

Frequently Asked Questions Regarding Women & Worship at Highlands

1. Q: Why have a document specifically addressing the role of women in worship?

A: Because gender issues are a highly charged topic in our society. Both social liberals and social conservatives have deep commitments on these issues. Many Christians who come to Highlands from other churches may wonder why we do, or don't do, different things in this area.

2. Q: Is it important where someone stands on women in Christian worship?

A: Absolutely. God has given clear instructions about his worship and to dismiss his instructions would be a great sin. Likewise, how we conduct our worship bears testimony to how much we love each other. Our worship should reflect the invitation of God to all people to participate in his worship as sons and daughters.

3. Q: Are not the instructions in the Bible about some things old and outdated? Aren't some teachings in the Bible, particularly about women, just reflections of a patriarchal culture?

A: God knew that culture would change when he "breathed out" (2 Tim 3:16) his word. God's word is "living" (Heb 4:12) and continues to speak to us today with authority, power and healing. The New Testament didn't simply reflect the culture of its day, it challenged it constantly. This is especially true with issues regarding women.

4. Q: Should women be allowed to do things in worship simply because Scripture doesn't speak to it?

A: We would never wish to say that anything that is not forbidden is permitted. We must seek God's wisdom in all of Scripture to try to judge matters on which Scripture is silent. Our Confession of Faith has wise counsel on this subject: "There are some circumstances concerning the worship of God, and government of the church, common to human actions and societies, which are to be ordered by the light of nature, and Christian prudence, according to the general rules of the Word, which are always to be observed." If we were to take the negative approach to this issue, that things which are not permitted must be forbidden, we would end up with many absurdities. For one, elders would not be allowed to lay hands on people in prayer. If we read Scripture negatively only with women we would seem to be prejudicial in our use of Scripture.

5. Q: What are women not permitted to do in the church?

A: Women are not permitted to "teach or have authority over a man." (1 Tim 2:12) The context of this passage seems to indicate that "teaching" means "preaching" (a common use of the term in the New Testament). The exercise of authority in the church is given to the elders. Therefore, for that reason,

and several others, women do not have the calling to be elders.

6. Q: What acts of the elders are authoritative acts?

A: Preaching/teaching, ordaining officers, and exercising church discipline are all areas in which elders have formal authority and sole authority as they pertain to worship. For instance, though all believers are to speak God's word to others, only the elders, or those whom the elders are training for ordained ministry, may preach to God's people. Any member of the church can nominate someone for church office. The members must consent to someone being placed in authority over them. But, only the elders may ordain the person. Every person in the congregation should confront sin, but only the elders may do so on behalf of the church of Jesus. Other actions, such as reading Scripture, leading music, collecting the offering, and giving praises to the Lord, are not authoritative acts.

7. Q: Are only elders or men allowed to lay hands on people for healing?

A: There is no passage in the New Testament which forbids non-elders or women from laying on hands to pray for healing. In fact the New Testament never describes elders as laying on hands to heal. The most direct passage regarding the elders' ministry of healing prayer is James 5:14, which mentions prayer and anointing with oil, but not laying on of hands. The only passage which teaches about the practice of laying on hands to heal is Mark 16:17-18, which says that "those who believe" will lay on hands in healing. This passage seems to include women in this ministry.

8. Q: But isn't "laying on of hands" an act of authority and therefore only appropriate for elders?

A: The laying on of hands IS an act of authority when it is the laying on of hands in ordination. There are at least three different actions which the phrase "laying on of hands" can describe: healing (Acts 9:17), ordination (1 Tim 5:22), and arrest (Luke 22:53). Only the elders of the church can ordain someone to office.

9. Q: Are women allowed at Session meetings?

A: Session meetings are open for members of Highlands to come and observe. Any member of Highlands may ask to address the Session (in advance) and will be placed on the docket to do so. Members come for membership interviews, for counsel, for private confession of sin, and to make their opinions known. Members of Highlands are also sometimes asked to attend a Session meeting to make reports on ministries or offer the Session insight or counsel. Observers of Session meetings cannot participate in discussions uninvited and even if invited to discuss an issue cannot take part in voting/decision making. In all of these things, the Session of Highlands makes no distinction between men, women or children. We deeply desire to hear the perspectives and concerns of all our members and invite all our members into the worship of and service of our Triune God.