



Baptist Churches

WESTERN AUSTRALIA

Statement on Women and Men in Ministry

Theology

We believe the Bible teaches that men and women were created by God and equally bear His image (Gen. 1:27). God's intention was for them to share oneness and community (Gen. 2:23-24), even as the Godhead experiences oneness within the Trinity. Each had a direct relationship with God and they shared jointly the responsibilities of rearing children and having dominion over the created order (Gen. 1:26-28). However, human oneness was shattered by the Fall. The struggle for power and the desire to "rule over" another is part of the result of human sin. Genesis 3:16 is a prediction of the effects of the Fall rather than a prescription of God's ideal order.

However, God has acted in Christ to redeem the human race, and to offer to all people the opportunity to be part of the New Community, His church. It is God's intention for his children to experience the oneness that exists between the Father and the Son (John 17:11, 20-23). This means that old divisions and hierarchies between genders and races are not to be tolerated in the church, where all are "one in Christ Jesus" (Gal. 3:28).

In the formation of the church at Pentecost, the Holy Spirit was poured out on women and men alike, as had been predicted long before the coming of Christ (Joel 2:28, Acts 2:18). In the New Testament, women as well as men exercise prophetic and priestly functions (Acts 2:17-18, 1 Cor. 11:4-5, 1 Peter 2:9-10). Further, the Spirit bestows gifts on all members of the New Community sovereignly, without giving anyone preferential treatment based on gender (Acts 2:1-21, 1 Cor. 12:7,11). Every believer is to offer her or his gifts for the benefit of the Body of Christ (Rom. 12:4-8, 1 Peter 4:10-11). To prevent believers from exercising their spiritual gifts is to quench the work of the Spirit.

In all attempts to understand and put into practice appropriate relationships between genders in the body of Christ, our sole authority is the will of God as expressed in Scripture. A few isolated scriptural texts appear to restrict the full ministry freedom of women. The interpretation of those passages must take into account their relation to the broader teaching of Scripture and their specific contexts. We believe that, when the Bible is interpreted comprehensively, it teaches the full equality of men and women in status, giftedness, and opportunity for ministry.

History

In 1991 Bentley Baptist nominated Valma Manning (a member of the Union Executive from 1990) to the position of the Western Australian Baptist Union President. By October of that year the church had withdrawn its nomination citing the best interests of the Baptist denomination and strongly requesting the establishment of a Task Force to deal with the issue of women in ministry.¹

The Baptist Union Council duly established a Task Force in November 1991 giving it a twofold brief. First, to address the issue of women in ministry with particular reference to which positions women could appropriately hold within the denomination. Secondly, the Task Force was instructed to consider how best to deal with issues of contention within the denomination in order to maintain unity while embracing diversity.²

The resulting recommendations were presented to the Annual Assembly in October, 1992 with the Task Force recommending, among other things, that when a woman is nominated to a denominational position, normal voting procedures should be followed.³

A move that went hand in hand with both the appointment of the Task Force and its final recommendations was the establishment of another Task Force to investigate replacing the practice of Ordination with Accreditation.⁴ The Task Force presented its report, *Baptist Churches of Western Australia Task Force on Ordination and Accreditation. Revised Final Report* to the 1995 Spring and Annual Assemblies, making the recommendation to cease ordaining pastors and practice accreditation only. This recommendation was accepted by the Assembly and has since been the practice in Western Australia.

Practice

Based on the theological position described above and the resolutions of the 1992 Baptist Assembly we are committed to the following practices:

- To provide opportunity for ministry based on giftedness and character, without regard to gender.
- To pursue the kind of purity and loyalty in relationships between genders that led New Testament writers to describe them in terms of family: “brothers and sisters.”
- To use sensitivity in language that reflects the honour and value God desires for maleness and femaleness and to encourage the use of translations of Scripture that accurately portray God’s will that His church be an inclusive community.
- To be intentional where appropriate in overcoming sexist elements of our culture and to offer encouragement to women in areas where their giftedness has been traditionally discouraged.

¹ Minutes of the 95th Annual Assembly of the Baptist Union of Western Australia. 19th of October, 1991.

² Task Force Concerning The Ministry Of Women: Recommendations to Annual Assembly of the Baptist Union of Western Australia, October 1992. 1.

³ Task Force Concerning The Ministry Of Women: Recommendations to Annual Assembly of the Baptist Union of Western Australia, October 1992. 1.

⁴ Minutes of the 96th Annual Assembly. 16 -17 October, 1992 held at the North Beach Baptist Church. 19. At the 1992 Annual Assembly Bob Clark moved that a Task Force be set up to investigate the practice of Accreditation and its relationship to Ordination. .

- To teach and model these values to members of our community, to the Baptist churches Western Australia, and to the world at large.

For further study and more complete discussion of the key scriptural passages pertaining to this issue, we recommend:

Biezikian, Gilbert, Beyond Sex Roles, Baker
Barton, Ruth, Becoming a Women of Strength, Shaw
Hull, Gretchen, Equal to Serve, Fleming H. Revell
Keener, Craig, Paul, Women, Wives, Hendrickson
Ogden, Greg, The New Reformation, Zondervan
Spencer, Aida, Beyond the Curse, Hendrickson

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