

# Women in Ministry

A Position Paper of The Antioch Movement

Men and women are equally valuable in the sight of God, and they are different.  
This was always God's design for humanity—and He declared it “very good.”

## Introduction

The purpose of this article is to address the Antioch Movement's stance on the role of women in ministry. Our heart is to release both men and women across Antioch into the fullness of their uniqueness, gifting and calling. The Scripture is our authority for faith and practice; therefore, the Bible should always interpret our lives rather than allowing our culture to interpret the Scriptures, and ultimately, our application. Biblical clarity will give our movement both strength and longevity.

In Scripture, we see that men and women are both created in the image of God. Together they are blessed by God and given authority on the earth, and together they express the image of God. There is a uniqueness to both genders that when joined together express God's image to the world. This starts by affirming that men and women are equally valuable in the sight of God, and they are different. This was always God's design for humanity—and He declared it “very good.”

Sin corrupted the goodness of God's creation, and the relationship between men and women was placed under a curse. Rather than demonstrating God's image to the earth, the relationship between men and women often became a place of pain for both. We believe this rupture is still seen in our world today.

Each one of us views this topic through the lens of our experience. While we must show compassion to one another as we seek God for healing and proper empowerment of all, we must also avoid the temptation to allow our (or someone else's) pain to guide our theology and praxis.

The death, burial and resurrection of Jesus changed everything for humanity. He freed us from our bondage to sin and made us into a new creation, once again empowered to express God's image on the earth. The curse of sin still affects humanity but, in Christ, we overcome and live according to His original calling for mankind. This holds major implications for the relationship between men and women—the brokenness of sin still impacts us, but our calling is to walk in the Spirit. This requires us to embrace our gender as a good and beautiful aspect of our calling and identity, and it calls us to recognize that men and women are equal in the sight of God and need each other in order to fulfill our calling on the earth and to demonstrate His image to the world.

We believe God empowers both men and women with every type of spiritual gift and invites both genders to exercise their gifting within the church. We also believe that there are God-ordained gender roles within the home, with men leading their families with the humility and sacrificial love of Jesus and with women respecting

and following the leadership of their husbands. We believe gender roles extend into the church, which is the family of God.

Men and women alike must step into ministry under the authority of Jesus and as revealed through His written Word. Our fulfillment will never take place outside of our surrender to Him; therefore, it is of vital importance that we first submit ourselves to the Word of God when determining our role in the Body of Christ.

This framework guides the following conclusions:

1. We believe gender is assigned by God at conception, is realized at birth, and is a critical aspect of God's design for humanity, that we might bear His image and fulfill His purposes. *Genesis 1:27-28, Galatians 3:28*
2. We believe women can demonstrate every spiritual gift found in Scripture and can hold leadership roles in the church, including those of teacher, pastor, international team leader, and elder (though eldership is left to the discernment of individual churches). *Acts 2:17-18, Acts 21:9, Ephesians 4:7-8, 11-12, 1 Corinthians 12:4-7*
3. We believe every leader must serve under authority and model the leadership example of Jesus, which seeks to serve, love, and empower those they lead. *Philippians 2:2-8, 1 Peter 5:1-11*
4. We believe that for those called to marriage and/or parenting, the home is the first priority for the calling of both men and women. We believe this calling is more important than our unique careers, and we encourage all couples to seek the Lord accordingly. *Ephesians 5:21-6:4, 1 Timothy 3:4-5*
5. We believe the church is best represented as the family of God and not a modern corporation; therefore, we look to Biblical teaching on the family as an example for order within the church. We believe this example includes a male covering, with the primary goal of releasing and empowering both women and men in every way. As such, it is not the normal practice of the Antioch Movement for women to serve as Lead Pastors. Though this is not derived from any one passage, we see this reflected in several passages, including many that are discussed later in this document, including *Ephesians 5:21-32*.
6. We believe men need women in their life, women need men; this is the way God made us to express His glory, for "*in the Lord, neither is woman independent of man, nor is man independent of woman. For as the woman originates from the man, so also the man has his birth through the woman; and all things originate from God.*" *1 Corinthians 11:11-12* We recognize that some people will live a life of singleness, including major leaders of the church throughout history, and believe they can equally experience the fullness of God and their unique calling through church community.

