

MEN AND WOMEN TOGETHER IN MINISTRY

Introduction

At Eastside Community Church, we are committed to being shaped by God's Word. **We believe** that the Bible is God's trustworthy and final authority in all matters (Ps. 19:7-11; 2 Tim. 3:16; 2 Pet. 1:20-21). We desire to hold a biblical vision that honours the Lord. **We believe** that this will glorify God most and result in the flourishing of all members in our church.

This paper is a summary of the Elders biblical convictions regarding men and women in ministry at Eastside. This paper is presented in humility and grace, praying that it will bring clarity. For the exegetical and theological work behind this summary, please refer to the accompanying document.

Foundations in Creation

The Bible teaches that God created humanity as male and female to bear his image together (Gen 1:27-28; Matt 19:4; Mark 10:6, Jam 3:9). The pinnacle of God's creative work is humanity – male and female – which he declared to be *"very good"* (Gen 1:31). God crowned them with honour and glory by giving them the dual role of representing him and reflecting his glory (Ps. 8:5; Gen 1:29-30). **We believe** that men and women are absolutely equal in essence, dignity and value.

At the same time, the Bible teaches that God intentionally and lovingly created men and women to be meaningfully different and complementary. These differences are not a matter of better or worse but for good, unity and the glory of God (Gen 2:18-25). Scripture teaches that men and women are neither interchangeable (1 Cor 11:7-8) nor independent (1 Cor 11:11-12). Genesis 2 presents a beautiful picture of man and woman created in a perfectly

complementary relationship in order to fulfil their God-given mandate (Gen 1:28). **We believe** that gender is a created reality present in every person. **We believe** that because God is our good and loving Father, we should honour and preserve the created differences between men and women (Gen. 2:18-25; 1 Cor. 11:2-16, 14:33-35; Eph. 5:22-33; Col. 3:18-19; 1 Tim. 2:8-15; 1 Pet. 3:1-7).

Fall, Brokenness and the Gospel

Men and women sinned by failing to keep God's command (Gen 2:15-17; 3:1-7). One of the consequences of sin is that the ideal relationship between the man and woman was marred, resulting in hostility, gender abuse and marginalization (Gen 3:16b). **We believe** that all forms of abuse, be they physical, sexual, verbal or emotional, are evil and not of God (Col 3:19; Prov 27:12; Ps 10). **We believe** that that the Bible upholds Christ as the model of love for all relationships (Phil 2:5; Eph 5:25). Scripture teaches that men and women are equally proud, idolatrous, rebellious, demanding, self-centred and fail to please God (Rom 3:23). **We believe** that men and women are in equal need of the gospel of God's grace (Rom 1:16).

The Bible teaches that men and women equally share in all the blessing of the gospel of God's grace, for there is *"one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all"* (Eph 4:5). Men and women equally receive the Holy Spirit (Joel 2:28-29; Acts 2:1-4; Eph 1:13-14) and a portion of Spiritual gifts for ministry (1 Cor 12). And God's sanctifying purpose is for every man and woman to be conformed to the image of Christ (Rom 8:29).

Men and Women Together in Ministry

All Christians are charged with the Great Commission of proclaiming the gospel and making disciples of all nations (Matt 28:19-20). **We believe** both men and women have an integral role in the mission of the church. The Bible clearly depicts men and women labouring alongside one another (Rom 16:1-2; 1 Cor. 12:4-31).

Yet although the Gospel calls and gifts men and women to equally share in the mission of the church, **we believe** that this is worked out in complementary partnership. The gospel does not remove the created differences between men and women, but rather calls us to embrace these differences to the glory of God. In a similar way, the Gospel does not free us to exercise Spiritual gifts however we choose (1 Cor 14:27-28; 14:29-33).

Throughout the gospels, we see that Jesus honoured women in ways that were profoundly counter cultural (Matt 15:28; Luke 10:39; John 4:26-27). This same pattern of honouring and valuing the role of women is also evidenced throughout the rest of the early church (Acts 18:26; 21:8-9; 2:1-11; Rom 16:1-2; 1 Cor 12:4-31; Phil 4:2-3). **We believe** that society and the church, on many occasions, have failed to adequately value and honour the role of women and this grieves us.

The Bible teaches that church is a spiritual family (Eph 2:19; 1 Tim 3:15; 5:1-2; 1 Pet 4:17). It is within this context of family that we are taught to *“love one another deeply, from a pure heart”* (1 Pet 1:22). **We believe** that within the church, the predominant relationship between Christian men and women should be that of brotherly-sisterly love. Even within marriage, husbands are commanded by God to view their wives as *“fellow heirs of the grace of God”* (1 Pet 3:7) and warned that if they don't their prayers will be hindered. **We believe** that men and women are called to a deep appreciation and respect of one another.

