

MEN AND WOMEN IN BIBLICAL PERSPECTIVE pt.6 10-14-12

MEN AND WOMEN IN THE CHURCH

(Acts 1) The Gender Puzzle: Men and Women in Biblical Perspective is the series in which we find ourselves. In a sense this is the last installment on this subject and in another sense we have two to go after this. To explain: I see the series as being 8 parts but the last 2 studies won't pertain to our sexuality as it affects our functions and roles, rather it will deal with our sexuality as it affects our sexual activity. That is, we will be looking at what God teaches us about sexual behavior. Because of the subject matter ahead the next week two weeks we will be providing a special teaching experience for youngsters up thru 12 during the sermon if parents choose to utilize that. That is what is ahead; but today we turn our attention to men, women, and the church. As we have seen from Scripture in previous weeks, God has made men and women with some inherent differences that will result in their moving toward diverse functions in society. And I ran across a funny piece this week on male-female differences. This one entitled: *Great Reasons To Be a Guy*. I will give you the highlights. Great reasons to be a guy? Phone conversations are over in 30 seconds flat. You can open all your own jars. You can go to a public bathroom without a support group. You can quietly watch a game for hours with your buddy without thinking, *he must be mad at me*. You can drop by to see a friend without bringing a little gift. You are unable to see wrinkles in your own clothes. Christmas shopping can be accomplished for 25 relatives on Christmas Eve in 45 minutes. Certain feminist organizations have argued for decades that the only difference between men and women are physical, but honest folks know better. Today we consider how we might express masculinity and femininity in the church.

The first premise I would like to put forth is that the church is a co-ed institution. When we open the pages of the New Testament we find that the kingdom of God, as it is expressed in the visible church, includes men and women on an equal basis. That's no surprise is it? Nothing notable about that is there? Well, no, not from our 21st century perspective but it does become important when you understand that the gospel was first proclaimed in a society that saw women as second class citizens of God's kingdom. In first century Judaism, women were riding in the back of the bus to be sure, but Jesus, by word and example, abolished that kind of sexual bias and honored women as fellow heirs of the grace of life. The small core of the first Christians in Jerusalem included an important band of ladies. Acts 1:14 speaking of the 11 disciples it says **14**. *These all with one mind were continually devoting themselves to prayer, along with the women, and Mary the mother of*

Jesus, and with His brothers. And then on the day of Pentecost, in that first Christian sermon Peter quoted the prophet Joel and proclaimed 2:**17-18** *And it shall be in the last days,' God says, 'That I will pour forth of My Spirit on all mankind; And your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, And your young men shall see visions, And your old men shall dream dreams; 18 Even on My bondslaves, both men and women, I will in those days pour forth of My Spirit And they shall prophesy.* It is not the dominant note to be sure, but I detect at least a note of sexual equality being declared right at the start of New Testament history as the point is made that the Spirit of God will be poured out on men and women. In his account of the expanding church Luke took pains to make it clear that women were included. 5:**14** *all the more believers in the Lord, multitudes of men and women, were constantly added to their number.* We know that New Testament baptism was applied equally to women as to men, but this is not something that would have been assumed. The writer of Acts especially notes it. 8:**12** *But when they believed Philip preaching the good news about the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were being baptized, men and women alike.* As we go on in Acts we find that the mission of the church was directed as much to women as to men. In Acts 16:**13** *on the Sabbath day we went outside the gate to a riverside, where we were supposing that there would be a place of prayer; and we sat down and began speaking to the women who had assembled.* It was the perspective of Paul that women were as worthy an audience as men and he gave himself on this sabbath to a purely female group. We read then of Lydia embracing the gospel and serving the apostles. Luke notes in Acts 17:**4** *some of them were persuaded and joined Paul and Silas, along with a large number of the God-fearing Greeks and a number of the leading women.* And so it goes throughout the history of the early church.

The epistles reflect the same state. Women believe, are baptized and enter the ministries of the church right alongside the men. In Romans 16 Paul gives thanks to several women who had helped him. In Philippians 4 he mentions Euodia and Syntyche who shared in his struggles for the gospel. We read of Priscilla and her husband Aquila who were great leaders and teachers. And we even read in Acts 21 about women who were prophets. In every way we see the practical outworking of the great declaration made in Galatians 3:**28** *There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus.* But, that essential equality in the eyes of God does not mean that men and women will function in identical ways within society or the family or the church. So, having set forth the similarities that exist between men and women in the church let me go on to those ways in which men and women will

function differently within the body of Christ and the first issue we need to address is the relationship of women to authority in the church.

