

# Women in Ministry

*A biblical and pastoral position paper adopted by the  
International Pentecostal Holiness Church Council of Bishops  
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## Introduction

From its beginning over 100 years ago, the International Pentecostal Holiness Church (IPHC) has licensed and ordained women for ministry in its churches, including the pastorate, as well as for leadership in its conferences and denominational positions. In September 1996, the IPHC convened a Solemn Assembly to address seven specific sins of the church's past. One of those was *male domination*, whereby the church repented of patterns of resistance to women in ministry.

At its Centennial Celebration in January 2011, the denomination adopted a Centennial Covenant that included these words:

*“We commit ourselves to live in the fullness of the presence and power of the Holy Spirit, continuing to recognize all the gifts, ministries, and fruit of the Spirit working through any man or woman, young or old, [italics added] for the edifying of the body of Christ and the glory of God” (Joel 2:28, 29; Acts 6:3; 1 Corinthians 12:4-7; Ephesians 3:19; 4:11-13; 5:18).<sup>1</sup>*

## Biblical and Theological Foundations

### *The Trinity*

The discussion of women in ministry begins with our understanding of the nature of God as revealed in Scripture. No sense of dominion or mastery is present in the interrelationships of the Godhead. Each of the equal persons in the tri-unity of the God who is indivisibly one in essence acts out of *agape* love (1 John 4:8, 16). This term, *agape*, is best defined as the love that will always selflessly do what is best for another without preconditions--a love that characterizes the heart of God (Luke 6:31).

In the interrelationships of the Trinity, the Father, the Son, and the Spirit serve as one essence in the harmony of equality wrapped in the ribbons of mutual submission. This is true in all divine activity. The term, domination, exerting control at the expense of another and against his/her will, is not even in the vocabulary of God. It is this equality and unity that lay the foundation for our discussion of the role of women in the church. The divine ideal for all relationships continues to be revealed in the biblical story of creation.

## ***The Creation***

Because God exists in equal tri-unity – Father, Son and Holy Spirit – in all functions each person of the Godhead acts to fulfill His role in the best interests of the others (*agape* love). This tri-unity is revealed in God’s statement to Himself: “Let *us* make man in *our* image, in our likeness...” (*Emphasis added*, Genesis 1:26). Therefore, it would have been inconsistent with God’s own character to create Eve as anything less than Adam’s equal. As a spiritual being, she equally carried the image of God in her own person, as did Adam. Each lived in a personal relationship both with God and with each other.

Genesis shows that God created man and gave him the assignment to keep his home, the Garden of Eden. In the process of creation, God knew man was lonely and could not find personal fulfillment with any of the animals of creation. Hence, God made woman and brought her to Adam, who recognized her with delight as “bone of my bone and flesh of my flesh” (Genesis 2:23). For Eve to have been made from Adam’s rib presupposes that the very essence of *woman*, her DNA, was in Adam, waiting to blossom into the blessing of partnership and companionship.

The designation given to Eve as Adam’s helper (*ezer*), suggests the support that comes from equals, not subordination (Genesis 2:18). This Hebrew word, *ezer*, even refers to God (1 Samuel 7:12, Psalm 121:1, 2). We know this is true because the Scriptures make clear subordination does not exist in the relationships of the Trinity, and it was not part of the first marriage before the Fall. Instead, grounded in *agape* love, mutual submission between equals was the divine ideal in Eden.

Everything God made was according to His character and that made it “good.” Neither Adam nor Eve had any concept of sin or inferiority before the Fall. They loved each other (*agape*) as equals, lived in innocent sinlessness and served in the Garden in mutual submission. As children of God they each carried the spiritual image and likeness of God, and as human beings they were “one flesh.”

The roles between equals in the Trinity meant there would be roles between equals in the first marriage. This understanding is vividly revealed in procreation. With God as the source of all life, Adam and Eve became co-creators of life with God. A fundamental demonstration of these roles among equals, therefore, is revealed in childbirth. Adam could plant the seed of life, but only Eve could receive the seed and birth a child. All roles in marriage, therefore, flow from the heart of God into this most basic principle of what it means to be “one flesh.” When their first child was born, Eve even acknowledged the role of God in childbirth. She said, “I have gotten a man from the Lord” (Genesis 4:1, KJV).