7. We believe the church is responsible to intentionally develop women leaders, both married and single, into the fullness of their gifting so that God might be glorified, and the church built up. *Ephesians 4:11-13.*

The Antioch Movement is called to reach the nations of the earth. We uphold Biblical principles while also recognizing they need to be contextualized within a wide range of the cultures we seek to reach, as well as adapted to the various church models we employ. As such, our various international teams and global church family will need to wrestle through the application of the Bible's teaching on gender within their specific context.

Gender is a beautiful representation of the character and love of God. Gender distinctions should be celebrated, and it is our joy to release one another into our various giftings. The topic is certainly complex, but we believe that as we celebrate and uphold God's design, He will lead us into healthy practice.

### **Biblical Overview**

The rest of this document reviews passages from Scripture that inform the previous conclusions. The NASB translation is used unless otherwise noted. Specific Greek words will be addressed when necessary for accurate translation.

### **God's Design for Gender**

Men and women are created of equal value and worth.

*God created man in His own image. In the image of God, He created him; male and female He created them. God blessed them and God said to them "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it and rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over every living thing that moves on the earth." Genesis 1:27- 28*

Men and women are created equal in their personhood as image-bearers of God. Despite the differences between men and women, both are of equal value, of equal dignity, of equal honor, and of equal worth. God designed men and women to complement each other from a place of equality. Being secure in God's value for us, male or female, inspires confidence to fulfill whatever ministry He has for every individual.

God affirmed His created work, including gender, to be "very good." Gender is not a design flaw in God's created order; it holds significance for our ability to understand God's nature and to realize His purposes on the earth. God created gender intentionally in order to reveal His image. Furthermore, He blessed both men and women and provided them with a vocation to rule the earth, to be productive, and to multiply.

There is tremendous cultural pressure in modern America to reject any distinction between men and women and instead view gender as an optional construct of society which can be changed or modified. We believe this is a serious error that undercuts God's original design for humanity. Though it is important to address the tremendous pain associated with gender relations, we must first recognize and affirm the beauty of the God-given design found in gender. The extent to which we celebrate God's intent for gender is the extent to which we can navigate the reality of a broken world.

We must resist the contemporary pressure to abandon God's design. We must administer the grace of God to the brokenness of mankind to see His purposes redeemed through the work of Jesus.

### **Sin Corrupted God's Good Creation**

*"To the woman [God] said, 'I will make your pains in childbearing very severe; with painful labor you will give birth to children. Your desire will be for your husband, and he will rule over you. To Adam he said, 'Because you listened to your wife and ate fruit from the tree about which I commanded you, 'You must not eat from it,' Cursed is the ground because of you; through painful toil you will eat food from it all the days of your life. It will produce thorns and thistles for you, and you will eat the plants of the field.'" Genesis 3:16-18*

Sin distorted the beauty of creation. The relationship between genders, the joining of two complementary humans to form one new flesh and thus more fully reveal the image of God, morphed into a place of pain and brokenness. Childbirth, the introduction of new life into the world, morphed into a place of pain, and sometimes even loss. All people experienced this curse as thorns grew up to thwart humankind's vocation to subdue the earth.

Ultimately, humanity's relationship with God was ruptured, and we were exiled from the Garden into the untamed wilderness, a haunting image of sin distorting God's good creation—including us. Brokenness was inserted into the union between God and man and then also between man and woman, and these painful conflicts have hindered God's design for humanity.

This curse is still felt today in a myriad of ways—the intensity of sexual immorality, abuse, manipulation, abandonment, along with the mundane problems of miscommunication and conflict. In the two most significant human relationships—parent-to-child and husband-to-wife—this pain is most deeply felt.

No one is left unscathed by sin's curse. This is our reality, but for Christians, this is not our destiny. We must recognize the pain and yet still hold on to God's idea of man and woman being co-image bearers, though we may never see it fully realized until Christ's return.

