

The Divine Order of the Sexes

By Gerry Watts

One of the most controversial topics in the church today is the issue of women in ministry. Well, to be more exact, the controversy is not really about ministry in general, but it has more to do with women being in positions of authority over men, such as, for example, priests, vicars, pastors or teachers. But as far as Scripture is concerned, Christendom's hierarchy of priests and vicars, etc, does not actually apply to the Body of Christ as taught by the apostle Paul.

So in this article we shall be briefly addressing the common question 'Should women become pastors, teachers or elders in the local Christian congregations?' We shall also briefly address some well-known passages from Paul's teaching on the subject and see how they are applicable for today. This is only a brief study to lay out some principles for further reflection. For further study, see *Spiritual Authority and Order in the Ecclesia of God*.

It is evident that throughout the Scriptures there are certain principles or laws that God, as the Creator, has established within His creation. Fundamentally, these truths never change. These laws often take the form of a divine order in creation, particularly as applied to humanity. The order of the sexes is one such example and this order is clearly taught throughout Scripture, with the male being first and then the female. This is especially evident in the Law of Moses and later Judaism, although humanity as a whole has generally practised this natural order from the beginning.

This order is based on the original creation of humanity recorded in Genesis chapter 2, where it clearly states that Adam was created first, and then his wife Eve was formed from a part of Adam to be his complement or 'helper' (see also 1 Corinthians 11:8-12 & 1 Timothy 2:13-14). Even though numerous men have greatly abused their position in this regard, nevertheless, the patriarchal society is God-given.

The original founder of a people, tribe or clan was generally a male, and one of the primary reasons for this is because the male contains the seed for generating further offspring. The father is the head of his children, whom he has generated, and he is also the head of his wife, because woman was created for man (1 Corinthians 11:3, 8-9).

In the East, where the cradle of civilisation began, a wife was seen as the property of the husband, and she was to be taken care of as his treasured possession. This male position of responsibility is evident throughout the Scriptures and it was also taught by all of the apostles (Ephesians 5:22-6:4; 1 Timothy 2:11-14; 1 Peter 3:5-7). Another factor was that it was usually the males that did the fighting and defending of family and land, and they are therefore shown to be the physically stronger sex, generally speaking.

Peter says that honour should be awarded to women as the weaker vessel (1 Peter 3:7). In other words, a woman inherently longs for love and protection from a man (whether she admits it or not), and she should be treated as though she is a priceless vase. A female is the weaker vessel only in the sense that women are generally physically weaker than males, and smaller in stature, but in other respects, women can be stronger than men. For instance, how many men would put up with childbirth?

So it is clear that this divine order does NOT mean that men are better than women, and it does NOT give men an excuse to arrogantly mistreat women, but in accordance with the divine order, each sex has its unique place and role in creation. A man is to be a man and a woman is to be a woman, and particularly within marriage, the two complement one another.

But it is also clear that there is not absolute equality (this equality is only achieved in the New Humanity, in spirit). Even in the celestials or spirit world, there is a divine authority structure, which does not make all equal. This truth is especially evident in 1 Corinthians 11:3, where Paul makes it very clear that God is the Head of Christ, Christ is the Head of man, and man is the head of woman. (Although God is said to be the Head of Christ, Christ has been given the unique position of being equal to God in the task of revealing His Father to all creation - *'He deems it not pillaging to be equal with God'* - Philippians 2:6-7).

Now, of course, many women throughout history, and particularly in modern times, have rebelled against this order of the sexes, rightly or wrongly, due to the domination and abuse of men. Many women today are anti-men understandably, due to abuse, but others are just as proud and rebellious as men and they do not wish to submit to God's laws. All of this is the result of humanity's sin, and the flesh hates to submit to God's laws (in fact, it cannot truly do so by itself - Romans 8:6-8).

Through the influence of Satan, the world system always seeks to reverse the God-ordained order through changing customs, cultures and laws. This is particularly true concerning religion, which basically shapes a society. Within the various religious beliefs of the nations, God's truth and divine order is usually perverted or reversed (although this isn't always the case, as the nations have always had the law of God written in their hearts, with nature and conscience bearing witness - Romans 2:14-15).

The order of the sexes is a classic example. The female is raised to the status of a goddess with great power, dominating and seducing the male. Prostitution becomes an integral part of worship to the goddess or Queen of heaven. Another example is the view that all creatures are equal, whether it be an ant or a lion or a human. This belief then leads to animal worship and extreme forms of Vegetarianism. This places everything on the same plane without distinction, yet it ignores the divine order. The Theory of Evolution does the same thing.

According to the Bible, humanity is to rule wisely over the lower animal creation, and all edible plants and animals have been given to us for food (Genesis 9:1-4 & 1 Timothy 4:3-5). Yet the world, with its fashions and ideas, change, but God's truth fundamentally remains the same. We need to remember that in these last days, the

apostasy, rebellion and lawlessness will continue to increase, especially within Christendom.

