

Letter from Scott (Lead Pastor)

Like some of you, I've lost a lot of sleep over this journey we are on - as I've both led and lived in the middle of this with all of you. As I've studied and taught scripture on my knees, and listened attentively to the history of the Church (ancient and modern)... And as I've listening to you - to the ache and wounds of some one day, and to the anxiety or fear of another the next.

And so today, beyond the biblical exegesis that I have offered, I want to bring **a few pastoral remarks.**

First, we need to acknowledge that we are not alone in having this conversation. As Jay Gurnett mentioned this morning, evangelical churches have been engaged in this conversation for years, decades, even centuries. In our city, there are many evangelical churches led by male-only elders, and there are many other churches with men and women serving together as elders - including Saanich Baptist, the Church of the Naz, Gateway, Emmanuel Baptist, Victoria Alliance, and as of just recently, SBF (our sister church in Saanichton). Each made this decision in the light of their understanding of scripture.

And at a larger scale, this is a conversation that many evangelical denominations have engaged in - many affirming that a credible case can be made "within the bounds of orthodoxy and a commitment to biblical authority" for two differing conclusions.

The Canadian Baptists, Free Methodists, Evangelical Covenant Church, and the Church of the Nazarene are all national denominations that have affirmed the biblical call for women in leadership across their entire movement. And then there are many evangelical movements - the Christian and Missionary Alliance, the Mennonite Brethren, the Baptist General Conference (whom I pastored with for 10 years), the Pentecostal Assemblies of Canada, and many others who have all declared this a **non-confessional issue**, inviting churches to discern for themselves which interpretation will guide them. And with this, affirming that this is not an issue that should divide evangelicals or be held over one another as a litmus test to orthodoxy.

And I say this not to pressure anyone, but to highlight that we are not the first to explore this... Many God-honoring, Christ-centered, biblically-committed, evangelical men, women and churches have fought for this - long before our cultural moment.

So, please here me church - though many of us have strong and deep feelings about what the bible teaches on this matter, we need to be very careful not to demonize or even discredit those who interpret Scripture differently. As anyone

studying scripture on this topic is forced to admit, this is not a simple matter to make sense of. There are complicated questions on both sides of the conversation.

Now obviously, there are **extreme** positions - on both ends of the spectrum that move well beyond orthodoxy and the bounds of biblical thinking, but that is not what we are seeking or proposing.

As we have affirmed through all of our history, and again and again in these days, **to be a Christian is to live in joyful submission to the Word of God**. And our calling is to do all we can to hear, understand, and follow God's Word - seeking to understand it in its original context and to discover its implications for our lives today.

But, as we know, it's hard. It's hard to have this conversation.

Because it's not just theological. It's personal. And for Lambrick, it's historical.

And so it's easy and understandable for some to **not** want us to have this conversation **at all**, *apart from theology*, simply for the way **it makes things uncomfortable**, if not, **downright painful**. I've heard that from some over the years.

And yet **Jesus** commands us - "*Blessed are the **peace-makers**."*

Not just peace-**keeper**, or worse, **conflict-avoiders**.

Which is how many of us are wired. Right?

We hate discomfort, confrontation, and conflict.

But in spite of this, or maybe because of it, Jesus calls us to be **peace-makers**. Which, as most of us know, is not about the absence of tension, or things feeling calm and pleasant. At least not biblically. In the Bible peace refers to **God's Shalom** - God's restoring and reconciling grace being experienced by all...

Which means that sometimes obeying Jesus in **peace-making** actually involves some real discomfort - but with the goal of something better. Something redemptive: **Peace - God's Shalom - for all**.

Although we've likely never stated it this way, this is what is guiding the Elders and I as we have led and are leading toward this proposed change - we are seeking to **make peace** - seeking **shalom for all**... women and men...

Now, as I've already said, though some will argue that what we are voting on in two weeks is a matter of either **obeying** or **denying** scripture, the Elders and I stand with many evangelicals that believe this conversation and decision is **not** primarily about **biblical authority**, but **biblical interpretation**.

Though some may disagree with our interpretation, a coherent biblical case has been made that, interpreted in context, the gospel points toward the full partnership of men and women in life and leadership - that our gender **differences** don't necessitate the perpetuation of gender **hierarchy** (which we see rooted in the fall).

We believe that Jesus, and the coming of the Spirit, and the example of Paul, and the rest of the New Testament **point us beyond themselves** to a day when the church would affirm and embody the “blessed alliance” of men and women sharing together as equal partners in life and leadership. Restoring through Christ, what we see in the beginning - in Gen 1 - where Adam and Eve were commanded and blessed by God to fulfill their creation mandate together - in shared submission to the ultimate rule of God... With **no distinction** of roles based on gender.

This is the vision and trajectory that I am and we are convinced the Bible calls us to pursue.

We believe this interpretation best honors the whole story of God’s revelation, including Paul’s prohibitive texts understood in context.

Now, hear me clearly friends - everyone - **in saying this** we are **not** *saying, teaching or implying* that the gospel does away with gender or gender distinctions. God has made us male and female. The gospel does not change or do away with this. *But it does confront and lead toward the overturning of **gender-hierarchy**.*

And that is what the Elders and I are seeking in this proposed change to our bylaws, and church practice.

