

Declaration on the Position, Role, and Ministry of Men and Women in the Church

We – a group of men from the Allgäu and other regions of Germany who are trying to follow Jesus – have come, before God and through his word, to the realization that we were wrong in our attitude and opinion about the biblical role of women. We have summarized this realization in this declaration and are making it public. Many believing men already hold this view of the biblical equality of men and women, which in our conviction corresponds better to God's thoughts. Yet many Christians for whom the Bible (as for us) is God's unshakable standard are still of the opinion that there is no equal standing of men and women and that, on the basis of biblical teaching, there cannot be. Our appeal is addressed to them: to study Holy Scripture once more with this question in mind and to recognize God's plan and creation order (before the Fall and in salvation in Christ). We can no longer remain silent about this, because the consequences and effects on the churches are a loss, and in the women affected they cause in part great hurt and deep insecurity. We ourselves defended, taught, and lived this wrong view for decades. It is therefore highly relevant and of great importance how we view the position and role of men and women.

We do not want to provoke anyone, even though with this topic that can hardly be avoided, even without any intention to do so. We are equally aware that this question is not decisive for salvation, but church life is, after all, affected by it every day.

We invite all men to join this statement, now or later, and to declare this by having their names published.

What have we come to understand, how do we see it today?

We believe that the Bible teaches the equality and the mutual – not one-sided – submission of men and women. The God-given difference between the sexes leads to mutual complementing of one another. Without hierarchy, and with the full participation of women and men in all areas of ministry and leadership in the church.

“God created men and women in his image. He appointed both to rule over this world. He has never withdrawn this mandate from human beings. Not from women either. In the Old Testament we see how God again and again calls and commissions women. That he blesses them and empowers them as queens (Esther), prophetesses (e.g., Huldah, Miriam, Deborah), and judges (Deborah, Judges 4:4). In the New Testament we see how Jesus teaches women (Luke 10:39), heals them (Matthew 9:20–22), sets them free (Luke 8:2), respects women and commissions them; after his resurrection he sends them out to proclaim the message (Matthew 28:10, 18–20). In the first churches we see that the Holy Spirit came down on men and women in the same way (Acts 2:4, 17–21). This Spirit gave both of them spiritual gifts for the church in equal measure (1 Corinthians 12), so that both took an active part in the church, that they held leadership positions (Romans 16), and that they were persecuted in the same way as men. In church history it is striking that especially in times of spiritual awakening and revival many women were and are involved. That is why the signatories hold the view that women, in the same way as men, are called and gifted to carry out the Great Commission of Jesus Christ and to take on leadership tasks in the churches, which include preaching and teaching. In order to fulfill God's will, men and women must spread the kingdom of God in this world together, without differences of

hierarchy and without power struggles, in mutual submission, with respect and love. This only works well together.”¹

Summarized once more, we stand up for this conviction:

- Man and woman are equally created in God’s image, in the first and in the new creation (Col 3:10; 2 Cor 3:18).
- Man and woman have equally received the creation mandate and God’s blessing for it (Gen 1:26–30).
- The redeemed – men and women – are equal “in Christ”; they share the same standing in salvation (Rom 10:12–13; Gal 3:28; 1 Cor 11:11).
- The nature of church leadership is not based on hierarchy but on servant leadership, and it applies equally to men and women (1 Cor 1–2; 9:19; 16:16; Matt 20:25–28; Luke 22:25–27).
- Mutual submission in the church presupposes the equal standing of women and men (Eph 5:18–21; Gal 5:13; Rom 12:10; Eph 4:2).
- Mutual submission in marriage presupposes the equality of men and women (Eph 5:21–22; Col 3:18–19; Titus 2:4).
- The unity of the body of Christ presupposes the equal standing of men and women (1 Cor 12:25).
- The priesthood of all believers presupposes the equality of men and women (2 Cor 3:12–18; Col 3:16; 1 Cor 14:26; 1 Pet 2:9; Heb 10:19–22).
- The gifts of the Spirit manifest the equality of men and women in the church (1 Cor 12–14; Rom 12:6–8).
- Freedom in Christ presupposes the equality of men and women (Gal 3:28; 5:1; 1 Thess 2:7).
- The new creation in Christ, which has already begun, presupposes the equality of man and woman and affirms that the sexes complement each other (1 Cor 7; 1 Tim 4:3; Eph 2:11–22).