It is the official position of the second largest Presbyterian body, the Presbyterian Church in America, and historically of all Presbyterian groups, that the office of elder – the ruling office in the church- is not open to those of the feminine persuasion. It is the position today of the mainline, Presbyterian Church in the United States, that the office of elder must be open to women. It is the position of our denomination, the Evangelical Presbyterian Church, that the matter is up to the convictions of each individual church, so that some EPC churches have women in ruling offices and some do not. For those of you who don't understand our system of government, we believe in church rule by a group of elected leaders whom we, and the Bible, call elders. Other churches may call their governmental heads deacons or trustees. But whatever you call them every church has some person or group in whom authority is vested. And North Park Church believes that the office of elder should belong exclusively to men. Now why would anyone hold such a position? Why would someone in our enlightened society where women are senators and secretaries of state and heads of corporations, why would a church exclude women from such a position of authority? Surely the only possible reason is a personal narrowness of perspective, that kind of close-mindedness seen in the bigots of our world. Surely the reason that some churches refuse ordination to women is that they are controlled by a group of insecure, power-hungry males. Such are the accusations leveled against groups such as the PCA and North Park Church. TV preacher, Fred Price once told his audience that any church that refused to ordain women was not a Jesus church but a devil church. Sociologist Tony Campolo said that any church that restricts the role of women has become a tool of Satan. Those somewhat more charitable might label us as traditional or old-fashioned. But certainly there cannot be any good reasons for limiting the eldership to men. Well, maybe there isn't unless you believe the Bible to be the word of God ... which I do and because of that I also believe that women should not be elders. Now, to accuse me of having some evil disposition which causes me to hold this view would be to completely misunderstand me. My inclination is not to exclude but to include women. My temptation is to go along with the great wave of our society. I don't enjoy swimming against the tide. I don't want to be thought narrow or chauvinistic. But I know that one day I will give an account before God of how I followed His instructions and my conscience is held captive by the word of God. And friends, there are Scriptural reasons for making elders only of men. I Timothy 2:**11-14** *A woman must quietly receive*

instruction with entire submissiveness. 12 But I do not allow a woman to teach or exercise authority over a man, but to remain quiet. 13 For it was Adam who was first created, and then Eve. 14 And it was not Adam who was deceived, but the woman being deceived, fell into transgression.

12 *But I do not allow a woman to teach or exercise authority over a man.* Since the elder is in the place of church authority what does that tell you? In chapter 3 it gives the qualities of an elder and they fit the man. Verse 2 says he is the husband of one wife. 4,5 *He must be one who manages his own household well, keeping his children under control with all dignity 5 (but if a man does not know how to manage his own household, how will he take care of the church of God?)* And as we read elsewhere in God's word, who is it that is to be the manager of the household? The man. In the nation of Israel all the elders were men. In the New Testament church all the elders were men. I hope you can see that an unbiased Christian could think that only men should be elders. The Bible teaches it and teaches it quite plainly.

But the more enlightened might claim that these words of Paul in I Timothy 2 are culturally bound prescriptions. They were relevant for AD 65 but not 2012. And it must be granted that some commands in Scripture are culturally bound, directed only to the immediate situation and not normative for us today. God said some things to Old Testament Israel that we don't need to do, certain things important only for their day such as laws pertaining to the land, to the temple and to ritual purity. It is reasonable and possible that we find in Scripture certain commands given and relevant only in light of a persisting situation. But is I Timothy 2:12 such a command? Let's see. 12 *But I do not allow a woman to teach or exercise authority over a man, but to remain quiet.* Why? Is there some problem in Ephesus where Timothy was pastor that would make this wise? If Paul gave no reasons that might be an acceptable conjecture, but Paul gives reasons for what he says and his reasons have nothing to do with present problems. 13 *For it was Adam who was first created, and then Eve.* He points back to creation and the order of creation. The basis for Paul's claim in 2:12 has not and never will change. Adam was constituted as the leader in his relation to Eve back in the garden, and if that informs our relations in the first century it will inform our relations in the 20th century. And again, the issue here is not superiority and inferiority but God-appointed roles. From the beginning God made man male and female, both in His image, both with the same inherent dignity and worth. But the principle roles of leadership in the home and church God reserves for the male. That is a principle that transcends every culture. Our job in these days is to discern how that applies in our present culture. To that we go right now.