Subjection

The real issue here is subjection. God, as the Supreme Subjector, is teaching His creation the principle of loving subjection through His divine order. This plan and purpose will not be complete until the consummation (1 Corinthians 15:24-28). A close consideration of the texts in Paul's letters that are referring to the role of women in the ecclesias will show that the fundamental issue that is being addressed is God's order of the sexes and spiritual authority. Paul needed to expound on this in some detail due to the 'pagan' influences in the ecclesias of the nations. So some knowledge of Graeco-Roman culture and beliefs is helpful in understanding Paul's meaning.

In these newly established 'churches' there was a mixture of Jewish, Greek and Roman influences, so Paul needed to lay down certain truths and guide lines for the ecclesias under his ministry. Some of these instructions were for local assemblies, and some of the observances were cultural, but nevertheless, the underlying truth that Paul was declaring through these instructions is applicable for the whole Body of Christ ecclesia throughout this administration of grace.

1 Corinthians 11:2-16 deals with the ancient custom of head covering, particularly for women. This was, and still is, intricately a part of Judaic culture and tradition, as even the men have prayer shawls to cover their heads. The Greeks and Romans were more liberal in regard to this custom.

'For a man, indeed, ought not to be covering his head, being inherently the image and glory of God. Yet the woman is the glory of the man. For man is not out of woman, but woman out of man. For, also, man is not created because of the woman, but woman because of the man. Therefore the woman ought to have authority over her head because of the messengers. However, neither is woman apart from man, nor man apart from woman, in the Lord. For even as the woman is out of the man, thus the man also is through the woman, yet all is of God...

Is not even nature itself teaching you that if a man, indeed, should have tresses, it is a dishonour to him, yet if a woman should have tresses, it is her glory, seeing that tresses have been given her instead of clothing? Now if anyone is presuming to be rivalrous, we have no such usage, neither the ecclesias of God.' (v 7-16)

Paul here confirms the God-ordained order of the sexes, but also makes it clear that both have their unique place in creation and ALL is of God. Even the celestial messengers are taking note of this order. He goes on to say that nature itself reveals to us that long flowing hair on a woman is her natural, glorious head covering, but on a man, it is a dishonour. This naturally distinguishes between a woman and a man, and hair is the 'real' head covering, not a shawl or scarf, etc. These instructions are for all the ecclesias of God, for it is the natural order. The actual observance of this custom may not now apply to those in the West, but the fundamental truth that Paul is declaring here concerning God's order and authority still stands.

The same applies to 1 Corinthians 14:34-38 and 1 Timothy 2:9-15.

'Let the women in the ecclesias hush, for it is not permitted to them to speak, but let them be subject, according as the law, also, is saying. Now, if they want to learn anything, let them be inquiring of their own husbands at home, for it is a shame for a woman to be speaking in the ecclesia. Or from you came out the Word of God? Or did it attain only to you? If anyone is presuming to be a prophet or spiritual, let him be recognising that what I am writing to you is a precept of the Lord. Now if anyone is ignorant, let him be ignorant!'

'Let a woman be learning in quietness with all subjection. Now I am not permitting a woman to be teaching nor yet to be domineering over a man, but to be in quietness (For Adam was first moulded, thereafter Eve, and Adam was not seduced, yet the woman, being deluded, has come to be in the transgression). Yet she shall be saved through the childbearing, if ever they should be remaining in faith and love and holiness with sanity.

(1 Timothy 2:11-15)

The ancient custom of the segregation of women may no longer apply, but Paul is saying that women should submit to the authority of the male elders and teachers, and should not usurp that authority by speaking or teaching. This particular 'speaking' or 'teaching' is referring to authoritative instruction to men in the public assemblies. It must be noted that many men, and especially women, were uneducated in those days and not many could read. Nevertheless, education isn't the real issue here, but the usurping of God's order.

Generally speaking, God does not raise up women to be pastor/teachers in the local assemblies. This doesn't mean that women shouldn't minister to others by giving scriptural instruction, but it does mean that God's spiritual order and authority needs to be reverently observed.

It would appear that women are more easily seduced by the Adversary in spiritual matters than men are, because women can be more sensitive to these things. Paul is implying this when he states that Adam knowingly sinned, but Eve was deluded by Satan, so that both of them have come to be in the original transgression, which led to the entrance of sin and death.

But he also says that a believing woman can be saved or rescued from these deceptions by adhering to her God-given role of childbearing or motherhood, and that believing women can escape many of sins problems by living a life of faith, love and holiness, with a sound mind. They are not to seek to change God's order and take on the role of a man, otherwise numerous problems and deceptions will inevitably arise.

