

PRISM LEADERSHIP GROUP

A Position Regarding Men and Women in Leadership¹

*You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. **Not so with you.** Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be your slave—just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.* - Matthew 20:25-28 (emphasis added)

Introduction

PRISM LEADERSHIP GROUP has been asked on occasion to give churches input in this area and it is with this in mind that we offer our current thinking on this matter as we look to the Bible for guidance and ways to articulate our position. In so doing, we have sought to uphold both the inspiration and complete authority of the Bible. In addition, three foundational assumptions remain central:

1. There are four main purposes of the Church:

- To *extend* God’s Kingdom into the world;
- To *establish* biblically functioning communities of Christ-followers;
- To *equip* and mobilize people for ministry, and;
- To *exalt* God the Father, Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit.

Fulfilling God’s calling is paramount to every local church. However these purposes are articulated, they are non-negotiable.

2. We believe that the issue of women in leadership positions in the local church (while important) is a “gray area” or *non-essential of the Christian faith*. We recognize there are godly, wise people who hold divergent views on the subject. Seeing it as a non-essential issue, we seek to respect those who hold differing views and will strive for unity in the body of Christ while living out our convictions concerning men and women in leadership. The following statement serves as a base from which to both examine and dialogue regarding the essentials and non-essentials of Scripture and can be traced to some early reformed “peaceful divines” (see below) and recorded in one of the premier literary works on church history:²

- In the *essentials* of the Christian faith, we must have *unity*. (Eph. 4:4-6)
- In the *non-essentials* of the faith, we embrace *diversity*. (Rom. 14:1-6)
- In *all matters* of faith, we seek to have *charity*. (1 Cor. 13:1-3)

3. Our focus is empowering people: It is our desire as a ministry serving local churches to fully equip, empower, and release people for fruitful and fulfilling ministry – both men and women. We regret when anyone is not released in this manner, and we are seeking to learn and grow in this area.

Five Biblical and Theological Considerations

The view of PRISM LEADERSHIP GROUP related to men and women in leadership in the local church focuses on five key biblical and theological issues.

¹ PRISM LEADERSHIP GROUP has expanded. Not every person on our staff holds the same view. These remarks primarily reflect Gregg Caruso’s current thinking. Additionally, this position paper was adapted from material developed by Crossroads International Church in Amsterdam, The Netherlands (where Gregg served as the intentional interim preaching pastor in 1998).

² *The History of the Christian Church*, by Philip Schaff. In Volume VII, Modern Christianity, The German Reformation, Schaff writes: “This famous motto of Christian Irenics, which I have slightly modified in the text, is often falsely attributed to St. Augustin (whose creed would not allow it, though his heart might have approved of it), but is of much later origin. It appears for the first time in Germany, a.d. 1627 and 1628, among peaceful divines of the Lutheran and German Reformed churches, and found a hearty welcome among moderate divines in England...The authorship has recently been traced to Rupertus Meldenius, an otherwise unknown divine, and author of a remarkable tract in which the sentence first occurs. He gave classical expression to the irenic sentiments of such divines as Calixtus of Helmstädt, David Pareus of Heidelberg, Crocius of Marburg, John Valentin Andrew of Wuerttemberg, John Arnd of Zelle, Georg Frank of Francfort-on-the Oder, the brothers Bergius in Brandenburg, and of the indefatigable traveling evangelist of Christian union, John Dury, and Richard Baxter.”

1. Our Standing Before God

The Bible teaches that men and women are made equally in the image of God (Gen. 1:27), are equally condemned under sin (Gen. 3:6), and are equally redeemed by the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ (Gal. 3:26-28). Both men and women are equally called upon to acquire the mind of Christ and be transformed into his image (Eph. 4:13; Phil 2:5).

2. The Wonder of God's Creation

We understand the Bible to describe a specific creation order uniquely designed by God, that there is a significance that the man was created first and then the woman created from man. We submit that there is a certain amount of "mystery" to the biblical account concerning Adam being formed first and Eve being formed from Adam's rib. We do not wish to dispel the mystery of this. Yet based on the creation account in Genesis 1 through 3 we seek to uphold the view of "male headship."

However, in our understanding of Scripture, "headship" *never* implies "dominance" or that women are inferior, but rather "headship" points to self-giving servant leadership (Eph. 5:25-28), or *initiator*. In addition, the idea that "the head of every man is Christ, and the head of the woman is man" (I Cor. 11:3) is best understood as the *source* of every man is Christ and the source of the woman is man (a reference back to who Eve was created from Adam's side).

