

WOMEN IN LEADERSHIP

At RAINIER VIEW CHRISTIAN CHURCH

January 2025

The purpose of this paper is to understand God's wisdom about how men and women shall engage in ministry and church leadership at Rainier View Christian Church. In support of women serving as pastors and elders, we will dig deep into scripture to better understand God's design for these ministry roles and the relationship between men and women.

INTRODUCTION

The roles of women serving in modern Christian churches have been debated for over 50 years. Although Biblical scholars have looked to Scripture for wisdom and guidance, the Bible wasn't written as a handbook on this topic, nor is it designed to answer all our questions about how to organize and structure a local church. The Bible was written as a unified story that leads to Jesus' restoration and renewal.

A wide variety of passages in the Bible address women in ministry and leadership. Because there are equally wide and varied interpretations of these passages, there is a continuum of views throughout church history and in modern church practice. The general range of views can be summarized as:

- **Complete Mutuality**

No gender limitations for church offices and exercising of gifts in the ministry of the local church.

- **Partial Mutuality**

Some gender limitations of church roles or offices exist. Women may hold ministry leadership and pastoral roles, but higher offices of Elder, Deacon or Lead Pastor are often reserved for men.

- **Partial Hierarchy**

Some distinction between gender roles where women may fill limited leadership roles in ministry such as Director of Children's Ministry but are often precluded from teaching or holding higher offices with a pastoral title or the position of Elder, Deacon or Director.

- **Complete Hierarchy**

Definite distinction between genders. Men and women practice a traditional patriarchal structure excluding women from higher roles and offices such as Pastor, Teaching Pastor, Leader, Director, Elder, Deacon, or any other significant office in the church.

As you can see by the list above, there are several combinations of positions women might hold in church leadership. However, without complete mutuality, there is often a double pane glass ceiling limiting women from first, teaching and second, serving as an elder. Some churches may employ women in ministry leadership roles but do not allow them to hold the title of Pastor. Other churches may have women pastors who also teach, but in the same church, women are not eligible for eldership. Let's look at some history at RVCC.

Ministry and Leadership Roles at RVCC

Historically, women at RVCC filled administrative office roles and the position of Director of Children's Ministry, until 2011 when a Children's Ministry Pastor was hired. This was the first woman to hold a *Pastor* title. This change in title further empowered women in ministry and moved RVCC's needle toward mutuality between men and women.

Because the new Children's Pastor was gifted in teaching, she later preached on a few Sunday mornings in the adult services. There was controversy within the congregation because of 1 Timothy 2:12, "*I do not permit a woman to teach or to assume authority over men.*" In response, it was argued that a woman could teach under the authority of the lead pastor who at the time was a man. Regarding the issue of a woman teacher under a man's authority, former RVCC pastor, Ryan Reed, challenged this interpretation in a position paper about women teaching in church:

"Women have long served in roles of Children's Ministry and Youth Ministry. The opposing argument would be that these are suitable roles for women as they are not speaking over men, but rather children. However, logic would argue that these age groups are the most formative years of development and to have a woman leading male children during their formative years is far more influential than a woman leading fully developed men who are capable of discernment and formulating their own thoughts and ideas. To be logically consistent, one must argue that women cannot lead over any male individual regardless of age. Additionally, it would be inconsistent to allow for men to serve in these areas of ministry as they would be serving under a female lead, thus submitting to their coaching, guidance, and expertise (Reed)."

"This inconsistency points to a notion that women are incapable of leading men, speaking spiritual truths into their lives, and ultimately being used by God in these areas. This is not only false on an empirical scientific front, women are just as capable cognitively, developmentally, and intellectually as men, but it is also a denial of the power of the Holy Spirit to work when and how it pleases through whoever it chooses (Reed)."

Later in 2016, RVCC's first woman Student Ministry Pastor was hired. This pastor was also highly gifted in her teaching ability. Not only did she give a message every Sunday to students but became part of the adult teaching team and preached on Sunday mornings in adult services six to eight times per year on a rotating schedule.

At the time this paper was written, RVCC employed five women pastors, two of which have been ordained.

Elder Roles at RVCC

Historically, the RVCC Elder Policy Manual clearly specified that only men were qualified for eldership until the elder board agreed to study the topic of women and eldership from a biblical perspective. This study involved a yearlong process that included a careful review of relevant scripture, reading and discussing several articles as well as a book: *Two Views on Women in Ministry*, written by four biblical scholars.

