

Gender and the Church

Modified from an article on the same topic by Rev. Tim Keller¹

INTRODUCTION

The Debate in the Church. City Church is committed to a high view of Scripture. We believe that unless the Bible is God's Word to us, we live without any real moral authority. "Right" and "wrong" would then become matters of personal taste or popular opinion. We would not really be able to talk of justice or truth at all, for there is no way to know objective truth without the Bible as our final authority.

Today, some people charge that the church and traditional Christianity are oppressive to women, denying them the right to the full use of their gifts in ministry. Some claim additionally that the Bible in general (and Paul in particular) are specifically guilty of this unjust treatment of women. These are extremely serious issues, especially for City Church. We are committed to the authority of the Bible and also to the liberation of all Christians (male and female alike) to use their gifts in ministry.

The following paper represents much study and reflection upon Biblical text. It will, we hope, serve as a foundational paper for future patterns of women's ministry in the life of our church family.

The Problem of "Objectivity."

I recognize that it may seem easy for me (as a man) to talk in an objective, studied way about what this or that verse means about this subject. I can imagine women saying to me in the midst of such a discussion, "For you this is a discussion, but for me this is my life you're messing with!" I recognize that this may be difficult for some. But my hope is that all who are interested in this subject will approach it in a way that elevates Biblical truth above emotional considerations. Both men and women will find it difficult to hear God's voice clearly and submit to His authority because of the biased, emotional grids we carry with us to the discussion table. But only when we come submissively to the table, with God's Word as our final authority, can we even begin to then submit to one another.

The Problem of Divisions.

The divisions among evangelical Christians over this issue are very tragic. For many centuries, the church did not let the Scripture lead it away from the general oppression of women conducted by society. The church should have seen that the Bible does not teach the inferiority of women. Now, we fear, the fruit of the church's sin are coming home to it.

We live in an era of tension. In many churches, a particular view of women in ministry has become a basis for fellowship. Sometimes the message is: "though we believe in the Scripture, in Jesus as the Son of God, the need for repentance and faith in order to be born again, the importance of spreading the kingdom through the ministry of the Holy Spirit – if you don't share my view of women in ministry, there's the door!"

¹ This paper, though organized and written by Redeemer pastor, Scott Sauls, is almost in its entirety a combined adaptation of similar papers written by Pastor Tim Keller (Redeemer Presbyterian in New York City), Charles Dunahoo (of the Christian Education branch of the PCA), Dr. David Jones (Theology and Ethics professor at Covenant Seminary), Pastor James Boice (Tenth Presbyterian in Philadelphia), and Mr. Jerram Barrs (Practical Theology professor at Covenant Seminary and Director of the Francis Schaeffer Institute). In other words, it's a product of the work of many fine scholars, with very little that could be considered original thought. Of all those cited above, Tim Keller is responsible for the lion's share of this paper.

We do not want that to be the case at City Church. If you hold a view that differs from church policy or from the personal approach of the pastor or elders, you should not feel bound to leave. We will not give the “left foot of fellowship” to those who have a like-minded view regarding the authority of Scripture, yet have a view that differs from ours which they have arrived at through their own study of Scripture.

THE TRINITARIAN PATTERN AND BIBLICAL HEADSHIP

“Now I want you to realize that the head of every man is Christ, and the head of woman is man, and the head of Christ is God” (1 Corinthians 11:3). Here Paul says that the man is the “head” of the woman. But what does that mean?

Biblical headship involves serving.

Let’s look at two analogies. First, Christ’s headship of man is clearly one of authority (there is submission), and yet His authority is expressed through sacrificial service. Jesus discovers our needs and meets them. “Christ did not please Himself,” therefore we must “please our neighbor for his good, to build him up” (Romans 15:2-3). A “head’s” job is to use authority to please, to meet needs, to serve.

Biblical headship involves voluntary, respectful submission between equals.

