

**WOMEN
ARE NOT FOR
ORDINATION**

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WOMEN ARE NOT FOR ORDINATION

"All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works." (2 Timothy 3: 16-17) In other words, Scripture is sufficient to make every Christian, that is, the whole church, complete and thoroughly equipped for every good work.

THE VITAL QUESTION

The vital question concerning women's ministry in the church, hinges on this one question, "Can a woman be admitted into, appointed to, ordained to the office of a presbyter or bishop?" In other words, can a woman be ordained or appointed to the regular ministry of the church which involves leadership and rule? Is this one of the "all good works" of the church? Will the ordination of women to the presbyterate bring the church to completion? Is a woman ever thoroughly equipped by God for the position of authority and rule in the church? For the last two thousand odd years, church tradition has said, "No". The church of Rome said, "No". The Reformers, who threw out everything that was not Scriptural said, "No". The Eastern orthodox churches said, "No". And I believe they were right.

Where there is a dispute over the interpretation of passages of Scripture, the traditional teaching of the church throughout the ages must not be lightly rejected. The whole church may be wrong but we would have to show they were wrong by Scripture, as Athanasius did in his day when he dealt with the Arian heresy. And I would say that in order to admit women into the office of presbyter or bishop of the church, you have to deny the authority and the sufficiency of Scripture and also say that the whole church throughout the ages, including the Old Testament, was wrong when it did not put women into positions of rule and authority in the church, when they did not appoint or ordain women to the regular ministry of the church which involves leadership and authority.

RED HERRINGS

The debate is not about "worth and importance" nor about "inferiority and superiority". Is a woman treated as inferior and of less importance and worth because she is denied a ruling and teaching role in the church? If so, then men who are not ordained are also treated as inferior.

Nor is the debate about whether a woman can be ordained, ordination being seen as a sacrament and the impartation of an indelible character. Nowhere in Scripture can we find that ordination or appointment to the presbyterate imparts an indelible character separating the clergy in some mystical way from the rest of the people of God. All Christians are a holy, royal priesthood (1 Peter 2: 5,9), to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. So Christian women as well as men are already priests ordained to it by their baptism and endowed with an indelible character by the Holy Spirit and his work of regeneration. So they will be priests to God for ever. The Bible nowhere supports the idea that the Old Testament sacrificing priesthood is perpetuated in the New Testament era, which is the error of Roman and Anglo-catholicism.

Nor is the debate about who can preside at the Lord's Table. Scripture does not tell us who can and who cannot preside at the Lord's Table, though we can infer that if the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper is another form of authoritative teaching, that by visual aid, then perhaps a woman cannot preside, but it must be a presbyter or bishop, though I do not see why a woman may not help in the distribution of the bread and wine, for the privilege at Communion is sharing in the bread and wine by faith. And here is one instance, perhaps, where Paul's teaching that in Christ there is no male and female may be applied. The privileges and blessings of Christ are for all equally, though their roles and callings may be different.

Nor is it about whether a woman can represent God who reveals himself as Father, and Jesus who was incarnate as a male. Nowhere in the Bible is this given as a reason for a male ministry. After all, God did call women to represent him in the extraordinary ministry of prophecy. All these only complicate and confuse the issue.

The debate centres on the one question only, which is "Who may rightly be admitted to the office of presbyter or bishop, to the regular ministry of the church in the light of Scripture?" Who can have rule and oversight over a church or congregation of worshippers?

THE ORDINATION OF WOMEN WOULD OVERTHROW THE SUFFICIENCY OF SCRIPTURE

The answer from Scripture is clear and has been endorsed by the whole church throughout the ages. Only men can be admitted into the office of presbyter or bishop, and to deny this is to deny the authority and sufficiency of Scripture. This is consistent with the rest of Scripture too. In the Patriarchal period, certain men, the fathers as head of the family, acted as priests for other men and women. Abraham was commended for this (Genesis 18: 19). In the Mosaic period, certain men, the posterity of Levi, acted as priests, leaders, and representatives in all cultic affairs for other men and women. So it would be consistent, in the light of the fact that we have no clear direction in God's Word that women should now be ordained into the regular ministry, that in the New Testament church presbyters and bishops should be male, also acting for other men and women.

Let me illustrate this in the matter of infant baptism. The Reformers and the Puritans did not reject infant baptism, because there was no clear direction from God in his Word that the spiritual privileges of the initial seal of the covenant of grace granted to the infant seed of Abraham (Genesis 17: 10, 12) had ever been revoked. Therefore this grant must stand for ever until it is revoked by God, and this he has not done. Nor has he ever brought in a greater privilege or mercy to infants of believers in the New Testament to replace the privilege of being admitted into the covenant as infants and receiving the seal of the covenant. God never revokes a privilege without giving something better to replace it. (See John Owen, "Infant Baptism," Vol 16 of his works, published by The Banner of Truth Trust.) So also there is nothing in Scripture which declares that God, after always having men in the regular ministry is now going to admit women into it. So we have Adam, the Patriarchs, the Aaronic priesthood, and the male presbyters and bishops in the New Testament church (1 Timothy 3, Titus 1).