In 2022, the elder board finished their study and found no definitive biblical evidence that either supports or forbids women from serving in the capacity of elder. Consequently, the elder board concluded that RVCC elders should be selected solely on biblical qualifications without gender bias. In 2023 the elder board agreed to change the elder qualifications policy to include women thus taking on a church posture of complete mutuality.

The following addresses the overarching premise, specific scripture analysis and the core beliefs and values that have made this elder policy change not just possible but championed by church staff and elders.

OUR BELIEFS

Essential and Non-Essentials

We recognize that women in ministry and eldership is a complex biblical topic and should be approached with humility and love because there are many faithful modern churches that hold an opposite view about complete mutuality. In other words, it is dangerous to think in absolutes, and it is important to prayerfully keep an open mind and an open heart that is full of grace.

There is a central core to the Christian confession of faith that accounts for the essentials of salvation. We believe in the Deity of Christ (Jesus is God the Son), the Triune identity of God (one God who is God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit) and the divine authority of Scripture. We are blessed with salvation by accepting Jesus as our personal Savior who died for our sins and who was raised up by God and now sits at the right hand of the Father.

Beyond these core beliefs, there are many topics, practices, rituals, organizational structures, and methods that vary greatly and are debated among Christian churches. We call these areas *non-essentials* because, while they are still important, they are not considered part of the fundamental beliefs for salvation.

A common phrase attributed to Saint Augustine, Bishop of Hippo from 396 to 430 (Britanica), is quoted as: *“In the essentials unity, non-essentials liberty and all things love.”* In the essentials, the core of truth is our union with Christ, and we value unity as the unshakable foundation that binds us together. In the non-essentials, there is liberty so that all might follow their consciences under the Word and Spirit. In all things, there must be love which binds everything together in perfect harmony, peace, and grace.

At RVCC, we subscribe to *Complete Mutuality* – women serving as ministry leaders, pastors, and elders is a non-essential, church practice.

BIBLICAL NARRATIVE

Creation

The story of God's creation in Genesis is essential in understanding God's design for men and women and their relationships. Starting with Genesis 1:26-27, God declares: *“Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals and over all the creatures that move along the ground.”*²⁷ *So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.”*

The English word “mankind” is a translation from the Hebrew word “אָדָם” (pronounced as adam) (Keener, et al.). In its most common usage, adam refers to either a human being or mankind collectively. It encompasses all people, regardless of gender or background. Therefore, this passage means that both men and women are created in God's image and there is little evidence to indicate that a woman is subordinate to man in God's original plan for humanity. Both Adam and Eve are equally reflective of God's image and are blessed and given the responsibility of ruling the earth. Although God first created man, there is no statement of first-made privilege, headship, or gender roles (Pierce, et al.). We can conclude that both males and females are created in the image of God, and they are called to do so as equal partners.

The story continues in Genesis 2:15 *“The Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it.”* Here God appointed “the human” to oversee the Garden of Eden. In this verse, the Hebrew translation for “the human” is “ha’adam” meaning a singular person and not all humanity (Freedman). Then God claims that the only problem in his perfect creation is that there is something “not good” in paradise because a single human cannot accomplish the calling of being fruitful and multiplying and taking responsibility for the land.

In Genesis 2:18, God declares, *“It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him.”* The Hebrew translation for *“a helper suitable”* is *“ezer kenegodo.”* Throughout the Hebrew Bible, *“ezer”* refers to a delivering ally, an essential other, who comes to solve an otherwise unsolved problem. Another interpretation is a *lifesaver* (Barr). Consider Psalm 33:20, *“he is our help (ezer) and our shield”*, and Psalm 70:5, *“But as for me, I am poor and needy; come quickly to me, O God. You are my help (ezer) and my deliverer; Lord, do not delay.”*

We believe that women were not created to be secondary. In fact, the word *ezer* conveys the opposite: women were created to be a power, strength, and lifesaver for men, and in this role, she is secondary not to men, but to God, who is the ultimate *ezer*.

Fall

So why have people, throughout time, considered women to be less than men, secondary to men, or unable to lead like men? It’s not because God intended it to be this way, it is because humans decided to turn away from God and twist what God has made good. Adam and Eve decided that it is better for them to judge good and evil for themselves, rather than trust in God and work in partnership with God, and so there are consequences to their actions. (*It’s Mutual*)

We see the consequences for Eve in Genesis 3:16, ¹⁶ *To the woman he said, “I will make your pains in childbearing very severe; with painful labor you will give birth to children. Your desire will be for your husband, and he will rule over you.”* The consequence applied to the woman, *“he will rule over you”* is a Hebrew verb about absolute authority over someone (BibleHub.com). However, the man is never called to rule over the woman in the creation story. In fact, man alone does not have the ability to fulfill his creation mandate apart from her, so she partners with him to *“rule and reign”* over God's creation together.

