

Reflections on Shepherds and Deacons

Let's be clear. God has made everyone in the *imago dei*.

There is a divine equality that every man, woman and child has across ethnicities, ages, cultures, and, yes, genders. Therefore, we wholeheartedly welcome men and women into leadership roles at Mosaic.

We believe vision and power sharing among the shepherding team and pastors is best when we truly have a mosaic of qualified men and women coming together to serve God's church. Our Pastors will take on the primary teaching responsibility for the congregation. Alongside them, we'll have a shepherding team, deacons, staff, ministry leaders, and volunteers all leading and serving together.

Some reasons why:

We believe it's **biblical**. That does not mean we think it's the only biblical position you can have. There are wise men and women on either side of this discussion that will disagree, and we won't break fellowship with them. But if we didn't think God's word actually guides us in this direction then we wouldn't make this decision. (more below)

We believe it's **wise**. We believe in both our inherent equality (that men and women are created equal, and that Christian men and women are all given the Holy Spirit for the empowerment and edification of the church, therefore men and women should lead together), but it's actually because of our gendered distinctiveness that we're convinced men and women should lead. Because the body of Christ is so diverse, we need to care for it with diverse leadership. And the good news is, the Holy Spirit has equipped the church with all it needs. So it's wise and responsible to unleash all the Spirit's gifts by including called, gifted and trained women to shepherd the church. We are confident of this: By listening to the wisdom of called and gifted women, and by including their spiritual discernment in all matters, Mosaic will be a far more healthy church than we would be otherwise.

What does this mean for Mosaic?

This means we will have a team of both men and women—nominated, trained, disciplined, and voted on—serving in leadership. Members of Mosaic will then be cared for by that team, which guides the church and exercises authority collectively.

What is the role of a Shepherd?

A shepherd should *smell like their sheep*. That's a sure sign they've been with them. In scripture we see a shepherd is asked to do 4 things:

- 1) **Feed** (1 Pet 5:2) - applying the gospel in disciple making, teaching, and worship.
- 2) **Lead** (John 13:14-15) - serving and praying for the church, and stewarding its mission.
- 3) **Protect** (Isaiah 56:9-12) - from false doctrines and through discipline.
- 4) **Care for the Flock** (1 Peter 5:1-11) - by tending to the church in crises or major life events.

Who can be on the Shepherding Team?

Men and Women who have the character, the competence and the compatibility to lead at Mosaic.

What do we mean?

Character: loving, compassionate,

Competence: experienced, gifts to train others

Compatibility: a good articulator and defender of Mosaic's mission

We will always prioritize Character over Competence (1 Timothy 3 / Titus 1). This character is something that is *formed over time, discerned and evaluated in community*.

What is the role of a Deacon?

A Deacon is a servant. Deacons' hearts break for those in need. Their focus is on the physical and benevolence needs of the church. We see the first evidence of a diaconate in Acts 6 when the disciples appointed a team to care for the widows amongst them.

Who can be on the Diaconate?

Men and women who have the character and willingness to take up the role of a deacon. Again, this person is marked by their character but it's displayed in a willingness to meet the needs of the body.

FAQ's:

Where could I look for more information in scripture about this?

In the Old Testament you could look to Deborah (Judge, prophet, and a leader), Huldah (prophet and interpreter of the Law), Esther (Queen, intercessor, and leader) and Miriam (a prophet and a leader as well). In the New Testament we see women everywhere, from the genealogy highlighting the women who were crucial to Jesus' advent, to his mother's beautiful and theologically rich song, to the women disciples who sat at his feet studying from him in Mary and Martha, to the first eyewitnesses of Jesus' resurrection who then go tell the good news to the rest of the disciples and many others.

In Acts 2, the first sermon for the Christian church, we hear that the Holy Spirit will be poured out on everyone, that both sons and daughters will be prophesying.