While embracing the biblical concept of "headship" we also believe the word "helper" (Hebrew: *ezer*) in Genesis 2:18 most naturally means "companion" or "counterpart." In other contexts in the Old Testament (e.g. Ps. 33:20) "helper" refers to God Himself. Consequently, when used to describe the relationship between two humans the word most naturally refers to a "soul mate." Thus, the forming of Eve from Adam illustrates the interdependence of men and women. In Genesis 2:18 and 2:20 the word "suitable" (Hebrew: *kenegdo*) carries the notion of completeness or wholeness.

3. The "Divine Design" for Male-ness and Female-ness

We live in a culture that is increasing in its sexual confusion. For this reason as a ministry to local churches, we believe it is crucial to articulate what the Bible says about how God has made us male and female, and that He did so for a purpose. We celebrate the distinctiveness of men and women -- that while each are created in the image of God this is expressed differently in *male-ness* and *female-ness*. These differences are experienced on spiritual, emotional, and physical levels. We embrace God's design for men and women and the unique contribution each makes to the other.

4. God's Call for Mutual Dominion

The Bible points to a partnership, or mutuality, between men and women in regards to work and in "subduing the earth." This especially holds true in ministry situations. In Gen. 1:28 God tells *both* the man and woman, "Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over every living creature that moves on the ground." We believe the command to "rule" (given before the Fall) is given to both the man and woman together.

Consequently, we believe there is an important partnership between men and women in carrying out the work of ministry. The nature of this partnership is illustrated by both Jesus and Paul in the New Testament. While Jesus appointed only male apostles he also encouraged women to minister with him (Luke 8:1-3) and allowed a woman (Mary) to sit at his feet *as a disciple* as only a man would have in first century Jewish culture (Luke 10:38-42).

This is further highlighted in the life and ministry of the apostle Paul, who ministered alongside women and repeatedly acknowledged their leadership and ministries (Phoebe in Rom. 16:1, Priscilla in Rom. 16:3, Junias mentioned as an apostle in Rom. 16:7, Euodia and Syntyche in Phil. 4:2-3). In specific contexts (e.g. in Rome and Philippi) Paul embraced women ministers and leaders.

Paul's Prohibitions Regarding Women in I Cor. 14:33-35 and I Tim. 2:11-15: We also believe it is important to understand the whole counsel of God, including the direct statements by Paul in I Corinthians 14 and I Timothy 2 prohibiting women from speaking in public and having authority over men. Admittedly these are difficult passages and we respect the range of views people within the Body of Christ have concerning these verses. We believe Paul is speaking to specific problem situations in the

churches at Corinth and Ephesus in which women were usurping the authority of men and undermining Paul's central concern for order in worship (1 Cor. 14:26ff). In these situations Paul prohibited women from having authority *over* men but in other contexts in the New Testament Paul encouraged women to have authority *with* men (e.g. in Rome and Philippi mentioned above). Consequently, we do not believe Paul is declaring normative statements for all ministry contexts but rather is responding to problems in Corinth and Ephesus.

5. God's Call for Mutual Empowerment

Lastly, we believe the Bible teaches that at Pentecost both men and women were filled with the Holy Spirit and given power from God to minister (Acts 2:1-21). In addition, the Bible teaches that men and women both are given spiritual gifts regardless of gender. The Bible does not refer to any specific gift as being only given to men or only given to women. Both men and women are gifted by God to minister to the whole body of Christ (Acts 1:14, 21:9, 1 Peter 4:10-11, Col. 4:15).

For these reasons as a ministry to local churches we desire for both men and women to mutually encourage and empower one another to use their God-given gifts in leadership and service for His glory and Kingdom.

A Statement on Church Leadership

All people in the Body of Christ are called to ministry. Both men and women may lead small groups, teach adult, youth, and children's education, preach/teach, counsel, and carry out the many other functions in the church. We believe that men and women receive a spiritual gift or gifts from the Holy Spirit and are to exercise and develop these gifts to their full potential to extend God's Kingdom through His Church.

The functions and roles of leadership in the local church are open to both men and women, single and married. Roles such as pastors, directors, and coordinators of ministries; as well as the role of elder and deacon are open to qualified men and women. The role of elder and other leadership as mentioned above is also open to mature and godly singles who meet the biblical criteria.

A central issue for PRISM LEADERSHIP GROUP is to focus on working with churches to raise up spiritually-gifted, grace-oriented, and Spirit-filled servant-leaders, regardless of their gender, race, or nationality.