Adam and Eve each answered directly to God for their care of the Garden and for their personal choices regarding God’s prohibition not to eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil (Genesis 2:9). In a secondary sense, they also answered to each other in the unity of their equality.

We conclude the Scriptures teach that before sin entered the world, Adam and Eve enjoyed equality with each other in mutual submission, and walked in *agape* love, even as they worshiped God by living out His image and likeness, mutually serving the best interests of each other. In their distinctive roles they became co-creators of life with God and cared for the

Garden that was their home (Genesis 1:26-28; 2:23; 5:1-2; 1 Corinthians 11:11-12; Galatians 3:13, 28; 5:1).

## ***The Fall***

The conclusion that Eve was solely responsible for the Fall is untrue and a delusion. Paul wrote that “Sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all men, because all sinned” (Romans 5:12). Paul also said, “Eve was deceived by the serpent's cunning” (2 Corinthians 11:3). There is plenty of blame to go around. They were both individuals made in the image of God and equally answerable to God for their choices. As co-conspirators in the rebellion, both Eve and Adam willfully transgressed.

The result was a radical change in their relationship with each other and with God. In regards to their relationship with God, the bright and glowing temple of God inside each of their souls went dark, and Satan moved into the darkness. Both of them died a spiritual death in those moments. The result was they immediately felt shame and tried to hide from God. In regards to each other, the darkness clouded and changed their mutual relationships. Many centuries later the Apostle Paul would describe the condition of mankind and his relationship to God as “dead in trespasses and sins” (Ephesians 2:1, KJV).

A whole new lifestyle resulted from the rebellion. This new beginning can only be described with the word, *fallen*. They fell from the paradise that surrounded them, and from the paradise that was within them. This tragic loss of favor with God included such ominous new experiences as multiplied pain in childbirth, unfulfilled desires, rule (or domination), sweat, and thorns. Adam would now have to earn his living by the sweat of his brow, and conquer thorns and thistles as he did it. The whole of nature felt sin's impact: "Cursed is the ground because of you" (Genesis 3:17). God said to Eve, “With pain you will give birth to children. Your desire will be for your husband, and he will rule over you.” They would also be compelled to leave the Garden of Eden with no hope of ever going back.

Many read Genesis 3:1-19 as only the decree of God; as His judgment on their sin. It can be seen, however, as both a curse and a prophecy of their new lifestyle that would of necessity evolve resulting from their freely made choices. Genesis 3 foretells and describes their new life of accelerated pain, sweat, thorns, unfulfilled desires, and the particularly ominous statement, “he will rule over you” – male domination (Genesis 3:1-19).

This new norm, however, is not at all God's ideal. The divine norm is revealed in their relationships before the Fall.

The crown jewel of God's creation had become God's enemy, with all of the hostility, hatred, antipathy, and ill will that goes with choosing the path of enmity against God (James 4:4 KJV). Ultimately, the curse of sin resulted in their physical deaths too.

## ***The Revelation of Grace***

While foretelling what life would be like after the Fall, God also gave the first great disclosure of the magnanimous grace in His heart; grace in inexhaustible supply (see Genesis 41:49 and Ephesians 2:4). Yes, Eve exercised her free will and rebelled first. But one day a woman would be the chosen of God to birth the Redeemer who would “take away the sin of the world” (John 1:29, 36).

A God-fearing peasant girl named Mary, by a miracle of the Holy Spirit, delivered the Christ-child to the human family in the silent night of Bethlehem. From His birth, that “old serpent, called the devil” (Revelation 12:9, KJV) tried to destroy Him. Satan did succeed in bruising the “last Adam” (1 Corinthians 15:45), but he did not triumph over Him. Instead, at Calvary, the Messiah crushed the head of the serpent (Genesis 3:15).

### ***The Old Testament Era***

The status of women in the era from the Garden of Eden to the garden of Jesus’ empty tomb is largely a story of women unappreciated, abused, and misused (Genesis 2:8-15; John 19:41). The prophecy given to Eve in Eden came true in the lives of all women.

