

Equal, But Different

At Crossing, the equality of the sexes (male and female) is a settled matter. Beyond a shadow of a doubt, Scripture is clear that men and women have equal value in God's economy, and neither sex is inferior or superior to the other. In the beginning, men and women were created equally as image bearers of God (Gen. 1:27). In the time of the New Testament, against cultural and religious norms Jesus elevated the status of women by teaching them, touching and healing them, and allowing them to travel with him (Mark 5:25ff.; Luke 8:1-3, 13:10ff.; John 4). And of course, men and women are equally called to believe in Christ for salvation, receive the Holy Spirit, and be renewed (Rom. 10:5-13).

At the same time, we affirm that *equal* does not mean *the same*. Though equal in the need for grace, and possessing equal access to the Father through the Son, the Bible is also clear that men and women were created different — with divinely ordained roles and responsibilities that complement each other. One such difference can be seen in the arena of leadership. God ordained the role of headship in the nuclear family and in the family of God, the church, to men (Eph. 5:23; 1 Tim. 2:8-3:7), while he ordained the place of "helper" for women (Gen. 2:18; Eph. 5:22; Col. 3:18). Biblically understood, there is no cause for offense here. In fact, the Lord calls himself a *helper* for his people (Deut. 33:7; Ps. 33:20) when he is clearly not inferior to his creation! Contrary to culture's (mis)understanding, no superiority/inferiority need necessarily be implied by the ideas of headship and submission (one being made a helper to the other). Even within the Godhead the Son submits to the Father, though both persons are "one God, the same in substance, equal in power in glory."¹

Women In Ministry At Crossing

The New Testament gives witness to the ministry of many women, some of whom's actions played a significant role in the spread of the gospel: Lydia (Acts 16:11-15), Phoebe (Rom. 16:1-2), Priscilla (Rom. 16:3-5), and Euodia and Syntyche (Phil. 4:2-3). Throughout history, we have many examples of women contributing vitally to the church's mission. And today women continue to play a critical role in ministry and the spread of the Kingdom. While Scripture may reserve the role of pastor/elder for men, at Crossing women are invited to participate in virtually every other area of ministry — including deacon.²

What If A Woman's Participation In Ministry Involves Teaching?

The Bible is clear that God created men and women with equal worth and dignity. It's not culturally popular to say, but the Bible also seems clear that the role of pastor/elder is reserved for men. What's less clear though, is which teaching opportunities are not biblically permissible for women, given Paul's words in 1 Timothy 2:12 and 1 Corinthians 14:33-35. In order to honor the information God has made clear (men and women are equal yet different, pastor/elder-authority in the church belongs to men, and women have and continue to play vital roles in many areas of ministry), we take questions about teaching opportunities on a case-by-case basis; they are measured against principles designed to account for the context, nature of the teaching, authority over the community, et cetera.³ Since each opportunity is unique, these continuums help us determine if a woman teaching in a particular setting may violate the Scriptures or not.

¹ Westminster Shorter Catechism, Question 6.

² For more information, please refer to a separate paper entitled, "The Role of Deacons."

³ More about this principled approach can be found in Mary Kassian's helpful article entitled *Where Can Women Teach? Eight Principles for Christian Churches* at: <https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/where-can-women-teach>