



MEMO

Date: April 6, 2018

From: Randy Boltinghouse

To: Elder Leadership Team

Re: Response to inquiries regarding men and women in ministry

Fellow Elders,

Grace and peace in the Lord. Recently, the Elder Leadership Team (ELT) received inquiries from the church family as to the rationale of having women preaching in morning worship. Also, we have received queries as to our perspective behind having an all-male ELT. Subsequently, in December 2017, the ELT asked me to assist them in responding to any questions. What follows is my response to the team's request; please feel free to pass this along as you see fit.

ELDER LEADERSHIP TEAM GOVERNANCE

As you may know, guests who become familiar with our church family often ask how this church family is led. I have explained it this way: Windsor Road Christian Church is an independent, non-denominational church. The church possesses no legal ties to a national governing denomination. All financial assets and property belong to the church as a corporate body. No overseeing bishop or area superintendent exists to whom the congregation or their ministers are accountable. This church is locally governed; from among the church, members choose and affirm a board of governors called "Elders." They serve with no pay. The Elders oversee the Sr. Minister, who oversees the staff.

An Elder-governed congregation has biblical precedence. As the Faith spread across the Roman Empire, the Apostle Paul knew that the newly planted churches needed leaders to mentor, teach and model the life of Christ. *And when [Paul and Barnabas] had appointed elders for them in every church, with prayer and fasting they committed them to the Lord in whom they had believed. (Acts 14:23)*¹

In Acts 20:28, Paul charged the elders of the church in Ephesus to *"Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for the church of God, which he obtained with his own blood."*

¹ All Scriptures are in the English Standard Version.

Qualifications for the ELT stem from three passages. What we see is that an elder must first lead himself in the Lord, then lead his family in the Lord, as a prerequisite for leading the church in the Lord.

1 Timothy 3:1-7

The saying is trustworthy: If anyone aspires to the office of overseer, he desires a noble task. 2 Therefore an overseer must be above reproach, the husband of one wife², sober-minded, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, 3 not a drunkard, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money. 4 He must manage his own household well, with all dignity keeping his children submissive, 5 for if someone does not know how to manage his own household, how will he care for God's church? 6 He must not be a recent convert, or he may become puffed up with conceit and fall into the condemnation of the devil. 7 Moreover, he must be well thought of by outsiders, so that he may not fall into disgrace, into a snare of the devil.

Titus 1

This is why I left you in Crete, so that you might put what remained into order, and appoint elders in every town as I directed you— 6 if anyone is above reproach, the husband of one wife, and his children are believers and not open to the charge of debauchery or insubordination. 7 For an overseer, as God's steward, must be above reproach. He must not be arrogant or quick-tempered or a drunkard or violent or greedy for gain, 8 but hospitable, a lover of good, self-controlled, upright, holy, and disciplined. 9 He must hold firm to the trustworthy word as taught, so that he may be able to give instruction in sound doctrine and also to rebuke those who contradict it.

1 Peter 5

So I exhort the elders among you, as a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, as well as a partaker in the glory that is going to be revealed: 2 shepherd the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight, not under compulsion, but willingly, as God would have you; not for shameful gain, but eagerly; 3 not domineering over those in your charge, but being examples to the flock. 4 And when the chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory.

²I interpret Paul's phrase *husband of one wife* as a "one-woman man"; meaning (1) not a polygamist and, (2) possessing a healthy marriage and family. I do not believe that divorce automatically disqualifies someone from entering the eldership but that each circumstance needs to be carefully talked through on a case-by-case basis with the current elders and the support of the congregation.

Note the following characteristics of biblical eldership:

Shared leadership—there is a plurality of elders so that ministry may not rest on only one.

Pastoral leadership—there is a concern for the spiritual growth of the church family.

Qualified leadership—there is an obvious manifestation of Christ’s life in each elder.

Servant leadership—there is a desire to lead for the flourishing of the church family.

Male leadership—there is a sensitivity to the responsibility of “headship.”³

WHY IS THE ELDER LEADERSHIP TEAM MALE?

