



Irritated by the 1971 Canadian census that defined the husband as head of the household a lady wrote in the space marked "householder's comments", "In this family my husband and I definitely share the household equally, and I wish to register my complaint at your archaic wording". Several days later, when she checked over the form before mailing it, she found to her chagrin that her husband had penned the following comments after her note: "Statements made by the employees do not necessarily reflect the position of the management" and it was signed, 'Head of the Household'. Probably after a few chuckles together, they had a discussion on the issue. Concerning equality, we need to say that we have made some significant moves as people. For example; I came across this piece of English legislation from the 17th century, "All women of whatever age, rank, profession, or degree, whether virgin, maid or widow, that shall impose upon, or seduce, betray into matrimony any of His Majesty's subjects, by scents, paints, cosmetic washes, artificial teeth, false hair, Spanish wool, iron stays, hoops, high heeled shoes or bolstered hips shall incur the penalty of the law now in force against witchcraft and the like misdemeanors and that marriage, upon conviction shall be null & void." So I believe it is fair to say there have been some positive steps toward the equality of the sexes over the years. But the question is not how far we have come as much as how far do we have to go? That is a question the church as God's institution on earth needs to face. We, as His church, are called to be examples to our world of the principles and attitudes of our God. For some of you who work in the corporate world you may wonder why I am even talking about this topic. What you need to know is that when it comes to the place of women in the church and the role they are to play there is a large variance of opinion.

- The Catholic Church refuses to ordain women yet the United and Presbyterian churches have been doing it for years.
- The Pentecostal, Alliance and Mennonite churches are against women Elders but will have woman evangelists, pastors and missionaries.
- Among Baptists, there is a large variety of opinion. In the NAB denomination we have ordained a few women (two in Canada) and while only about 20% of our churches in the USA have women Elders, here in Canada about 60% of our churches have women Elders. But I need to tell you that it wasn't that long ago that the Southern Baptists excommunicated the pastor of one of their largest churches for accepting women on the deaconate.

What we need to understand is that this issue is complicated by the fact that each group seems to have its own scriptural documentation for their position. What confuses this discussion even more is that if we are honest:

1. We need to admit that it is hard to come to the scriptures with an **open mind**. In most instances as we discuss this issue we filter it through the: a) theology we were raised with and b) our world view (feminist, for male leadership, or egalitarian).

2. It is hard not to **categorize others' views** before we hear them. For example, if you hold a certain view, then we say that you must be a liberal theologically or if you hold a different view we say you are a chauvinist. And with a sneer we say, "Eventually you will grow out of your dark age view." Off the top we need to say that is unfair. I know many people who believe that only men should be Elders, who do not hold that

view out of chauvinism but because they have a deep love/passion for God's Word and believe that is what it says. And the reverse is also true, I know many people who hold that women should be Elders/Pastors who are not liberals who demean the Bible but hold that view because they have a deep love/passion for God's Word and believe that is what it says.

When it comes to this type of discussion, as Christians we have to put aside our conceited attitudes that seem to believe that we have a complete corner on the truth and humbly ask what does God's word say on this issue? I need to do one more thing before we proceed, that is to tell you of my journey on this issue (so I am upfront with you before we look at the scripture). I was brought up under conservative Baptist teaching which saw no possibility of women Elders/women Pastors. My training at the undergrad level re-enforced that belief. Actually, the Lead Pastor I served with in my first pastorate gave the church we served an ultimatum; they had to either take the two women off the deacons board or he would resign (they stepped down). And I agreed with his stand based on what I believed the scripture taught. It was in my third year at our last church that I was challenged to re-examine my view by a couple in our church. So, I took a semester and did a special research project (while at Taylor seminary) to re-enforce or to re-examine my view from the scripture. After my study I was convinced that the scriptural guidelines with regard to the specific key leadership roles were not as male restrictive as I believed before and subsequent studies have re-enforced my view and deepened it. I tell you my journey in this subject so you will know the respect I have for both views. And how I believe sincere believers with a passion for the Bible can stand on both sides of this issue. Please understand that although this is an important issue and demands our prayerful/ biblical study that God is greater than our decisions, for He is using churches on both sides of this issue. For His work/ways are greater than this one issue.

