

# Statement of the Elders of The Anchor on the Role of Men and Women



## Background and Points to Note

1. As elders we have endeavoured to do what we see as right and not sought a compromise when writing this statement. We have also not sought to provide a comprehensive theological statement in this paper.
2. With the diverse views on this topic, it is impossible that everyone will agree. Our prayer is that as a church we accept this statement and have unity in the essentials of faith, to allow diversity in the non-essentials and have charity in all things. The essentials where it is important that we are united are set out in our Statement of Faith. The role of men and women is important but it is a non-essential of faith - it is not an issue of our salvation and reconciliation with God.
3. Much of the debate on the role of men and women revolves around quite a small area of our Christian life and we should not let that distract us from the greater aim of encouraging each other, reaching our community, and bringing glory to God.
4. There are some higher principles that as a church we need to keep in mind.
  - a. The most important commandments are to love God with heart, soul and mind and also to love your neighbour as yourself. (Matthew 22 v 34 - 4)
  - b. Paul challenges us saying that we can have everything worked out but if we lack love, then we are as useful as a resounding gong. We gain nothing. (1 Corinthians 13 v 1 - 3)
  - c. We are called to have the mind and attitude of Christ and to consider the interests of others first. (Philippians 2 v 1 - 8)

## Key Principles

In preparing this statement the following key principles have been considered.

### Creation

1. Men and women are created equal, in the image of God (Genesis 1 v 26 - 27). In the same way that God is a complementary union of Father, Son and Holy Spirit so also men and women created as complementary union, distinct but complete when united together.
2. In creation, men and women were both given the position of having dominion over the earth. (Genesis 1 v 28)
3. That the only thing in creation that was not good was man alone (Genesis 2 v 18) without women. Eve was created to complete man, as a helper suitable for him (Genesis 1 v 18). Together they were "one Flesh", complete (Genesis 1 v 24) and interdependent (1 Corinthians 11 v 11 - 12). The term helper is a term used of God himself, presenting a picture of the high value of women.
4. That there is a principle established in creation order, where Adam was created first and given the command by God not to eat of the forbidden fruit.
  - a. Although not directly referred to in this account, it seems, Adam had the responsibility to pass on this instruction to Eve. Adam, being first created, had the position of naming the animals and giving Eve her name.
  - b. Though Eve sinned first, Adam is held accountable before God for introducing sin into the world and to humanity. (Romans 5 v 12)

## The Fall

1. That as a result of sin, the relationship between men and women became marked by a contest of wills, women desiring to dominate men and men exerting control and domination over women. The consequences of this are still alive and well. (Genesis 3 v16)<sup>1</sup>

## The New Testament

1. Jesus Christ and the establishment of the church addressed the abuses of the relationship introduced by sin but did not remove the principles established in creation. (Ephesians 5 v 22 - 24)
2. All have equal access to God's grace, the gifts of the Holy Spirit and together serve as priests in the church of God. (1 Peter 2 v 9, 1 Corinthians 12)
3. In the New Testament, the concept of headship is referred to and this is linked back to the creation account. The concept of headship is mentioned in relation to:
  - a. God the Father and Jesus Christ (1 Corinthians 11v 3)
  - b. Christ and the Church (Ephesians 5 v 23)
  - c. Husbands and Wives (Ephesians 5 v 23)
4. Throughout the Bible, the concept of headship and authority is characterised by:
  - a. Servant leadership
  - b. Spiritual responsibility
  - c. Submission

It is not characterised by domination or hierarchy. Authority and submission are referred to in a number of relationships; citizens/government (1 Peter 2 v 12 - 17), employee/employer (Ephesians 6 v 22 - 23). Submission is a general attitude required of all followers of Christ (Ephesians 5 v 21). The greatest example of this is Christ Jesus, although equal with God He submitted himself to the Father's will, even to the point of death on a cross. (Philippians 2 v 6 - 8)

## The Church

1. In agreement with this concept of headship/authority is that:
  - a. The leadership of the church should be suitably qualified men meeting the specifications of elders set out in 1 Timothy 3 v 1 - 7 and Titus 2.
  - b. The responsibility for the authoritative teaching role in the church should reside with suitably and gifted men (1 Timothy 2 v 11 -15). Women were involved in teaching men in some situations (Acts 18 v 26).
  - c. The position of deacons is open to men and women (1 Timothy 3 v 8 - 12). This is our interpretation of these scriptures.
  - d. Both men and women do have particular responsibility to nurture, mentor and teach younger men and women respectively (2 Timothy 2 v 2, Titus 2 v 4).
  - e. The standard of spiritual responsibility and servant leadership set for men as husbands and elders is extraordinarily high - set by Jesus Christ himself (Ephesians 5 v 25, 1 Peter 5 v 1 - 3).
  - f. Both men and women have been instructed to have the right heart attitudes before they participate publicly in the church (1 Timothy 2 v 8 -13).