Now if God intended at some time in the future, namely in our day and age, to admit women into the ordained, regular ministry, then this should have been clearly revealed in Scripture or else Scripture would not be sufficient to make the church complete and thoroughly equipped for every good work. But Scripture nowhere states that God intends to appoint women to the ordinary, regular ministry, therefore either women should not be ordained, or if we do ordain them we are saying that Scripture is not sufficient to make the church complete and thoroughly equipped for every good work but that we know better how to make the church complete and

thoroughly equipped for every good work, or that God has given a new revelation concerning this in our day. Both in the New and in the Old Testament there was the regular ministry to which only men were ordained, and there was an "extraordinary ministry" to which anyone could be called directly by God without human authority. Such were prophets and prophetesses called by God to deliver a divine revelation. So let me state that only men can be ordained into the regular ministry, unless it can be shown from Scripture that God now, in the times of the gospel, calls women into the ordained, regular ministry. And if he does, why did he not reveal this to Paul? Ordination of women can only be maintained by denying the authority and sufficiency of Scripture or by suggesting that Paul deliberately suppressed a revelation given to him by God.

ARGUMENTS USED TO DENY THE AUTHORITY AND SUFFICIENCY OF SCRIPTURE

There are several arguments which attempt to deny the authority and sufficiency of Scripture. One argument is to say that Scripture is not infallible because it has many contradictions and inconsistencies in it, having been written by fallible men who did not know everything there is to know about everything, and that it was not written by holy men who were carried along by the Holy Spirit (2 Peter 1: 21). We are told Scripture is not authoritative because it does not tell us everything about everything. It is not authoritative because it does not come to us with full and complete knowledge. But they forget that God who gave us Scripture is omniscient. So we do not need to have perfect knowledge of all things, provided the knowledge we do have is true knowledge, and we can only have assurance that we have true knowledge, when we know that the person who gives us this knowledge knows everything there is to know about everything.

Another argument used to deny the authority and sufficiency of Scripture is to say that Scripture can only speak for the cultural ideas and opinions of its own time, and therefore it is not always applicable to the cultural ideas and opinions and the new insights of our own time. In other words, the writers of Scripture did not lay down infallible laws and rules for all time, because they could not speak with infallible authority for all ages of history. Therefore the Bible is not sufficient to guide us aright today and has not given us sufficient data to know what makes for a complete church thoroughly equipped for every good work.

So Paul is said to be inconsistent and contradictory in his teachings, that he did not write as he was moved by the Holy Spirit but as he was moved by prejudice and

by the cultural ideas of his own time, and that he tried to support the prejudices and cultural ideas of his own time by some far-fetched exegesis of the early chapters of Genesis.

A further argument is that there is in Scripture a clear contradiction between the writings of Paul and the basic principle of the gospel, namely, the equality of the sexes. And the full meaning of this equality Paul deliberately suppressed because he was a hater of women and a Pharisee. Therefore the clear statements banning women from the office of presbyter and bishop are rejected as prejudice on Paul's part, in favour of what is seen as the basic principle of the gospel, namely that there is no difference between male and female in Christ and that therefore it does not matter whether you have a male or female in the office of presbyter or bishop, a teaching which Paul deliberately tried to suppress and deny. If both men and women in Christ are entitled to the same privileges of the gospel, then both are entitled to officiate in the same roles in the church. So the equality of male and female in Christ is turned against the details of Biblical teaching, namely, that the woman is forbidden by the apostolic authority of Paul to teach and to usurp authority over the man in church assemblies (1 Timothy 2: 12); she is to learn in silence with all submission (v. 11). One part of Scripture is considered to have more authority than another. Scripture is seen as influenced by the customs and standards of its own time. So it is argued that Scripture's conformity to its own time may be set aside to allow the church in our day to conform to the cultural ideas of our own time. In other words, Scripture must conform to man's ideas and cultural opinions. But suppose that a law was passed that women could not enter the same jobs as men. Is the church then to change its teachings to conform to this new law? Do our cultural ideas and opinions influence our interpretation of Scripture, or should Scripture influence our ideas and cultural standards? Is the church to agree with the world that sex before marriage is a good thing because the majority of young people are said to indulge in it?

Another argument is taken from Isaiah 43: 19 — "Behold I will do a new thing." One new thing God did was to bring the Gentiles into his church, and now he is doing a new thing in leading us to ordain women into the office of presbyter and bishop, so the argument goes. The only thing is, that God did not take his people by surprise. He told them about the Gentiles long before he actually brought them into the church. So when the debate about the Gentiles was brought up at the Council of Jerusalem, it was clearly shown that this "new thing" was prophesied long before in Scripture (Acts 15: 1-18). But where in Scripture do we find that the Apostolic injunction that women should not teach nor usurp authority over the man has now

been rescinded or will ever at some time in the future be rescinded? Where in Scripture has God declared that at some future date he is going to admit women into the regular ministry? Ah, but the Holy Spirit is now revealing to the church new things and ordination of women is one of these new things. So by claiming to have a new revelation from the Spirit which cannot be backed up by Scripture, anything is naively accepted, and those advocating this "new thing" do not realise they are denying the sufficiency of Scripture to make the church complete and thoroughly equipped for every good work. But this is fanaticism and not Biblical Christianity, and those who hold to new revelations and so add to Scripture "new things"; are in danger of having the plagues written in the Book of Revelation added to them (Revelation 22: 18).

IS UNISEX GOD'S PLAN FOR THE CHURCH?

Paul taught equality of the sexes in Christ and then made them unequal by not allowing women to have a teaching, ruling role in the church. He banned them from the office of presbyter and bishop. But does equality of the sexes in Christ mean unisex? Does it rule out all differences between men and women?

