

# Male/Female Eldership

The Board of Elders, CBCGB  
14 November 2013

## Introduction

The male/female eldership issue is very controversial. It has been debated over many years. Most theologians don't consider this matter as a fundamental doctrine and usually avoid the dispute. Today, different denominations or churches take different positions; some churches accept women as elders and other churches forbid.

In order to avoid unnecessary dispute over this issue, which may create disunity within our church, the BOE decided to keep the wording of the current bylaws, which doesn't specify a gender requirement on the eldership, in the final bylaws revision proposal which is to be approved in a special membership meeting held on 15 December 2013.

In order to help the church members better understand the male/female eldership issue from the Biblical and theological point of view the BOE provides in the following a brief summary of arguments for two primary viewpoints on this issue. The cited scripture passages are included. A few recommended resources are also listed for those who like to study further.

That we don't set a gender requirement on the eldership in the bylaws does not imply it is not an important issue to our church. In the future the Church Council may consider passing a non-binding resolution that declares our position on this issue, just like we did on the issue of charismatic movement ten years ago.

## Two opposing viewpoints

**Viewpoint #1:** an elder ought to be a brother only. This is the traditional view. The primary argument points are:

1. An elder is a shepherd (Acts 20:17, 28; I Peter 5:1-4). Two of his main duties are ruling (governing the church) and teaching (I Tim 5:17).
2. Paul forbids women to teach or rule over men. (I Tim 2:12-14). Note how the two functions here coincide with the two functions given in I Tim 5:17 (although the verbs used for "ruling" are different). Because the two functions coincide, many people believe that Paul does not want to see women become elders.

3. The reasons Paul gives have to do with creation and fall, not with culture (1 Tim 2:13-14). Therefore we cannot say this passage is outdated or applicable only to ancient Ephesus (where Timothy was).
4. Wives are to submit to husbands (Eph 5:22-24). Therefore women should not rule over their husbands or other people's husbands. This means they should not be elders.
5. An overseer (elder) is to be faithful to his wife (1 Tim 3:2). Thus, an elder has to be a man. In addition, the masculine pronouns ("he" and "his") occur 10 times in 1 Tim 3:1-7. This indicates that the office of elder is assumed/intended to be fulfilled by men.
6. Jesus Christ demonstrated and established the male's headship and leadership in the church. Jesus is God's son (not daughter). He is the second man (not woman) and the last Adam (not Eve) (1 Corinthians 15:45, 47). He is the head of church. He chose 12 male apostles after spending the night praying to God (Luke 6:12) even though he could choose from quite a few female disciples.

**Viewpoint #2:** an elder can be a sister. The main points supporting this viewpoint are:

1. The case in the book of Judges (Deborah, Judges 4-5) demonstrates that God doesn't forbid a female to take lead.
2. Paul teaches that there is neither male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus (Gal 3:28). Therefore, female can play the leadership role as man in the church.
3. Priscilla taught Apollos (Acts 18:26). And she is even mentioned before her husband Aquila. That shows that the practice of the early church allowed women to hold the office of teaching as elders.
4. As long as we agree that all believers are priests, then there shouldn't set a rule that only a certain people can do certain job.
5. In reality, females are more passionate than males in church ministries. Why not treasure them?
6. Not to ordain females or let them preach is out of fashion in the modern times.

Additionally, it is worth noting that John Stott, in his commentary, agrees with position 1 in principle, but he allows for exceptions to the rule (for example, no mature brother available in a church).

## **Cited Scriptures**

1. Acts 20 <sup>17</sup> From Miletus, Paul sent to Ephesus for the elders of the church.
2. Acts 20 <sup>28</sup> Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. Be shepherds of the church of God, which he bought with his own blood.
3. 1 Peter 5 <sup>1</sup>To the elders among you, I appeal as a fellow elder and a witness of Christ's sufferings who also will share in the glory to be revealed: <sup>2</sup> Be shepherds of God's flock that is under your care, watching over them—not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be; not pursuing dishonest gain, but eager to serve; <sup>3</sup> not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock. <sup>4</sup> And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that will never fade away.
4. 1 Timothy 5 <sup>17</sup> The elders who direct the affairs of the church well are worthy of double honor, especially those whose work is preaching and teaching.
5. 1 Timothy 2 <sup>12</sup> I do not permit a woman to teach or to assume authority over a man; she must be quiet. <sup>13</sup> For Adam was formed first, then Eve. <sup>14</sup> And Adam was not the one deceived; it was the woman who was deceived and became a sinner.
6. 1 Timothy 3 <sup>1</sup> Here is a trustworthy saying: Whoever aspires to be an overseer desires a noble task. <sup>2</sup> Now the overseer is to be above reproach, faithful to his wife, temperate, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, <sup>3</sup> not given to drunkenness, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money. <sup>4</sup> He must manage his own family well and see that his children obey him, and he must do so in a manner worthy of full respect. <sup>5</sup> (If anyone does not know how to manage his own family, how can he take care of God's church?) <sup>6</sup> He must not be a recent convert, or he may become conceited and fall under the same judgment as the devil. <sup>7</sup> He must also have a good reputation with outsiders, so that he will not fall into disgrace and into the devil's trap.
7. 1 Corinthians 15 <sup>45</sup> So it is written: "The first man Adam became a living being"; the last Adam, a life-giving spirit. <sup>47</sup> The first man was of the dust of the earth; the second man is of heaven.
8. Luke 6 <sup>12</sup> One of those days Jesus went out to a mountainside to pray, and spent the night praying to God.
9. Judges 4-5 <sup>1</sup>Now Deborah a prophet, the wife of Lappidoth, was leading Israel at that time.....

10. Galatians 3 <sup>28</sup> There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.
11. Acts 18 <sup>26</sup> He began to speak boldly in the synagogue. When Priscilla and Aquila heard him, they invited him to their home and explained to him the way of God more adequately.

### **Recommended Resources**

1. Alexander Strauch, “Biblical eldership: an urgent call to restore biblical church leadership”, Lewis & Roth, 1988.
2. John Piper and Wayne Gruden, “Recovering Biblical manhood and womanhood”, Crossway Books (Wheaton, Illinois), 2012.
3. John Piper and Wayne Gruden, 50 Crucial Questions About Manhood and Womanhood, Council on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood (Louisville, Kentucky), 1992
4. Bonnidell and Robert Clouse, eds, “Women in ministry: four views”, IVP Academic, 1989

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