The second analogy is critical: “the head of Christ is God.” Whereas Christ is of a higher order of being than human beings, the Father and the Son are equal in power, greatness, and dignity. The Son is not inferior to the Father at all. This second analogy proves that “headship” does not imply superiority. Philippians 2:6 tells us that the Son was equal to the Father, but voluntarily took on a subordinate role, obeying the Father. He did this to accomplish our salvation.

What do we conclude about “headship” from the Christ-to-mankind and the God-to-Chris analogies?

Headship is something given by one person to another. The giver is equal to the receiver; the receiver has a real and final authority, but uses it only to serve and please and build up the giver.

The traditionalist misunderstanding.

What does it mean, then, when Paul says (when discussing the role of women in the church) “the head of the woman is man?” There is a traditional view that comes to Scripture with a prejudice. It asserts, or at least implies, that women are inferior in many ways, unfit for leadership. This leads to all sorts of conclusions: “it means women should stay home, should not have careers, should not take jobs of leadership, and so on.” This view looks to the first analogy of headship (Christ and man) but not the second one (the Father and the Son), where there is no inferiority at all. Men and women are both given the mandate to rule the earth (Genesis 1:28), and they are joint-heirs in God’s grace (1 Peter 3:7; Galatians 3:28). Even here in 1 Corinthians 11 Paul makes it clear that there is equality of being. In v. 8, he points out that Eve came from Adam, so “woman was created for man, not man for woman.” Yet in vv. 11-12, he points out that each human male is born of a woman, so “man is not independent of woman.” Man should not lord it over women with his authority, since “everything comes from God.” All authority is derivative from God and partial. We exercise authority only as an act of submission to God.

The feminist misunderstanding.

But others come to Paul’s statement on headship and try to ignore it. Some say, “Paul only means that Eve came out of Adam.” Many interpreters point out that the Greek meaning of “head” (*kephale*) means “source,” not “authority.” Virtually all evangelical feminist interpreters make this point. The problem is that, while Christ did create humankind, God did not create Christ, He was not the “source.” A survey of 2,336 examples of the use of *kephale* in Greek literature reveals only two times that it is used as “source” and not “authority.” Actually, Paul probably means *kephale* in both senses. In 1 Corinthians 11:8 he says, “For man did not come

from woman, but woman from man; neither was man created for woman, but woman for man.” There the two are combined. Paul grounds male headship in creation (that is, pre-fall, the way God originally intended things to be), while in 1 Corinthians 11:3 he grounds it in the Trinity (in whose image we as human beings have been created).

Evangelical feminist interpreters also point out that Paul told slaves to submit to their masters and also told wives to submit to their husbands. Isn't it (the reasoning goes) natural to assume that, just as slavery has gone by the boards with time, that female submission should as well? The difficulty is Paul's basis. Does Paul ever say: “slaves, obey your masters because of the way you were created?” Does Paul ever ground the basis for slave-master submission in the nature of creation or in the nature of the Trinity? Many feminists say that Paul was simply accommodating himself to the times. But the relationship of man to woman in Paul is not based on customs of the times but the relationships within the Trinity itself. It is grounded not upon changing cultural considerations, but rather upon the timeless nature of the Triune God in whose image we are made.

The evangelical feminists do not come to the Scripture “neutrally” (who does?). They come with this conviction:

“Many Christians thus speak of a wife's being equal to her husband in personhood, but subordinate in function. However, this is just playing word games and is a contradiction in terms. Equality and subordination are contradictions.” – L. Scanzoni and N. Hardesty, *All We're Meant to Be* (Word, 1974), p. 110.

This crucial statement is completely at odds with the God-Christ analogy. Christ was equal with the Father, yet took a submissive, subordinate role. It ignores the 1 Corinthians 11:3 definition of headship, just as does the traditionalist.

