brief response to five frequently asked questions:

1. Why does MVCC allow women to teach in general services and classes where men are present?

Spiritual gifts such as prophecy, teaching, and encouragement are given to women as well as men (1 Cor. 12:7), and since we believe that there is no Biblical prohibition against women teaching in coed settings, we consider it important that the church benefit from the ministries of both men and women.

2. Don't Passages such as 1 Cor. 14:34-35 and 1 Tim. 2:11-12 forbid women to teach or lead men in the church?

No. In 1 Cor. 14, where Paul is giving instructions designed to bring order and peace to worship gatherings, he simply calls for the women, who customarily sat apart from the men, to cease talking or making inquiries and instead get the desired information from their spouses later at home. In 1 Tim. 2:11-12, Paul indeed says that women are not to "teach or to have authority over a man", but the immediate context confirms that the teachers who are called to exercise such authority in local churches are the "overseers" (see 1 Tim. 3:1) a term Paul often used in referring to elders. Therefore, this passage seems to disallow female overseers or elders, but does not forbid gifted women to teach or lead under the authority of a church's elders.

3. Why doesn't MVCC have female elders?

Passages such as Romans 16:1-5 and Philippians 4:2-3 reveal that women were among Paul's most important fellow workers in ministry. However, nowhere in these or other New Testament passages do we find references to female apostles, overseers, or elders. Additionally, in 1 Tim. 3 and Titus 1 Paul refers to prospective elders as husbands who manage well their families, a further indication that women were not appointed to this office. Thus, women can and do serve in significant positions of leadership within our congregation, but only qualified men serve as elders.

4. If the Apostle Paul didn't permit women to serve as elders/overseers in the church, why did he say, "There is neither...male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus" (Gal. 3:28)? Gal 3:28 teaches that all believers have equal value in God's sight which transcends ethnic, social and sexual distinctions. However, being equal is not the same as being identical. We do not all have the same gifts, callings, responsibilities, or roles, a fact supported throughout Paul's letters (e.g., see 1Cor. 11:3 & 12:12-20). Thus, while equality in Christ is clearly taught here, this passage does not address the issue of ministry roles and responsibilities.

5. How should we respond to those who say that the Bible relegates women to a position of inferiority and subservience?

We should point out that both the Old and New Testaments confirm the significance and value of women in the plan of God. Consider these facts:

- Women are partners and co-rulers with men over God's creation (Gen. 1:26-28)
- God's covenant was made with all of Israel, both men and women (Deut. 29:1-11)
- Women ministered at the tabernacle door (Ex. 38:8)
- Both men and women offered sacrifices (Lev. 1&5)
- Women prayed directly to God and their prayers were answered (1Sam.1)
- God spoke directly to women (Gen 25:22-23)
- Women could become Nazarites (Nu. 6), prophetesses (Ex. 15:20), and even judges (Judges 4).

Furthermore, in New Testament times when (a) many cultures considered women in the category of slaves, (b) rabbis would not speak to women in public, and (c) it was thought better to burn the Torah (the Old Testament) than to give it to a woman, Jesus not only spoke to women publicly, but also ministered to their needs (John 4:5-30; Luke 4:38-39). Women were also part of his entourage (Luke 8:1-4).

In addition, women were significant in the early church:

- They were among the disciples in the upper room (Acts 1:14)
- They were filled with the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:4)
- They were persecuted for their faith (Acts 8:3)
- They were prophetesses (Acts 2:17 & 21:8)
- They were among Paul's most important fellow workers in ministry (Rom. 16:1-15; Phil. 4:2-3)
- Priscilla, along with her husband Aquila, instructed Apollos in the way of God (Acts 18:24-26)

In conclusion, we realize that this position differs from that of some wonderful Bible teachers and church leaders who, like us, seek to honor God and remain true to His Word. We accept the fact that there will always be honest disagreements about such disputable matters and pray that this debate will not cause hurtful division within the body of Christ.