### **Jesus Redeems and Restores the Brokenness of Sin**

*For 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, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's descendants, heirs according to promise. Galatians 3:26-29*

The death, burial and resurrection of Jesus freed us from the power of sin and death. In Him, we are born again as a new creation. Through the transforming work of the Holy Spirit, the curse of sin is broken over our lives and we experience relationship with Him and the restoration of our identity. We return from exile, we access His presence unhindered, we experience a restored relationship, we live under a new covenant and we live within His Kingdom. This new reality transforms every aspect of our life, including gender.

When both men and women experience the grace of God and walk in relationship with Him, the beauty and purpose of gender is once again revealed and restored. A Kingdom culture recognizes men and women to be fundamentally different, yet of equal value and purpose in displaying God's character. This stands in contrast to our world, which seeks to both minimize gender distinctions while simultaneously promoting a sexualized and antagonistic relationship between the two.

Grace allows us to recapture God's intention for humanity. This process will remain incomplete until the return of Christ, His Kingdom is still *not yet* fully realized on the earth, but we believe we can access His grace now to bring fresh healing, purpose, and life.

### **The Uniqueness of Femininity and Masculinity**

The confusion of our culture requires us to clearly state that men and women are *different*. We believe this reveals God's original and complementary design. It is right for a woman to be a woman, and it is right for a man to be a man.

Each person has a unique personality, which sometimes conflicts with cultural gender stereotypes. However, this does not change nor lessen their God-assigned gender. Furthermore, our gender represents the image of God; therefore, it is important that we embrace the roles and responsibilities of our gender, regardless of our personality or preferences. Men should embrace their role(s) as son, brother, husband, and father, as according to the teaching of Scripture. Likewise, women should embrace their role(s) as daughter, sister, wife, and mother. These roles come with responsibilities, as we will see in the next section.

### **Gender Roles in the Home**

*Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ. Wives, be subject to your own husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife, as Christ also is the head of the church, He Himself being the Savior of the body. But as the church is subject to Christ, so also the wives ought to be to their husbands in everything.*

*Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her, so that He might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, that He might present to Himself the church in all her glory, having no spot or wrinkle or any such thing; but that she would be holy and blameless. So husbands ought also to love their own wives as their own bodies. He who loves his own wife loves himself; for no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ also does the church, because we are members of His body. Ephesians 5:21-30*

*For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and shall be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh. This mystery is great; but I am speaking with reference to Christ and the church. Nevertheless, each individual among you also is to love his own wife even as himself, and the wife must see to it that she respects her husband. Ephesians 5:31-33*

*In the same way, you wives, be submissive to your own husbands so that even if any of them are disobedient to the word, they may be won without a word by the behavior of their wives, as they observe your chaste and respectful behavior. Your adornment must not be merely external--braiding the hair, and wearing gold jewelry, or putting on dresses; but let it be the hidden person of the heart, with the imperishable quality of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is precious in the sight of God. For in this way in former times the holy women also, who hoped in God, used to adorn themselves, being submissive to their own husbands; just as Sarah obeyed Abraham, calling him lord, and you have become her children if you do what is right without being frightened by any fear. You husbands in the same way, live with your wives in an understanding way, as with someone weaker, since she is a woman; and show her honor as a fellow heir of the grace of life, so that your prayers will not be hindered.*

*To sum up, all of you be harmonious, sympathetic, brotherly, kindhearted, and humble in spirit; not returning evil for evil or insult for insult, but giving a blessing instead; for you were called for the very purpose that you might inherit a blessing. 1 Peter 3:1-9*

We believe gender roles within the context of marriage and family reveal the nature of God and serve as a model for the Church. Ephesians 5:21-33 illustrates God's design for marriage. Ephesians 5 calls believers to imitate God, embrace our identity as beloved children and walk in the way of love as modeled by Jesus. This then leads to an attitude of mutual submission, which undergirds a healthy marriage. We believe both husbands and wives must first submit to God, and then to one another. From this place, a husband is called to model the sacrificial, servant-leadership of Jesus in leading his home and the wife is to submit and respond to his leadership.