What followed was a world in which men were dominate and women had very few rights. “He will rule over you,” male domination, has never been the divine ideal. But it did largely become the norm in ancient cultures. It is also the norm in many contemporary cultures.

The Old Testament contains notable exceptions that give examples of God’s divine plan of equality before God. The stories of women like Deborah, Jael, Abigail, Huldah and Esther illuminate the era.

### ***The Ministry of Jesus***

#### Women's Status and Freedoms

Women were severely limited by Jewish law and custom in the ancient Israel of Jesus’ earthly sojourn. This was also true in other cultures of the time. The standard was far removed from the mutuality and equality in the Godhead, as well as the mutual equality between Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden before the Fall. Generally speaking:

- Women were restricted to roles of little or no authority and thought to be schemers. The character of Rebekah and her relationship to her father, Laban, is an illustration (See Genesis 24-27).
- Women were largely confined to their father’s or husband’s home. Only very rarely could they go out in public or speak to a stranger. When they did leave the home, they had to be veiled.
- Women were judged inferior to men and under the authority of men, either their father before marriage or their husband after marriage.
- In first century Israel, women were not allowed to give testimony in court. Their legal status was little better than that of slaves.
- Jewish tradition at the time did not allow women to be taught in the rabbinical schools. Rabbi Eliezer wrote in the first century: "Rather should the words of the Torah be burned than entrusted to a woman.... Whoever teaches his daughter the Torah is like one who teaches her obscenity." (Rabbi Eliezer, "*Mishnah*," *Sotah* 3:4)

The inferior position of women in society in the first covenant was defined in the Old Testament Scriptures. It was then interpreted and enforced according to the prejudices of the Pharisees, Sadducees and Essenes.

## Social Customs

“In the fullness of time,” the Messiah did come, being sent by God and “born of a woman” (Galatians 4:4). One of the areas of Jesus’ ministry that quickly marked Him as a revolutionary was social customs.

- Jesus would talk to women, as he did the Samaritan woman, and teach them, as he did Mary, Lazarus’ sister. Each of these women was obviously eager to learn (Luke 10:38-42).
- Jesus did not feel bound by Jewish customs that defined uncleanness. One example is when He healed the woman with the issue of blood (Matthew 9:20-22).
- Jesus boldly challenged the customs of the day when He cured a woman who had been crippled for eighteen years (Luke 13:10-17). He also called her a “daughter of Abraham,” thus implying she had equal status with sons of Abraham.
- Jesus preached an urgent message of repentance that resulted in a New Birth (John 3). It is also described as “living water” in John 4, and is applied equally to men and women. In John 4, Jesus intentionally ministered to the woman at the well at Samaria. He spoke with her openly, violating social customs. She was isolated and disgraced by the community for her lifestyle, yet after experiencing God’s grace through Jesus, this woman began to minister the Gospel to her community (John 4:25 MSG).

## Women in Jesus’ Ministry

Considering what is revealed about the interrelationships of unity and equality in the Trinity, it seems natural that Jesus brought women on His ministry team. They travelled with Him and served Him and the disciples’ needs (Luke 8:1-3). In the culture of first century Israel, that was highly unusual.

Women have always been especially drawn to Jesus. Some of the reasons are self-evident. Spiritually and physically Jesus was strong and wise--strong enough to disregard the culture and accept women; wise enough to redeem them, bless them with eternal life, and give them opportunity to serve. He was also tough enough to handle the negative consequences that always followed.

Women felt no sense of inferiority in Jesus’ presence. They were not sex objects to the Lord. Jesus did not want their bodies; he wanted *them*--their hearts, and it meant they were safe. Their unique gifts and abilities could blossom around Jesus. Instead of putting them in their place, as the Pharisees freely did, Jesus elevated them. It gave them a sense of true self-worth and importance.

We should not be surprised at Jesus’ attitude toward women. There is no sense of inferiority or prejudice in the Trinity; hence, Jesus treated them with respect--the same respect God showed Adam and Eve in the Garden. Women felt accepted in Jesus’ presence.