We must understand, though it is very difficult in this modern era, that Scripture and nature clearly reveal that a woman's unique gift is to bear children and nurture them. In the ancient East, if a woman was barren, it was viewed as a shame and a curse. So motherhood is given high esteem throughout the Scriptures. Further evidence of this is given later on in Paul's first letter to Timothy. (It goes without saying that many women can be childless due to all kinds of circumstances, and even though adoption is another option, many choose to remain childless for all

sorts of reasons. A Christian woman in these circumstances can be greatly used by God in a way that goes far beyond motherhood).

In chapter 5, he gives instructions for dealing with the widows in the believing community. In those times, a woman needed to belong to a man, whether it was her father or a husband, or as a maidservant, otherwise she would become very poor and even homeless. An older widow was therefore often left without an income, and if there wasn't any family around to take care of her, she was left alone and in great need. Paul addresses this issue for the believing community and reveals that a list was kept of all widows over 60 years of age who were in genuine need, so that the ecclesia could take care of them if they were without family. Paul then gives a list of credentials for those widows who were to be accepted onto the list, which is very interesting in regard to our present subject.

'... having been the wife of one man, attested by ideal acts: if she nourishes children, if she is hospitable, if she washes the saints' feet, if she relieves the afflicted, if she follows up with every good work.'

(1 Timothy 5:9-10)

Scripture is very clear on this, that a woman who displays these characteristics of submissive love and service is greatly blessed in God's sight. Many of the women who followed Jesus were of this spirit, though a number of them had not previously been this way until they had met Jesus, such as Mary Magdalene. But we must also remember that Jesus washed his disciples' feet as an example for ALL to follow, whether male or female. We are ALL to submit to one another out of reverence for Christ (Ephesians 5:21).

Paul also goes on to say

'... that younger widows are to be marrying, bearing children, managing the household, giving an opposer nothing as an incentive favouring reviling, for already some were turned aside after Satan.' (verses 14-15).

Again, Paul encourages the women to stick to their God-given roles and good works, otherwise rebellion and loose living will inevitably take over instead, especially for the younger women.

In the above passages, Paul states that God's Word and divine order is the final authority, and we should not attempt to change it because we think that we know better or because the spirit of rising feminism says we should! *Did the Word of God originate with us?* Peter also confirms this truth in his first letter (1 Peter 3:1-7).

These principles of subjection also apply in other areas of life, such as, husband and wife, father (or parents) and children, masters and slaves, king or government, etc (Ephesians 5:22-6:9 & Romans 13:1-10). (It is very interesting to note that slavery or servanthood is never condemned in the Scriptures, and instructions for the treatment of male and female bondservants is very evident in the Law and in the writings of Paul. It is the abuse of slavery, and racial bigotry, that is condemned).

It would appear as though in other spheres of life, such as business and administrative roles, women can hold prominent positions, but believers should still display a spirit of wisdom and respect for God's order. Even throughout Scripture, in Israel's history, there were unique times when women were raised up to superior positions because of the lack of spiritual men available!

The Transitional Epistles

We must also bear in mind that Paul's earlier letters, which include 1 Corinthians and 1 Timothy, were written during a time of transition. It was a transition from the gospel of the Circumcision (primarily for Israel), which included Jewish customs and rituals, to the gospel of the Uncircumcision (for all nations), which doesn't require any ritual or observance of the Law. In his later epistles, which reveal the fullness of this administration of pure grace, Paul teaches that, in the new humanity, all are completely equal, including male and female (Colossians 3:11; Ephesians 2:14-16).

He had touched on this in his earlier letters (Galatians 3:27-28, 6:15-16) but the truth was now fully applicable to the whole Body of Christ ecclesia. Figuratively speaking, we are all sons of God and not daughters. This is the ultimate ideal at the Consummation of God's plan - perfect equality, with all subjected to God.

When the kingdom is fully established after Christ's return, it would appear as though the only women that shall be ruling the earth are those who are included in the Bride/Body of Christ, who are figured as Sons of God and the Wife of the Lamb. There is equality in the spiritual New Humanity. In spirit, we are all equals before God. In the meantime, though, Christian women are to respect God's Divine order in the Lord in this present age.

In this present age, the kingdom is not being enforced on the earth, so it is inevitable that there will be a clash of various worldly cultures within the Body of Christ. But the underlying spirit of Paul's teaching for the nations still applies for believers - that men and women have distinct roles before God and need to act accordingly under Christ in a spirit of grace. We may not be under the Law, but this same law of God, when used lawfully, is ideal for revealing God's righteousness and His guiding principles for humanity (1 Timothy 1:8-11). Without it, we are lawless! With the Spirit's law of life, in grace, we are fulfilling it (Romans 8:1-4).

Scripture quotations are from the Concordant Version