THE BIBLICAL PATTERN OF HEADSHIP IS NEITHER THE TRADITIONAL NOR THE FEMINIST. THE FEMINIST REJECTS THE IDEA THAT SUBORDINATION CAN EVER CO-EXIST WITH EQUALITY (THOUGH THIS IS THE BASIS OF THE TRINITY'S RELATIONSHIP). THE TRADITIONALIST BELIEVES THAT SUBORDINATION ASSUMES INEQUALITY. SO BOTH OF THESE GROUPS AGREE, IN THAT THEY REJECT THE BIBLICAL CONCEPT OF HEADSHIP AS INCONSISTENT!

Now let's see how the Trinitarian pattern of rule-and-submission-among-equals works itself out in marriage, in society in general, and in the church.

THE TRINITARIAN PATTERN AND BIBLICAL HEADSHIP

A head may never use authority to please self.

In marriage, wives are told to give headship to their husbands (Ephesians 5:21 ff.). This does not mean that the man simply can make all the decisions nor does it mean that he gets his way whenever there is a difference of opinion. Why? A “head” may never overrule his spouse simply to get his way or please himself (Romans 15:2-3). A head sacrifices his wants and needs to please and build up his partner (Ephesians 5:21 ff.).

Headship is “tie-breaking” authority.

Well, since this is also true of the wife (Ephesians 5:21 – “submit to one another”), then what is the difference? A head only exercises authority to over-rule when he believes his spouse is doing something destructive to her or the family. In a marriage, where there are only two “votes,” how will the stalemate be broken in cases where there is not just a difference in taste or preference, but in cases where both parties believe the other is seriously mistaken? There can be no unity unless one person has the right to cast the deciding “vote.” That person knows that, along with this “right” comes the greatest accountability and responsibility before the God who gives it.

The Bible directs that a wife, when she marries, yield that “right/responsibility” freely to her husband. The husband realizes that ordinarily, his authority does not take the form of “over-ruling” – in fact, the servant-model directs the “head” to usually put aside his own tastes and preferences in deference to pleasing his spouse. But when there is a “hung jury,” and it is critical for one person to take both leadership and responsibility, the “head’s” service takes the form of initiation. He leads by over-ruling.

A problem of practicality.

It is fairly obvious that the need for “tie-breaking authority” is necessary in a marriage partnership. But why does God direct in His Word that it go to the man? Many people struggle the most with this very point. If they cannot see a practical reason for a command of God, they hesitate to commit to it.

We must reject the traditional rationale.

The traditionalist says: “Women must submit because women aren’t fit for making decisions, for leadership.” But many couples will admit that the wife is more decisive and has better judgment than the husband. Besides, the Bible nowhere gives that as a reason.

Our likeness to the Trinity.

The “reason” given by the Bible is simply that man-and-woman were made in the image of the Triune God. Women are called to follow Christ, who voluntarily subordinated Himself in response to the Father’s call. To put this in perspective let’s ask this question: “Why was Christ the one who gave up authority to become subordinate? Why did Christ answer the call from the Father to give away authority?” We don’t know, but if anything, it is a mark of His greatness, not His weakness (see Philippians 2:3-11)! A case could be made, then, that women have this calling because they are greater than men!

The Biblical pattern calls for both parties to submit.

Many godly couples have come to realize, then, that the Biblical pattern is equally difficult for both parties. The woman and the man both must submit first of all to their roles, their call from God.

Society traditionally gave to men the authority to over-rule their spouses for their own pleasure. But the Bible’s “headship” authority is quite different, as we have seen. As a result, many Christian men would gladly give up “tie-breaking,” servant authority to their wives. They don’t like the heavy responsibility for service and self-denial that “headship” brings. On the other hand, many women would gladly take the authority themselves, because they see how men abuse it, just as God predicted (Genesis 3:16). But both must struggle to submit to God’s call.

Tapping into the mystery.

When a Christian couple does so submit, however, they do so because God’s Word directs them to. And after years of practice, they begin to see that this pattern somehow gets them in touch with something deep within them. Neither is demanding submission from the other, but after first submitting to God they are both enabled to submit to one another’s needs. It makes them both strong and tender, bringing them to serve one another yet in different ways.