Issue #1 should women be ordained? Now first, understand that question means different things to different people. Different churches and denominations have different understandings of ordination. To some it may mean a simple setting apart to some special work. A person may be ordained to do evangelism in the inner-city or ordained to feed the hungry in Asia. If that is what you mean by ordination go ahead and ordain women. That would be fine. But in most churches ordination means more than that. In Presbyterianism in general it has had peculiar reference to the teaching ministry of the church. We call clerically ordained men Teaching Elders and that ordination serves as the denomination's seal of approval on what a man believes and teaches. It gives him a certain authority **and** it gives him a vote and a voice in church courts. It is clearly a position of authority and, as such, is off-limits to women according to I Timothy 2.

But in our system of government we have a second type of elder. In addition to the Teaching Elders such as myself and Jonathan and Bobby, there are also ruling elders who are called out to be shepherds and governors within the church just like the teaching elders except without the special calling to teach or preach. How about these elders? Is it permissible to put women in their office? Well, the answer to that is clear. Whether one is a teaching elder or ruling elder he is still an elder, a ruler within the church. He is vested with authority over the church and I Timothy 2:12 says a woman must not be in a position of authority over a man and the qualifications for elder clearly exclude women from the office. That is God's word.

And I offer one other thing to think about as it concerns church authority and submission. A woman in the church is in no different a position than is any other non-elder. The authority in the church is not vested in the men but in the elders. All non-elder men are just as subject to the authority of the elders as the ladies are. And even the elders themselves are each subject to one another or to the elder board as a whole.

Now obviously this biblical approach to church authority militates against the spirit of our age. Opposition to feminism is generally seen as a cardinal sin of the enlightened age. Westminster Seminary in Philadelphia has even been threatened with the revocation of its accreditation because their board of directors are all men. The day may come when churches like ours lose tax exempt status because of our convictions. Our position is frowned upon in general but I find one statistic very interesting. The fastest growing churches in America are those that do not ordain women. On the other hand, the denominations that have the most liberal attitudes toward women's roles are

losing members including the mainline Presbyterians, the United Methodists and Episcopalians. Considering only human factors that is rather hard to explain isn't it?

Before I move on, I want to say a brief word about the many solid churches and wonderful pastors, even in our own denomination, who interpret and apply the Scriptures differently. They do have arguments for their position that have some merit.. They point to women in Scripture, like Deborah and Priscilla, who had significant roles in leading and teaching men. I invite you to study their writings on the subject. Still, this is not an issue that I find to be especially unclear in Scripture, but I admit that there are folks who love Jesus more than me who have reached different conclusions on these matters. I also admit that there are exceptional circumstances, situations in which male leadership is absent, situations on the mission field where the church is undeveloped, in which women can and should take up roles that are not normally appointed for them.

So, we have seen that ordination of women to offices of church authority is prohibited by God's word. That means no women elders, but what about the office of deacon? The answer is not that simple when you consider the role of deacon, partly because the Bible does not as clearly define the role of the deacon as it does the role of an elder. In our form of government the deacon does not hold a ruling office. The board of deacons, called the diaconate, is an administrative board not a governing board. Does a woman in that office violate our principle? No it doesn't. That is why we have a board of deacons that includes women working alongside the men. Consider the qualifications for deacon listed in I Timothy 3. In verses 8-10 there is nothing that would indicate whether man or woman. Where it uses the term "man" it is the generic form of the word and could be "person." But in verse 11, in the middle of the qualifications for deacon it says 11 *Women must likewise be dignified, not malicious gossips, but temperate, faithful in all things.* And then it goes on to give more requirements for deacons. How you understand verse 11 determines your view on women as deacons. Some say this refers to wives of deacons. Others say it refers to deacons who are women. Others say it refers to a separate group who may be called deaconesses. #1, the idea that this concerns deacon's wives, seems forced. It would seem odd that this chapter list requirements for the wives of deacons but not the wives of elders. Options #2 and 3 seem to me to be equally valid positions. But there are other relevant passages. Romans 16:1 *I commend to you our sister Phoebe, who is a servant of the church which is at Cenchrea.* The term here translated "servant" is the Greek *diakonon* or deacon. It is found in the masculine form indicating that it was an office that Phoebe held. She is either a deacon or deaconess but it does appear she held an office.