Christlike leadership is never domineering, selfish, demanding nor harsh. Likewise, submission does not require passive acquiescence to a husband's decision. Godly leadership is both "understanding" and "seeks the good of others more than self" (Philippians 2:1-11). Jesus modeled sacrificial leadership with His life and taught it to His disciples (Mark 10:42-45).

A husband is called to emulate Jesus and should seek to empower and encourage his wife into her gifting, whatever that may be, even putting her interests above his own. A wife should honor and support her husband's leadership. When both model sacrificial love to one another, honoring their differences, and supporting one another in their calling, God's character is revealed in the home, and far beyond.

In Ephesians 5:31-32, Paul teaches that marriage itself reveals a great mystery by modeling the love of Christ for His Church. By properly ordering the home and embracing our roles, we demonstrate a critical aspect of God's relationship to us.

The Biblical delineation of these marital roles is not speaking to the capacity, giftedness or value of either the woman or the man. Rather, through the marital relationship, God is showing the world a living, breathing picture of how much Jesus loves his followers and how much his followers love him back. The wife and husband are like actors in a divine drama—the husband playing the role of Christ, the wife playing the role of the

church—each constraining themselves to the requirements of their roles as defined by the director—God—so that the world may recognize the gospel.

Ultimately, no illustration will capture the idea perfectly and Paul himself referred to this as a divine mystery. This ideal will never be fully realized within the brokenness of our world, but it is important that we continue to uphold God’s design for marriage.

Sin hinders the fullness of God’s design for marriage. This is seen in abusive relationships, disengaged spouses, selfishness, harshness and more. We recognize the tension that exists as we seek to faithfully live out God’s design in a broken world.

Some women must lead their families because the husband refuses to embrace his role as a spiritual leader. Some marriages end due to the sin of a spouse. We trust in the grace of God for each one of these scenarios. It is not God’s design or intention, but Jesus’s death and resurrection teaches us that God’s ability to bring redemption is greater than the stain of sin. The Antioch Movement strives to be a place of grace, healing, safety, and support in each one of these situations.

## Gender Roles in Ministry

God distributes spiritual gifts to both men and women.

*For just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, so in Christ we, though many, form one body, and each member belongs to all the others. We have different gifts, according to the grace given to each of us. If your gift is prophesying, then prophesy in accordance with your faith; if it is serving, then serve; if it is teaching, then teach; if it is to encourage, then give encouragement; if it is giving, then give generously; if it is to lead, do it diligently; if it is to show mercy, do it cheerfully. Romans 12:4-8 (NIV)*

*Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit. And there are varieties of ministries, and the same Lord. There are varieties of effects, but the same God who works all things in all persons (men and women). But to each one is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. 1 Corinthians 12:4-7*

*‘AND IT SHALL BE IN THE LAST DAYS,’ God says, ‘THAT I WILL POUR FORTH OF MY SPIRIT ON ALL MANKIND; AND YOUR SONS AND YOUR DAUGHTERS SHALL PROPHECY, AND YOUR YOUNG MEN SHALL SEE VISIONS, AND YOUR OLD MEN SHALL DREAM DREAMS; EVEN ON MY BONDSLAVES, BOTH MEN AND WOMEN, I WILL IN THOSE DAYS POUR FORTH OF MY SPIRIT and they shall prophesy. Acts 2:17-18*

*But to each one of us grace has been given as Christ apportioned it. This is why it says:*

*“When he ascended on high,  
he took many captives  
and gave gifts to his people.”*

*...So Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, to equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up; Ephesians 4:7-8, 11-12 (NIV)*

It is our Biblical conviction that God distributes all spiritual gifts to both men and women. We specifically chose the NIV for the Romans and Ephesians passages because we felt this best captured the original Greek by referencing all humanity.

