



**AbidingChurchSC.org**

*Statement of Belief: Compiled by Ryan Cole*

## **Women in Ministry and Church Governance**

At *Abiding Church*, we believe that women are able to preach, lead, hold offices, and have delegated authority in church. We do not want to exclude half of the body of Christ from leadership, and you will see that represented in the following detailed statements.

At *Abiding Church*, we affirm both the **distinctiveness of men and women by design** and their **shared capacity to serve in spiritual leadership** by divine calling. The Church is designed to function as a **living body and Kingdom family**, requiring the **cooperation of both men and women** for its full expression, fruitfulness, and governance.

We do not conform to secular or cultural ideologies of sameness or progressive inclusivity, nor do we accept religious systems that impose gender roles and limitations not rooted in Kingdom order. Instead, we uphold the **biblical vision of Spirit-led, gift-based leadership** within the framework of **spiritual headship, relational accountability, and the clear design of male and female roles**.

### **1. Men and Woman are Distinct in Design and Unified by Purpose**

Men and women are **biologically and functionally distinct by creation** (Genesis 1:27; 2:18–24). Man was created first, and woman was created as a helper—**not in subservience, but in strength and alignment**, as the Hebrew word *ezer* implies one who comes alongside to rescue or reinforce (also used of God as our helper).

Men are given the **headship role in the home** (Ephesians 5:23), bearing responsibility for the spiritual condition of their families. This headship is mirrored in the church, where **mature, qualified men are to lead** in oversight and governance. However, Scripture also affirms that women are **essential to the leadership ecosystem** of the Church.

A church led by only men or only women will lack the full expression of God's design. **Male leadership often brings strength, discipline, governmental order, and a unique aspect of the apostolic**, while **female leadership often brings discernment, nurturing wisdom, and a unique type of prophetic insight**. When both are operating in their respective grace under God's authority, the Church becomes a multi-dimensional expression of Christ's body—strong in doctrine, rich in Spirit, and whole in its witness to the world.

## 2. Governing Roles: Elders, Deacons, Apostles

### A. Elders (Greek: *presbuteroi*)

Elders are entrusted with **spiritual oversight, doctrinal integrity, and shepherding** the flock (Titus 1:5–9; 1 Peter 5:1–3). Paul's qualifications for elders in **1 Timothy 3** and **Titus 1** include:

- “Above reproach”
- “The husband of one wife”
- “Able to teach”
- “Not given to drunkenness”
- “Manages his household well”

#### Interpreting “Husband of One Wife”:

This phrase (*mias gunaikos andra*) is best understood as:

- A **moral qualification**, emphasizing faithfulness in marriage
- A rejection of **polygamy or marital unfaithfulness**, common in ancient culture
- Not an exclusion of women or unmarried men (Paul and Jesus were unmarried)

**Phoebe** (Romans 16:1) was called a *diakonos* (deacon)—the same word used in 1 Timothy 3. If the male language in that chapter automatically excludes women, **Phoebe's leadership contradicts Paul's own commendation**.

#### Our Position:

We affirm that **elders are ideally spiritually mature men**, functioning as spiritual fathers and protectors of the flock. However, in cases where qualified men are absent or when God clearly calls and appoints a spiritually mature woman, **we recognize the legitimacy of female elders who serve in alignment and accountability within a broader leadership structure** that includes male headship.

## **B. Deacons (Greek: *diakonoi*)**

Deacons are **servants and administrative leaders** who support the practical needs of the church (Acts 6:1–6, 1 Tim 3:8–13). They must be dignified, faithful, and self-controlled.

- **Phoebe** (Rom. 16:1) was a deacon and a *prostatis*—a benefactor and possibly overseer of the church in Cenchreae.
- In **1 Timothy 3:11**, some interpret “women likewise” (*gunaikas hosautos*) to refer to **female deacons** rather than wives of male deacons.

### **Interpretation of 1 Timothy 3:11 – “Women likewise...”**

1 Timothy 3:11 states, “*Women likewise must be dignified, not slanderers, but sober-minded, faithful in all things.*” The Greek phrase *gunaikas hosautos* can be translated as either “women likewise” or “wives likewise,” depending on context. Importantly, the Greek text does **not** include a possessive pronoun (such as “their wives”), which many English translations have inserted interpretively.

There are two main interpretations:

1. **Wives of Deacons:** Some view this verse as referring to the wives of male deacons. However, this interpretation is problematic. First, Paul does not give similar qualifications for the wives of overseers in verses 1–7, which would be expected if spousal character were central to qualification. Second, this interpretation interrupts the flow of Paul’s pattern of listing qualifications for distinct groups of leaders.
2. **Women Deacons:** A growing number of scholars interpret this as referring to women serving as deacons. This view is strengthened by the use of the word *likewise* (*hosautos*), which Paul previously used in verse 8 to introduce the qualifications for male deacons. Its repeated use in verse 11 suggests Paul is now introducing a third category—female deacons.

This interpretation aligns with Romans 16:1, where Paul refers to Phoebe as a *diakonos* (deacon) of the church in Cenchreae, using the same Greek term applied to male deacons in 1 Timothy 3:8. It also explains why Paul lists character qualifications for these women, as he does for all other church leaders in the passage.

Therefore, 1 Timothy 3:11 is best understood as referring to women who serve as deacons. This is consistent with the language, structure, and broader witness of Scripture regarding women in roles of leadership and service within the early church.

### **Our Position:**

Both **men and women may serve as deacons**, provided they meet the spiritual and moral qualifications, and function in unity with pastoral and elder leadership.