In the Old Testament we read that a "woman shall not wear that which pertaineth unto a man, neither shall a man put on a woman's garment: for all that do so are abomination unto the LORD thy God" (Deuteronomy 22: 5). Unisex is an abomination to God. Let me put it like this. Women who put on the role of men and men who put on the role of women are an abomination to the Lord our God. Men should be men and women women. It is true, indeed, that spiritual privileges come to both men and women alike, as they do to slaves and free men and to Jew and Greek. But if this means that there can be no subordination of women to men, then it follows also that there can be no subordination of men to men, which would contradict all Scriptural principles of church organization. It is clear, then, that there is nothing inconsistent in Paul's teaching of the equality of the sexes in Christ with differences in roles and functions. When God has given a particular role and function to men only, a role and function he nowhere says women can be admitted to, then for women to go against God's Word and take on themselves that role is to put on that which by God's decree pertains only to men and so they make themselves an abomination to him.

*EXAMPLES OF EQUALITY
WITH DIFFERENT ROLES AND FUNCTIONS*

The first example is the Trinity. In the Godhead there are three Persons, each equally infinite in power, wisdom, and goodness, each perfect God, but in the matter of our salvation each has a different role and not one of the Persons in the Godhead tries to usurp the role of either of the other two.

The second example is the human body. A human body has many different members, all equally important to the perfection and health of that body, yet all do not have the same functions. So with Christ's body, the church, there are many members, all of equal importance to Christ, but Christ does not give them all the same role and function. And surely Christ knows infallibly what is the best role and function for the male members of his body and what is the best role and function for the female members of his body; how men can be most useful to the church and how women can be most useful to the church. And are we going to say that we know better than him?

*WHY CHRIST CHOSE ONLY MEN
TO BE HIS APOSTLES*

In his earthly life, Christ valued and esteemed highly the ministry of women, the loving care and provision they made for him and his disciples, but he did not give them any official authoritative role in his church, nor did he intimate that women would ever be admitted into such an authoritative role in his church. All twelve apostles were male. If Christ was establishing a new people, why did he not choose six men and six women? Why did he lay the foundation of his church on the male sex alone? The most natural explanation of this is that Christ intended that the Patriarchal nature of government among the people of God should continue from the Old covenant to the New covenant, and nowhere are we told that this is to change.

*THE ROLE OF MAN AND THE ROLE OF WOMAN IN
THE HOME AND IN THE CHURCH*

The role of man, both in the home and in the church, seems to be to symbolise and show forth the glory of Christ as the head of the church who gave himself for her, nourishing and cherishing her as his own flesh (Ephesians 5: 25-29). The role

of the woman, on the other hand, seems to be to symbolise and show forth the glory of the Holy Spirit's work as comforter, helper and encourager. God says, "As one whom his mother comforteth, so will I comfort you" (Isaiah 66: 13).

Deborah is an example (Judges 4: 5). Deborah was called to an extraordinary ministry by God. She called Barak to awake and fulfil his role as leader of God's people. She went with him to encourage and support him. She urged him to battle and to victory. It is the special and privileged ministry of women to encourage and cheer men who are called to lead and rule in the church militant. Women's ministry is also to utter God's praises when victory has been won. Women are, on the whole, more sensitive than men, and so are more able to rouse God's people to songs of praise and thanksgiving, while men are slower in expressing their gratitude. In leading the praise of the church, women have a truly womanly mission. Deborah's mission was to be a "mother in Israel" (Judges 5: 7). What was the secret of Barak's greatness? I think he would have said what the psalmist said, "Thy gentleness hath made me great" (Psalm 18: 35). Wives and mothers are exhorted by Peter to cultivate a "meek and quiet spirit" (1 Peter 3: 4). Deborah's attitude was "maternal, not matriarchal". She was no Joan of Arc. She praised the Lord that the "governors" of Israel, namely those who bore rule, took the lead (Judges 5: 9). But it was through her that they were stirred up to act responsibly. It seems to me that one part of woman's ministry in the church is to be a spiritual mother. Her mother comfort, encouragement, and inspiration is specially needed by men. Unmarried women may fulfil their maternal instincts in this way, not by teaching and leading men, but in supporting and encouraging them and stirring them up to fulfil their roles as leaders both in the church and in the home. Deborah did not lead, but called out one whose responsibility it was to lead. Both in the family and in the church the roles of men and of women are different, and the church is nothing more than Christian families coming together to worship God.

It is not that women cannot do the things that men can, but that as in the home it is the man who is the head and ruler of the family congregation, which is an order instituted by God, so that order must be reflected in the family of his church congregation, which is also an order instituted by God. The man is the one who bears rule. The local congregation would be made up of several worshipping households coming together and therefore it was from the heads of the households that presbyters and bishops were chosen (1 Timothy 3; Titus 1). So we read that presbyters and bishops should be husbands of one wife and should rule their households well. The basis of the church congregation is the family unit. And as the head and leader of family worship was the father, so the leader and ruler of the

congregation should be a man chosen from amongst the fathers of the separate households who fulfilled the necessary qualifications (Titus 1: 5,6; 1 Timothy 3). The local congregation reflects the family congregation. It must not therefore do anything that would destroy the structure of the home congregation. The organisation of the Christian congregation should reflect that of the family. Husband and wife together symbolise Christ and his people (Ephesians 5: 22-23). The congregation is the local expression of this relationship of Christ and his people. So the fellowship of the family and that of the congregation are expressions of divinely ordained relationships in a way that other human organisations are not. Will God, then, organise the fellowship of the congregation in such a way that destroys his ordering of the family? The family and the congregation both express God's relationship to his people. Therefore God will not order his congregation so as to contradict his ordering of the family. This is why Scripture so clearly forbids wives or women to teach or to have authority over the man in the church, for they are not to rule or have authority over their husbands in the home. (See D. B. Knox's argument in his book *Sent by Jesus*, published by The Banner of Truth Trust.) It may be that the desire of some women to be ordained to a leadership role in the church reflects the home situation and the failure of man to fulfil his role of leadership and authority there.