A few points of note from the above passages: I Corinthians 12:4-7 reveals God working His gifts through *all*, representing all of humanity—men and women. Additionally, Ephesians 4:7 states that “to *each one* of us grace was given” (which, in context, refers to spiritual gifts), and goes on to declare that Christ “*gave gifts to his people*” (Greek: Anthropoi, which refers to all humanity). Acts explicitly states that women will prophesy, which is a public gift (1 Corinthians 14:3 teaches that “*one who prophesies speaks to men for edification and exhortation and consolation.*”)

Antioch interprets these passages to state that God gives gifts to both men and women, including the ministry gifts of apostle, prophet, pastor, leader, teacher, and more.

This stance is further strengthened by glimpses into early church life in the Book of Acts and the Epistles. In Acts 21:9, Philip’s four daughters are considered prophetesses, presumably exercising a public ministry. Paul acknowledged the pastoral, evangelistic and apostolic gifts of women in Romans 16:1-16, honoring them as servants, just as Paul was honored as a servant of the Lord. In Romans 16:7, Junia (a woman) is acknowledged as an apostle.

Paul acknowledged the contributions of Priscilla and Aquila in their church leadership role. Furthermore, in Acts 18:18, 26, Priscilla is mentioned before her husband, indicating her significant role in the ministry which potentially eclipsed the role of Aquila. She is specifically mentioned as teaching Apollos, who was a man and an emerging leader in the church.

In summary, Scripture teaches that different gifts establish the Body of Christ and these are given to men and women alike. The predominant emphasis in these passages is that all spiritual gifts be exercised in a Christ-like attitude of love, honor and submission. To the extent we model the love of Jesus in how we use our different giftings is the extent to which we believe we will see His Church established.

Lastly, it is important to note that family roles are not “giftings” as described above. Men and women are given spiritual gifts and callings in the church, but that is distinct from their role in the home. We believe our first priority is to our families, which may periodically limit how we may exercise our gifts and callings in the church. We encourage husbands and wives to work together to see their respective giftings released for the building up of the church, knowing that their individual expressions may manifest differently in different seasons of life.



## Passages Indicating Prohibitions for Women in Ministry

Having discussed giftings available to both men and women, we must now shift to the Scriptures that seem to prohibit women from speaking in the church. In reviewing these passages, it is helpful to remember God's original design for gender and Jesus' redemptive work on the cross. We no longer live as slaves to sin nor do we live bound to the Law because of the atoning sacrifice of Jesus. We live in Christ, and He is transforming us and healing the curse of sin.

Sound Biblical scholarship looks to the whole counsel of Scripture to discern doctrinal principles rather than developing a doctrinal position based on one or two verses or passages. This approach is important when considering the two passages of the Bible in which women seem to be prohibited from speaking.

Throughout the New Testament, Paul repeatedly addresses inherent weaknesses of men and women. With this background, read 1 Timothy 2:8-15:

*“Therefore I want the men in every place to pray, lifting up holy hands, without wrath or dissension. Likewise, I want women to adorn themselves with proper clothing, modestly and discreetly, not with braided hair and gold or pearls or costly garments, but rather by means of good works, as is proper for women making a claim to godliness. A woman must quietly receive instruction with entire submissiveness. But I do not allow a woman to teach or exercise authority over a man, but to remain quiet. For it was Adam who was first created, and then Eve. And it was not Adam who was deceived, but the woman being deceived, fell into transgression. But women will be preserved through the bearing of children if they continue in faith and love and sanctity with self-restraint.”*

Paul is addressing heart attitudes throughout this passage. He starts by challenging men, calling them to a life of prayer alongside hearts that are loving, forgiving, and peaceful toward one another. The point of this exhortation is not the physical act of lifted hands, but rather the posture of the heart.

In verse 9, Paul addresses the heart attitudes of women, stating “I want women to be modest and discreet, not with braided hair, gold, or jewelry.” We do not believe the Bible prohibits earrings, gold-plated jewelry, or braided hair. This passage refers to the heart, and Paul utilized cultural examples to make his point.

The central message exhorts women to reject vanity and the temptation to find their value in external appearance—a message of equal relevance today! The antidote is a quiet and gentle heart.