Scripture References

- Gen. 1:27 So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.
- Gen. 2:18-20 The LORD God said, "It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him." Now the LORD God had formed out of the ground all the beasts of the field and all the birds of the air. He brought them to the man to see what he would name them; and whatever the man called each living creature, that was its name. So the man gave names to all the livestock, the birds of the air and all the beasts of the field. But for Adam no suitable helper was found.
- Gen. 3:6 When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it. She also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it.
- Psalms 33:20 We wait in hope for the LORD; he is our help and our shield.
- Luke 8:1-3 After this, Jesus traveled about from one town and village to another, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom of God. The Twelve were with him, and also some women who had been cured of evil spirits and diseases: Mary (called Magdalene) from whom seven demons had come out; Joanna the wife of Cuza, the manager of Herod's

household; Susanna; and many others. These women were helping to support them out of their own means.

- Luke 10:38-42 As Jesus and his disciples were on their way, he came to a village where a woman named Martha opened her home to him. She had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet listening to what he said. But Martha was distracted by all the preparations that had to be made. She came to him and asked, "Lord, don't you care that my sister has left me to do the work by myself? Tell her to help me!" "Martha, Martha," the Lord answered, "you are worried and upset about many things, but only one thing is needed. Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her."
- Acts 1:14 They all joined together constantly in prayer, along with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brothers.
- Rom. 14:1-6 Accept him whose faith is weak, without passing judgment on disputable matters. One man's faith allows him to eat everything, but another man, whose faith is weak, eats only vegetables. The man who eats everything must not look down on him who does not, and the man who does not eat everything must not condemn the man who does, for God has accepted him. Who are you to judge someone else's servant? To his own master he stands or falls. And he will stand, for the Lord is able to make him stand. One man considers one day more sacred than another; another man considers every day alike. Each one should be fully convinced in his own mind. He who regards one day as special, does so to the Lord. He who eats meat, eats to the Lord, for he gives thanks to God; and he who abstains, does so to the Lord and gives thanks to God. There is one body and one Spirit — just as you were called to one hope when you were called — one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.
- Rom. 16:1-3 I commend to you our sister Phoebe, a servant of the church in Cenchrea. I ask you to receive her in the Lord in a way worthy of the saints and to give her any help she may need from you, for she has been a great help to many people, including me. Greet Priscilla and Aquila, my fellow workers in Christ Jesus.
- Rom. 16:7 Greet Andronicus and Junias, my relatives who have been in prison with me. They are outstanding among the apostles, and they were in Christ before I was.
- 1 Cor. 13:1-3 If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. If I give all I possess to the poor and surrender my body to the flames, but have not love, I gain nothing.
- 1Cor. 14:33-35 For God is not a God of disorder but of peace. As in all the congregations of the saints, women should remain silent in the churches. They are not allowed to speak, but must be in submission, as the Law says. 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.
- Gal. 3:26-28 You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus, for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.
- Eph. 4:4-6 There is one body and one Spirit — just as you were called to one hope when you were called — one Lord, one faith, one baptism; God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.

- Eph. 4:13 until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.
- Eph. 5:21-28 Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ. 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. Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless. In this same way, husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself.
- Col. 4:15 Give my greetings to the brothers at Laodicea, and to Nympha and the church in her house.
- Phil. 2:5 Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus....
- Phil. 4:2-3 I plead with Euodia and I plead with Syntyche to agree with each other in the Lord. Yes, and I ask you, loyal yokefellow, help these women who have contended at my side in the cause of the gospel, along with Clement and the rest of my fellow workers, whose names are in the book of life.
- 1 Tim. 2:11-15 A woman should learn in quietness and full submission. I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man; she must be silent. For Adam was formed first, then Eve. And Adam was not the one deceived; it was the woman who was deceived and became a sinner. But women will be saved through childbearing —if they continue in faith, love and holiness with propriety.
- 1 Pet. 4:10-11 Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God’s grace in its various forms. If anyone speaks, he should do it as one speaking the very words of God. If anyone serves, he should do it with the strength God provides, so that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ. To him be the glory and the power for ever and ever. Amen.

Recommended Books for Reading and Study

Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood, edited by John Piper and Wayne Grudem

Paul, Women and Wives by Craig Keener

Women in Ministry: Four Views, edited by J. Clouse and B. Clouse

Beyond Sex Roles: What the Bible Says About a Woman's Place in Church & Family by Gilbert Bilezikian