### **C. Apostles**

Apostles are **sent ones** who provide oversight, establish churches, and govern doctrine. While most apostles in the New Testament were men, **Junia** (Romans 16:7) is recognized as “outstanding among the apostles.”

Church fathers such as Chrysostom affirmed Junia as a **female apostle**. Apostolic authority is not derived from gender, but from calling, commissioning, and fruitfulness.

\*Note this position does not include our broader position on the role of Apostles in church today. Continued documentation will include our distinctions between the original *Apostles of the Lamb*, and the functional role of Apostles in the modern day church.

### **Our Position:**

Apostolic leadership is open to both men and women, though in our model, **apostolic function should flow in accountability with a company of elders**—reflecting spiritual order and community-based governance.

## **3. Pastoral and Equipping Roles: The Fivefold Ministry**

The fivefold ministry (Ephesians 4:11) includes **apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers**, given to the Church to equip the saints for ministry and build up the body of Christ.

These are **spiritually graced functions**, not gendered titles. There is no scriptural indication that any of these gifts are gender-exclusive.

#### **A. Pastors (Greek: *poimēn*)**

- Mentioned once in the NT in Eph. 4:11
- Function as **shepherds of people**, not necessarily institutional heads
- Women may pastor under spiritual authority, especially when in alignment with a male-led church government.

#### **B. Teachers**

- Priscilla (with Aquila) taught Apollos sound doctrine (Acts 18:26)
- Teaching is a gift that should be grounded in truth, not reserved by gender

#### **C. Evangelists**

- No restriction in Scripture
- Women like the Samaritan woman (John 4) and Mary Magdalene were the **first to declare the resurrection**
- **The Great Commission applies to all believers.**

#### **D. Prophets**

- Anna the prophetess (Luke 2), Philip's four daughters (Acts 21:9), and many others prophesied publicly
- Prophetic leadership often broke cultural norms in both Old and New Testaments

### **4. Exceptional Function in the Absence of Qualified Men**

While God's design places **men as heads of the home and elders within the church**, Scripture and history show that in moments where **men abdicate their roles**, God **raises up women** to function in the highest offices:

- **Deborah** judged Israel in a time when no male leader responded (Judges 4)

- The early church was supported and expanded through the faith and initiative of women (e.g., Lydia, Phoebe, Junia)

### **Our Position:**

We affirm that women may function in **senior leadership**, even in roles normally occupied by men, when clearly called by God and in the absence of qualified male leadership. However, we maintain that the **best functioning scenario is one where men lead in alignment with God's design**, and women co-labor in strength, submission, and shared authority.

## **5. Spiritual Order and Mutual Submission**

Headship in the Kingdom is not about domination, but **responsibility and sacrifice** (Eph. 5:25–28). All leaders, regardless of gender, must operate in:

- Humility
- Submission to Christ
- Relational accountability
- Doctrinal soundness
- Spirit-led fruitfulness

Spiritual authority is confirmed not by title, but by **fruit, faithfulness, and alignment with the Word and the Spirit**.

## **6. Clarifying Misunderstood Texts: Paul's Instructions on Silence and Authority**

We acknowledge the seriousness of Paul's words in 1 Timothy 2:11–12 and 1 Corinthians 14:34–35, which have been interpreted by some to prohibit women from teaching, leading, or speaking publicly in the Church.

However, we believe these verses must be interpreted in light of the broader biblical context, the original Greek language, and the specific situational issues Paul was addressing.

### **A. 1 Timothy 2:11–12 – “I do not permit a woman to teach or assume authority over a man...”**

This passage refers to issues in the church at Ephesus, where false teaching and disorder were spreading (1 Tim 1:3–7). The Greek word translated “authority” (*authentein*) is a rare word used only here in the New Testament. It carries the sense of domineering or usurping authority, not simply holding a leadership position.

Paul's concern appears to be correcting abusive or disruptive behavior, not issuing a universal prohibition. This is especially clear since Paul acknowledges women prophesying and praying publicly in other contexts (e.g., 1 Cor. 11:5), which presumes a speaking role in gathered worship.

### **B. 1 Corinthians 14:34–35 – “Women should remain silent in the churches...”**

This statement seems to contradict Paul's earlier affirmation of women praying and prophesying in the same letter (1 Cor. 11:5). The more likely interpretation is that Paul is addressing a specific disruption, such as women asking questions or engaging in out-of-order speech during services (common in Greco-Roman settings where women were less formally educated than men).

Furthermore, many scholars believe Paul is quoting a Corinthian saying in verses 34–35 and then refuting it in verse 36 (“Did the word of God originate with you?”), a common rhetorical method in the letter.

### **Summary:**

Paul's words in these passages were not blanket restrictions on all women for all time, but pastoral corrections addressing specific issues of disorder, false teaching, and role confusion in particular congregations. Throughout Scripture, Paul affirms, partners with, and commends women in ministry—including those who taught, led, and prophesied.

Therefore, we interpret these texts within the larger witness of Scripture, where women are empowered by the Spirit to teach, speak, lead, and serve in alignment with God's design and spiritual order.

### **Final Summary**

At **Abiding Church**, we affirm that:

- Men and women are distinct by creation but unified in purpose.

- Men are called to headship in the home and ideally in church governance.
- Women are essential co-laborers in the Church, functioning in fivefold ministry, spiritual gifts, and leadership roles.
- Women may serve in governing roles such as elder or apostle when called by God and when they walk in proper alignment.
- The Church functions best when male and female leaders co-labor in spiritual order, mutual honor, and Kingdom purpose.

*“The Lord gives the word; the women who proclaim the good news are a mighty throng.”*

— **Psalm 68:11**

*“There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.”*

— **Galatians 3:28**