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<sup>1</sup> If this is a consequence of sin, it is a sober warning to tread carefully in our interpretation as our sinful nature tends towards domination.

## Should Women be Silent?

1. There are two sections in the Bible that refer to women being silent (1 Timothy 2 v 8 - 13, 1 Corinthians 14 v 20 -40). The passage in 1 Timothy is clear that it is discussing the role of teaching. There are varying views on how the Corinthian passages are to be interpreted; ranging from absolute silence to that it is only a local situation being addressed. All seem to be based on a range of presuppositions and depending on your starting point, you arrive at differing conclusions. These all need to be considered in light of the above principles, the passages that also refer to women participating publicly, and the context of each.
  - a. Some accept the view that women participated but not within a collective church setting where they were silent. This has difficulties for some in defining what a collective church setting is. The context of the verses where women participating is discussed also seems to refer to a public setting, and certainly does not exclude it. If silence is accepted then non-participation by women is absolute in all circumstances. This position certainly eliminates uncertainty but does not seem to hold with the balance of scripture.
  - b. A view that this is simply a cultural situation and/or that there is no distinction in roles also does not seem to do justice to the passages as Paul, in all three passages, centres his reasoning on or refers to creation or the Old Testament.
  - c. We consider that it is clear that the silence or quietness of women as referred to in 1 Timothy was in the context of men having the spiritual responsibility for teaching and authority. We believe that the interpretation of silence in 1 Corinthians 14 is also explained in the context of the weighing up of prophecies which is consistent with the above principles of headship/authority within the church. We do not believe that this silence included all other aspects of corporate church life. With this in mind we believe that it is acceptable for both men and women to have the freedom to publicly participate in other aspects of corporate church life.

## Application

At The Anchor we wish to be a church:

1. That attempts to include in the context of our church life, practices which fulfil the intent and purposes of Scriptural themes and commands that were first issued in the New Testament.
2. Where men and women work together as partners, combining the rational and relational strengths of each gender for the glory of God.
3. That makes use of the gifts and abilities of all its members, subject to any limitations of whatever nature that God has placed on the use of these gifts.
4. Where love is shown in action, as men and women holding a diverse range of opinions regarding issues that can be emotive and controversial, choose to follow the more excellent way of biblical love and wisdom (1 Corinthians 13).

We believe a local church will function most effectively when men and women partner in developing and fulfilling the church's vision for ministry. Combining the strengths of men and women will give this vision the completeness only found when these two coalesce together.

We believe that men should give women the degree of freedom and dignity in worship and service, which God gives them. Men also should demonstrate their leadership in positive actions with servant attitudes, taking spiritual responsibility in home and the church in gentleness and humility and not in legalistic clamour, argument or dispute. Women should also work as partners with particular emphasis on their relational strengths and individual gifts, supporting this leadership in the home and church.

## Specific Freedoms and Limitations

The following responsibilities belong primarily to men:

1. Eldership.
2. The primary function and responsibility for teaching the whole church.

We believe that all Christians, both men and women are free to participate in a wide range of other activities.

1. The position of deacons and vision keepers.
2. That men and women are:
  - a. Able to participate within services for example request a song, pray, usher, distribute communion, take a bible reading, be lead singers, introduce a song, etc.
  - b. Able to fully participate in church ministry teams, committees, activities, pastoral visitation, etc.

There are a number of areas that will continue to require wisdom in how the scriptural principles are applied, without getting drawn into legalistic debates. For instance:

1. In chiring services or meeting of members of The Anchor, the responsibility can range from simply the role of a chair or facilitator to someone presiding over the service where there is particular spiritual responsibility, such as chiring and a leading a worship service. We consider that where there is particular spiritual responsibility this role should be the responsibility of men, however they should feel able to involve both men and women in planning and undertaking the service.
2. Teaching roles outside of main services such as within small group settings.

To arbitrarily decide at the time of writing this statement assumes we can assess all future situations. In these issues we would ask that it be accepted that it is the elders responsibility to decide, to give guidance and make any corrections necessary.