



## **Men and Women in Ministry**

*A biblical guide for teaching and practice at Redemption Hill Church*

### **Part 1**

Position Paper in Brief

(Part 2 Extended Position Paper is available upon request)

Approved by the Overseers of RHC

June 2012

## Introduction

Central to our identity as individuals is that God created us “in his image” – as male and female. We celebrate how men and women – walking together in the Spirit – relationally complement one another. Like a God-glorifying marriage displays Christ’s character, a local church similarly reveals God’s gracious glory when men and women minister together in harmony according to God’s intentions.

Ironically, God’s unifying intent for men and women to serve together has become one of the most contested issues in the church today. The issue of contention centers on how we should interpret Scripture’s teaching regarding ministry roles for men and women in the church. We recognize that our subjective experiences affect our interpretations. If the track record of church history revealed a consistent pattern of men demonstrating leadership humbly, wisely, sacrificially, and lovingly, the problems related to this question might be greatly reduced. Our desire is to see men valiantly embrace God’s calling for Christ-like leadership in the home and in the church. Similarly, we desire to see women eagerly embrace their distinctive roles as partners in the home and the church, fully engaged in God’s callings.

Our focus for this study is to clarify the relationship between women and men in ministry in the context of the church, and particularly to explore whatever distinctions Scripture affirms. This topic raises some challenging questions: If role distinctions are confirmed, does God still value men and women equally? What is God’s intent for men and women in ministry partnership? What guidelines has God established for local church leadership related to gender? Do the Scriptures affirm any limitations for women regarding their ministry roles?

The overseers of Redemption Hill Church have engaged in extensive, prayerful study and discussion to develop a teaching position on this subject. Our goal is to promote respectful harmony on this issue. This paper is intended to provide our official guide for the doctrine and practice of our church. We recognize there are a variety of approaches taken by Bible believing churches. As we have studied these issues in Scripture, we have come to a unified conviction on major themes that help us determine our practice in our local church context. Part 1 of this paper is intended for broad readership. Here we offer a synopsis of our conclusions from our study (p. 5), present a summary of our official church position (p. 6), and then address answers to expected questions on areas of practical application (p. 7).

For those who wish to understand better the study and reasoning behind these conclusions, we encourage you to continue reading. Part 2 provides a fuller overview of the topic, followed by an extensive development of Old and New Testament Scriptures pertinent to these issues. Our prayer is that the study of this significant issue will serve a unifying purpose in our church as we affirm what God has established for our benefit and for his glory.

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## **Part 1:**

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Plus: OT & NT Summaries

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## Synopsis of the Biblical Conclusions

In Genesis 1-2, we are told that men and women image God *together*, as male and female. This initial reality establishes an equality of worth and value among men and women. Additionally, Genesis 2 lays down a pattern for complementary roles where the husband is given responsibilities and the wife is to assist as God's appointed "helper." It is significant that these honorable roles are established prior to the entrance of sin in Genesis 3, which inevitably brings God's original designs into new tension. The rest of the Old Testament presents a variety of men and women engaged in strategic, wide-ranging, honorable ministry. Yet the regular pattern of headship in the home is never undermined. Meanwhile the primary, spiritual worship leadership throughout Israel's history is consistently assigned to men.

Similarly in the New Testament, all women and men "in Christ" share equality in value to God and now also in direct spiritual access to God and his blessings. In the church, women are led by the Holy Spirit to participate fully in crucial ministry among the body, alongside men. The New Testament reveals both an expansion of the visibility of women in ministry, and also the reaffirmation of the underlying context of male headship. Affirming the appropriateness of complementary role relationships, God has tasked men to lead their families and their churches; and has called wives to ably assist their husbands (at home) and women to be active partners (in the church). Male leadership is to be exercised with sacrificial love and care, modeled after Christ. Women are seen to respectfully participate in prayer and prophecy and other visible ministries, under willing submission to their husbands at home and church leaders in the assembly. They are to be active learners of God's truth and vibrant in ministry leadership and influence among other women, widows, and children. The repeated limitation for women is in the realm of teaching men in a way that could be viewed as exercising authority, and thereby undermining headship and God's intention for complementary relationships.