Woman was created as a “helper” (Genesis 2). This word indicates no weakness at all, but complementary strength. In the Bible, God is our Help. A helper is someone who can help because he or she is stronger than the one being helped. For example, a father can help his son with his homework because he knows more than his son. On the other hand, if he does his homework for him, he has stopped using his strength as a helper. In the same way, women have inherent strengths, insight and endurance and adaptability that men do not generally have. Women “help” their husbands through a willing submission through strength.

Mysterious it is! Real “masculinity” is full of tenderness and real “femininity” is full of strength. But they are still different from one another in many indefinable ways. Submission to God’s pattern for marriage gradually gets you back in touch with these deep truths and you begin to discover your true self.

The Pattern in Society

The next, logical question is: “is every man the head over every woman?” Paul’s statement by itself might lend itself to that conclusion, but the Bible’s testimony as a whole is otherwise.

Women achieve leadership in society.

Even in ancient Israel, at a time where women in society were the property of their husbands or fathers, women were endowed with unusual power in civil affairs. For example, women could not inherit property in those days, yet God specifically dictated that daughters could inherit the property of their fathers (Numbers 27:8). The “wife of noble character” in Proverbs 31 is clearly a woman who works outside the home. Also, Deborah eventually became the political leader, the “president” of Israel (Judges 4). There is no indication that she was acting illegally or extraordinarily.

There is therefore no indication that women in general society need to defer to men. Women can be executives, presidents of banks, or the president of a country. Does this seem inconsistent? Why would the Bible insist on a Trinitarian pattern in marriage, but ignore it in society?

Again, we must speculate a bit, because the Bible does not answer all of these “why” questions. One good possibility, however, may lay in the Biblical basis for democracy.

Democracy is for society while headship-submission is for our spiritual lives.

Christians are for democracy because we believe in sin. Many people believe in it for the opposite reason. Rousseau believed in democracy because he thought people were so wise and good that no one is fit to be a slave. Of course, Christians wish for no one to be a slave, but we believe democracy is good because no one is fit to be a master! Because of sin, people misuse absolute authority. Thus it is clear that monarchy, wise and good kings, would be a form of government that very much fits the Trinitarian pattern. God is a King, not a President, and our spiritual lives are based on monarchy. So why don’t we have Kings? The answer is that we have to abolish monarchy due to sin. We have to treat people as equal.

C.S. Lewis explains the Christian view of equality:

“This introduces a view of equality rather different from that in which we have been trained. I do not think that equality is one of those things (like wisdom or joy) which are good simply in themselves and for their own sakes. I think it is in the same class as medicine, which is good because we are ill, or clothes which are good because we are no longer innocent. I don’t think the old authority of kings, priests, husbands, or fathers, and the old obedience of subjects, laymen, wives, and children was in itself a degrading or evil thing at all. I think it was intrinsically good and beautiful as the nakedness of Adam and Eve. It was rightly taken away because men became bad and abused it. To attempt to restore it now would be the same error as that of the Nudists. Legal and economic equality are absolutely necessary remedies for the Fall, and protection against cruelty.

“When equality is treated not as a medicine or safety-gadget but as an absolute ideal, we begin to breed that stunted and envious sort of mind that hates all superiority. That mind is the special disease of democracies, just as cruelty and servility are the special diseases of monarchies. It will kill us if it grows unchecked. The man who cannot conceive of a joyful and loyal obedience on the one hand, nor an unembarrassed and

noble acceptance of obedience on the other, the man who has never even wanted to kneel or bow, is a prosaic barbarian. There are men whose tap-root to Eden has been cut: whom no rumor of the polyphony, the dance, can reach – men to whom pebbles laid in a row are more beautiful than an arch. Yet even if they desire mere equality they cannot reach it. Where we are forbidden to honor a king, we honor millionaires, athletes, film-stars, even famous prostitutes and gangsters. For our spiritual nature, like bodily nature, will be served; deny it food and it will gobble poison.

