

The Position Of Women In The Church

The position of women in the church is possibly the most contentious issue that we have faced this century, and unless we can get the Biblical perspective it is one that will tear the church to pieces. Perhaps the title itself is to some a little contentious; however women do have a major part to play, not a bit part. But we must first understand that part, so that women can play a full role according to the order of God and not the dictates of the modern feminist movements. My own position is I believe firmly anchored in scripture according to the Jewish traditions of our fathers. In Jewish tradition women are a little more subject, not because she is undervalued, but for her own safety, for women play the most important role God gave, they bring forth children into the world, unto God which is certainly not a role that a man could do.

So let us come to reason just what God ordained in the beginning. In Genesis 1:26 we read

*“Then God said Let us make man in our image, according to our likeness: let **them** have dominion over the fish of the sea ,over the birds of the air and over the cattle over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth” Gen 1:26-27*

Now let us examine this likeness, in what way are we like God? well man is a personal, rational, and moral being. Although God is infinite man is finite, but he nevertheless bears the similarities of the divine God in **Thinking** (Gen 2:19-20, **Feeling** (Gen 3:6) **Willing** (Gen3:6-7). It has been said before that man is made up of **Body, Soul, and Spirit**. But this is not correct according to Hebraic understanding, this is a purely Platonic and Greek-o Roman theory, the Hebrew understanding is that man is body and spirit, for in this thinking the spirit and soul are the same thing and they make up the personality. Now the way in which man has the likeness of God is he is made like the Trinity, that is he is made in God’s ‘image’, not His express image but His ‘selem’ in Hebrew which means something cut from an object, like a piece of clay cut from a sculpture. That is man has two parts to his being - his body and his spirit, and originally it was made for him to both function on the earth whilst also moving by his Spirit back to the presence of his Father and creator God (Gen 3:8). But in verse 18 of chapter two God said

“It is not good that man should be alone, I will make him a helper comparable to him. And the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall on Adam, and he slept; and He took one of his ribs, and closed up the flesh in its place. Then the rib which the Lord God had taken from the man He made into woman, and He brought her to the man.” Gen 2: 21-22

If we look at our previous quote Gen 1:26-27 we see plainly that God speaks in the plural when He says ‘Let **them** have dominion’ which shows that it was always in the mind of God to make Adam a helpmate. Why? Because Adam is made in His image. Now let us concentrate on this ‘image’ or likeness for a moment, the Bible shows the likeness of God which He duplicated to be the two members of the Godhead, Father and Son and they together have one Spirit (Math 11:27, Luke 10:22, John 5:17,6:57,8:29,10:30,10:38,14:9-11).

Therefore male and female are an image or likeness of the Godhead because when they come together they are one flesh, in a similar way the Godhead is one. Now if we return to Gen 2:21-22 we read that woman was made of a rib from Adam; but the Hebrew doesn’t read rib, it reads ‘tzeilah’ which means ‘side’, so after God had placed Adam in a deep sleep He took away his side. Now this does not make sense unless we understand it in its proper meaning. The word side is used as of the side of a building as used in Ex 25:12 so now it all begins to make sense. God took half of Adam away to make Eve, and the rabbis say that it was part of his emotions and his spirituality which would

equip Eve to be a mother of all living humans, the first of her kind. This is why women are usually more emotional and more spiritual than men, and it is because women took on board the superior spiritual role that they are vulnerable to demonic attack because the male role that God left for Adam and subsequently man, was one of overall authority.

If you just think on this for a minute we can now see why women in the New Testament are told they can not preach or have authority over men (1 Tim 2:12). Not because she can't, for many women preach better than men, but because although she has the superior spiritual ability she has not got the authority from God to do the job. The order of God is first God, then men and finally women, just like the image: first God, then the Son, then the helper (John 16:7, 1Cor 11:3). Another word used is comforter and this explains the two roles adequately. This is why a woman is the weaker vessel, not because she is physically weak but spiritually weak. That is why both together are the better team and God's choice. It could never be that women are physically weak, most women are many times stronger than men, they can endure more pain as they do over and over again in childbirth and many women hold down a job and then come home and are expected to start there all over again, looking after lazy men. But marriage is a partnership where both are expected to contribute; they are co-equals in life, but spiritually they have to take a back seat for their own protection.