It is this last characteristic that often gets inquiries, so let me explain as succinctly as I can. In the nuclear family, I believe that God created Adam and Eve equal before Him in persons and distinct in manhood and womanhood. This conviction teaches that the role of husbands is to submit themselves to their wives by providing humble, loving, sacrificial leadership for the sake of their marriage and family; out of reverence for Christ.⁴ This is called “headship,” a servant-leadership role assigned to the husband from the Lord in Genesis 1-2.⁵ *The purpose of biblical headship is for building up.* Likewise, the role of wives is to submit themselves to the servant leadership of their husbands by providing thoughtful, willing, and joyful cooperation; out of reverence for Christ.

Likewise, in the family of God, it is the responsibility of qualified servant-leaders—godly men who are seasoned husbands and fathers—to shepherd the church. This has been called “complementarianism;” that Eve complemented or completed Adam.⁶ Complementarianism does not permit the husband to be bossy and overbearing nor passive and unengaged. Complementarianism does not permit the wife to be domineering nor a doormat. The ideal relationship is Christ (the husband) and the Church (the bride).

³See Alexander Strauch, *Biblical Eldership*, who expounds on these characteristics.

⁴In Ephesians 5:21ff, the Apostle Paul began his remarks on household relationships with the overall phrase: *submit to one another out of reverence for Christ*. He then explains the distinctive ways such submission plays out in the lives of husbands, wives, fathers, children, masters, and slaves. Submission does not mean inferiority.

⁵Craig Blomberg Stanley N. Gundry, ed., *Two Views of Women in Ministry*, 2nd edition (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005). Evidences of headship in Genesis 1-2 which include: the woman came from the man; the man named the woman; the man cherished the woman through song; she is called *ezer*—helper—“one who comes to the aid of the other who is primarily responsible for the activity in question.” Also, in Genesis 3, the Lord first approaches the man, holding him accountable before anyone else.

⁶There is another view on manhood and womanhood called, “Egalitarianism,” with a fourfold definition: (1) the equality of women and men; (2) the God-given gifts to each person for the good of Christ’s kingdom; (3) the responsibility for Christians to develop and exercise their God-given gifts in home, church, and society; (4) and the commitment to oppose injustice. (source: Christians for Biblical Equality) Thus, men and women are partners together in every arena of ministry. All ministries and offices in the church are open to all qualified men and women. Gender does not exclude any person from any church office.

To be clear, complementarian male headship takes place in two and *only* two relationships: (1) the relationship of the family (husband, wife, children) and; (2) the relationship of the church family. The limitations which apply to the office of the elder do not apply to other ecclesiastical activities, including the diaconate and the ministerial staff. (And they certainly do not apply to the work world outside of the church!) Women and men serve on like footing outside the office of elder, utilizing their gifts and abilities for the flourishing of all in the church family. This includes pastoring, shepherding, serving, teaching and preaching (which I understand to be the gift of prophecy, explained further below), showing mercy, administration, etc., to men, women, and children in the congregation. From 1 Peter 2:5, God's people are called a "royal priesthood." This does not mean that a certain group within God's people are priests (like the Levites); it means that God's people as a whole are "royal priests." Through Christ all gain access to God the Father; by the power of Christ's Holy Spirit, all minister for God.

REGARDING WOMEN PREACHING, HOW DOES WINDSOR ROAD CHRISTIAN CHURCH UNDERSTAND 1 TIMOTHY 2:1-15, 1 CORINTHIANS 11:1-16, AND 1 CORINTHIANS 14:26-40?

Certain passages of Scripture speak to the behavior of men and women in the church community; at the outset it needs to be acknowledged how difficult these verses are to interpret. A helpful way of understanding the epistles of Paul is to assume that he wrote in order to solve some problem. When Paul authored 1 Corinthians and 1 Timothy, a gender and sexual revolution was occurring in major cities of the Roman Empire. Called the "new Roman woman," this revolution described an aggressive, confrontational public presence on the part of women during the very time Paul was writing these letters; and in the house churches themselves.