“We must wear clothes since the Fall. Yes, but inside, under what Milton called ‘these troublesome disguises,’ we want the naked body, on proper occasions, to appear. It is still so in the marriage-chamber. In the same way, under the necessary outer ‘covering’ of legal equality, the whole hierarchical dance and harmony of our deep and joyously accepted spiritual differences should be alive. It is there when, as Christians, as laymen, we can obey the priest all the more because the priest has no authority over us on the political level. It is there in our relation to parents and teachers – all the more because it is now a willed and wholly spiritual reverence.

“It should also be there in marriage. Husbands have so horribly abused their power over women that to women, of all people, equality is in danger of appearing as an absolute ideal. Naomi Mitchison speaks of women so fostered on the defiant idea of equality that the mere sensation of the male embrace rouses an undercurrent of resentment. This is the tragi-comedy of the modern woman; taught by Freud to consider the act of love the most important thing in life, and then inhibited by feminism from that internal surrender which alone can make it a complete emotional success.

“This whole question is of immense practical importance. Every intrusion of the spirit that says, ‘I’m as good as you’ into our family and spiritual life is to be resisted as jealously as every intrusion of bureaucracy or privilege into our politics. Let us wear equality, but let us undress at night.”

In summary, the pattern of rule-and-submission is greatly muted in society because of sin. People abuse authority – so politically, all authority must be elected authority – and all individuals must have access to places of authority.

The Pattern in the Church

When we come to the Scriptural teaching on women in the church, we discover again a different pattern. Unlike in marriage, all women do not submit to all men. But unlike society, there is a Trinitarian pattern, it is not muted.

On the one hand, women are clearly partners with men in ministry. The Christian church is far ahead of Judaism and pagan religions in this.

The Christian church Women were full members of the covenant community (Acts 1:14). They were deaconesses (1 Timothy 3:11; Romans 16:2); this meant they were ministry leaders, initiating and supervising ministries. It is wrong, therefore, to say that women cannot be area directors in para-church ministries, or to say that women cannot lead evangelistic, discipling, educational, or teaching ministries. Women taught women (Titus 2:3-5) and they taught children (1 Timothy 3:5) from the Scriptures. They also taught men by example (Proverbs 31:28, 31; 1 Corinthians 7:16; 1 Peter 3:1-2), and shared the gospel with them (John 4:28). They also led in many ways. Tabitha (Acts 9:30) was a leader of mercy ministry to the poor, while Euodia and Synteche (Philippians 4:2-3) were Paul’s evangelistic associates. Priscilla disciplined and instructed Apollos, a man (Acts 18:26) and helped lead a house church (Romans 16:4-5). As in the Old Testament (Exodus 15:20), women were prophets and did prophesy (Luke 2:36-38; Acts 2:17-18, 21:19). They spoke the Word of God and prayed in public worship (1 Corinthians 11:5). They exhorted both women and men in the public worship setting (Exodus 15:21).

It appears from this that there are virtually no ministry gifts or ministries that are forbidden to women. And yet, Paul draws some limits.

On the other hand, the office of elder is forbidden to women.

Elders are to be men (1 Timothy 3:1-3). In 1 Timothy 2:11, Paul forbids women to “teach or have authority” over men. The following statement from James B. Hurley is helpful:

“In light of...consideration of 1 Timothy 2 and 3, I conclude that Paul taught that the office of elder/bishop/presbyter was restricted to men. He felt that the creational pattern of male headship in both home and church required that women should not exercise spiritual oversight of the flock. They could not be in positions of authoritative teaching or exercising discipline over men. He grounded his view in the relationship of the man and his wife before the fall (although we have noted that it continued beyond it) rather than on relationships established as a result of the fall of Adam. He did not make any appeal to cultural factors such as the relative lack of education for women or the response which outsiders might have to women in positions of responsibility. The nature of his argument leaves virtually no room for modification of his conclusions as a result of alterations in cultural situations.” – James B. Hurley, Man and Woman in Biblical Perspective, 1981, p. 233.