So we see that Paul was not at all inconsistent. As far as spiritual privileges and the way they are received are concerned, there are no differences between male and female. But as far as roles and functions as members of the body of Christ, especially where the family and the church are concerned, the ordinary and regular ministry to which some men are called and the extraordinary ministry to which some women and some other men are called are quite different. As members of the same body of Christ, they have the same privileges and the same fellowship in Christ, but as concerns their activity and function both in the family and in the church, their roles are different and they are different because God has ordained it so.

PAUL'S SUPPOSED PHARISAICAL PREJUDICE

Did Paul write as he was moved by Pharisaical prejudice against women? The Talmud classified women with slaves and heathen and assumed they were incapable of learning. The Pharisee prayed, "I thank God I was not made a woman." Pharisaic theology saw religious status as being dependent on keeping the commandments. Women were not expected to keep certain commandments so we have the joy of the man who had to keep all the commandments. (See "Women in

Teaching / Ruling Offices in the Church", in Noel Weeks, *The Sufficiency of Scripture*, The Banner of Truth Trust.)

Only the Rabbis knew the Hebrew language and they refused to teach women. The Babylonian Talmud states, "He who is not versed in the Scriptures and the Mishnah and in good conduct is of no benefit to the public weal" (Kiddushin 1.10). So women, who were not taught the Torah, were of no use to Judaism. Again Rabbi Eliezar, a first-century teacher, following a long chain of tradition, said, "Rather should the words of the Torah be burned than entrusted to a woman . . . Whoever teaches his daughter the Torah is like one who teaches her obscenity" (Babylonian Talmud, Kiddushin 70a). And again, "May the words of the Torah be burned than given to women" (Rabbi Eliezar). The Jewish historian, Josephus, a contemporary of Paul, wrote, "the woman is inferior to the man in every way" (*Contra Apiones* 2, 201; quoted in *The Role of Women*, 125).

But when Paul went to Philippi, "On the sabbath we went out of the city by a river side, where prayer was wont to be made; and we sat down, and spake unto the women which resorted thither." Among the women was Lydia, a seller of purple, who was baptized along with her household, to whose house Paul, and Silas, and Luke were invited. So, at Philippi the nucleus of Paul's church was drawn from this group of women (Acts 16: 13-16). "Now," says an advocate for women's ordination, "a few days later the Philippian gaoler was converted. Did the women then hand over the leadership of the church to this ignorant Gentile?" We do not know what they did. But it is quite conceivable that Paul taught the gaoler the fundamentals of the gospel and, in those days when churches were being planted and the full revelation had not yet been given the Scriptures not having yet been completed, that the Holy Spirit may well have given the gaoler supernatural knowledge and ability, enabling him to take up the role of teaching and leadership in the church, as he would have immediately taken up his role of leader and teacher of his household church. But even if he did not, there is no reason why the women, Lydia especially, should not have taken him aside as called to a temporary extraordinary and private ministry and given him further instruction, as Priscilla and Aquila did with Apollos. In a family, the father takes the lead. But if the father dies, the mother has to take over the father's role in the family as well as being mother. But if she marries again, then the new father takes up his position as leader. That is why it is so necessary for both couples to be Christian. Sometimes in the church there are no "fathers in Christ." The mothers in Christ must then take the lead in an extraordinary, temporary ministry until God raises up another "father in Christ." The Romish doctrine of ordination to an indelible character would not

allow a woman to take up a temporary role. But I do not see why the protestant doctrine should not. This does not imply women can be ordained to a regular ministry such as presbyter or bishop.

Noel Weeks in his book brings to our attention the many leading and prominent women mentioned in Acts. At Thessalonica, "of the devout Greeks a great multitude, and of the chief women not a few" joined Paul and Silas (Acts 17: 4). At Berea, "many of them believed; also of honourable women which were Greeks, and of men, not a few" (Acts 17: 12). At Athens a woman named Damaris joined Paul (Acts 17: 34). At Corinth, Paul met up with Aquila and Priscilla with whom he stayed and worked, for they, along with Paul, were tentmakers. Euodia and Synteche (Philippians 4) were fellow labourers with him in the gospel and their falling out with each other was serious enough in Paul's eyes to hinder the gospel. He speaks highly of women in Romans 16: Phoebe a helper of many and of myself also (v. 2); he counts Priscilla as a fellow worker in Christ Jesus (v. 3); he speaks of Mary, who laboured much for them (v. 6). Here are just some examples to show that Paul's Pharisaic prejudices against women, if he had any, were not brought over into his Christianity.

WAS PAUL CULTURALLY CONDITIONED?

Did Paul write as he was moved by the cultural ideas of his time? "It is common to represent women in Biblical times as a suppressed group, oppressed, belittled, and despised," says Noel Weeks. "The attitude of Jesus to women is placed in contrast to this and then used as evidence that he was a social reformer intending to change the position of women. While one might like to see Jesus as such an enlightened reformer, a note of caution needs to be sounded. Much that is said of the status of women in New Testament times is exaggerated and some is plain wrong" (*The Sufficiency of Scripture*, 138). Therefore, argues Noel Weeks, a true picture of Bible times is needed. The following is the substance of his argument.

Much of the case that women had no rights rests on their relationship to their fathers or husbands. But sons also were expected to obey and to take care of their parents. Restrictive obligations placed on girls were also imposed on sons. The only difference was that in the case of girls, fathers had the right to give them in marriage.