We find in the New Testament one ministry position reserved exclusively for men:

**The role of overseer is the only official ministry in the church that separates men from women, the sole position which is open only to men, and only to those particular men who meet the biblical qualifications. This distinguishing spiritual leadership position centers on two interrelated roles for which overseers are accountable to God:**

- 1) Being responsible to provide spiritual oversight and direction as the official leaders of the congregation; including**
- 2) Exercising authority through teaching that establishes and protects the doctrine of the church.**

We are convinced that this synopsis represents the heart of consistent biblical teaching based on both the broad sweep of Scripture and the careful examination of critical passages

particularly germane to the issue. The biblical issues are developed much more fully in the larger section of this paper, which follows in Part 2. This synopsis of the biblical teachings leads us to establish our official church position for teaching and practice which follows here.

### **Summary of RHC's Position for Teaching and Practice**

- We affirm that God created men and women in true equality, but with particular role distinctions in the home and later in the leadership of the church. This position is commonly referred to as “complementarian.”<sup>1</sup> The essence of this is that men and women are recognized to have differing roles which are mutually beneficial.
- We affirm that the roles God has established follow a pattern of male “headship” in the home and the church, modeled after Christ’s loving sacrificial leadership; and that God has called women to honor this role by being willing and respectful partners in the home and in ministry in the church.
- We affirm that God established the church under the loving, sacrificial leadership of a group of leaders referred to in Scripture primarily by the synonymous terms “overseers” and “elders.”<sup>2</sup> This leadership office is open to males who satisfy certain requirements laid down in God’s Word (notably in Epistles of 1Timothy and Titus).
- We affirm that the primary role of these overseers is to function as the leaders responsible to provide spiritual oversight<sup>3</sup> for the entire church. This includes exercising authority<sup>4</sup> through teaching that confirms doctrinal positions. A memorable way to consider the interplay of the key roles is that overseers “Guide Direction” and “Guard Doctrine.” In other words, the overseers determine where the church is going and what the church believes.
- We affirm the full participation of women with men in every ministry area in the church, except overseer leadership and authoritative teaching of men. These roles are reserved for men. The reason women are restricted from teaching in the gathered assembly is not because they are unable or unqualified to accurately communicate scriptural truth, but because teaching doctrine necessarily includes an oversight component. In relation to men, this runs the risk of violating the principle of headship.

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<sup>1</sup> The complementarian position is developed later and is also distinguished from being either egalitarian or hierarchical.

<sup>2</sup> While these terms are interchangeable, in our Redemption Hill context we have chosen to use the term “overseer” to embrace both unpaid “elders” and full-time paid “pastors.” While “overseer,” “elder,” and “bishop” refer to the primary ministry leadership *office*, the term “pastor” emphasizes the teaching and shepherding *functions* pursued by all overseers.

<sup>3</sup> By “spiritual oversight” we mean the broad responsibility to provide spiritual leadership and care for the entire congregation. The overseers take responsibility for ministry vision and mission and equipping the body for service.

<sup>4</sup> By “exercising authority” we do not mean “authoritarian.” This speaks to what is official, not the tone in which it is offered. Rather, we mean under the authority of Jesus that God has granted to particular qualified men who exercise godly oversight of the local church through the establishing and protection of biblical doctrine. So, we are referring to that which is regulative, or which represents the church’s official teachings. Through this kind of teaching leadership their oversight is displayed.

- We affirm that the office of deacon is shared equally among men and women, as it is one of special service, not authoritative teaching or leadership oversight.
- We affirm that we must hold unswervingly to the truth of God’s Word, humbly and graciously, both firmly and respectful towards those with differing views.

The above affirmations will guide all teaching and practice at Redemption Hill Church. While we recognize that there may be some who hold to more egalitarian or more hierarchical positions,<sup>5</sup> we ask all members of RHC to respect these affirmations, to work toward unity, and not to promote teachings in our church setting that are contrary to this position established by the overseers.

