

Affirmations of God's Design For Men & Women¹

Oakwood Community Church Elders

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Principles for Interpreting the Bible

The Bible not our own opinions, is the sole authority which determines what we believe and how we are to live. All texts are equally and fully inspired revelations from God and as such are completely reliable in all matters that they address. The Scriptures must first be interpreted with the desire to ascertain the intended meaning of the text for the hearers in their day. The second step involves careful consideration as to which commands and derived principles are intended by God to be culture specific and which are intended by God to be transcultural in application for us today. If they are transcultural we must determine in what ways we are to appropriately transport its teachings from that day and time to our modern situation.

The Bible must be interpreted wholistically and thematically. We must seek to apprehend revealed truth in harmony with the totality of Scripture. The few texts that may restrict the role of women must not be interpreted simplistically without regard to the setting of the text and without careful regard for the rest of Scripture.

Appeal for unity

While it is the God-given responsibility of the Oakwood elders to interpret and apply the principles of Scripture, they

realize there are a diversity of convictions within Oakwood's membership. They do not expect agreement of conviction, but they do believe unity is possible when all the members maturely apply the principles of Romans 14 and 15 concerning secondary issues. Unity will be maintained when the following is observed: 1) the members refrain from judging each other, 2) those whose conviction is not practiced by the church recognize that this is a "secondary issue" and therefore willingly submit to the leadership of the church 3) those whose conviction is practiced by the church, refrain from arrogantly flaunting their position.

Equality

1. Men and women are equally created by God and equally resemble God. They are both responsible to cooperate with the Creator in the development of the earth's resources for the common good.
2. The forming of woman from man demonstrates the fundamental unity and equality of human beings. In Genesis 2:18, 20 the word "suitable" denotes equality and adequacy.
3. God values mothers and fathers equally. Children are commanded to honor their mother, not just their father, and the mother's instruction is as important as the father's.

Together they are responsible to instruct, nurture, and discipline their children.

4. Jesus equally regarded the dignity and status of women and classified believing women as being His disciples. Jesus measured people by faith, not by sex and thereby shattered many of the restrictive conventions concerning the value and role of women.
5. Jesus came to redeem women as well as men. Through faith in Christ we all become children of God, one in Christ, and heirs to the blessings of salvation without reference to racial, social, or gender distinctives.

Complementarity

6. While men and women are equal, they are distinct in their manhood and womanhood. As such they were made to complement one another sexually and psychologically. Therefore, there is an interdependence of the sexes, not only in marriage but also in the church and society.
7. The woman is a "helper" (Gen 2:18) in the sense that while not being identical to the man, she is capable of complementing what the man lacks and vice versa. Males and females are to complement each other in partnership.
8. Since God created men and women complementary to each other, we must appreciate these distinctives rather than usurp them, and cooperate with each other in such a way that we more fully reflect God's image.

Responsibility

Headship is transcultural

9. Scripture's teaching of male headship is clearly transcultural rather than cultural-bound (irrelevant to today's values) or culture-specific (situational). While there are culture-specific applications in the New Testament, the principle of male headship is theological and therefore transcultural since it is based on the doctrine of creation and the timeless relationship of Christ and His church.
10. Adam's headship in marriage was established by God before the Fall, and was not a result of sin. His headship is further evidenced by God's placing upon Adam ultimate responsibility for obedience.

What headship is

11. While establishing full equality and partnership between the sexes, God has also assigned to the husband in a marriage, and to a plurality of male elders in a church, the role of ultimate *responsibility*, rendered with care, *authority*, rendered with service, and *leadership*, rendered with love. The wife's responsibility in marriage, and the woman's responsibility in a church, is to respect and graciously follow God's designated male leadership.

Distortions of responsibilities

12. The Fall introduced distortions into the relationships between men and women:
 - a. In the home, the husband's loving, humble headship tends to be replaced by domination or passivity; the wife's intelligent, willing submission tends to be

replaced by usurpation or servility.

- b. In the church, sin inclines men toward a worldly love of power or an abdication of spiritual responsibility, and inclines women to resist Biblically prescribed limitations on their roles or to neglect the use of their gifts in appropriate ministries.

Restoration of responsibilities

- 13. Redemption in Christ aims at removing the distortions introduced by the curse:
 - a. In the family, husbands should forsake harsh or selfish leadership and grow in self-giving love and care for their wives; wives should forsake resistance to their husbands' authority and grow in willing, joyful submission to their husbands' leadership.
 - b. Also in the family, mothers are to place a high value upon the role of mothering and not abandon their nurturing responsibilities in the pursuit of positions of influence.
 - c. In the church, redemption in Christ gives men and women an equal share in the blessings of salvation; nevertheless, some governing and authoritative teaching roles within the church are reserved for men.
- 14. In all of life Christ is the supreme authority and guide for men and women, so that no earthly submission -- domestic, religious or civil -- ever implies a mandate to follow a human authority into sin.

Ministry

- 15. The Bible teaches that at Pentecost the Holy Spirit came on men and women alike. Without distinction, the Holy Spirit indwells men and women, and sovereignly distributes gifts without preference as to gender.
- 16. Both men and women are called to develop their spiritual gifts and to use them as stewards of the grace of God. Both men and women are divinely gifted and empowered to minister to the Body of Christ, under His authority and the authority of the local church.
- 17. Men are to respect, honor, and cooperate with women who are engaged in various forms of ministry.
- 18. In the New Testament, women likely served in the role and office of deacon. Such a position did not carry the level of "spiritual authority" that the elders possessed, but they did have a delegated authority in the physical realm of a church's ministry that impacted the personal lives of believers.
- 19. The principle of male headship confines the office and ministry of elder to godly males. Male elders are responsible to safeguard the doctrinal and moral purity of the church, and provide it with overall leadership.
- 20. Under the supervision and delegated authority of the elders, women may teach men the Scriptures, lead in public worship, and generally, serve in all other ministries. Because their leadership is a delegated one, women are to display a respect for the elders' authority and humbly seek to preserve the dignity of men.

21. As the elders seek to preserve the principle of male headship, and in sensitivity to our culture, they may choose to reserve certain tasks or roles to males.

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¹The values affirmed in this statement are compatible with Paul B. Phair's work entitled: *Women, Men, & Leadership*, January 1995. Several of the actual phrases within this affirmation are modifications and direct quotations from two conflicting statements on the role of women. One is the "Danvers Statement" (a traditional position) written by the Council On Biblical Manhood and Womanhood and the other is "Men, Women, & Biblical Equality" (an egalitarian position), sponsored by an organization called, Christians For Biblical Equality.