Three features of the new Roman woman set [1 Timothy and 1 Corinthians] in its historical context. First, the "new Roman woman" was expressing her newfound freedoms in immodest, sexually provocative, and extravagant dress. Rome was not terribly conservative, but these women were flouting even the limits of the Romans. Second, the "new Roman woman" was noted for snatching the podium for public addresses and teaching.... Third, especially in Ephesus, alongside the presence of the "new Roman woman" was the Artemis religious fertility cult. This worship cult not only favored the freedom of women in public religion as did the new Roman woman movement, but it also surrounded these worshipers with eunuch (castrated male) priests. Part of their worship was the elimination of normal sexual relations; these women despised marriage and childbearing and childrearing.⁷

⁷McKnight, Scot. *The Blue Parakeet: Rethinking How You Read the Bible* (pp. 198-199). Zondervan. Kindle Edition.

These contextual elements are important when interpreting the following chapters.

1 Timothy 2:1-15

Here Paul instructs Timothy that the way toward orderly worship is an environment of prayer and learning. The notion of “cultural transposition” leads us to conclude that in these verses, there are timeless principles and specific cultural applications to be discerned.

In v. 8 the *timeless principle* appears to be that whenever men pray, they are to do so in holiness and love without anger; while the *specific cultural application* may differ (i.e., standing, kneeling, hands clasped, hands raised, etc.).

In vv. 9-10, the *timeless principle* appears to be that Christian women—as opposed to the “new Roman woman”—are to adorn themselves with modesty, decency, propriety, and good works; while the *specific cultural application* regarding clothing, hair styles, and jewelry may vary.

In vv. 11-14, the *timeless principle* appears to be that of an ordered relationship between husband and wife. The husband—whether introvert or extrovert—is to be first to serve, sacrifice, protect, cherish, and pastor his family, setting the spiritual tone. The Christian wife lives toward her husband as the church lives toward Christ; with a voluntarily yielded heart. The point of v. 14 seems to be that Satan subverted this order. The *specific cultural application* pertains to the importance of non-disruptive listening during the act of teaching. Apparently the “new Roman woman” resisted the teaching of God in a manner disruptive to the house churches of Ephesus.⁸ I believe Paul is addressing this dynamic in 1 Timothy 2:11.

I understand 1 Timothy 2:12 as a reference to the office of eldership, not simply to the function of teaching. The phrase “to teach nor have authority” is a way of identifying the office of eldership. The key interpretive word is “nor;” formally called “hendiadys”—one through two—that is, the joining of two expressions that are mutually defining. Paul is not forbidding two actions but one—the eldership.⁹

v. 15—Although the subject in 1 Timothy 2:15 surely is women in general (which would include Jesus' mother), “the childbearing” has been argued to refer to a particular birth, that of Jesus.¹⁰

1 Corinthians 11:1-16

Regarding the highly dysfunctional and disunited church at Corinth, Paul deals with the issue of avoiding marital shame in public worship. The specific cultural issue has to do with wives wearing head coverings.

⁸See McKnight, Towner’s commentary on 1 Timothy, and Winter’s *Roman Widows, Roman Wives*.

⁹ Gundry, 169.

¹⁰Ben Witherington III. *Letters and Homilies for Hellenized Christians: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary on Titus, 1-2 Timothy and 1-3 John (Letters and Homilies for Hellenized Christians Series)* (Kindle Locations 3018-3020). Kindle Edition. See also John Stott. 1 Timothy 2:15 literally reads: “Women will be kept safe through the birth of a child.”

“Possibly, the fuzzy boundary between the home and the house church caused [wives] to neglect this covering. Since they were not accustomed to wearing the covering in their home, they did not wear it when the church met in the home. Behavior acceptable in the home may not be appropriate for the church gathering in the home. We are left only with guesses as to the motivation behind this behavior.” (Garland 2003, Kindle location 11697)

The point of a head-covering in the first century (and in some cultures today, i.e. Turkey), is to communicate that the wife is committed to sexual purity towards her husband and she intends to stay that way. No husband wants his wife to send confusing signals to the culture about her purity. Thus, this passage deals with avoiding whatever might bring shame to a marriage.

Note that in vv. 4-5, Paul takes for granted that women may pray and prophesy aloud in the assembly as long as they have an appropriate head covering. When you think about it, this is astonishing, especially for those from a background in Hebrew synagogues, that women were free in the church gatherings to pray and prophecy. More on the definition of prophecy later.