### **Key Application Questions**

Below are key questions we expect some people may ask. This Q&A can offer a view of how this policy is to be applied at RHC:

- **May a woman serve as a deacon at RHC?**

Yes. This office of ministry service is open to qualified men and women.

- **May a woman serve as an overseer (“pastor” or “elder”) at RHC?**

No. This office of official oversight is limited by the Scriptures to qualified men.

- **May a woman have “up front” roles that involve speaking in church gatherings?**

Yes. A woman may pray, read Scripture, offer testimony, give exhortation, offer spiritual insight, proclaim the gospel, lead in worship, minister through music, receive offerings, greet people, promote ministries, share praises, participate in and chair commissions, etc. just like men for the building up of the body and under the authority of the overseers of RHC.

- **May women be involved in serving communion and in baptizing?**

Yes and no. Women may be involved in the distribution of the elements of the bread and cup representing Christ’s broken body and shed blood or in partnering with the baptizing of believers. However, the person presiding over communion and leading baptisms is to be a male overseer – as leading the church in our primary ordinances implies overseer-like authority. Assisting roles may be viewed as deacon functions.

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<sup>5</sup> “Hierarchical” is a term which emphasizes an actual hierarchy of value – where men are considered intrinsically superior to women and are to be in authority over women in all arenas of society. Meanwhile, “egalitarians” view men and women without distinction in both value and also in roles and functions. So, in application, egalitarian churches will have male and female overseers, preachers, and pastors. This is pursued more fully in Part 2. RHC holds to equal value and differing roles.

- **Are women encouraged to actively learn Bible doctrine and to develop skills in exegesis and Bible interpretation?**

Yes. First, this is of enormous personal benefit for growth and worship. Second, this learning and skill development is essential for effective teaching and personal ministry to others.

- **Are women encouraged to exercise teaching ministries at RHC?**

Yes. Women are heartily encouraged to exegete well and teach effectively in ministry to other women and to children within the RHC body, and to their own children at home. These spheres of ministry are crucial and should not be minimized. Additionally, husbands and wives are encouraged to partner in a variety of counseling and discipleship ministries to both men and women.

- **Is there a circumstance where a woman would be allowed to teach Scripture to men?**

Yes. There may be occasions where there is a compelling reason to have a woman teach and where she will not encroach on the overseer role or violate the headship of her husband. There may be particular topics or scriptural passages that are especially fruitful when presented from a woman's perspective or a particular woman might have special expertise.<sup>6</sup> When an ABC has questions about the appropriateness of a given situation, they should consult an overseer.

- **May a woman serve as a regular, primary teacher of mixed-gender adult bible communities at RHC?**

No. Certainly, women are fully capable of effectively interpreting scripture, proclaiming correct doctrine, and communicating engagingly. However, in our context, the purpose of our ABCs is to establish biblical literacy among men and women together. Primary teachers in such a setting are functioning in a way that overlaps significantly with the spiritual authority of overseers. For this reason we have determined that official class teachers must be qualified men. As a rule, a woman may not serve as the primary teacher in a worship service (i.e. the sermon), or teach in an Adult Bible Community as the lead teacher or on a regular basis in a teaching rotation.

- **May women be active participants in mixed-gender small groups?**

Yes. Women may speak freely and engage fully in mixed group discussions in Small Group ministries, as long as a wife is sensitive to her husband's leadership role. This is a great opportunity to partner in ministry.

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<sup>6</sup> Both the general limitation on women functioning as overseers via authoritative teaching and the occasional permission for unique teaching opportunities are presented in a well-balanced way by Charles Powell, in *Paul's Concept of Teaching and 1 Timothy 2:12*. Available online: <https://bible.org/article/paul%E2%80%99s-concept-teaching-and-1-timothy-212>.