Now this protection is something we must also address; Paul says in 1 Corinthians 11 that women should pray with their heads covered as a symbol of authority (1Cor 11:10) because of the angels. What difference would it make to the angels? Its not God's angels that are a problem - it's the fallen angels, the demons who could take advantage of a women who has no symbol of authority to protect her. This especially applies to single women, who because of their love for the Lord think they can do almost anything, even usurping authority from men who are called of God, these women through pride cause splits and dissensions in the church. This is something that God will not allow, as we read in the book of Revelations 2 about the church of Thyatira and the pastors wife Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess to teach and seduce. The Masoretic text reads 'your wife Jezebel', her weakness was that she came out from under her husbands covering or authority and the demonic forces caused her to commit sexual immorality and eat things offered to idols. The Lord said that he had given her time to repent but she did not, so He said He would place her on a sick bed along with all who are involved with her into great tribulation.

These women place themselves in harms way by not obeying scripture; many do become sick and infact very ill until they resume their God given position. How many pastors wives do you know of that have gone through such terrible illnesses because they neither cover their heads in worship or they take on pastoral roles that are not God given. Demonic oppression is something that is largely ignored these days; because of false teaching that says that the devil is a lion with rubber teeth and that he can do nothing. If Peter informs us that we should beware of the devil who goes about like a roaring lion to see who he may devour (1Peter 5:8), he would not waste his time seeking whom he could devour if he couldn't devour. It is precisely that he can devour that he goes around trying to devour. And women are a prime target because he knows that many of them, like the fallen angels will not stay in their first estate. The devil tempts them to move just as he did with Eve (Gen 3:1-6) and they become discontented with their lot, then he devours them. Why do you think that so many spiritualists and psychics are women? Incidentally it's not only women that get caught in his snares, but the temptations are different for men than they are for women. The temptation for men is to lay aside their authoritative roles, which is one reason why men become homosexuals and many other kinds of perversions which are unspeakable. If satan can usurp the authority from men he wrecks God's plans for the family and forces women to take on board the roles that men have forsaken, to protect her family, which again leaves her vulnerable.

Women's Roles

The plan of God for women in the church is that she teaches other women and children how to live modestly; a God fearing life in prayer and supplications as well as encouraging the men to take

on board the major roles in the church for the good of all, and not to opt out of their responsibility. (Titus 2:3-5) So what roles can women take on that enable them to remain Biblical? They may become deacons as this in no way erodes authority; a deacon has a serious task to perform. The word deacon comes from the Hebrew word 'shamash' and a Shamash was someone who cleaned and looked after the synagogue, lit the candles and generally prepared it for the various meetings and festivals. In the Bible in the book of Timothy when discussing deacons Paul always uses the male gender 'he', 'let him'. However we read in Acts and throughout scripture that the early church was happy to hold their meetings in the homes of prominent families which meant that they were to a certain extent flexible where necessary. So to must we be, in certain circumstances such as very small churches that have only a few elderly ladies keeping the witness, or if there is an occasion where the church has more females than males, the light must not be allowed to go out just because men won't take up the roles. As long as the authority is female and they don't teach and have authority over men then in certain circumstances this should be permitted. The Bible doesn't say they can't run churches or have authority in churches, it just says that the authority must not be in place if there are men in the congregation. There are also ministries to the sick, elderly and disabled, as well as the socially estranged, prisoners, youth work etc, there is so much in civil life outside the church that women could do and do well. Sunday school is a natural role of which many women avail themselves, along with old age people groups not to mention prayer ministries, if they are under the church authority, along with missionary work.

We must remember this is not an anti-women thing, it's a safety for women thing, and it is the decree of the traditions of the elders of the early church and their response to a rejection of these traditions is

" But if anyone seems to be contentious, we have no such custom, nor do the churches of God".

1Cor.11:16

Misinformation on the Subject

Various people have in the past contended for the case of women taking leadership roles, one is a lady who is Rebbetzin in Beth Emanuel Messianic Congregation in Holbrook New York. Carol Carlisle has made a number of points which I will reiterate. Carol has used the following texts to prove that the New Testament, and especially in the writings of Paul show women in leadership.

In Philippians 4:2-3 she makes the point that the two women mentioned were regarded by Paul as leadership material, simply because Paul referring to them as 'fellow workers' means they were ministers.