Our Confession of Guilt and Request for Forgiveness

Not everything necessarily applies to every signatory of this confession, but we have gathered together what our conscience has shown us, because none of it may remain unspoken. We have **not** behaved in keeping with what Holy Scripture tells us. It, and nothing else, is our binding standard. Neither the world nor its zeitgeist is our motivation or our model. We therefore see ourselves called to an open and unsparing confession of sin. We hope that these words will reach the ears and hearts of our sisters in Christ. At the same time our repentance is directed to our Creator:

Yahweh Elohim, Creator of man and woman, forgive us that we thought, demanded, and acted as if women were not of equal standing but subordinate. As if they were not counterparts on an equal footing, but one step below us.

Forgive us that we hindered women from developing their gifts fully and freely. We are sorry that we restricted women’s freedoms, that we ignored their gifts, that we silenced their voices.

Lord Jesus, forgive us that we thought women had to be silent in the assembly or in the worship service and were not allowed to teach or lead.

We confess to our wives and to our sisters in the Lord, to all women who work for the kingdom of God, that we regarded you as hierarchically under the authority of men! Forgive us this wrong attitude,

which we thought was godly and biblical! We actually believed – and looking back we are ashamed of it – that we were serving God and obeying his word.

Forgive us that we discussed and decided important questions in the church without you. We did not ask for your counsel, even though these decisions affected you just as much! We acted as if we did not need you – worse still, as if you were not there at all.

Forgive us that we always judged, criticized, underestimated, and sometimes even condemned you and what you did and wanted to do for Jesus from a hierarchical point of view.

We men have failed. Often, and without noticing it, we were selfish, domineering, and discriminating machos and know-it-alls. Blind to ourselves. Blind to you women and to your callings and gifts. And therefore, in this vital question of life, blind to God, our Creator as well.

Forgive us where we have exploited you. Forgive us where we pushed you to the front and relied on you, where we should have stood up like men and led the way, and where you could rightly have expected this of us.

Forgive us our indifference to what was hard for you in the role we assigned you, what hurt you, and what you never understood. Forgive us that we did not ask you how you felt about these discriminating attitudes and teachings. Forgive us that we did not stand on your side.

We are very sorry. We were wrong.

We commit ourselves to do everything we can to honor, encourage, value, praise, listen to, and respect women. We firmly commit ourselves to invite women as partners with equal rights in faith, in leadership, and in life, and to practice and promote biblical equality.

Stand up! Be free! Serve the Lord with joy!

We All Must Act and ...²

Enter into a positive dialogue by lamenting the mistakes and the pain we have caused, repenting of them, changing our thinking, and seeking reconciliation; in the conviction that this is a first step toward a greater empowerment through Christ for women, girls, men, and boys.

Honor. We honor the strength and courage, the gifts and the ministry of women in the church of Jesus all over the world.

Dedicate. Dedicate our gifts and opportunities to God, in order to strengthen the local and the worldwide church of Jesus in its growth and maturing, following the example of Christ and his servant leadership.

Commit ourselves to the cooperation of women and men.

Equip. Equip women and girls to take on leadership roles in the church of Jesus and in all areas of society, which includes training, development, and the best possible use of innovative resources.

May 20, 2021

If you would like to support this declaration, even if it is only agreement with the view presented here, which you may have always held, please send me an e-mail with your name at hj-ronsdorf@t-online.de. This declaration is published and updated on the homepage www.frauen-vergebt-uns.de.

Hans-Jörg Ronsdorf

Ingo Damith

Tobi Stricker

Wolfgang Klöckner

Jochen Gerbershagen

Fridtjof Wandt

Emil Wagner

Klaus Sydow

Christian Beese

Rolf Stücher

Bernd Hüsken

Bernd Bessler

Christof Lenzen

Daniel Blatt

Notes

1. This text is by Elke Werner and is quoted here with her kind permission. <https://www.wings-online.de/>
2. Taken from the “Call to All Christians” of June 2019 in Amsterdam.