- **May a woman offer correction or counsel to a man?**

Yes. A woman may offer counsel or correction to a man as a fellow member of Christ's body. If she is married, it is generally preferable for her to do so in partnership with her husband being an active participant.<sup>7</sup> To confront an overseer requires multiple witnesses (1 Tim. 5:19). Whenever correction or counsel are given to a person of the opposite gender (either a woman speaking to a man, or a man to a woman) particular wisdom must be exercised and it is often best to partner with someone of the same gender in the interaction.

- **Are women free to pursue *every other ministry*?**

Yes. We heartily encourage women to freely and fully engage in all forms of ministry at RHC other than what is specifically restricted above. Women have every bit as much to offer as men do and may offer some things men cannot. RHC needs full and wide participation in ministry by both women and men. We want an environment that is affirming and freeing for everyone – including unleashing women to do everything God calls them to do within the structure he has established.

- **Is submission only an issue for women?**

No. Every member of RHC is under spiritual authority, submitting to Christ by submitting to the leadership he has established over his church. Individual overseers (including the Senior Pastor) serve under the authority of the Board of Overseers and submit to the counsel and decisions of the whole group. The collective group of overseers are servant leaders whose primary focus is submitting to Christ and his word, and helping the whole body do the same.

- **What does male “headship” in the home look like?**

We encourage each couple to prayerfully and lovingly work this out together in a way distinctive to their partnership. But the following is a starting point: The husband should winsomely take primary responsibility for guiding the family in a way that it thrives spiritually and relationally and brings glory to God. He will be held accountable to God for this. Meanwhile, the wife should honor the husband's efforts here and offer helpful support in implementation. How this partnership plays out will vary from family to family according to the backgrounds, personalities, abilities, and spiritual maturity of each spouse, among other factors. The husband should not domineer over his wife, but model and lead with humility and sensitivity. And the wife should not usurp God's calling for her husband.

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<sup>7</sup> As modeled by Priscilla and Aquila in Acts 18:26.



## **Summary of Old Testament Teaching on Gender Roles**

Genesis lays down a pattern of equal worth and complementary roles within the family. The husband is to be the head and the wife is to be the helper. This is a functional distinction, which in no way distinguishes their ultimate value before God. However, this complementary role relationship effectively displays his image in the world as somewhat analogous to the Godhead. We know from a variety of other Scriptures that the persons of the triune God play distinct roles, wherein the Son subordinates himself to the Father and the Spirit subordinates himself to both the Father and the Son. This pattern is laid down as part of the initial creation and is not the result of human sin. Sin subverts this pattern by making it very difficult to live in harmony with each other. Sin causes us to chafe under our roles as we try to live them out, but it has not removed the responsibility we bear to live obediently.

A number of exemplary women reinforce the distinction of roles. Indeed, a number of very powerful female leaders are presented, and their skill and prowess are held up as virtues. However, they are pictured as exercising their great gifts within the context of male headship in their homes. Similarly, women are active and faithful participants in worship. Yet the record is consistent of all the appointed leadership positions of spiritual authority being given to men.

## **Summary of New Testament Teaching on Gender Roles**

Women are wondrously different from men and, according to God's intention of design, are to be in complementary and mutually beneficial relationship with men. When men are humble, loving, sacrificial leaders in the home, thereby honoring their wives, they fulfill the headship role Christ has pictured for them. When women respond to their husbands in respectful submission, marked by willing partnership in life's callings and ministry, they become their husband's glory and fulfill Christ's picture for his church. This complementary relationship allows both male and female partners to thrive in ways God intended, which results in benefits for both. In this, God receives glory. When brought into the church, women are integral participants in the vibrant life and ministry of their local churches.

According to God's intent as revealed in the New Testament, qualified male overseers are responsible to God for exercising spiritual authority in a local congregation. Specifically, they are tasked with the general ministry oversight and care of the congregation and with responsibility and authority for the teaching and protection of pure doctrine. This is the singular ministry to which women are restricted. Alongside the overseers are the deacons (men and women of equal status) who are noteworthy assistants to the overseers, supporting them by vibrant ministry service among the church community.