1 Corinthians 14:26-40

In v. 26, Paul wants all aspects of corporate worship to be for the edification of others.

Orderliness is how edification will occur. “God is not a God of confusion but of peace.” (1 Cor 14:33)

According to Paul, the prophetic Spirit is not limited to a few men and women; it can be imparted to all, which explains why Paul encourages the church to earnestly seek prophecy. (1 Cor 14:1, 39)

In vv. 29-33, there may have been too many wanting to prophecy at the same time or some were “hogging the microphone” for an extended period of time. Paul urges order and quashes anything elitist in the church gathering.

In vv. 33-35, these instructions apply to how wives are to relate to their husbands in the church’s public assemblies. Paul is addressing those women who are married and speaking disruptively by asking questions to their husbands as the worship is in process. They are simply asked to hold their speech for the moment to avoid any embarrassment to their marriages. This rule does not permanently and absolutely direct women to be “quiet as a mouse” in every circumstance, requiring that they learn only at home. “All” are to possess an attitude of learning when the church gathers (1 Cor 14:31). Moreover, Paul is not laying down rules for women in general or for women prophets. Women are not called to be subject to every man in the church any more than slaves are called to obey every master.

Paul simply prohibits speech in the gathered assembly that would suggest insubordination from the wife toward her husband, be it an interruption or a challenge to a prophetic word.¹¹

What is teaching and what is prophecy?

A biblical definition of teaching can be deduced from Nehemiah 8:8, *“They read from the book, from the Law of God, clearly, and they gave the sense, so that the people understood the reading.”* Biblical teaching has three components: first, it is word-based; second, it interprets for meaning; third, it nets understanding which leads to obedience and life-change.

The biblical definition for prophecy is debated. Some scholars such as Wayne Grudem hold that prophecy is a “spontaneous revelation from the Holy Spirit” to men or women that still needs to be tested by discerning believers.¹² Others such as Anthony Thiselton (who prefers the phrase “utters prophetic speech” over “prophesies”) asserts that “Prophetic speech may include applied theological teaching, encouragement, and exhortation to build up the church not merely (if at all), *ad hoc* cries of an expressive, diagnostic, or tactical nature.”¹³ Also, Thiselton notes: *“Prophecy consistently included both “foretelling” (predicting future events) and, more predominantly, “forthtelling” (exhorting God’s people, and occasionally his enemies, about his will for their present circumstances).”*¹⁴ Craig Blomberg agrees:

New Testament prophecy therefore included both conventional preaching, when the preacher had the sense of being gripped and convicted by the Spirit about his or her message, and more spontaneous, unpremeditated utterances. A scholar, Hill, captures both of these concepts in his definition: Christian prophets are “those who have grasped the meaning of Scripture, perceived its powerful relevance to the life of the individual, the Church and society, and declare that message fearlessly.” Their prophecy is not on a par with Scripture and their exercise of the gift, like that of all other spiritual gifts, is subject to error and misinterpretation (cf. esp. Acts 21: 4 with vv. 11, 13– 14).¹⁵

Thus, prophecy seems to be a broader communicative word than teaching. There is an honest difference of opinion in the definition of prophecy; that said, Thiselton seems more convincing than Grudem. This leads to a discussion about the essentials and non-essentials of the faith.

¹¹ Garland, David E. *1 Corinthians* (Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament) (Kindle Locations 15395-15397). Baker Publishing Group. Kindle Edition. It should also be noted that the distinction between home and church, so clear to persons accustomed to worshiping in buildings dedicated to worship, would have been fuzzier for those worshiping in *house churches*; and this may have prompted some of the problems. Christianity did not see dedicated facilities for worship until the 3rd century! Men and women may have felt more comfortable in a home setting and were more expressive. Certain behaviors permissible at home, however, were out of place in the church.

¹²Wayne Grudem, *The Gift of Prophecy in the New Testament and Today, Revised Edition* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2000), 117.

¹³Anthony C. Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians: NIGTC* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans 2000), 826, 956. See also Hill’s definition: “Christian prophets exercised a teaching ministry in the Church which included pastoral preaching.”

¹⁴Ibid.