This understanding also helps explain why Luke names some of these women--Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James and Joseph, Joanna, the wife of Herod’s steward Chuza, Susanna, Salome, the mother of the sons of Zebedee, and “many others,” in Chapter 8 (Luke 8:1; Mark 15:40).

Many women were present when Jesus was crucified and “looked on from a distance” (Matthew 27:55; John 19:25). Mary the mother of Jesus is identified, along with Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James and Joseph, and the mother of the sons of Zebedee. (Luke 2:35).

On resurrection morning, according to Mark’s gospel, Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome visited the tomb with burial spices (Mark 16:1). But Jesus selected only Mary Magdalene and sent her to His disciples to declare the fact of His bodily resurrection. Though Mary Magdalene could not give testimony in a Jewish court, Jesus saw her potential and knew her honesty. He vested His trust in this woman out of whom He had cast seven devils (Mark 16:9; Luke 8:3). He also gave her a special place with her name recorded in salvation history.

## ***Women in the Apostolic Church***

### The Gift of the Holy Spirit

The church was born fifty days after the Lord’s resurrection, on the Day of Pentecost. The occasion was marked by the heavenly Father’s gift of the Holy Spirit that Jesus requested (John 14:16-17, 26). In his Pentecost sermon, the Apostle Peter explained what was happening and affirmed what the Prophet Joel wrote was actually the Word of God:

*“In the last days, God says, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your young men will see visions, your old men will dream dreams. Even on my servants, both men and women, [italics added] I will pour out my Spirit in those days, and they will prophesy” (Acts 2:17-18; Joel 2:28-29).*

Each member of the tri-unity of God participated in the birth of the church: Jesus petitioned the heavenly Father and the Father gave God--the Holy Spirit. It was wholly in the character of God that the gift of the Holy Spirit was received by men and women equally, including the young and the elderly. No gender prejudices exist in the heart of God.

The Apostle Peter expressed this principle when he preached in Cornelius’ house, saying a few years later, “I perceive that God is no respecter of persons” (Acts 10:34; see also Romans 2:11; Ephesians 6:9; Colossians 3:25; James 2:1; 1 Peter 1:17; 2 Peter 3:11).

The Apostle Paul also spoke boldly to this in a simple, powerful and easily understood statement. When a person is “clothed with Christ,” Paul said, he will live a lifestyle in which “there is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus” (Galatians 3:27-28). This is classic Trinitarian thinking that concisely expresses the heart of God, and it frames the divine ideal in the church that Jesus Christ heads.

We conclude, therefore, the Holy Spirit will indwell and empower for ministry a woman just as He does a man. Anything less would be out of character with the mutual submission that flows out of the three-in-one unity and equality in the Trinity.

### House Churches

Some of the earliest meeting places for believers were houses, and women played a vital role by opening their homes. Mark’s mother made her home available as a place of

worship (Acts 12:12). Lydia, at Philippi, did the same (Acts 16:14-15, 40). Nympha, who lived in Colosse, hosted a church in her house (Colossians 4:15). When Paul wrote his first letter to the church at Corinth, he said he received his information about the divisions in the church “from those of the house of Chloe” (1 Corinthians 1:11). Paul wrote that Priscilla and Aquila led a house church, and said they “risked their lives” to save his (Romans 16:4-5).

### Spiritual Gifts

The principle of unity and equality in the heart of God, anchored in *agape* love and mutual submission, also applies to spiritual gifts.

*“He gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; for perfecting the saints for the work of the ministry, for edifying the body of Christ” (Ephesians 4:11-12, KJV).*

The New Testament identifies women who functioned as prophets—Anna (Luke 2:38) and Phillip’s daughters (Acts 21:8); women who functioned as evangelists—the Samaritan Woman (John 4); as pastors and teachers—Priscilla (Acts 18), Lydia (Acts 16), Eunice (2 Timothy 1); and as deacons—Phoebe (Romans 16:1). There is also evidence that Junia had an apostolic anointing.