So, we know that women may not hold the office of elder and may hold the office of deacon. What else can they do in the church? Well, my first response is to note that the opportunities for women in Christian service are great and varied. Almost every non-ruling kind of service in the church is open to women. Women accomplish an enormous amount in their evangelism, and encouragement and teaching. They function as worship leaders, especially the musicians. They function in positions of service and administration. They are the backbone of our youth educational ministries. Women in this church and every other church I've been in are busy serving God and His people; they aren't sitting on their hands saying, "if I can't be an elder, I'm not going to do anything in this church." Ladies, the opportunities for you to use your spiritual gifts are endless. But there is one other matter that I must address. I Timothy 2:12 not only keeps women from exercising authority over a man but also from teaching a man. *12 But I do not allow a woman to teach or exercise authority over a man, but to remain quiet.* What exactly does this mean? With regard to the part about remaining quiet. I am not convinced that this means women are not allowed to speak in church contexts. The word for "quiet" is the same Greek word used earlier in I Timothy 2: **1-2** *I urge that entreaties and prayers, petitions and thanksgivings, be made on behalf of all men, for kings and all who are in authority, so that we may lead a tranquil and quiet life.* By a "quiet" life he doesn't mean a life that does not involve oral communication. He means a life free from contention and strife. I Peter 3 calls women to maintain a gentle and quiet spirit. No thought here of wordlessness, but of a cooperative, peaceful demeanor.

But what about the teaching issue? Again we go back to the principle which is, women in the church are not to be in authority over men. Is teaching a position of authority? This is a judgment call. In Paul's day, the teacher had more perceived authority than our average teacher today and so Paul said they should not teach. Does that mean that a female nurse should not teach a class on First-aid to men who work in our nursery? I doubt that. I would restrict the concern to Biblical and doctrinal instruction. But even then, is it wrong for a woman in any context to teach men? That's a tough one. My loosely held view is "no" or not necessarily. I can go along with a woman teaching men if she does so under the authority of the appointed male elders who endorse her and oversee her. Teaching done by an ordained person takes on an additional authority since that teacher himself bears the approval of the church. The question again is authority. In any given teaching context we do well to show that a woman is doing what she does under the proper authorities. There are, I think, some legitimate differences in application of this principle when it comes to

women teachers. Some things are lawful that may not be best, and so I prefer to eliminate any question as much as is possible by appointing men as the primary teachers in the church. Obviously women are to teach other women. Older women are exhorted to teach younger women. Women are allowed to teach children but where to draw the line is very difficult. The question to ask is: "does this role place the woman in authority over men?" Be honest with that and I believe God will be pleased.

My final application of our study is directed primarily to the men. In the home and in the church, brothers, God says we are to set the pace. We are to provide leadership. We are to set the course and provide the example. Of all the reasons I know why we have such tremendous gender confusion in our day, reason #1 is that men have failed to live up to their responsibilities. Women in the home are confused and wondering what they are supposed to do in light of their husbands failures. How much should they allow their kids to suffer, how much should they allow the finances to suffer, how much should they allow themselves to suffer while they wait and pray that their husbands will start to live according to the commandments of God? And the same things happen in the church. Well-meaning women, concerned for the work of the church and the ministries thereof, are sucked into positions of leadership for which they aren't especially suited because there is a vacuum of male leadership. And rather than sit around speaking scornfully of those who ignore Biblical order I suggest we men do our part in seeing that the church is well supplied with qualified men to lead and to teach. Leonard Ravenhill likes to point out that the church was born in the upper room with a group of men agonizing but the church will die in the supper room with a group of women organizing. Where are the men who in word and deed are saying that what matters are the things of eternity, the things of the kingdom of God? When the men are providing servant leadership in the home and the church I don't find the ladies fighting with that. I find that they are freed up to give themselves to those things for which they are especially gifted and to which they are called by God. Ladies, your efforts in the church are so valuable and they are so needed, I urge you to give yourself to those things God has granted for you to do. Still, I think it fitting to close with the words of William Merrill's hymn that are addressed to us brothers. "Rise Up O Men of God have done with lesser things, give heart and soul and mind and strength to serve the King of Kings. Rise up O men of God! The church for you doth wait, her strength unequal to her task; rise up and make her great."

- Prayer that Christ might rule His church and have His way. close with He is Lord