Priscilla, in partnership with her husband, Aquilla, taught Apollos (Acts 18:26), who became one of the central leaders of the first century church. They are called Paul's "co-workers in Christ Jesus." Churches met in the households of Mary (Acts 12), Lydia (Acts 16), and Nympha (Col. 4). In his letter to the Christians in Rome, Paul calls Phoebe a "minister" or "deacon," using the same term he applies to Jesus (Rom. 15:8), to himself (2 Cor. 3:6), and to Timothy (1 Tim. 4:6). Philip's four daughters prophesied (Acts 21). In Romans 16:7 Paul commends Junia and refers to her as "outstanding among the apostles." This is significant because apostles had the highest level of authority in the ancient church.

How do we square this structure with passages like 1 Timothy 2:11-12 and 1 Corinthians 14:34-35?

These two texts are the reason this conversation is so complex and difficult. And therefore, we want to give much grace and freedom for you to wrestle. We know a small little Q&A won't answer all your questions, but we want to at least give you something to chew on.

In the Timothy passage, the word "authentein," often translated "to exercise authority," is found in the New Testament only here, which makes it difficult to arrive at a definitive understanding of a word that has a wide range to its meaning. There are many words that Paul could have used to convey authority including the most popular: "exousia". However, Paul does not use that common word, but this obscure one. Why? Because Paul is addressing a specific false teaching, as it says in 1 Timothy 1:3. We do not know exactly what the heresy is, but as most versions translate "authentein" as "usurp authority", we get the idea of a power play. A better rendering would be "to dominate, to get one's way." The translation would then be, "I do not

permit a woman to teach so as to gain mastery over a man” or “I do not permit a woman to teach with a view to dominating a man.”

The term “silent” is better translated as “quiet,” so the full verse would be “I do not permit a woman to teach a man in a dominating way, but to have a quiet demeanor.” An altogether different way to understand this text would be to recognize it as referring to household codes, not the role of women in the church. A perfectly acceptable way to translate the term “woman” is “wife” and “man” as “husband.” This understanding would better fit with the difficult wording that follows (1 Timothy 2:13-15).

The other passage that brings about questions is 1 Corinthians 14:34-35, where Paul says, *“Women should remain silent in the churches. They are not allowed to speak, but must be in submission, as the law says. ³⁵ If they want to inquire about something, they should ask their own husbands at home; for it is disgraceful for a woman to speak in the church.”*

On the surface this seems confusing, difficult, and downright out of character with the God of the Bible. We don’t hear many arguing for the complete silence of women. Instead the argument is they can’t speak prophetically or in a teaching role. And when we do this, we’re bringing context into the discussion (which is good). So whatever Paul means in 1 Cor. 14 needs to square with what he says in 1 Cor. 11:5, where he says, *“But every woman who prays or prophesies with her head uncovered dishonors her head”* – clearly if a woman’s head was covered (which is a really fascinating discussion), they could pray and prophesy!

What do we make of this apparent contradiction within a mere few chapters of one another? Again, I think context is helpful to bring into the discussion. In the first century, most women weren’t allowed to go to school, to seminary, or to receive a formal education. Therefore, Paul’s restriction here is more about having qualified teachers teaching. And when they do learn... Paul clearly appoints them to speak and do the work throughout the book of Acts.

Is this why you left the PCA?

Not at all. There were other differences that led to that decision. However, sometimes being free to ask a question allows yourself to be open to wherever the truth takes you.

What if I don't agree?

As we’ve tried to communicate, this is a highly complex and divisive topic, and it has been all throughout church history. So, we want to be gracious and compassionate to whomever we disagree with and give others the freedom to come to their own conclusions. Let’s respect others' conclusions and be open to hearing one another out.

Are there more resources you recommend?

Yes! Here's some great places to start:

NT WRIGHT

<https://ntwrightpage.com/2016/07/12/womens-service-in-the-church-the-biblical-basis/>

ECO's Gender in Christ

<https://static1.squarespace.com/static/58d5cdabe58c627d57e31c71/t/5e2f344cc4935b7946a300b6/1580151886578/Gender+in+Christ+Compiled+online.pdf>

Paul and Gender: Reclaiming the Apostles Vision for Men and Women in Christ

<https://www.amazon.com/Paul-Gender-Reclaiming-Apostles-Vision/dp/0801097940>