

No other issue in the past 100 years has brought greater division in the Body of Christ than the subject of women in ministry. It has pit believers against believers, split denominations, divided local congregations, and brought disappointment and disillusionment to genuine followers of Jesus Christ. Many believers have become confused by the variety of voices, including those from the feminist movement, both conservative and liberal interpreters of Scripture, and both modern and ancient cultural practices. In this world, there are women who serve as prime ministers of powerful nations, as well as women who are enslaved, scarred, and beaten by their husbands. So what about the church? May women serve as elders? May women speak in the worship services? May they lead Care Groups? It is against this background, that the elders of ECC seek to agree upon a position on this issue. It is our aim to announce a position that faithfully reflects Scripture, consistent with the liberating news of the gospel, and preserves the unity of Christ's Church.

Our Position

We affirm that all positions of leadership and service in the church are open to women, except for roles in the highest authoritative body in the church, namely, the Elder Board. Because of the present structure of ECC, the members of this Board, namely the offices of pastor and elder, shall be limited to men. The basis for our position is the principle of male headship in the home and church, as described by the Scriptures, in 1 Timothy 2:12-14, Ephesians 5:22-33, and 1 Peter 3:1-7. Yet we also encourage women to seek out all avenues of leadership and service, including teaching, co-leading small groups, serving in various church leadership groups, exercising appropriate leadership roles in public worship, and in other ways exercising all their gifts for the greater benefit of the Body of Christ, as long as they are serving under or with a male in authority.

The above statement is essentially in agreement with the position statement of our sister church, Island ECC,¹ and the Danvers Statement² prepared by the evangelical leaders of the Council on Biblical Manhood

¹ "An Island ECC Positional Paper On: Women and Ministry," www.islandecc.hk, Feb. 15, 2011

² Grudem, Wayne A., *Evangelical Feminism and Biblical Truth*, Colorado Springs: Multnomah Publishers, 2004, pp. 538-40.

and Womanhood. This Danvers Statement reflects ECC's position in greater detail:

1. Both Adam and Eve were created in God's image, equal before God as persons and distinct in their manhood and womanhood (Gen 1:26-27, 2:18).
2. Distinctions in masculine and feminine roles are ordained by God as part of the created order, and should find an echo in every human heart (Gen 2:18, 21-24; 1 Cor 11:7-9; 1 Tim 2:12-14).
3. Adam's headship in marriage was established by God before the Fall, and was not a result of sin (Gen 2:16-18, 21-24, 3:1-13; 1 Cor 11:7-9).
4. The Fall introduced distortions into the relationships between men and women (Gen 3:1-7, 12, 16).
 - In the home, the husband's loving, humble headship tends to be replaced by domination or passivity; the wife's intelligent, willing submission tends to be replaced by usurpation or servility.
 - In the church, sin inclines men toward a worldly love of power or an abdication of spiritual responsibility, and inclines women to resist limitations on their roles or to neglect the use of their gifts in appropriate ministries.
5. The Old Testament, as well as the New Testament, manifests the equally high value and dignity which God attached to the roles of both men and women (Gen 1:26-27, 2:18; Gal 3:28). Both Old and New Testaments also affirm the principle of male headship in the family and in the covenant community (Gen 2:18; Eph 5:21-33; Col 3:18-19; 1 Tim 2:11-15).
6. Redemption in Christ aims at removing the distortions introduced by the curse.
 - In the family, husbands should forsake harsh or selfish leadership and grow in love and care for their wives; wives should forsake resistance to their husbands' authority and grow in willing, joyful submission to their husbands' leadership (Eph 5:21-33; Col 3:18-19; Tit 2:3-5; 1 Pet 3:1-7).
 - In the church, redemption in Christ gives men and women an equal share in the blessings of salvation; nevertheless, some governing and teaching roles within the church are restricted to men (Gal 3:28; 1 Cor 11:2-16; 1 Tim 2:11-15).
7. In all of life Christ is the supreme authority and guide for men and women, so that no earthly submission-domestic, religious, or civil-

ever implies a mandate to follow a human authority into sin (Dan 3:10-18; Acts 4:19-20, 5:27-29; 1 Pet 3:1-2).