The Apostle Paul mentions numerous other women who served in the ministry of the church including Tryphena, Tryphosa, Persis, Julia and Rufus’ mother (Romans 16).

### ***Cultural Passages***

This study began in the Trinity, showing the equality and unity in the Godhead that is grounded in *agape* love and expressed in mutual submission in role relationships. It is an understanding of Scripture that characterizes all of the interrelationships in the Godhead. Equality and unity also found expression in the mutual submission that followed in the marriage of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden before the Fall. Together, they were living out the divine ideal.

When sin entered into the world, that equality amid unity was lost, and the blame largely fell, albeit unfairly, on Eve and women who were born after her. Thus began the era of the subjugation of women, or male domination. But God promised a Redeemer.

- Jesus of Nazareth is that Savior, and a woman brought Him into the world (Galatians 4:4).
- Jesus showed no partiality or prejudice in His ministry as He reached out to both men and women.
- Women were “daughters of Abraham” to Him (Luke 13:10-17).
- The first person to drink the living water of the New Birth was a woman (John 4).
- Women traveled with the Lord, and ministered to the needs of Jesus and His disciples (Luke 8:1-3).
- A woman was the first person to announce to the disciples the bodily resurrection of Jesus (Mark 16).

- The gift of the Holy Spirit was promised to men and women alike (Acts 2:17-18; Joel 2:28-29).
- Peter preached that God is no respecter of persons (Acts 10:34; see also Romans 2:11; Ephesians 6:9; Colossians 3:25; James 2:1; 1 Peter 1:17; 2 Peter 3:11).
- A woman was Paul's first convert in Europe (Acts 16:14).

The gifts of the Spirit are sovereignly given, as the Holy Spirit chooses, to both men and women, including the five-fold equipping leadership gifts (Ephesians 4:11-13), the manifestation gifts (1 Corinthians 12:8-10), and the body ministry gifts (Romans 12:3-8; 1 Peter 4:10-11).

With God, Paul preached, "There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female." Instead, "we are all one in Christ Jesus."

Paul's overall teaching regarding women is liberating and expansive, but he also wrote restrictive language. He addressed the subject in his first epistle to Timothy, with the congregation at Ephesus in mind (Acts 18 and 19). The Apostle Peter also offered some of the same restrictions.

Each of these churches at the time Paul wrote was an infant Christian congregation surrounded by all of the idolatry and paganism of Greek culture. Ephesus, for example, boasted a magnificent temple that was one of the seven wonders of the ancient world. It was the world capital of the decadent immorality of Diana worship. Diana was viewed as the universal goddess of fertility. She was also recognized as the moon goddess, and the goddess of the hunt. Greek culture in its decadence taught and practiced that temple prostitution in Diana worship enhanced fertility, for example, bringing blessing to families, as well as crops and fields.

Paul's preaching brought many new believers to Christ in Ephesus (see Acts 18 and 19). Paul obviously wanted to anchor them in the basic principles of faith in Jesus Christ, as revealed in the Lord's triumphant resurrection from the dead. The foundation of the Gospel "stands sure," Paul taught (2 Timothy 2:19, KJV). Luke's account of Paul's two years of ministry in Ephesus makes clear, however, the demons of Diana worship did not give up easily.

As Paul preached the Gospel in Ephesus, the new message of Jesus Christ found a large and hungry following. When the Apostle Paul told them of the sacrificial death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, they accepted the message of the love of God, including the fidelity it established in marriage. Edward Gibbon, author of *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, wrote that "marital faithfulness in the Roman Empire was virtually unknown," and that "the dignity of marriage was restored by the Christians."<sup>2</sup> These new believers were still learning what it meant as Christians to walk away from the immorality of Diana's temple and live in moral purity.