Jesus was criticised for associating with women of dubious reputations but not for associating with women as women. The closest we find is the disciples' amazement that Jesus spoke with the Samaritan woman (John 4: 27). Perhaps we

may deduce from this that one could not carry on a conversation with a woman, especially a stranger or a Samaritan. But that may not necessarily indicate the role of women within the family circle or the circle of acquaintances. Apart from this there is no evidence that Jesus' attitudes to women were considered exceptional.

There is no teaching of Jesus attacking any discrimination against women. If women were despised in Jewish society as some would have us believe, and Jesus opposed this attitude, then it is all the more remarkable that we have such a lack of actual teaching on the subject. We have already seen the mention of leading and prominent women who existed in the various cities to which Paul went. So how do we reconcile the existence of these prominent and leading women with the supposed status of women in New Testament times? Doesn't this make it all the more remarkable that Jesus did not choose women as his disciples, if he meant them to take up ruling offices in the church? If women were so despised and suppressed as a sex, how does one explain the existence of such leading and prominent women?

Generally the New Testament commands against women teaching and ruling in the church assemblies are explained as directed against women who have been inspired by their freedom and equality with men in Christ. Paul is then said to be less consistent than were these women. But Acts shows us that these same women held prominent positions in society before the gospel came to them. Is it not possible, then, that these women expected to carry such leading and prominent positions into the church and that that is what caused the problem? If the problem was one of misunderstanding the true nature of gospel freedom, why did Paul never explain the true nature of gospel freedom to these women?

What then was the social position of women in New Testament times? To answer that question we must first rid ourselves of the perspectives of modern times, of the attitudes which are prevalent today. Modern western societies have sought to eliminate all social distinctions especially those which are racial and sexual. But such distinctions should not be projected back to Biblical times. Pre-modern times tended to divide people according to their wealth and position in society rather than by race and sex. So women who were in wealthy families could play a leading and prominent role in society. But to say that all women were despised is to project our divisions of society along sexual lines into societies in which the main divisions were along quite different lines.

Noel Weeks goes on to say that Scripture persistently attacks the notion that worth in the true sense is connected to one's position in society. Thus its heroes are often those not in leading positions: the poor, the young, and women (Ecclesiastes 9: 13-16; 1 Samuel 17: 41-49; Judges 5: 24-27). The New Testament here is at one

with the Old Testament (James 2: 1-7; 1 Timothy 4: 12; Matthew 26: 13). To say that Scripture has accommodated itself to the social views of its time is a slur on Scripture and a denial of its witness against false views. Nevertheless, the same Bible insists on the proper relation of authority and respect between old and young and between man and woman.

There were, of course, racist and sexist sentiments expressed in antiquity, says Noel Weeks, but even there we must place such remarks in their unique context. Racism doctrines today tend to be biological. Certain races are seen as inferior. But racist comments in the ancient near East tended to be more cultural. Certain groups were despised for their lack of culture, but there was no barrier against any in those groups joining more cultural groups and even coming to high positions in them. Sexist comments today tend to ascribe emotional or intellectual inferiority to women. But Scripture does not. Scripture sees a difference between male and female because they were created for different purposes.

Women of prominent families had status, whereas women of lowly families shared the low estate of their fathers and husbands. Modern ideas of equality were not held and women's roles were defined more by tradition, but business women who contradicted conventional stereotypes did exist. So the whole attempt to explain away the New Testament doctrine and the writings of Paul as a concession to the cultural ideas of the time is really based on simplistic views of ancient societies.

Noel Weeks now introduces us to another intriguing line of evidence which, he says, ought to be considered. We have, he tells us, inscriptions in which women are listed as holding official positions in the Synagogue. Some women were "presidents, leaders, elders and mothers" of Synagogues, the Greek word being the same as used of Jairus in Luke 8: 49.

But like most of our data on the Synagogue, he says, it is later than the New Testament and gives no real evidence just what the women named did. The earliest such inscription is from the second century A.D. So it is possible to suggest that these were honorary titles held because the woman in question was married to a synagogue officer, or perhaps it was in recognition of donations for the building of the Synagogue. But if these titles did mean that women played a leading and teaching role in the Synagogue, and if this practice went back to the first century, then there is another way of understanding why Paul did not allow women to teach or have authority in the church, and why Christ did not choose women to be his disciples. Both Paul and Christ would be warning against a practice which had become common in the Synagogue or, by the Spirit's inspiration, a practice which would become common in the Synagogue. But what this does show is that if

Paul did write as he was moved by the cultural ideas of his time he would not have excluded women from official teaching and ruling roles in the church. (See Noel Weeks, *The Sufficiency of Scripture*, chapter 18.)

But far from Paul's writing as he was moved by the cultural ideas of his time, he rooted his doctrine on the creation of the man and the woman.

PAUL'S EXEGESIS FROM GENESIS

Did Paul resort to a far-fetched exegesis of the early chapters of Genesis? In 1 Corinthians 11: 3-16 Paul is saying that when praying or prophesying in an extraordinary ministry, in the church assemblies, a woman must have a symbol of authority on her head because the head of the woman is the man. And the reason he gives is, Man "is the image and glory of God: but woman is the glory of the man. For man is not of the woman; but the woman of the man. Neither was the man created for the woman, but the woman for the man" (vv. 7-9). In this chapter Paul is talking of the position and status of women in worship. Now, if women are ordained into the role of presbyter or bishop, will they have some symbol to show that they are under the authority of men or will they wear exactly the same robes as men? And what about a woman with short hair, like a man? If she does not wear something that shows her distinctive role as a woman, then she is disobeying this Apostolical injunction and causing great offence to the angels: "For this cause ought the woman to have a power on her head because of the angels" (1 Corinthians 11: 10). Paul, writing to the Ephesians, says, that God's intention in creating the church was to teach the angels his manifold wisdom by the church (cf. Ephesians 3: 9-10). Now one important lesson the angels needed constantly to be reminded of was submission to God's will, especially after the rebellion of the evil angels. And this lesson is continually kept before their eyes by the willing submission of the woman to her head, the man. This seems to me one great spiritual ministry of women in the church. And if a woman does wear a symbol of authority, then she is admitting that she should not be teaching and having authority over men.