What God says in Genesis 3:16 is not his intention, but the byproduct of human sin. Here, the two blessings for women: childbirth, and the desire for her husband, have now been distorted into sources of pain and domination, and suddenly God’s desire for women to serve as an *ezer* is compromised. It is important to note that these are corruptions of the ideal partnership that God created for men and women. These consequences are distortions that came after sin, not before. Any kind of subordination of women under men is a deception of the fall, not a part of God's creative order. In other words, this passage describes the reality of how human sin has ruined and continues to destroy, what God intended to be a mutual relationship.

Redemption

God's redemption plan is directly aimed at the repair of sin’s consequences so that there is a path through Jesus for our salvation and in that process, women have played critical roles. The redemption story reaches its peak in Jesus. God willingly chose to enter the human story through the womb of a virgin woman. And it was a woman, Mary Magdalene, who first shared the good news of Jesus' resurrection. It’s clearly indisputable the importance of women in the birth, death, and resurrection of Jesus.

Jesus himself was revolutionary and counter-cultural in his empowerment of women. Here are some notable examples in the New Testament (Bridgetown):

- The Gospel of Luke explains that there were “*many others*” (women) who traveled with Jesus alongside the 12 disciples, and he names three women specifically (Luke 8:1-3)
- In Matthew’s Gospel, he tells of a time when Jesus explained to his disciples, “*here are my mother and my brothers. For whoever does the will of my father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother.*” In this ancient context, to name *mother* (sister and brother) among his disciples was revolutionary. (Matthew 12:49-50)
- Mary “*sat at the Lord’s feet listening to what he said,*” which was the posture of a disciple before a rabbi. (Luke 10:39)
- One day as Jesus was teaching, a woman in the crowd called out, “*blessed is the mother who gave you birth and nursed you.*” This was meant as a compliment because, in the ancient world, it was thought that a woman’s highest calling was to bear children. Instead of receiving the compliment, Jesus responds “*blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and obey it.*” For Jesus, motherhood and fatherhood are honored but a woman’s highest calling is not to bear children, instead, a woman’s highest calling is equal to the highest calling of man: salvation and discipleship. (Luke 11:28)
- The longest recorded conversation between Jesus and another individual occurred with the powerful and transformative encounter with a Samaritan woman at the well. The woman was so shocked by Jesus’ willingness to address her directly that she questioned his knowledge of social customs. (John 4)

There is clear biblical evidence that Jesus did not draw a distinction between his male and female disciples when it came to value or qualifications for discipleship or even leadership. Culturally, Jesus was revolutionary in his inclusion of women among the disciples. Before Jesus, women were regarded as inferior beings during the times of ancient religion that valued a patriarchal culture (Witt). New Testament scripture confirms that Jesus extended the same human dignity to both men and women.

The life, death, and resurrection of Jesus points forward to the gift of the Holy Spirit and the birth of the church on the day of Pentecost. Consider what the prophet Joel says in Acts 2:17-18:

¹⁷“In the last days, God says, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your young men will see visions, your old men will dream dreams. ¹⁸Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days, and they will prophesy,”

Here we see that the power and presence of God are made available to all people and that the Old Testament prophecy is equally inclusive of both men and women. As prophesied, the Spirit was poured out on all people on the day of Pentecost.

We know from scripture that Spiritual Gifts are bestowed upon believers by God through the Holy Spirit and that they are not differentiated by gender. In the New Testament, we have evidence that women served alongside men as apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers. Rick Warren, retired senior pastor of Saddleback Church, points out that,

“On that day at Pentecost, we know women were in the upper room. We know women were filled with the Holy Spirit; we know that women were preaching in languages that other people couldn’t [understand], to a mixed audience. It wasn’t just men—women were preaching on the Day of Pentecost.” (Warren)

Restoration

The biblical story is one of recovery for all that was lost in the fall, the restoration of Eden, and the renewal of all things (Col. 1:15-23). The biblical narrative ends with the restoration of God's created order; what was present in the first two chapters of Genesis is restored in the final two chapters of Revelation's garden city (Bridgetown). Today's church must strive to be a living preview of the end of the biblical narrative—restoration.