I. The Basis of our View of Women Elders must begin with God's Ideal:

You see what complicates this issue is that if we like it or not, this is one issue where our approach can determine our conclusion.

- a. You see if you take a very **Literal** approach to scripture you will find I Timothy and Titus both use the male pronoun when referring to deacons. I Timothy 3:1, *"Here is a trustworthy saying: If anyone sets his heart on being an overseer, he desires a noble task."* Titus 1:6, *"An elder must be blameless, the husband of but one wife, a man whose children believe and are not open to the charge of being wild and disobedient."* Therefore, you will conclude from scripture that only men can be Deacons/Elders.
- b. However, if you take a more **Over-Arching** view of scripture you will find women in Jesus' day experiencing liberation within their church that went far beyond any of the freedom that other women of their day had. In the context of their culture Paul and Jesus gave astounding new freedoms to women in their marriages and in the church. At a time when the Jews wouldn't allow a woman in the temple, Paul had them in the service, preaching, teaching and praying. Thus, if you take a more panoramic view of scripture, you will conclude that women should have freedom in the Church, equal to, and beyond the societal restraints of one's culture. The point I am trying to make is let's be honest, our approach to scripture (our Hermeneutic) will to a great

extent determine our conclusion. If the view you bring to scripture is very literal you will say no to women Deacons, Elders, Pastor's. However, if the view you bring to scripture is more panoramic (overarching) you will be forced to agree with women Elders.

Where to Start? How do I determine which view to bring to scripture? It is my humble opinion, in these kinds of issues what you need to do is to go back to God's ideal and work from there.

- Where do we find God's ideal? Let's go back to the very beginning. **Gen. 1:27**, *"So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them."*; **2:22-25**, *"Then the LORD God made a woman from the rib he had taken out of the man, and he brought her to the man. The man said, 'This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called 'woman, for she was taken out of man.' For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh. The man and his wife were both naked, and they felt no shame."* In the garden, in the beginning, God made us male and female. Both share the same bones and flesh. Both had the same essence of God's image within them.
- God made us totally and completely equal. In **3:8**, *"Then the man and his wife heard the sound of the LORD God as he was walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and they hid from the LORD God among the trees of the garden."* He didn't come just to talk/walk with Adam. He came to meet with them both for they were equals.
- **Gen 3:16**, *"To the woman he said, 'I will greatly increase your pains in childbearing; with pain you will give birth to children. Your desire will be for your husband, and he will rule over you.'"* Somehow because of the fall into sin, a relational change happened between men/woman and the equality in which they had lived ceased to exist. If you look at history or look around globally we will see male dominance almost everywhere. That means that while God created us equal because of sin entering our world, a shift occurred and the equality which women and men had shared was damaged. But don't forget that God's plan of salvation through the ages has been to restore man's relationship with his God and I believe a consequence of that there should be a progressive restoration of male/female relationships back to God's idea again. That means that Christ's death on the cross was meant to restore our garden relationships with God and with each other. The Bible teaches that when Jesus becomes part of our life, things change. The Bible says "Behold - all things are to become NEW". How new?
- **Gal. 3:26-28**, *"You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus, for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus."* Notice a change occurs because as we are in Jesus there is no longer Jews, Greeks, slave, free, male or female instead we are equally children of Christ.

That does not mean we lose our distinction as a male or female but it should mean that in the process of developing again a garden relationship with our Jesus in which there is a restoration of the old freedom again. And I believe what the scripture is saying is that your relationship with God used to be 1=1 but due to sin 1 is greater than 1. But, now because of what Jesus did we are moving back toward 1=1. If that is true, then the overarching thrust of scripture is that with our salvation, there is a re-establishment of the relationship of equality found in the garden. That means that as our salvation is worked out in the church it should lead toward increased equality in the relationship of men and women. God's plan is that through salvation He will bring us back to his ideal.