But some have tried to make this passage say something else. "Head," we are told, can mean "source" as in "head of a river." Therefore Paul is not referring to authority. Woman is taken to mean "wife" and therefore this passage has no reference to single women. I suppose the conclusion then is that only single women can be ordained. But if "head" here means "source", then we have Adam as the source of Eve, but ever after woman has been the source of man. And what God

being the source of Christ has to do with a woman wearing a symbol on her head to show that she is under the authority of man is anybody's guess. But this is only one way in which so-called expounders of Scripture are trying to get round Paul's clear teaching.

In 1 Corinthians 14:34, Paul says, "Let your women keep silence in the churches: for it is not permitted unto them to speak; but they are commanded to be under obedience". Here Paul is talking of the activity of women in the church, and the most reasonable interpretation I have come across is that of James Hurley, that women were not to evaluate or interpret or question the prophecies which were made in the church assembly, but were to be silent for they are not permitted to speak, that is, to speak with authority. Matthew Poole, the Puritan commentator, excludes women called by the Spirit to exercise an extraordinary ministry from this injunction to be silent. But whatever the meaning, women were to be submissive, as the law says.

Now submission implies they were not to assume the role of authority. But what law is Paul referring to? Most commentators and marginal references take us back to Genesis 3:16. Noel Weeks in his book, *The Sufficiency of Scripture*, suggests the following. "In 14:34 Paul appeals to 'the Law'. Yet he does not tell us what teaching of the Law he has in mind. It is quite unusual for Paul to make such a general appeal. Generally he tells us specifically what portion of the Old Testament supports his argument. We therefore naturally wonder whether there have been any indications in the preceding context of the passage he had in mind. The one place where he referred to the teaching of the Old Testament in connection with women is in 11: 8,9." Paul is referring back to a subject already considered in more detail earlier. "Paul can refer to 'the Law', knowing his readers would know what he meant" (pp. 128-9).

From both 1 Corinthians 11 and 14 a couple of things seem clear. Paul is not dealing with the official duty of a presbyter or bishop, but with the extraordinary ministry of charismatic gifts. Paul would not in any way have the Sovereignty of the Spirit suppressed. But if a woman is inspired by the Spirit to prophesy or pray in the church assembly, let her do it in a spirit of submission to the presbyter or bishop, just as men also in the church assembly who were not presbyters or bishops were also called to submit. As in the Old Testament period there was a regular ordained ministry and prophets who exercised an extraordinary ministry under the Sovereignty of God, so in this transition period, as there was the beginnings of a regular ministry in the appointment of bishops and elders, so also there was a continuation of the extraordinary ministry of prophecy. But when the full revelation

had been given and Scripture was complete, the extraordinary prophetic ministry was no longer needed; so any argument from that line for women's ordination is not valid (1 Corinthians 13: 8).

But the passage that is clearest of all and which is most relevant to us who have the full revelation of Scripture and do not look for any further revelations from the Spirit is that of 1 Timothy 2: 11-14: "Let the woman learn in silence in all subjection. But I suffer not a woman to teach, or to usurp authority over the man, but to be in silence. For Adam was first formed, then Eve. And Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived was in transgression." James Hurley says, "Paul wants women to learn quietly and submissively and will not permit them to teach authoritatively. The situation in view appears to be formal teaching in the assembly, cf. vs. 8-10. Christian women, along with men, were present at worship and learnt from teaching. They were, however, to do so 'quietly.' Paul's actual words do not mean 'with buttoned lips'; but have the connotation of learning with a quiet, receptive spirit. Paul will not permit the opposite to take place; he will not allow women to teach or to exercise authority over men. The teaching in view is formal teaching, teaching which comes with disciplinary authority and ought to be quietly received by those under authority. It is easy to see that the opposite of learning quietly and submissively is teaching verbally and with authority" (James Hurley, in *The Role of Women*). Paul is not talking about the extraordinary ministry of prophecy to which any Christian could be called directly by God without any calling from the church, but of the regular, ordinary ministry of rule and oversight.

Paul's language not only qualifies teaching as an exercise of authority, but by means of the "nor" before "to usurp authority" also extends his prohibition to other exercises of formal authority. A woman must not be appointed to any position of authority over men in the church. The strength of Paul's feeling can be gauged by his verb *epitrepo*, "I suffer not . . .". This verb does not mean "to advise" or "to suggest." It means "to permit" or "to allow." Interestingly it is the same verb he used in 1 Corinthians 14: 34, where he would not permit women to speak in the evaluation of prophetic messages: another speaking situation which involved an exercise of authority.

But what does Paul mean by having, exerting, or usurping authority over a man?