It was essential, therefore, for Paul to distinguish what was foundational in the Gospel message. Only then could he identify what was cultural and not foundational. Paul was well able to make those distinctions. He knew "the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit, because anyone who serves Christ in this way is pleasing to God and approved by men" (Romans 14:17-18, Luke 17:20-21). The following shows just how capable Paul was at laying the foundation of the Gospel, and at the same time handling the culture that surrounded the churches that were springing up:



*“Though I am free and belong to no man, I make myself a slave to everyone, to win as many as possible. To the Jews I became like a Jew, to win the Jews. To those under the law I became like one under the law (though I myself am not under the law), so as to win those under the law. To those not having the law I became like one not having the law (though I am not free from God's law but am under Christ's law), so as to win those not having the law. To the weak I became weak, to win the weak. I have become all things to all men so that by all possible means I might save some. I do all this for the sake of the gospel, that I may share in its blessing” (1 Corinthians 9:19-23).*

With this background, we can begin to understand the following passages:

**1 Timothy 2:9-15:** “I also want women to dress modestly, with decency and propriety, not with braided hair or gold or pearls or expensive clothes, but with good deeds, appropriate for women who profess to worship God. A woman should learn in quietness and full submission. I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man; she must be silent. For Adam was formed first, then Eve. And Adam was not the one deceived; it was the woman who was deceived and became a sinner. But women will be saved through childbearing — if they continue in faith, love and holiness with propriety” (see also Titus 2:4-5).

**Titus 2:3-5:** “...aged women” [should] “teach the young women to be sober, to love their husbands, to love their children, to be discreet, chaste, keepers at home, good, obedient to their own husbands, that the word of God be not blasphemed” (KJV).

**1 Corinthians 11:4-16:** “Every man who prays or prophesies with his head covered dishonors his head. And every woman who prays or prophesies with her head uncovered dishonors her head — it is just as though her head were shaved. If a woman does not cover her head, she should have her hair cut off; and if it is a disgrace for a woman to have her hair cut or shaved off, she should cover her head. A man ought not to cover his head since he is the image and glory of God; but the woman is the glory of man... long hair is given to her as a covering. If anyone wants to be contentious about this, we have no other practice — nor do the churches of God.”

This, then, is the language of apostles who understood culture and how customs flow from it. At the same time they knew what the message of Jesus Christ was all about, and the great power of the Holy Spirit to launch new beginnings in people’s lives. Paul no doubt wanted to break the controlling, demonic influence of the “priestesses” in the temple of Diana and lead the church and its families into the faithfulness that so describes the heart of God.

To achieve this in the lives of the Ephesians, Paul knew the new congregation had to distance itself from the customs, dress, and practices of Diana worship. This meant Paul had to limit the role of women in settings where Diana worship was so predominant, and especially in the infant church at Ephesus, the home town of Diana worship.

Paul met this need with his list that included braided hair, gold jewelry, pearls, expensive clothes, head coverings, and long hair for women. It also explains Paul's instruction to Timothy: "I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man; she must be silent" (1 Timothy 2:12-13).

Regarding the injunction against women teaching men, two examples will make the point that this too was a cultural command. First, any interpretation of this admonition must be made recalling Paul wrote to Timothy regarding issues in the church at Ephesus. Priscilla, a woman, and the stronger personality in her marriage to Aquila, took the lead in teaching Apollos "the way of God more adequately." She did it *in Ephesus* where the church met in her house (Acts 18:26; Romans 16:4-5). So the admonition in 1 Timothy 2 was not a divine mandate binding the Lord's church in all generations worldwide, but an adaptation to a cultural setting.

## Conclusion

The divine ideal remains to this day. Equality and unity in role relationships is the standard for all generations. This model is expressed first in the Trinity, and then in the Garden of Eden. It is also exemplified in the New Testament through the ministry of Jesus and the life of the Early Church.

The challenge to reach this generation with the Gospel is so great that each of the gifts the Holy Spirit gives to believers is needed in kingdom service; no one – male or female – should be restricted.

Based on these biblical and theological foundations, the IPHC affirms the role of women in all areas of ministry, including all conference and denominational roles, as well as pastoral ministry.

## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> [IPHC Manual 2009 – 2013, p. 36.] Scripture references in this Position Paper come from the New International Version (NIV), except as otherwise noted.

<sup>2</sup> Edward Gibbon. History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire. Vol. 1, (London. 1898, p. 313, note 40; also p. 478).

## FOR FURTHER STUDY

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