In 1 Corinthians 14:35-36 women are not to take part in determining whether a teacher is teaching sound doctrine “in the church,” that is, when the church is gathered for an official worship assembly (Note: Paul’s command for women to “keep silent in the church” cannot mean that they may never speak publicly. That would contradict 1 Corinthians 11:5 where it is clear that women may pray and prophesy in the assembly. In this context, it means they are to keep silent when the prophets are judged).

Elders are leaders who admit or dismiss people from the church, they do “quality control” of members’ doctrine, and they proclaim doctrine in an official, authoritative capacity (this type of proclamation is limited, we believe, to preaching in an official worship assembly of the church²). These are the only things that elders alone can do. Others (both men and women) can teach, disciple, serve, and witness.

There are a number of qualifications for the office of elder – God must call and give elder gifts. When the congregation elects elders, it is not to elect people it likes, but people God has gifted along the lines of 1 Timothy 3:1 ff. Most men and all women do not qualify and will never be Biblical elders. It is not something they can attain through hard work. It is a unique calling from God the King.

Why does God call certain ones? Because they are inherently more worthy? That has never been the case. It is the same question: why did the Father rule while the Son submitted? The answer is that both were great and wise persons who did not resent the submission-and-rule pattern but rejoiced in it.

Does exclusion from the eldership mean that women are inherently unfit for leadership? The only thing we can conclude is that by God’s design women do not fit this particular kind of leadership. Consider the types of leaders in Israel. There were prophets, kings, priests, and

² Our reasoning here relates to the context of 1 Timothy 2 – clearly Paul is restricting women, not from all teaching, but from a certain kind of teaching that carries the weight of ecclesiastical authority. We believe that this particular kind of teaching is limited to the official assembling of the church, under the oversight of its pastor (in this case Timothy) and elders (3:1 ff.). In light of other Biblical considerations, we do not believe this passage restricts women from teaching men in other less “formal” contexts, such as Sunday School, home fellowships, etc.

elders. Though kings had physical, political power over the priests and elders and prophets, they could not take over their duties. Saul, for example, was forbidden from doing priestly work, offering sacrifices.

Women and non-elder males can use any and all spiritual gifts in ministry.

Though the job of elder is a high calling, every believer is a “prophet, priest, and king.” All non-elders in the church can and must use their gifts in the church whatever they are.

In a nutshell, our position is this: whatever a non-ruling elder male can do in the church, a woman can do. We do not believe that 1 Timothy 2:11 or 1 Corinthians 14:35-36 restricts women from teaching the Bible to men or speaking publicly. To “teach with authority” (1 Timothy 2:11) refers to:

- 1) the authoritative kind of teaching that is limited to the official assembly of worship or
- 2) disciplinary authority over the doctrine of someone. For example, when an elder says to a member: “You are spreading the thought that one must be circumcised in order to be saved – that is a destructive, non-Biblical teaching which is hurting people spiritually. You must desist from it or you will have to leave the church.”

That is “teaching authority” – it belongs only to the elders.

Thus, women at City Church will be free to use all the gifts, privately and publicly.

Besides the handful of exceptions above that are unique to the office of elder, there are no restrictions on ministry at all. There is a restriction on the office of elder. Why? Because the Bible establishes it, and therein it points us back to the Trinitarian pattern which is strong in marriage and muted in society, but which is practiced in the church.

Aren't Paul's prohibitions to women in authority specific instructions just for those local church situations?

Evangelical feminists have for years recognized the difficulty of denying Paul's preclusions to women and yet maintaining a high view of Biblical authority. There are two ways they have argued:

Absolute norms or circumstantial advice?

First, they say we must distinguish between absolute norms and circumstantial advice, instruction given only to some churches at some time. Paul's advice about women and authority has only to do with particular churches at that time.