G. W. Knight (in *New Testament Studies*, 30, 1984, 143-157) did a study of all known uses of this Greek word 'authentain' and came to the conclusion that it does not mean wrongful or usurped authority, but rather corresponds simply to the neutral English verb. What Paul forbade women was having and exercising that sort of

authority which church members ought to accept quietly and submissively. In the *Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, p. 1066, Colin Brown says, "1 Timothy 2: 12 might be interpreted not as an absolute prohibition of women teaching but as a prohibition of allowing them to domineer and lay down the law. 'Authentein' can mean both to have authority over and to domineer (cf. Arndt. 120.)." Now if any role in the church involves authority it is that of presbyter or bishop. They were to proclaim God's truth faithfully (2 Timothy 1: 13,14; 2: 2). They were to protect the flock of God against false teaching, and to nurture it in its growth in grace (Acts 20: 25-31). They were rulers in the church to whom obedience and submission was owed (Hebrews 13:17). And it is this fact, based on 1 Timothy 2: 12-15, which has led the church for nearly two thousand years to forbid the office of presbyter and bishop to women.

Now if women are ordained into the office of ruling authority in the church, what do we do with this passage of Scripture? Reject it? Say it is no longer relevant to our day and age? If we do it with this Scripture, why not with other passages of Scripture? Had we better not heed the warning given in Revelation 22: 19, "And if any man shall take away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part from the book of life, and out of the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book"? And I repeat, that there is nothing in Scripture telling us that there is going to come a time when Paul's not allowing women to teach or to usurp authority over men would pass away and no longer be relevant, that God is going to do something new and ordain women into the regular, ordinary ministry.

And on what does Paul base this denial of the presbyterate to women? He bases it on two facts related in Scripture. The first fact is that "Adam was first formed, then Eve," and the second fact is, "Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived was in the transgression." He does no exegesis but simply states the facts. Therefore his teaching is not based on prejudice, nor is it rooted in the cultural ideas of the time. He wrote as he was moved by the Holy Spirit, and the only explanation the Holy Spirit will give us through Paul is "Adam was first formed, then Eve, and Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived was in the transgression." But there are two things we learn from these bald statements of fact. The first is that the early chapters of Genesis are part of history. The events recorded there actually happened. And the second is, that we are left to study these chapters for ourselves. But we have not expounded the creation of Adam and Eve and the fall correctly unless we arrive at the same conclusion that Paul was moved to write for

our learning, namely, that women are to be submissive and not to teach or to have authority over men, because of man's priority in creation and women's priority in the transgression.

Paul's second argument seems to suggest a difference between the natures of the man and the woman. Daphne Key, in her article in *The Role of Women*, suggests that Paul is saying that "Woman is more easily led astray." I'm glad it's a woman who says this! But James Hurley suggests that "Priestly leadership responsibility and rebellion were Adam's; Eve had not been prepared for leadership in this area and was deceived." I would suggest also, that Adam had possibly neglected to teach Eve the full meaning and intention of God's command.

This brings us back to one of the questions asked at the beginning. "Is a woman ever thoroughly equipped by God for the position of rule and authority in the church?" Paul seems to suggest that God did not so equip Eve and nor, it seems, does he intend to equip any woman at any time for such a position of leadership and rule in his church, because he did not create her for that but to be a support and comfort and strength to the man. If God wanted women in the ordinary, regular ministry of the church he could easily have appointed them and equipped them for it just as he does men. But if, in his Word, he has not declared his intention to call women into the ordinary, regular ministry, then it is also his intention not to equip them for it, for such equipping would be useless and unnecessary and it would not be to the glory of his wisdom to do such a useless and unnecessary thing. To be equipped for the ministry is more than just passing the General Ordination Exam or whatever, which a woman can do equally as well and sometimes better than men! And without the equipment that God gives, no woman nor any man is fit for the ministry.

Paul says in 1 Corinthians 11: 11: "Nevertheless neither is the man without the woman, neither the woman without the man, in the Lord." Man needs the woman's help, support, and encouragement to carry out his role of leadership and teaching responsibility, and the woman needs the security that man can give her. God said to Eve, "Thy *desire* shall be to thy husband." *Desire* in the Hebrew is "that affection which is drawn out to a superior" (Wilson's Word Studies). In the Septuagint, the Greek Old Testament, the Greek word used is *apostrophe*, which means "turning back" and is translated "Your *submission* shall be to your husband." Now this Greek word *apostrophe* also means "finding an escape, a refuge, a place or person to whom one can resort." It also means "satisfying a desire." See Liddell and Scott, *Greek-English Lexicon*. The picture is that of a ship in a storm seeking refuge and security in a safe harbour where all her needs and maternal instincts are satisfied.

The woman is a great strength to the man and the man is a secure refuge for the woman. He finds in her strong comfort, and she finds in him a sure leader and guide. God said to Eve, "He shall rule over thee." He shall be your head in the family, and his headship in the family is to be expressed in the church.

THE DIACONATE

But what about the Diaconate? Is this open to women? In the general use of the word, yes, of course, for all Christians are servants of Christ. *Diakonos* views a servant in relationship to his work, whereas *doulos* views a servant in relationship to his master (See W. E. Vine, *Expository Dictionary of New Testament words*). James Hurley says, "Elders are responsible for the protection, spiritual growth and discipline of the flock. Deacons are responsible for representing and leading the people of God in the expression of the love of God in deed. The term "deacon" means servant, and is exemplified in the services which the "deacons" of Acts 6 and Phoebe rendered. As defined (and I believe this is a correct biblical definition of elder and deacon) the office of the deacon does not come within the purview of the prohibition of 1 Timothy 2, because it simply does not involve formal teaching or disciplinary authority." (*The Role of Women*, 139)

But does Scripture suggest that there was an order of women deacons or deaconesses? This would be hard to prove. But wasn't Phoebe a servant or diakonos of the Church at Cenchrea? Yes, she was. But does diakonos used here mean she was ordained a deacon? Or is Paul using the word generally in its meaning of "one who serves"?