The full restoration of God's created order has been made possible through the sacrificial death and resurrection of the Son and the giving of the Holy Spirit. On the Day of Pentecost, the Holy Spirit distributed spiritual gifts equally to both men and women, sons, and daughters. The restoration and the call of the church include equal relationship and leadership between men and women. Because our time of restoration mirrors God's original creation, we believe the local church should be one of mutuality—men and women co-laboring as God's equally empowered image bearers.

WOMEN in BIBLICAL LEADERSHIP

Old Testament

- **Deborah** stands out, particularly as one who was both a prophet and a Judge of all of Israel. Judges 4:4-5: *“⁴Now Deborah, a prophet, the wife of Lappidoth, was leading Israel at that time. ⁵She held court under the Palm of Deborah between Ramah and Bethel in the hill country of Ephraim, and the Israelites went up to her to have their disputes decided.”* Deborah led Israel nationally as a governor while also leading Israel spiritually as a prophet. In her society, this meant she was the Supreme Court, the Secretary of Defense, the President, and the Pastor of a nation, appointed by God to lead and be a “lifesaver” for his people. (Barr)
- **Huldah** was also a notable prophet and leader during the era of Jeremiah, Zephaniah, Nahum and Habakkuk (2 Kings 22:14-20). Huldah played a crucial role in interpreting the law, advising royalty, and speaking on behalf of God. (Barr)

- **Miriam** played a significant role in the biblical story. In Exodus 15:20 Miriam is referred to as a prophet. *“²⁰Then Miriam the prophet, Aaron’s sister, took a timbrel in her hand, and all the women followed her, with timbrels and dancing.”* Miriam also played a role in saving her brother Moses. When the Pharaoh's daughter found the baby floating in the Nile River and adopted him as her own, Miriam boldly stepped forward and offered to find a Hebrew woman to nurse the baby, ensuring that Moses was cared for. (Kimball)
- **Esther** was placed by God into a position of leadership, influencing Xerxes and ultimately saving the Jews from extermination. Esther 4:13-14 *“...he sent back this answer: “Do not think that because you are in the king’s house you alone of all the Jews will escape. For if you remain silent at this time, relief and deliverance for the Jews will arise from another place, but you and your father’s family will perish. And who knows but that you have come to your royal position for such a time as this?”* (Kimball)

In addition to Deborah, Huldah, Miriam and Esther, the Old Testament tells how God also uses women like Rahab and Ruth who inspire us with their courage, faith, and kindness.

New Testament

We know that 1st-century Christian Churches were conducted in homes. The apostle Paul notes that many of these household churches were led by women. Theologian Gordon Fee states, *“the householder would naturally serve as the leader of the house church.”* A person outside the household would not come in and lead because it was understood that leadership was an extension of the householder. In other words, the church is not likely to gather in a person's home unless the householder functions also as its natural leader (Fee). And many of these house-church leaders were women. Examples of these leaders are **Chloe**, (1 Corinthians 1:11), **Nympha** (Colossians 4:15), **Lydia** (Acts 16:11-15) and **Apphia** (Philemon 1:2).

Additionally, the New Testament recognizes women in a diverse network of leadership roles throughout the Roman Empire serving as missionaries, local house-church leaders and interchurch liaisons. Paul's letter to the Romans is possibly the most significant example of women’s leadership in the New Testament church. The fact that Paul personally greets more women than men in the same letter is not just counter-cultural, it’s revolutionary. (Bridgetown)

Romans 16:1-13

*“I commend to you our sister **Phoebe**, a deacon of the church in Cenchrea. ²I ask you to receive her in the Lord in a way worthy of his people and to give her any help she may need from you, for she has been the benefactor of many people, including me.*

*³Greet **Priscilla** and Aquila, my co-workers in Christ Jesus. ⁴They risked their lives for me. Not only I but all the churches of the Gentiles are grateful to them.*

⁶ Greet **Mary**, who worked very hard for you.

⁷ Greet Andronicus and **Junia**, my fellow Jews who have been in prison with me. They are outstanding among the apostles, and they were in Christ before I was.

¹² Greet **Tryphena** and **Tryphosa**, those women who work hard in the Lord.

¹³ Greet my dear friend **Persis**, another woman who has worked very hard in the Lord.

¹³ Greet Rufus, chosen in the Lord, and **his mother**, who has been a mother to me, too.

¹⁴ Greet Asyncritus, Phlegon, Hermes, Patrobas, Hermas and the **other brothers and sisters with them**.

¹⁵ Greet Philologus, **Julia**, Nereus **and his sister**, and Olympas and all the Lord's people who are with them."

There are many significant women identified in the New Testament who demonstrated leadership and influence in spreading the gospel within the early Christian community. The following women filled many important early church roles as apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers.