Which leads me to a question I think some of us need to consider.

And I say this as an honest challenge to those of you who believe the Bible **only allows male leadership in the church.**

I know the scripture that guides you in this, and I understand your commitment to these texts. I’m committed to them as well, but obviously interpret them differently. But here’s the question I’m asking you to consider:

Does your reading of the Bible and conviction about God’s design for church leadership **have room for God to call forth women like Miriam** in our midst (*who, who in Exodus, led God’s people in prayer and worship*)... **women like Deborah** (*who was called and blessed by God to lead Israel politically, militarily and spiritually - in Judges 4-5*)... **and women like Huldah** (*who was called forth by God to direct King Josiah to call the people of God back to righteousness - in 2 Kings 22*)?

Does your biblical conviction have room for God to, at least, invite these women to the table today - among us?

If not, tell me - how is this biblical? How is this honoring of the whole story of God’s revelation?

Similarly, in regard to the witness of the New Testament, does your reading of the Bible and conviction about God’s design for church leadership **have room for**

God to call forth **women like Phoebe** (whom Paul celebrated in Romans 16 for her ministry and leadership in the church - with no suggestion that it was limited to women), **women like Priscilla** (whom Paul honored, alongside her husband, for teaching theology to a man - again honored in Romans 16), and **women like Junia** (whom to the Apostle Paul celebrated as a pioneering leader in his day - again in Romans 16)?

Does your biblical conviction have room for God to, at least, invite these women to the table today - among us?

Again, if not, tell me - how is this biblical?

How is this honoring **all scripture** as God-breathed, and useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness?

Can we sit with this question in the coming days - for the sake of the Miriam's, Deborah's, Huldah's, Phoebe's, Priscilla's and Junia's **that God has GIVEN + will GIVE US?**

Oh friends, **this is a costly conversation** - but **the cost of not addressing it is even greater.**

First, **there is the cost of dishonoring and disempowering women** that God has gifted and called to serve the church and world with us.

Which has happened too often over the years...

Many stories can be told - to our collective shame.

Second, **there's the cost of us all missing out on having women at the table.**

Personally, *I feel this so often.* I am a better man, pastor, leader and preacher today because of the women who have shared in leadership with me over the years. Whom I've served alongside and under.

Just as I'm a better husband and father when I listen to my wife and honor her as my partner in marriage and parenting; I'm a better Christian, leader, pastor and preacher when I am actively listening to, learning from and walking with not just Christ-seeking men, but Christ-seeking women as well.

I need the pastoral and leadership contributions of women.

And I'm convinced we all do...

So, yes, it's costly to lead this process, **but it's even more costly to ignore it.**

Third, there's **the cost of continuing to maintain a practice that unnecessarily serves as a barrier** to so many of our non-believing friends and neighbors encountering the gospel among us.

And this isn't hypothetical.

Two years ago, a young woman moved in just a few houses away - who needed a church community to nurture her fragile faith through the trial of studying at UVic - but who felt unable to step in our doors because she couldn't reconcile the gospel we proclaim with our exclusion of women from the Board.

And it's not just one story. It has happened so many times over the years. It's happened in this season.

Our mission is *to embrace and invite everyone to follow Jesus with us* - but for many, our historic practice of excluding women from leadership is a barrier that causes many to feel **pushed away**, rather than **embraced**. Including some of our own friends, neighbors, children and grandchildren.

So, yes, it's costly to lead this process, **but it's even more costly to ignore it.**

So, for me, this is about **aligning ourselves with the gospel** and **honoring God's revelation in the whole Story of Scripture.**

This is about **prioritizing God's mission** - as Jay talked about this morning.

This is about **making peace** - and honoring the voice of the Spirit in the life of the church that has increasingly and consistently called for this change.

This is **pastoral** - particularly toward **women** - and particularly those who've suffered at the hands of men and systems that have diminished and disempowered them.

But equally, this is about the discipling of **men** - men who will follow Jesus in laying down their power to lift up others, and particularly women...

This is about **ministry - God's ministry** among us - through **all** the gifts at work in **all** God's people...

And ultimately, this is about **bowing**, not to culture, but **to Jesus** - who, centuries ago, in a male-only leadership world - welcomed and celebrated Mary's choice (in Luke 10) to embrace the posture of a disciple - **something formerly only open to men.**

And yet a decision that Jesus declared **will not be taken from her...**

So, whether we call it **complementary egalitarianism**.

Or **complementarity without hierarchy**.

Or **biblical mutuality**.

Or **equal partnership in Christ** - I don't care.

All that matters is that we **follow Jesus together** - seeking the gospel of Jesus to increasingly define and guide our life together.

So, what happens if this proposal doesn't pass?

If it gets voted down?

Well, in many ways, the answer is the same **whatever happens**.

There will be real pain for some, and deep relief for others.

And some hard decisions will come for some - on both ends of the spectrum.

But either way, we will all wake up May 17 with the call of Jesus in our hearts, saying, "*Come, follow me...*"

*Come, put your Hope **in Me**...*

Come, deny yourself, take up your cross and follow Me..."

With hope that Jesus is still seeking His kingdom and will - and He is not done.

Thank God.