The serious problem with this view is that everything Paul wrote he wrote to specific situations. All his writings were letters, not theological essays. When we hear Paul say, “In Christ there is no Jew and Greek, no male and female” he has written it to Galatians who are embroiled in a particular problem. When he says, “I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man” in 1 Timothy, he is speaking to a man (Timothy) whose job it was to plant churches and set up an organizational structure. 1 Timothy is all about how to appoint elders and deacons, how churches are to function. If anything, 1 Timothy 2:12 could be said to be a general principle in a book of general principles about how churches are to be operated!

But our point here is that even 1 Timothy is a particular letter to a particular situation. Everything Paul teaches is to a specific situation. To distinguish between “timeless” and “temporary” Biblical principles is to set up a “canon within a canon,” and one based on your own opinion. In fact, if the ordination of women is a “justice issue,” then surely to prevent women from speaking or having authority in even one church would be horribly wrong. This leads us to the evangelical feminists' second approach.

Was Paul in error?

The second way for evangelical feminists to respond to Paul is to frankly assert he was in error. This is the position of virtually all people who favor women's ordination to all offices.

Feminist interpreters continually point out that there are ambiguities and difficulties in the passages on women. What does it mean that “because of the angels, the woman ought to have a sign of authority on her head” (1 Corinthians 11:11)? Or “women will be saved through childbearing” (1 Timothy 2:15)? By bringing up these difficulties, it is often implied that “these are difficult passages and who knows what they really mean?” But actually, Paul’s basic points are extremely clear. Hardly anyone doubts that Paul meant to exclude women from ruling office. So the real question is: how do we regard his view?

The basic answer of evangelical feminists is: he was wrong. Usually, this kind of blunt statement is avoided in print, but it is everywhere assumed. One of the first evangelicals who wrote in favor of women’s ordination was the most frank:

“Because these two perspectives – the Jewish and the Christian – are incompatible, there is no satisfying way to harmonize the Pauline argument for female subordination [a view that is considered “Jewish”] with the larger Christian vision of which the great apostle himself was the primary architect.” (P. Jewett, *Man as Male and Female*, p. 113).

In other words, Paul’s teaching on women cannot be avoided. It is there. But it is wrong, contradicting the rest of the Bible, implies the evangelical feminist. We are, then, really back to the same thing – a “canon within a canon,” set up arbitrarily, determining which parts of Scripture are “higher, and purer” and which parts are backward, retrogressive. If Scripture alone is our final authority, where do we get a standard for judging Scripture?

Virginia Mollenkott, an evangelical feminist, gives significant insight into how it was necessary to change a view of Scripture to accommodate women’s ordination. In an interview with *The Other Side* magazine (TOS) she tells how she was speaking at a conference with Paul Jewett and others on women in the church.

“Mollenkott: Anyway, the night before Jewett spoke, some of us had a long and painful private meeting. We were discussing whether he dared say his thing on the Pauline self-contradictions. We decided he didn’t dare to because it would jeopardize the job of the person who had set up the conference. So Jewett retreated into what is the safe thing to do: that is, talk about Jesus’ behavior...”

TOS: If we interpret the Old Testament by the New, we have some sort of criterion for the Old Testament. But how do we tell in Paul? If his teaching about women is merely cultural, then maybe what he says about justification is, too...”

Mollenkott: It seems to me that at this point we have to rely on good, careful, scholarly exegesis. We have to place passages in context...We have to pay attention to word choice, literary form...”

TOS: But...your approach will help us find out what a passage means, but so far you haven’t said much that I can see which helps me pick out what passages are true. In literature it is one process to determine what something means and quite another to determine if it’s true...Now how can I tell which are records of errors and which are normative?

Mollenkott: When we find a passage, a spirit which runs all the way through the Bible – at that point I know which one is for all time and which one for the hardness of our hearts. Another guideline is the analogy of what Jesus said and did. If something doesn’t fit the life and teaching of Jesus, again I know which is for all time...”