In Acts 21:8-9 we see that Philip had four daughters who were prophets: *"Leaving the next day, we reached Caesarea and stayed at the house of Philip the evangelist, one of the Seven. ⁹ He had four unmarried daughters who prophesied."*

Euodia and **Syntycha** were leaders and evangelists in the Philippian church and were described as "contenders for the gospel" who worked alongside Paul (Phil. 4:3).

Priscilla and Aquila are a couple whose names appear in the book of Acts as well as the letters of Romans and 2 Timothy. When Paul arrived in Corinth, he became acquainted with Aquila, a Jew born in Pontus, and his wife, Priscilla. First, it should be noted that Priscilla's name is listed first in the account, which is counter-cultural in and of itself. Second, Acts 18:26 tells of how Priscilla and Aquila instructed Apollos, further educating and sharpening his understanding of the gospel as a fellow teacher. The text does not imply that Priscilla instructed Apollos under the "Authority" of her husband, but rather they approached it together as equal partners.

(Murphy-O'Connor)

Phoebe, in Romans 16:1-2, is addressed as a deacon. She would have opened her home for the church to meet in, dealt with administrative tasks that came up and was responsible for making sure that benevolence needs were taken care of. More importantly, Phoebe was the one who carried the letter to the Romans, meaning that she was also the one who was responsible for reading it to the church, teaching it, answering any questions people might have, and making sure that people understood what Paul was trying to say. In other words, Phoebe was the first person to preach a sermon series on the Book of Romans. (McKnight)

Mary Magdalene, who suffered greatly, having been possessed by seven demons until Jesus miraculously healed her (Luke 8:1-3). Her transformation was profound. Mary became one of Jesus' devoted followers and after traveling with him and standing near him during his crucifixion (Matthew 28:1-8), Mary holds a unique place in the story of Jesus by also witnessing and being among the first to proclaim his resurrection. Rick Warren points out that: *"the very first [Christian] sermon...the message of the gospel of Good News of the Resurrection, Jesus chose a woman to deliver it to men....He had Mary Magdalene go and tell the disciples. Now, that clearly wasn't an accident. It was intentional...Can a woman teach an apostle? Evidently. [Jesus] did it on the first day—he chose her to be the first preacher of the gospel."*

Junia is considered by some to be most notable because she receives the highest marks, "outstanding among the apostles" (Rom. 16:7). For the most part, biblical scholars have accepted that women have served as prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers, but the status of Junia's apostleship has been sadly misinterpreted. Starting in the 13th century, Bible translators started translating Junia as Junias. This was an attempt to circumvent Junia's apostleship by asserting that she was not a woman but a man by the name of Junias. Some thought the idea of a woman apostle seemed impossible, and so Paul must have meant a different name, a male name, even though there is no scriptural evidence of Junias being a Roman name used in the first century. In context, Paul is commending Junia and her husband Andronicus, as eminent leaders among the apostles. (*McKnight*)

BIBLICAL TRAJECTORY

The biblical narrative is one with an arc bending toward redemption, it is a story that builds and builds until all that was lost in the fall has been restored through Christ. Biblical Trajectory acknowledges that the understanding and application of Scripture can evolve as history unfolds and these developments can occur after the New Testament was written.

Biblical trajectory looks at the direction in which Scripture was heading and applies that trajectory to contemporary contexts, even if the New Testament itself didn't explicitly address certain issues in their final form.

The best example of biblical trajectory is found in the issues of slavery and gender equality. The Bible was written in an era when slavery was prevalent, and patriarchal norms were deeply ingrained in society. However, rather than completely overturning the institution of slavery or radically altering the role of women, the Bible set in motion a trajectory that elevates the rights of slaves, the poor, and women. This paper already addressed how Jesus recognized men and women in mutual relationships, now consider these passages about slavery:

Colossians 4:1

“Masters, provide your slaves with what is right and fair, because you know that you also have a Master in heaven.”

1 Corinthians 7:21

“Were you a slave when you were called? Don’t let it trouble you—although if you can gain your freedom, do so.”

1 Peter 2:16

“Live as free people, but do not use your freedom as a cover-up for evil; live as God’s slaves.”