¹ In Scripture, the titles *elder*, *overseer* and *shepherd/pastor* are used interchangeably to describe the same role (1 Pet 5:1-2; Titus 1:5, 7).

The Office of Elder

As a Baptist church, Eastside holds that the ultimate human authority resides with the congregation under the Lordship of Jesus (Matt 18:15-20; 1 Cor 5:1-13; Col 1:18). However, the Bible is clear that doctrinal and governmental oversight is exercised by a smaller group of qualified elders that are appointed by and accountable to the congregation (2 Tim 3:1-7; Titus 1:5-9). **We believe** there is to be a mutual love and respect between the elders and the congregation with all under the Lordship of Jesus (1 Thess 5:12-13; Heb 13:17).

We believe Scripture reserves the office of elder/pastor and its functions for qualified men (1 Tim 3:2; Titus 1:6). Scripture calls *elders*¹ to lead and govern the affairs of the church (1 Tim 5:17; Titus 1:7), preach the Word (1 Tim 3:2; 2 Tim 4:2; Titus 1:9, Heb 13:7; Acts 20:27), determine doctrine (Acts 15:6), be examples (1 Tim 4:16; 1 Pet 5:3; Heb 13:7), pray for the sick (James 5:14), help the weak (Acts 20:35), counter false doctrine and teachers (Acts 20:28-31), and equip the church for ministry (Eph 4:11-12).

We believe elders are to do this work without pursuing dishonest gain and without lording it over the church (1 Pet 5:2-3; 2 Cor 1:24). In this way, qualified men practice sacrificial and Christlike—not domineering—headship.

Teaching

The church is birthed by God's Word and we grow together as we take seriously the responsibility to teach one another (1 Pet 1:23; Eph 4:15; Col 3:15-17). **We believe** that God calls every person at Eastside to speak the truth of God's Word to one another in love (Eph 4:15; Col 3:15-17). Practically, there are many ways that we can teach one another such as, one-on-one conversations, small groups, children and youth ministry, ministry training, devotions in the home, mentoring etc.

We believe that the Bible reserves authoritative doctrinal preaching and teaching, in corporate gatherings, for qualified men (1 Tim 2:12; 3:2; Titus 1:9). Feeding the flock through teaching and protecting the doctrine of the church is a primary way that Elders fulfil their function of shepherding (1 Tim 3:2; Titus 1:9). At Eastside, we believe that this type of teaching occurs in corporate settings of mixed gender (e.g. Sunday Services).

Other positions of authority

We believe that all qualified men and women can participate in positions of authority in the church, other than the role and function of elders. In fact, this is necessary if the church is to fully embrace the mission of the church. **We believe** that elders should engage and value the contribution of women as they sacrificially lead and shepherd the church.

We believe that qualified men and women can fulfil the office of deacon. While the qualifications of elder and deacon greatly overlap, the key difference is that elders must be “*able to teach*” (1 Tim 3:2b; Titus 1:9). While deacons do not have the authority of elders, the qualifications of character are nearly identical. In this way, it is clear that deacons hold significant spiritual influence in the church (1 Tim 3:8-13; Acts 6:2).

Practical Outworking at Eastside

Corporate Gatherings

Every member of the church body should actively participate in corporate gatherings, not just those up-front. Every role is open to both men and women (e.g. service leading, praying, testimonies, baptisms), except for preaching and teaching the Word of God.

Corporate Training Opportunities (e.g. Growth Group Leader Training)

Mixed-gender teaching environments are to be overseen by elders and will be led by qualified men. These men should seek out, equip and utilize gifted men and women to help lead, teach and shape these ministries. Gender-specific

teaching environments are to be taught by a leader of the same gender.

Youth and Children

The role of leading and teaching at youth group and kids church is open to qualified men and women.

Small Groups (e.g. Building Foundations and Growth Groups)

Gender-specific groups are led by a leader of the same gender. Mixed-gender groups are led by both a man and woman. In mixed-gender group leadership we expect for there to be a co-discipleship relationship between the man and the woman. Both men and women may serve as leaders, and co-leaders. And both may lead the Bible study time.

Conclusion

In coming to these conclusions, we recognize that some will find this position too conservative. There will also be others that do not find this position conservative enough. We ask for charity from all, as well as a desire to continue to humbly search out the scriptures.

We must be honest: this is not a simple topic to address. But it is our conviction that the Lord has not left us without guidance. Consequently, we are not at liberty to order the life of the congregation according to our own preferences, or the preferences and assumptions of our wider culture.

Above all we desire to honour God by upholding a biblical vision for his church. We are convinced that this will result in the flourishing of both men and women at Eastside. It will also enable us to most effectively know Jesus and make him known.