*TOS: I am gradually moving toward your position...But if I wind up where you are, I am seriously considering resigning from *The Other Side*. Our stance has been to call America and the church back to the Bible. It seems to me that calling people to that is one very important thing which accepting your position makes hard to do. Maybe I should just clear out and go work for some less evangelical magazine...”*

Mollenkott: I don't think you should do that...I think before long many, many evangelicals will come along toward a more scholarly approach to Scripture...Let the rest have their iron maiden of a definition of inspiration which they use to oppress other people. Let them declare themselves as fundamentalists. Let's the rest of us get on with the job." – The Other Side, May/June 1976.

This interview does show that it requires a shift in one's view of Scripture to work around Paul's limitations on women's authority in the church. Mollenkott says that we can choose the normative from relative passages on two criterion:

- 1) If a teaching is repeated more often in the Bible, an apparently contradictory one can be rejected if it appears less often, or
- 2) If a teaching contradicts the life and teaching of Jesus, it can be rejected.

These criterion do not work, if you hope to find Biblical support for the ordination of women. Consider the first criterion. In the Old Testament, God is the "husband" of Israel, who is the "wife." In the New Testament, Christ is the "husband" of the church as we are the "bride" of Christ. When God wishes to express His loving authority over us He depicts us as feminine and himself as masculine. This is a repeated, broad-based Biblical theme, throughout. All believers are "feminine" toward God, for we give ourselves in surrender to Him. See Romans 7:1-6. By putting ourselves in His arms, He bears His fruit into the world through our bodies.

And consider the second criterion: Jesus' life and ministry. Not one of His apostles was female. Feminists are quick to point out that He was adapting to His culture. But now they are doing the same thing to Jesus that they did with Paul. What, really, is the standard now by which we judge Jesus? If women's ordination is a real justice issue, can we excuse our Lord on the basis of cultural pressure? Was He the type of person to succumb to popular opinion?

We feel that there is a deep inconsistency in the phrase "evangelical feminism." The feminists who are consistent recognize the Bible as a sexist book throughout. They reject it. The feminists who try to hold to complete Biblical authority have, really, an impossible balancing act to conduct.

The Pattern at City Church

On the basis of the above position paper, how will women function in ministry at City Church?

Leadership structure.

We will have two boards of officers: elders and deacons. Women in the church will have a pivotal role to play in coming alongside the elders to assist them in their leadership of the church, and the office of deacon will be open to women as well as men.

Women and the elders.

The church will continue to have broad-based planning and strategizing. The women in the church will serve on planning/oversight teams and focus groups (e.g., outreach, education, worship) with church officers and non-officers. A woman could chair such a team if the group so elects. Also, the elders, deacons, and appointed members of the women in the church will meet regularly for strategy and oversight of the church. In matters of discipline and doctrine, the elders have the final say – they have "tie-breaking authority!" Also, the elders represent the church at denominational meetings. But the women in the church will sit in positions of influence and will have regular part (along with many women on program committees) into the strategizing and decision-making process of the church.

The real challenge will not be to create a structure, but to create a climate in which men and women truly work together as equal ministry partners in the church, still recognizing the principle of male headship in the eldership. Will we let women lead the types of ministries that were led

by women in the Bible? Will we release women's gifts to witness, nurture, and serve in the church? Will we incorporate the wisdom of all the mature Christians into the planning of the church? May it be so! This is indeed our goal – to create a community that even non-Christian feminists recognize as not being oppressive, yet one that honors the Biblical distinction between the genders.

Conclusion

We know that our position on women in ministry may dissatisfy some people. Some friends from the traditional evangelical mindset may find it too “open” while many friends on the other side still feel it is oppressive. Our position is not totally unique. See J. Hurley's book, *Man and Woman in Biblical Perspective* or S. Foh's book, *Women and the Word of God*. They come close to where we are.