The trajectory toward freedom and mutuality can be seen in the following table (Web):

Slavery:

Original Culture	Biblical Trajectory	Our Culture	Restoration
Prevalent slavery with its many abuses	Slavery with better conditions and fewer abuses	Slavery eliminated. Working on equality and true reconciliation	Mutual and complete Harmony, Equality, Respect, Trust

The same biblical arc can be observed in the case of women:

Original Culture	Biblical Trajectory	Our Culture	Restoration
Strong patriarchy with many abuses of women	Moderate patriarchy, fewer abuses, and new freedoms for women	Improved status for women, increasing opportunities	Complete Mutuality, and Partnership between men and women

As we read the Bible, we see a redemptive movement away from the original sin and the fall. We see a movement toward freedom for the enslaved. Likewise, we see a movement from a harsh patriarchal culture toward mutuality between men and women.

STUDY OF SCRIPTURE

Meaning of Scripture

How do we know exactly what the biblical author means to say when we read scripture? Occasionally, the meaning is unclear, and misinterpretation can occur. Understanding the truth and meaning of what the biblical writer meant to say requires careful analysis and interpretation. This kind of interpretation that draws meaning out of scripture is called **exegesis**. The word comes from the Greek term (*exegeomai*), which means “to explain.” Exegesis focuses on the author’s original intent; what the author wanted the original reader to understand. Exegesis seeks to avoid speculation and inventiveness. When studying and analyzing scripture, it is important not to slide into **eisegesis**, which means reading meaning into the text that isn’t there. Exegesis digs into the text to pull out the meaning, while eisegesis imposes meaning onto it. (Collins)

Forest For the Trees

Sometimes when studying scripture, we miss the forest from the trees. Much of our beliefs about women in ministry or eldership have more to do with our cultural assumptions and biblical misinterpretations. But “the whole forest” of what God has to say about women is quite clear and can be seen throughout the entirety of scripture. To see the whole picture, we need to understand and discern the context, history, and culture in which the biblical text is framed (*It’s Mutual*). Another way of looking at this is to consider the following components of each passage:

- **Characters:** Biblical narratives feature characters who play crucial roles. Their actions and decisions drive the plot.
- **Setting:** The context and environment in which the events occur are essential. Settings can be geographical, cultural, or historical.
- **Events:** The sequence of events shapes the narrative. Some events are pivotal, while others provide context or development.
- **Purpose:** Each narrative serves a purpose—whether it’s teaching a moral lesson, revealing God’s character, or emphasizing a theological truth.

Careful analysis and interpretation of the following Bible passages are critical for understanding women in ministry and eldership.

1 Corinthians 14:34-35

³⁴ Women should remain silent in the churches. They are not allowed to speak, but must be in submission, as the law says. ³⁵ If they want to inquire about something, they should ask their own husbands at home; for it is disgraceful for a woman to speak in the church.

In this passage, we need to be aware that this single paragraph means something very different when it is read within the context of the entire chapter. Here Paul tells multiple groups of people to be “silent” in the church gathering (like someone speaking in tongues without an interpreter, or someone interrupting a prophet; see 1 Cor. 14:26-40).

It should be noted that there is a counter-cultural element that empowers, and not restricts women when Paul affirms the right of women to ask questions. For a woman to ask questions in and of itself falls outside of the normal cultural expectation.

There are two important facts to consider when looking at this passage. First, in ancient Greco-Roman culture, particularly within the less formal setting of a Corinthian house church, questions were a part of the teaching portion of a worship gathering. These were smaller groups, gathered in homes, and that meant the entire experience was more like an interactive dialogue. Second, women were encouraged to speak in the worship gathering, even given instructions related to public prayer and prophecy earlier in this very letter (1 Cor. 11:5). So, if Paul explicitly told men and women to “speak” and “pray” in the church gathering just three chapters earlier, why in this chapter would he restrict not just questions in general, but questions about prophecy coming from married women? (Bridgetown)

1 Timothy 2:9-15

⁹ I also want the women to dress modestly, with decency and propriety, adorning themselves, not with elaborate hairstyles or gold or pearls or expensive clothes,¹⁰ but with good deeds, appropriate for women who profess to worship God. ¹¹ A woman^[a] should learn in quietness and full submission. ¹² I do not permit a woman to teach or to assume authority over a man; she must be quiet. ¹³ For Adam was formed first, then Eve. ¹⁴ And Adam was not the one deceived; it was the woman who was deceived and became a sinner. ¹⁵ But women will be saved through childbearing—if they continue in faith, love and holiness with propriety.