8. In both men and women a heartfelt sense of call to ministry should never be used to set aside Biblical criteria for particular ministries (1 Tim 2:11-15, 3:1-13; Tit 1:5-9). Rather, Biblical teaching should remain the authority for testing our subjective discernment of God's will.
9. With half the world's population outside the reach of indigenous evangelism; with countless other lost people in those societies that have heard the gospel; with the stresses and miseries of sickness, malnutrition, homelessness, illiteracy, ignorance, aging, addiction, crime, incarceration, neuroses, and loneliness, no man or woman who feels a passion from God to make His grace known in word and deed need ever live without a fulfilling ministry for the glory of Christ and the good of this fallen world (1 Cor 12:7-21).
10. We are convinced that a denial or neglect of these principles will lead to increasingly destructive consequences in our families, our churches, and the culture at large.

Biblical Grounds

Our most trustworthy and authoritative source for knowing God's will is Scripture. Although we admit that we are prone to biases shaped by our culture, denominational practices, practical outcomes, and even personal joys and pains, we yet strive to appeal to Scripture alone. This is not to say that one's disagreement with our position renders him/her unbiblical or liberal. Rather, the following verses put forth some of the texts that support our conclusion. This list is by no means exhaustive, but only the beginning for inquirers of ECC.

Genesis 1:27 – ...male and female He created them. (ESV, 2001)

God created both men and women in the image of God. Thus, they are both equal in value, dignity, and importance in God's kingdom and church.

Acts 2:17, 18 – And in the last days it shall be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see vision, and your old men shall dream dreams; even on my male servants and female servants in those days I will pour out my Spirit, and they shall prophesy.

God has given spiritual gifts to both men and women, to sons and daughters. Believers of both genders all have spiritual gifts for various kinds of ministries.

1 Corinthians 12:7 – To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.

God gives spiritual gifts to all believers. Those given to women are not to be neglected, but to be used for the benefit of the church body.

Galatians 3:28 – There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.

God equally values all believers, regardless of ethnicity, social standing, or gender.

1 Timothy 2:11-15 – Let a woman learn quietly with all submissiveness. I do not permit a woman to teach or to exercise authority over a man; rather, she is to remain quiet. For Adam was formed first, then Eve; and Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and became a transgressor. Yet she will be saved through childbearing – if they continue in faith and love and holiness, with self-control.

Women so gifted may teach (i.e. “teaching” in sense of Acts 15:35 and 18:11), except in the assembled church (which is the context given in verses 8-10). This prohibition is not limited to the ancient Ephesian church, the original recipients of the letter, but for the church in general, since Paul in verses 13-15 appeals to the story of creation, not to the local situation.

Yet not all teaching or public speaking is prohibited. Women may explain Scripture in private contexts (Acts 18:26). They may teach other women (Titus 2:3-5). They may do evangelism whether privately or large groups (John 4:28-30; Matthew 28:5-10). They may prophesy publicly in the church (1 Corinthians 11:3-16).

The Bible passage also conveys that God prohibited women to have authority over a man. Although Paul makes this command simply and emphatically, it is not clear how to apply it. Deborah led Israel (Judges 4:4). And Phoebe was a deaconess (Romans 16:1, *diakonon*, the feminine form of the Greek word for deacon). For the sake of consistency, and to maintain both freedom as well as faithfulness to Scripture, we at ECC

have chosen to open all positions roles of leadership to women, except for the highest offices of ECC, namely, pastors and elders.

Ephesians 5:22-33 – Wives, submit to your husbands as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the Savior. Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything.

In this text, God refers to male headship in the home, by commanding wives to submit to their husband’s leadership. This does not imply that she become a “doormat,” but rather to be respectful (verse 33), gentle, and supportive.

Husbands are not to be tyrannical or overbearing, but sacrificial and loving to their wives, as they fulfill their roles as spiritual heads of the household and take the initiative to lead their families to greater holiness and knowledge of Christ. In this way, both husbands and wives emulate Christ and they “submit to one another out of reverence for Christ.” (verse 21)

1 Peter 3:1-7 – Wives, in the same way be submissive to your husbands so that, if any of them do not believe the word, they may be won over without words by the behavior of their wives, when they see the purity and reverence of your lives...

Another reference to male headship, God commands wives to submit to husbands through “purity,” “reverence,” and a “gentle and quiet spirit.”

Resources

Grudem, Wayne A., *Evangelical Feminism and Biblical Truth*, Colorado Springs: Multnomah Publishers, 2004.

Grudem, Wayne A., and John Piper, eds., *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*, Wheaton, IL: Crossway Publishers, 2006.

The Council on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood, www.cbmw.org

Strauch, Alexander, *Biblical Eldership*, Colorado Springs, Lewis and Roth Publishers, 1995.

*Adopted, March 7, 2012, Elder Board
Evangelical Community Church, Hong Kong
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Women in Ministry

A POSITION STATEMENT OF
EVANGELICAL COMMUNITY CHURCH
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