



From Your Elders

Women in Worship

Overview and Position

The role of women in worship is a topic that is often avoided in many local churches. The elders at Holland Park have spent time in prayer and study to better understand this issue and with a focus on areas where women have been excluded in worship. Our intent is to be true to God's word as we understand it and for the church to have the freedom in Christ that God has granted to us.

The elders at Holland Park believe that God has placed upon men the responsibility for leading the local churches. Men are given the responsibility for providing teaching & preaching and for leading the church (elders/deacons/preachers). This is not meant to diminish the work, service and ministries of women in the church. Paul mentions many women who served with him in spreading the gospel (Phil 4 and Romans 16). The leadership model for the family serves as an example for leadership in the church in that the roles of husbands and wives in a marriage are a strong parallel for the roles of men and women in the church.

There are other many activities or roles in our worship services (prayer, reading scriptures, serving communion, etc.) which our tradition has made male only functions. Our study and discussions have led us to the position that many of these roles and activities in our worship services can be done by women and remain true to God's word.

One of the strengths of the churches of Christ is the belief that local leadership has the responsibility for spiritual health and growth of the churches. There is no over-arching or denominational decision-making group which mandates answers or positions on these issues or questions like this one. The decision making process on questionable issues is left to the local leadership to decide based on their understanding of God's word and based on the need of the church which they shepherd for God. They are also the ones who will be accountable to God for their leadership decisions.

The following passages and discussion are offered as biblical support to our view regarding women in worship. We are providing this document to the church family for your prayerful review and consideration. We understand that some will view our conclusions differently and we are open to discussions with anyone about our position.

Passages concerning Women in Public Worship

As we consider the role of women in public worship, there are two passages that need to be heeded and understood as best we can – 1st Corinthians 14:34&35 and 1st Timothy 2:12.

1st Corinthians 14:34&35 teaches that women are to be silent and states that it is shameful for women to speak in the church. Taken literally, women would not be allowed to even sing in the worship assembly. The context appears to be aimed at women who were asking questions in the service which either disrupts the service or reflects an unsubmitive attitude which would hurt the appeal of the gospel to those outside the church. 1st Timothy 2:12 instructs that women are not to teach or to have authority over a man and they are to be quiet. For years, these two passages have been the guiding verses on this issue. There are other passages which offer women the opportunity to participate in worship that have either been ignored or given little weight or consideration. We must see these all these passages in their context as we consider other biblical passages on the subject.

Other Passages to Consider for Full Understanding

1. 1st Corinthians 11:5-6 is placed in the context of the worship assembly. It teaches that if a woman has her head covered (or honors her husband as the context would seem to indicate) then she would be allowed to pray and prophesy. While we could say that prayer might be a silent act in worship the same cannot be said of prophesy. To prophesy meant that a woman would speak forth the words or message which had been put on her heart by the Holy Spirit as prophesy was a gift from the Spirit. This passage clearly indicates that women were not silent in all aspects of worship in the church at Corinth.
2. Joel 2:28 points to a new age with the Spirit filling the hearts of God's people that will be marked by sons and daughters who will prophesy (fulfilled on the day of Pentecost in Acts 2:17). As mentioned earlier, the gift of prophesy was meant to be shared by speaking in public to proclaim the revealed will of God. Note that gift is not for men only but also for women.
3. Acts 21:9 tells us that Philip had three daughters and that all of them were prophetesses. Why would the Spirit give this gift to three daughters in the same family if they were not allowed to speak publicly about what God had revealed to them?
4. 1st Corinthians 14:26 says the following:
26 What then shall we say, brothers and sisters? When you come together, each of you has a hymn, or a word of instruction, a revelation, a tongue or an interpretation. Everything must be done so that the church may be built up. NIV

The phrase "brothers and sisters" in this passage in the Greek is the plural of brother which some versions translate as brethren. But it seems that Paul has the entire church in mind, not just the men, as he used this phrase multiple times in this chapter alone. It makes more sense to understand it as gender inclusive as the NIV has translated it – much like we would use the term brotherhood of believers to refer to both men and women in the church.

This passage says that each one will have a hymn, each one a word of instruction, each one a revelation and etc. The emphasis of this passage is that whatever is done in worship is to be done in such a way as to build up the church and not to cause confusion. This passage indicates a sister who wrote a song or had a special message revealed to her by the Spirit would be free to share that in the assembly but even more it suggests that each one is to come to worship with something to share.

From the elders at Holland Park Church

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