This is a great example of needing to look at the whole forest from the odd tree. What is the broader concern here? Paul is writing to his trusted protégé, Timothy, instructing him to stay put in the city of Ephesus (1 Tim. 1:3) because of the prevalence of false teaching, which is the primary concern, not only of the passage but the letter as a whole. More importantly, at the beginning of the letter, Paul identifies that untrustworthy teachers have come to Ephesus who are spreading distorted theology from the earliest chapters of Genesis (1 Tim. 1:3-8), and who are targeting wealthy single women in the community for financial gain (1 Tim. 4:1-3; 5:11-15; 6:3-5). It is these wealthy women whom Paul identifies as the source of the teaching problem in 1 Tim. 2:9-10. This is why he mentions their ostentatious dress in the worship gathering, a kind of style that would have been unaffordable to most of the other women in the community. (Bridgetown)

Here we clearly see Paul's pressing concerns in these passages:

"As I urged you when I went into Macedonia, stay there in Ephesus so you may command certain people not to teach false doctrines any longer or to devote themselves to myths and endless genealogies." 1 Timothy 1:3-4

In that same verse, he says,

"They want to be teachers of the law, but they do not know what they are talking about or what they so confidently affirm." 1 Timothy 1:7

And just in case the point didn't come across, he ends his letter with,

"Timothy, guard what has been entrusted to your care. Turn away from godless chatter and the opposing ideas of what is falsely called knowledge." 1 Timothy 6:20

What we can gather from this is that false teachings have spread in the city of Ephesus, and so Paul not only tells Timothy to beware of this "godless chatter," but to take steps to get it under control. To correct these false teachings, Paul directs Timothy to instruct women to learn in quietness and submission and to not teach or have authority over men. (Westfall)

It is also noted that false teachings may have had a particular appeal to women. Ephesus was the capital of Artemis worship and home to the warrior goddess's temple. Many of its citizens believed that Artemis founded Ephesus, and according to scholar Nijay Gupta, this belief "gave the city a unique quality of female empowerment." Ephesus was home to the Artemis cult (Acts 19), a female goddess whose female traits were superior to men. Artemis was viewed as the protector of women and a guardian of their virginity. Because former cult members were converting to follow Jesus, Paul needed to confront the cult's influence by addressing both "false teaching" and "women" in 1 Timothy. (Gupta)

1 Timothy 3:1-7

"Here is a trustworthy saying: Whoever aspires to be an overseer desires a noble task. ² Now the overseer is to be above reproach, faithful to his wife, temperate, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, ³ not given to drunkenness, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money. ⁴ He must manage his own family well and see that his children obey him, and he must do so in a manner worthy of full^[a] respect. ⁵ (If anyone does not know how to manage his own family, how can he take care of God's church?) ⁶ He must not be a recent convert, or he may become conceited and fall under the same judgment as the devil. ⁷ He must also have a good reputation with outsiders, so that he will not fall into disgrace and into the devil's trap."

Titus 1:6-9

⁶ An elder must be blameless, faithful to his wife, a man whose children believe^[a] and are not open to the charge of being wild and disobedient. ⁷ Since an overseer manages God's

household, he must be blameless—not overbearing, not quick-tempered, not given to drunkenness, not violent, not pursuing dishonest gain. ⁸ Rather, he must be hospitable, one who loves what is good, who is self-controlled, upright, holy and disciplined. ⁹ He must hold firmly to the trustworthy message as it has been taught, so that he can encourage others by sound doctrine and refute those who oppose it. (Titus 1:6-9)

These are the two passages that lay out clear and straightforward qualifications for serving in the role of elder (also called “overseer”). Although Paul was writing to different people leading in very different contexts, the qualifications contain a notable amount of overlap. This kind of overlap helps in discerning the intent and wisdom that we need to pay attention to as we consider the qualifications for elders at RVCC.

The question some have regarding these passages is, “Are women disqualified from serving as elders based purely on gender?”

One phrase that stands out in the passage relevant to the question of women and eldership is “faithful to his wife” (1 Tim. 3:2, Titus 1:6). Contextually, this phrase assumes that men typically hold the position of elder in Ephesus and Crete, the places to which these letters are directed. The Bible narrative suggests that elders were men because these positions had been established through a long history of patriarchal roles in the Jewish community. One reason for assuming that most elders would be male is due to the inequalities in access to education and any formal leadership opportunities afforded women outside of the home. (Bellville)

However, we believe Paul’s intent in these letters is focused on the qualifications of elders without a gender bias. Even if Paul assumed that most elders in these communities were likely male does not mean he prohibited women from this role. Despite the Greek using male pronouns in these passages, our argument for supporting women elders stands on the preponderance of evidence throughout the biblical narrative supporting women in significant roles of leadership comparable to the role of elder.

CONCLUSION

RVCC subscribes to the principles of complete mutuality so that there is no gender bias and no gender limitations. All church roles and offices are based on non-gender qualifications where men and women are equally valued and respected.