What is God's Ideal? Firstly, a closer relationship with Him and secondly, a more equal relationship with each other.

II. How Do we see that Ideal working itself out in the N.T.?

As Jesus' salvation is felt among his people, do we see shifts in people's attitudes and actions stemming from their faith? Yes.

A. How was it working out in Jesus' Life?

As you read the NT you will see that Jesus' relationship with women was very unique for His time. At a time when women were not allowed to even enter the temple courts, a time when each Jewish man prayed daily, "I thank God that I was not born a Gentile, dog or woman". Jesus' actions were astoundingly different and stood in contrast to the behavior of His day.

At a Time when: And Jesus' response:

- i) Women were to stay at home in secluded quiet: Jesus had women travelling with His Band (women like Mary Madeline, Joanne and Susanna). Actually, women like Mary and Salome were financial backers for His ministry
- ii) When women were not allowed in the temple and Rabbis refused to teach them; Jesus taught women openly
- iii) When Jewish society did not allow women to count change into a man's hand; Jesus sat with, touched and was touched by women (in that setting, those incidents where women anointed Jesus' feet with oil takes on new meaning)
- iv) When it came time to choose who would be the first to see him after His resurrection; Jesus chose women to have this honor (Matt. 28)

Jesus placed women on a plain high above the actions of His fellow citizens and church leaders, granting them extraordinary freedom far beyond the social norm of His day.

B. How was it worked out in the early Christian Church?

As I list the activities of the women of the New Testament church keep in mind the context of their day. In the NT we find:

- i) **Women were** included among the first early converts who gathered in the upper room in Jerusalem **Acts 1:14**, *“They all joined together constantly in prayer, along with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brothers.”* Ryrie in his study Bible says they were not there to cook for men but to pray with them. Probably they were part of the process as they prayed for and chose Judas successor
- ii) **Women were** also baptized **Acts 8:12**, *“But when they believed Philip as he preached the good news of the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women.”* This was a startling occurrence. An outrageous step for that day for this meant women were given full or total membership in the church(they were no longer ‘outside looking in’). This was an amazing change from Judaism which banned women from even entering the temple for worship
- iii) Yet the early church had both male and females worshipping in the same room together as equal members. **Acts 5:14**, *“Nevertheless, more and more men and women believed in the Lord and were added to their number.”* There were added to the Lord multitudes of men and women.
- iv) **Acts 2:17-21**, *“17” ‘In the last days, God says, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your young men will see visions, your old men will dream dreams. Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days, and they will prophesy. I will show wonders in the heaven above and signs on the earth below, blood and fire and billows of smoke. The sun will be turned to darkness and the moon to blood before the coming of the great and glorious day of the Lord. And everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.”* This verse has both men and women present on the day of Pentecost and receiving the H.S. and evidenced the filling of the HS by speaking in tongues Women were given gifts the same gifts men had received i.e. **Acts 21:8, 9**, *“Leaving the next day, we reached Caesarea and stayed at the house of Philip the evangelist, one of the Seven. He had four unmarried daughters who prophesied.”* gifts of prophecy (Philip's 4 daughters)
- v) **1 Cor. 11:5**, *“And every woman who prays or prophesies with her head uncovered dishonors her head—it is just as though her head were shaved.”* the women prayed in church in public (shocking for that day for men would have been present)
- vi) **Titus 2:3**, *“Likewise, teach the older women to be reverent in the way they live, not to be slanderers or addicted to much wine, but to teach what is good.”* The gift of teaching was given and used by women. We find "older women" were teaching the young women; but we also read in Acts 18:24, *“Meanwhile a Jew named Apollos, a*

native of Alexandria, came to Ephesus. He was a learned man, with a thorough knowledge of the Scriptures.” that Priscilla explained the way of God accurately to the preacher Apollos Acts 18:26, *“He began to speak boldly in the synagogue. When Priscilla and Aquila heard him, they invited him to their home and explained to him the way of God more adequately.”* When asked what he thought about women having leadership in the church Bill Hybels said, “Who am I to stand in the way of women using the gifts which God has so clearly given them”. I Peter 4:10, *“Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God’s grace in its various forms.”*

vii) When God equally gifted men and women plus women took on roles of leadership:

- **Lydia** in Thyatira, sponsored the Home Bible Paul and Silas spoke at and later was a key leader in the Philippian church for it met in her home Acts 16:40, *“After Paul and Silas came out of the prison, they went to Lydia’s house, where they met with the brothers and encouraged them. Then they left.”*
- Paul himself speaks of **Euodia and Syntyche** Phil. 4:2, *“I plead with Euodia and I plead with Syntyche to agree with each other in the Lord.”* who laboured side by side with him at Philippi so they must have had key leadership roles in the church
- Romans 16 list 8 different women as co-workers with Paul. When you look closer you will see that **Julia** is spoken of as “outstanding among the disciples”, and when they describe the women **Phoebe** they use the Greek work **diakonos** (which is the word used almost exclusively for a Deacon.) Women were given gifts by God and places of involvement and leadership in the fledgling church that was unthinkable for their day. Far from being a chauvinist, Paul was a radical biblical feminist for his time period.

Review: Three factors made me re-examine my stand on women and leadership in the church.

1. The original ideal of the equality of men and women as found in Genesis. Linked to the idea that salvation has an effect on men’s and women’s relationship, the original equality intended by God at creation should be in the process of being re-established. We see this in the N.T. as Salvation began to change men’s and women’s relationships in the fledgling church of the N.T.

2. As I examined God’s generosity as he gave gifts to men and women in the N.T. Church I find no restriction evident due to sex. Actually, I see the opposite. I see gifts of teaching, prophesying and ‘Eldering’ becoming open to women for they are given leadership opportunities along with the men.

3. The young N.T. church is a place where women were baptized as full members in the church. They led in prayer, shared one room during worship, which leads me to see a renewal of religious equality that the Synagogue had strayed from. I should add that historically by year **91 A.D.** there is solid documentation of women deacons in Eastern churches. This has led me to conclude that if we are going to be biblical and live in the pattern which Jesus and the early church laid out for us that we must free women to experience the equality God showed in the N.T.

But you say - OK Dave, how do you handle the fact that only men were chosen as disciples, that only men were chosen as deacons in Acts 8 and only the male pronoun is used in I Tim and Titus? Plus, there are those controversial statements about women keeping quiet in the church? My answer would be that we need to put these verses in context of the culture of there day. George Regent says Paul's method of change was always characterized by caution and orderliness. He is speaking in the N.T. to a male-dominated society, whose women received little or no education, and thus he would suggest that at least in the majority of cases in that setting male leadership was preferred. However, that does not make his statements universal statements'. We are fortunate today, to be placed in a different situation than Paul's time. We have within our churches women who are gifted educationally and gifted with spiritual depth thus; we have at our disposal resources Paul could have only dreamt could some day happen.

How do we conclude this overview/study of the place of women in the church?

- We must go at a pace consistent with our culture. We must never demean others if their stand differs from ours. For we have seen that God is it work in churches that give a variety of freedoms to women.
- We must never put a person, male or female in a place of leadership to make sure our male-female quotas are full. Leadership depends on whether God places a person in a task and gifts them for that task, not their gender.
- We need to use Godly gifted women in the places of ministry that God has gifted them for and places them in. In other words, we must be willing to release them in the church to fulfill their God given destinies.

The key issue must be to free men and women to minister in the Role and ministry He has place them in so they can be the ministers of the Gospel He has 'ordained before hand for them." Eph. 2:8, 9, *"For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God— not by works, so that no one can boast."* For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do. Our task is to keep in step with God and give affirmation to what God is doing among us.

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