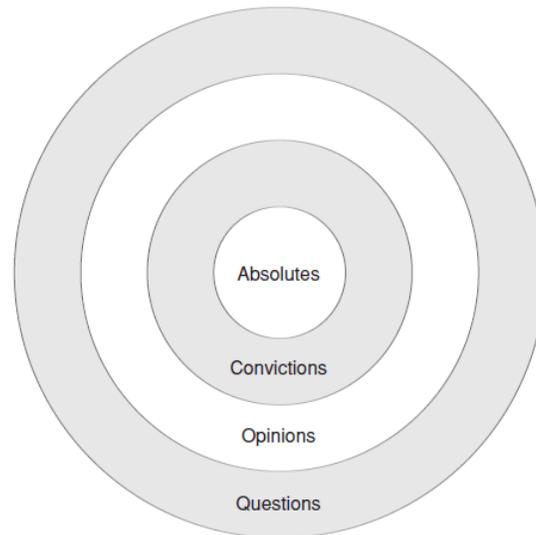
¹⁵Craig Blomberg, *1 Corinthians NIVAC*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan) p. 245.

ON THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN CARDINAL AND NON-CARDINAL DOCTRINES

In our church family, it is the responsibility of the ELT to establish doctrine, made clear in the church's Statement of Faith. I have found it helpful to think about doctrinal matters in terms of categories, namely four:

1. *absolutes* define the core beliefs of the Christian faith; see our Statement of Faith.
2. *convictions*, while not core beliefs, may have significant impact on the health and effectiveness of the church;
3. *opinions* are less-clear issues that generally are not worth dividing over; and
4. *questions* are currently unsettled issues.

The following illustration from the ESV Study Bible shows these categories in concentric circles, as if a dart board:



What I believe about both the complementarian polity of church eldership and our view of men and women in preaching/teaching ministry are *convictions*, not *absolutes*. I believe there is room in orthodox Christianity for different points of view in these matters. In fact, I would like to approach this topic with humility by saying, "I could be wrong." I agree with these words:

We believe that one can build a credible case within the bounds of orthodoxy and a commitment to inerrancy for either one of the two major views addressed [egalitarianism or complementarianism] although all of us view our own position on the matter as stronger and more compelling.¹⁶

¹⁶Stanley N. Gundry, ed., *Two Views of Women in Ministry*, 2nd edition (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005), 15.

That said, for the sake of unity, health, and effective ministry, I believe we must agree on how to lead the church in a way that makes more and more disciples for Christ. I hold that Blomberg's chapter on "soft complementarianism" has been our church's practice since I have been here. This is why we have ordained women into ministry. This is why we have had women regularly communicating Bible and theology to men and women throughout the week and occasionally on Sunday.

At Windsor Road Christian Church, I understand that my brothers and sisters in Christ may have different perspectives regarding what I see as a conviction, not an absolute of the Faith. As such, as a way of lovingly submitting to each other, I believe that our practice of complementarianism should be that of maintaining an all-male eldership and senior minister. *I also believe that our ELT is at its best when we encourage our brothers and sisters in Christ to exercise the Spirit-endowed gifts for the glory of God and the good of His people. We should bend over backwards to urge our brothers and sisters in Christ to utilize the gifts which the Spirit has given.* Thus, in these matters, my conscience peacefully desires qualified brothers and sisters with teaching gifts to share a Bible message in various settings in our church family, including Sunday worship; and only as it seems beneficial to the nourishment of the church family.

CONCLUSION

It is my view that *biblical headship and authority are for the sake of building up others.* Leadership involves the responsibility to take action for the sake of others rather than the right to command others for one's own benefit.¹⁷ Philippians 2:1-11 speaks of the headship which Christ commands for His elders: They must become leaders of no reputation imitating the Chief Shepherd, who humbled himself, becoming obedient to death on a cross. They must say with John the Baptist: Jesus must become greater and we must become lesser. They must say with the Apostle Paul: death is at work in us while life is at work in you. It is with much love and affection for you, our church family, and the Lord Jesus Christ that I submit these words.

¹⁷James B. Hurley, *Man and Woman in Biblical Perspective*. James B. Hurley. Academie Books. Grand Rapids, Michigan. Zondervan Publishing House, 1981, 234-252.