RVCC Principles and Core Beliefs

- Women and men are created equal in the image of God.
- God raises up and provides leaders for the church based on calling, spiritual gifts, obedience, and character.
- All roles and positions at RVCC (Staff and Volunteers) are based on qualifications void of any gender bias.

- We believe there is greater value and mission impact when men and women lead together in grace, mutual respect, and dignity. Mutual relationships are the healthiest relationships.
- There is no clear biblical evidence that forbids women from serving in the role of elder when considering all factors of biblical material and context.
- Women serving in ministry and eldership is a “non-essential” for salvation.

Vision-Focused

We believe that biblically informed mutuality creates a church posture of wanting to reach people right where they are, rather than making them culturally conform to us before they can follow Jesus. Paul writes about this in 1 Corinthians 9:10-23. (*It's Mutual*)

1 Corinthians 9:19-23

“Though I am free and belong to no one, I have made myself a slave to everyone, to win as many as possible. ²⁰To the Jews I became like a Jew, to win the Jews. To those under the law I became like one under the law (though I myself am not under the law), so as to win those under the law. ²¹To those not having the law I became like one not having the law (though I am not free from God’s law but am under Christ’s law), so as to win those not having the law. ²²To the weak I became weak, to win the weak. I have become all things to all people so that by all possible means I might save some. ²³ I do all this for the sake of the gospel, that I may share in its blessings.”

Further, we believe a church posture of complete mutuality and neutrality will advance our ability to see every neighborhood in Pierce County engaged by believers and transformed by Jesus. By valuing a biblical mutuality of men and women, as supported by the entire scope of the Bible, we help remove a barrier for many people as to why they resist coming to church or even the idea of Christian faith.

This position paper strives to make clear the biblical reasons why RVCC supports and empowers women in ministry, leadership, and eldership roles. Such clarity drives what we believe is a positive change in our church posture that will welcome more people to belong to RVCC and have a place to explore a faith that they currently believe is hostile to or incompatible with their lives.

There is a greater Kingdom impact when men and women, side by side, are proclaiming the Good News to a hurting and broken world. Both men and women are commissioned by Jesus, the head of the Church, to, *“Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely, I am with you always, to the very end of the age”* Matthew 28:18-20.

Every syllable in this statement is aimed at the fulfillment of Jesus’ Great Commission: to go and make disciples. At RVCC we remain vision-focused. That is to say that we will change our methods, but never the message, to make Jesus real to the next generations. And we have the

responsibility to reach and shepherd the next generation with the gospel! As pastor and author Andy Stanley says, *“What is the faith of the next generation worth? It’s worth everything.”*

UNITY FIRST

The staff and elders at RVCC recognize there may be some who disagree with changing the elder eligibility criteria to include women. However, unity in the essentials is of primary importance and respect for opposing views in the non-essentials defends this unity and fosters peace and harmony. The apostle Paul addresses the “unity of the Spirit” in writing to the church in Ephesus (EPH. 4:2-3), *“Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.”* It is important to note that how we view women in ministry and eldership comes from a place of humility and grace knowing that it is a biblical interpretation based on a comprehensive study and is not viewed as an unequivocal biblical truth. We understand that this policy change deviates from the position of many Christian churches and while there may be disagreement, we pray for loving, healthy conversations that place relationships first and love in all things.

We also acknowledge that some opposing views may be influenced by a fear that our church is conforming to social/cultural norms and feeling pressured to take on a more modern worldview. Some may view this deviation from traditional Christian church practice as a “slippery slope,” causing concern and anxiety. So, the question is, will changing our policy on women in eldership cause our church leadership to rethink other biblical positions that in today's culture fall under social/moral scrutiny? In addition to women in ministry and eldership, many local churches are faced with having to take positions on issues such as sexuality, marriage, gender, the sanctity of life, racial reconciliation, injustice, postmodern individualism, Christian Nationalism and any number of moral stances that become politicized by our local, state, and federal governments.

Although addressing these issues is beyond the scope of this paper, we wish to make it clear that the RVCC leadership is not re-examining or changing the contextual meaning of any other historically held moral/ethical positions that are clearly ordained and supported by biblical narrative, biblical scripture, or biblical trajectory. Complete mutuality and empowering women as pastors and elders will not lead to a “slippery slope” effect. Furthermore, we encourage our church body to stand firm in unity as devoted followers of Christ and share His light, love, and peace so that every neighborhood in Pierce County will be engaged by believers and transformed by Jesus.

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