A modern application should not focus on braids; rather, we should determine how this same temptation is seen today (perhaps projecting a particular image on social media?) and, in doing so, learn to find our identity in Christ and respond with a quiet and submitted heart. If the heart is right, we will trust God with the rest of the outward trappings.

This is critical in order to understand verse 10: “A woman must quietly receive instruction with entire submissiveness. But I do not allow a woman to teach or exercise authority over a man.”

The word “authority” could be a reference to Genesis 3:16 and a woman having a “desire” for her husband, indicating a tendency to usurp or dominate. Other scholars have suggested it is referencing the cult of Artemis or addressing problems that come from the education levels of women at that time. Regardless, the core problem being addressed is the attitude of the heart.

Through using cultural examples, this passage challenges men and women regarding sinful tendencies. Women should reject any temptation to manipulate others or attract attention using their feminine beauty and instead should show submissiveness to their husbands in the church. Men should walk in peace and the fruit of the Spirit.

Taken in the context of the passages regarding spiritual gifts and the numerous examples of women leading throughout the New Testament, as well as a better understanding of the overall exhortation, we believe this passage is confronting a heart issue in the context of a specific problem within **that** church.

Having addressed 1 Timothy 2:9-15, we must also consider 1 Corinthians 14:29-36:

*“Let two or three prophets speak, and let the others pass judgment. But if a revelation is made to another who is seated, the first one must keep silent. For you can all prophesy one by one, so that all may learn and all may be exhorted; and the spirits of prophets are subject to prophets; for God is not a God of confusion but of peace, as in all the churches of the saints. The women are to keep silent in the churches; for they are not permitted to speak, but are to subject themselves, just as the Law also says. If they desire to learn anything, let them ask their own husbands at home; for it is improper for a woman to speak in church. Was it from you that the word of God first went forth? Or has it come to you only?”*

Both Acts 2:17-21 and 1 Corinthians 11:5 (just three chapters earlier in the same letter) specifically mention women prophesying in the church; therefore, women speaking aloud does not appear to be the primary concern of 1 Corinthians 14.

Submissiveness, in the context of ordered worship, is the main point of this passage. Paul is primarily addressing the attitude of wives to their husbands in the church. It appears the Corinthian church was taking their freedom in Christ to inappropriate extremes. In this context, we understand that if a woman’s prophesying in the church can’t be done properly and in a submitted attitude then it ought to be worked through in the home. Paul was confronting wrong heart attitudes that affected order in the church.

We do not believe either of these passages prohibit women from exercising their spiritual gifts in the church, but rather that these passages reveal appropriate heart attitudes necessary to see these gifts properly function in the church.

### **Women Serving as Elders**

*“An overseer, then, must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, temperate, prudent, respectable, hospitable, able to teach.” 1 Timothy 3:2*

The role of gender in determining who can serve as an overseer has been interpreted in two ways by Bible scholars. How we interpret the phrase, “husband of one wife” is the primary dispute.

Some believe this passage requires overseers to be men since the command is specific to husbands. These scholars may also point out that Paul is assuming male eldership through this command.

Others believe the passage requires marital faithfulness but is not limited to men. These theologians would point out that Paul did not explicitly state elders must be men and the primary purpose of this command does not appear to be gender-specific. If gender were the main issue, then why was it not clearly stated? The main point of his command appears to be faithfulness within marriage, not the role of gender.

If the latter interpretation is accurate, then overseers may be either a man or a woman, but both must be faithful to their spouse. Taken with the spiritual gifts found in Ephesians 4:11, we believe a woman can exercise oversight as long as she follows the requirements of 1 Timothy 3:1-7, including a submitted heart and faithfulness in marriage (if applicable).

The Antioch Movement extends liberty for local churches to decide their stance on women serving as elders within the context of the overall church government model. Some churches might appoint women elders while others might interpret the 1 Timothy 3:1-7 passage to show eldership is exclusively for men. We provide freedom to make this decision. Regardless of which stance is taken, we ask churches to diligently search the Scriptures and be prepared to support their position in a way that highlights the authority of the Bible.