What did Phoebe do as a deacon of the church at Cenchrea? To answer that we must ask what she would need when visiting Rome. What she would need would be hospitality. Cenchrea was a port in Corinth and sailors landing there would, above all things, need hospitality. But to leap from this to an official function in the church is not warranted. Hendriksen in his commentary on 1 Timothy says, "As to Romans 16: 1, no adequate reason has been given to prove that there the term [*diakonos*] used in the original does not have its far more usual meaning servant (correctly thus rendered in the A.V.) or assistant, one who ministers lovingly . . . to the cause of the gospel." Also in 1 Timothy 3: 11 does *gunaikes* refer to deaconesses or to an office of women deacons? Paul suddenly interrupts this passage on the requirements of deacons with the requirements of women. But who are these women? Hendriksen in his commentary on 1 Timothy says, "that these women are not 'the wives of deacons'; nor 'all the adult female members of the

church' is clear from the syntax; 'The overseer therefore must be . . . Deacons similarly (must be) . . . Women similarly (must be) . . .' One and the same verb coordinates the three: the overseer, deacons, women. Hence these women are here viewed as rendering special service in the church, as do the elders and the deacons. They are a group by themselves, not just the wives of the deacons nor all the women who belong to the church.

"On the other hand, the fact that no special and separate paragraph is used in describing their necessary qualifications, but that these are simply wedged in between the stipulated requirements for deacons, with equal clarity indicates that these women are not to be regarded as constituting a third office in the church, the office of 'deaconesses,' on a par with and endowed with authority equal to that of deacons.

"... The simplest explanation of the manner in which Paul, not yet finished with the requirements for the office of deacon, interjects a few remarks about women, is that he regards these women as the *deacon's assistants* in helping the poor and needy, etc. These are *women who render auxiliary service*, performing ministries for which women are better adapted." Surely, if there had been an order of women deacons equal in authority to male deacons, Paul could have told us? That women performed a great and important ministry in the church is undoubted. But that they were admitted into an order of deacons or deaconesses is not at all clear.

CONCLUSION

So we see that there is no inconsistency in Paul's asserting the equality of the sexes in Christ and also declaring that each sex is different from the other and that men and women are not always called to the same roles. We see also that Paul did not write as he was moved by prejudice or by the cultural ideas of his own time. He wrote as he was moved by the Holy Spirit; and to say that women can be appointed or ordained to the teaching and ruling offices of the church, one must say that Paul was wrong to appeal to the account of the creation of man and woman and their fall, and/or that that account itself is wrong, or that he did not write as he was moved by the Holy Spirit. But once that step is taken it is clear that the authority and sufficiency of Scripture to speak for the church for all time has been rejected. (See Noel Weeks, *The Sufficiency of Scripture*.) Anyone who supports the ordination of women to a position of leadership and oversight in the church denies the infallibility and authority of God's Word.

All Scripture has been given by inspiration of God and is sufficient to bring the whole church to completion and to thoroughly equip it for every good work. But if women take to themselves that role and function which God and Christ have appointed for men only, will they not metaphorically be putting on that which pertains to men? And if the church appoints women into the role of presbyter or bishop, a position for men only, then will it not become an abomination to the Lord? And if the church persists in appointing or ordaining women presbyters or bishops, will it not be making meaningless the family order decreed by God as well as riding roughshod over the infallibility and sufficiency of Scripture? Will the church not also be making herself an abomination to the Lord as well as encouraging women to make themselves an abomination to the Lord? The church of Rome made itself an abomination to the Lord when the Pope usurped the authority and headship of Christ. Now the church of England is about to make itself an abomination to the Lord by encouraging women to usurp the authority and headship of man by putting on that office which pertains only to man. Take the example of Miriam (Numbers 12). She sought a position of equal authority with Moses and Aaron and God showed his displeasure by making her an abomination to all by turning her into a leper. She led in the transgression and Aaron meekly followed. So because Aaron did not exert his authority and prevent her from rebelling, he brought on her a terrible punishment.

What light then does the New Testament shed on the question of the ministry of women today? All Christians in their private roles are allowed all peaceful means to help each other to grow in godliness and all are called to minister to others as witnesses in a private, extraordinary ministry. It seems clear that anything is open to women except the office of presbyter or bishop. There is the ministry of prayer, of comfort, of strengthening and encouraging, and of speaking a word at the right time to the weary and the discouraged as John Owen tells us in his *Duty of Pastors and People distinguished*.

In the New Testament, Christ gave pastors and teachers as the ordinary appointed ministry, and these two offices were exercised by bishops and presbyters. But otherwise, ministry was extraordinary and depended on spiritual gifts and the present need. These ministries were often temporary, as it appears from the raising up of seven deacons to look after the needs of the Grecian widows. The question has been put by Tony Baker (*Churchman*, CIV (1990), no. 1), "Would not women be more honoured and their distinctive ministry be more respected if there was a distinctive order of women deacons who are part of a ministry team?" "What we need to do," suggests Jim Packer (*Why not?* edd Bruce and Duffield, Marcham

Manor Press, Abingdon, 1976, 172-3), "is to devise patterns of team ministry in congregations in which the masculinity of men and the femininity of women will both be fully realised." This sounds a good idea so long as we remember that women are not to be appointed to any position of leadership and authority over men in the church. And if we deny this then we must prove that we know better than God as to what makes for the perfect church.

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