I see nothing here to give that impression, Carol makes the point that the Greek text used is *'Ton loipwn sunergonmou'* saying that Paul only used these terms for people of authority in the church. If Paul used the term fellow workers He means exactly that, this term in no way infers leadership. Paul would want to have all his work fellows recognised especially in this case as he is commending them to the church and the church would have been expected to support them, but this does not infer leadership.

Again she insights Romans 16:3-4 which mentions Pricilla and Aquilla, inferring that because Pricilla is named first, this indicates that she had been made a leader of some kind.

Again I can not follow this line of thinking, Pricilla was the daughter of a high born Roman family called 'gens Prisca' and Aquilla was a slave in his house. It was usual in the secular families of that time for the person with the highest born name in a marriage to go first. The Cemetery of Pricilla on the Via Salara in Rome is called after a noble lady at the end of the first or beginning of the second century, many of the burials in that cemetery are of early church Christian members of the Senatorial family bearing the name 'Acilius Glabrio' who was the consul in AD91 and was put to death by the

Emperor Domitian on a charge of Judaism which might well imply Christianity.(1) Its probably the case that they left Rome when the Emperor Claudius issued an edict expelling all Jews in AD49 they returned in AD57 when they started a church in their house (1Cor 16:19) which appears to be the beginning of the fellowship in Rome. By the time they returned Aquilla was possibly able to afford his freedom for the name change in scripture occurs and it becomes Aquilla and Pricilla (1Cor 16:19). To conclude Paul often is seen to use the family name 'Prisca' since they were married, but there is no evidence to prove that Pricilla was a minister above Aquilla, indeed they worked on the principle that Christianity was Jewish, and in Jewish circles this would simply not happen.

(1) F. F. Bruce 'The Pauline Circle' p44 Paternoster 1995

In Romans 16:1-3 Phoebe is mentioned as a leader of the congregation in Cenchrea

Again I find no reason in scripture to support Carol's argument that Phoebe was an elder, Paul here announces Phoebe to be a servant and nothing more. Carol is right that Paul uses the word '*Diakonos*' which is deacon but as I have already said the Hebrew word for deacon is shamash and It means a person who looks after the synagogue, which would be why Paul uses the word 'servant of the church'

Romans 16:7 mentions a person named Junia who was said to be a female Apostle.

The text states that

"Greet Andronicus and Junia, my fellow countrymen and my fellow prisoners who are of note among the Apostles." (Rom 16:7)

On this subject FF Bruce states " It is impossible to tell from the Greek form used here whether the name was Junia (feminine) or Junias (masculine) but the name Junias or Junianus of which it would have been an abbreviation does not appear to occur elsewhere. C.E.B.Cranfield in his commentary on Romans states it is likely that Andronicus and Junia were a married couple. The text also states that they were from the same place as Paul; they were fellow workers of Paul, which had been of note among the Apostles. But that does not mean that they themselves were apostles, merely noted brethren who came to Christ before Paul did, but nothing more. Furthermore there were only twelve Apostles chosen by Jesus for the tasks he had for them to do, namely to release the Holy Spirit on the indigenous people groups, after which the position of Apostle was no more. (The Pauline Circle/ Paul :Apostle of the free spirit. FF Bruce)

She also makes the case that Ephesians 5 is not referring to women or prohibiting them from service in leadership roles, but is dealing entirely with marital relationships.

If we look closely at the chapter as a whole we will see that the previous portion of scripture (v18-21) is dealing with spiritual warfare in ones daily walk, and how one should conduct ones self in that light. Paul in his teaching methods was holistic not systematic, so in the next portion of scripture (v22-33) he deals with the typical scenario which makes men and women vulnerable their behaviour to each other, and of course their relationship to the Lord. Paul even uses the male female symbolism to denote Christ's marital obligations to the church. But the pre-emphasis is that each one should keep his authoritative role Christ gave them and not to usurp authority, this is why Paul refers back again to Gen 2:23-24.

Conclusion

It is clear that women have a dual role with men of co equal status in everything except the authority of God. The feminist movements of the 18th century had a lot to prove and women's rights were at that time appalling and in desperate need of reform, even now there are some areas in civic life that still need attention and people like Emily Pankhurst are absolute heroes for human kind, but even this is no reason to in anyway alter scripture, the word of God is sacrosanct in all and every era and remains untouchable. The paper mentioned in this article is found on

www.umjc.org/documents/.women.htm and is written by Carole Carlisle for those who would like a full transcript.