We believe eldership requires a gift of governance and should be based on character, gifting, calling and capacity—whether male or female. It is normal for only one spouse to serve on the eldership team. If a husband and wife both serve on the eldership team, then each spouse should be identified separately as having an oversight calling in order to serve as an elder.

### Spiritual Covering and Headship

*“Every man who has something on his head while praying or prophesying disgraces his head. But every woman who has her head uncovered while praying or prophesying disgraces her head, for she is one and the same as the woman whose head is shaved. For if a woman does not cover her head, let her also have her hair cut off; but if it is disgraceful for a woman to have her hair cut off or her head shaved, let her cover her head. For a man ought not to have his head covered, since he is the image and glory of God; but the woman is the glory of man. For man does not originate from woman, but woman from man; for indeed man was not created for the woman’s sake, but woman for the man’s sake.*

*Therefore the woman ought to have a symbol of authority on her head, because of the angels. However, in the Lord, neither is woman independent of man, nor is man independent of woman. For as the woman originates from the man, so also the man has his birth through the woman; and all things originate from God. Judge for yourselves: is it proper for a woman to pray to God with her head uncovered? Does not even nature itself teach you that if a man has long hair, it is a dishonor to him, but if a woman has long hair, it is*

*a glory to her? For her hair is given to her for a covering. But if one is inclined to be contentious, we have no other practice, nor have the churches of God.” 1 Corinthians 11:4-16*

In 1 Corinthians 11:1 Paul calls the church to “*be imitators of me, just as I also am of Christ.*” In verse 3 he continues by stating, “*I want you to understand that Christ is the head of every man, and the man is the head of a woman, and God is the head of Christ.*”

This passage can be confusing and therefore it is important to recognize the context. Paul is teaching how a woman should operate in her gift of prophecy. In doing so, he assumes she is using her gift on behalf of the church.

In the first century, wives expressed their submission to their husbands by covering their head with a shawl. We do not believe this cultural expression is required today and thus do not feel women must wear a head covering or maintain a certain length of hair. However, we do believe the passage highlights two enduring principles.

First, Paul affirms differences between men and women. Though this was illustrated through the customs of his day, we interpret this passage to reinforce the fact that men and women are created distinct, and that we glorify God by embracing our gender.

Secondly, we believe women thrive when under the spiritual covering of their husband (if applicable), and the leadership of the church. While we uphold this as a general truth, we also recognize a variety of unique family dynamics which lead to complications. We also honor the calling to singleness. In each of these scenarios, we believe God will provide a healthy covering as we submit to Him and to one another. Ultimately, we believe men and women alike need spiritual covering and accountability, and all the more so in an anti-authoritarian culture.

## **Conclusion**

Embracing the God-given distinctions of gender demonstrates His design for men and women (see also 1 Timothy 2:9 -15) and ultimately reveals His character to the world. These distinctions do not prohibit empowering women for leadership or the full expression of their gifting in serving the Body of Christ.

Everyone serving in ministry should serve as one under authority—male and female, everyone should be accountable to someone. This principle applies equally to men and women.

God’s design for gender and His ordering of the family provide a blueprint for the church. We believe male covering is an important and enduring principle in order to release women for ministry within the church.

We encourage men to be initiators and servants to women, first in their homes and then in the church. We want men to empower and encourage women into their gifting and calling. We believe women can lead men; however, we also believe these women should serve under a male spiritual covering. Humility, mutual submission and servanthood allow us express God’s design in both the home and the church.

We recognize the pain surrounding the treatment of women in the Church throughout history and in our world today—everything from the extreme examples of abuse to the general failure of churches to proactively develop and release women into their calling. Our prayer is that Biblical clarity combined with a deep conviction to empower women into their God-given gifts and calling will result in a fresh wave of women leaders raised up through our Movement.

Our highest goal is to glorify and honor God in every aspect of our life. Though these issues are complex Biblically and culturally, if our motivation stays centered on the person of Jesus, His purposes in the earth, and His heart of sacrificial leadership, then He will give us wisdom to navigate this topic and apply His grace no matter the situation.