

The Woman Question

by

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As the Lord begins to build His end-time Church, brought into freedom from the religious structure that has bound her for so long, we will again see the Church meeting in accordance with what we read in scripture; no formal style meetings run by a clergy hierarchy but rather gatherings of believers assembling in the power of the Spirit, each one having a psalm, having a teaching, having a revelation, having a tongue, having an interpretation; all things done for edification, (cf.1Cor.14:26), Jesus truly being the Leader. Not that this pattern has not been sought or practised before. It is no new thing. Yet it has to be the way the Church meets when Jesus is truly Head of His gatherings. One of the big questions, however, before we even start, has to be to do with the role and function of women in such meetings. So what does scripture really tell us? And what is the Holy Spirit wanting to teach us on this crucial matter?

Bringing the Church into the full freedom I speak of has been no quick or easy thing. Indeed it is still in progress. With it's beginning's in the 1500's with Martin Luther, what we call the 'Reformation' began to see the Church coming out of the long dark night that had enveloped her due to the spirit of antichrist bringing forth a 'Christian counterfeit religion' devoid of true life, full of error and deception. Since the 1500's the Lord has, precept upon precept, restored Truth to the Church with the recovery of this foundational truth through Luther - "This one and firm rock, which we call the doctrine of justification," he wrote, "is the chief article of the whole Christian doctrine, which comprehends the understanding of all godliness." Although the reality of a level brotherhood, the priesthood of all believers, is still not the majority view, even Luther wrote, "every good Christian, not only men, but women also, is a preacher."

This, however, we may consider to be an error in understanding as we struggle with what are known as the 'limiting passages', those that put some restriction on women's ministry in the Church. There are only two such passages that exist in all of the New Testament, however. These, of course, need to be compared with other scriptures for the Holy Spirit does not contradict Himself. We therefore cannot take these scriptures out of context without reference to other scriptures that speak of liberty and so appear to be contradictory.

The Limiting Passages.

The limiting passages are :- "Let the women keep silent in the churches; for they are not permitted to speak, but let them subject themselves, just as the Law also says. And if they desire to learn anything, let them ask their own husbands at home, for it is improper for a woman to speak in church." 1 Cor.14:34-35, and :- "Let a woman learn in silence with full submission. I permit no woman to teach or to have authority over a man; she is to

keep silent. For Adam was formed first, then Eve, and Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and became a transgressor.” 1Tim.2:11-14.

(It should be noted that there are no separate words for ‘woman’ or ‘wife’, ‘man’ or ‘husband’, in Greek. As with German, for example, the context makes the meaning clear. In German a husband is ‘my man’ and a wife is ‘my woman’. This needs to be taken into account when considering the scriptures we are looking at in this paper.)

Trying To Understand

Before we can take these passages at face value, as simple rules, we should first look at other scriptures that refer to women.

Peter in his first sermon preached, “And it shall be in the last days, God says, That I will pour out My Spirit upon all flesh and your sons and **your daughters** shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions and your old men shall dream dreams, even upon My bondslaves, both men **and women**. (Acts 2:17&18.)

The New Covenant, we see, speaks of a spiritual equality between men and women just as Paul taught in his letter to the Galatians: “There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor freeman, there is **neither male nor female**, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. (Gal.3:28). An inequality due to race, slavery or gender is put away in Christ. So even women are included as ‘sons’ in the “all” that Paul refers to :- “For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus” (Gal.3:25), and women are ‘priests’ in the priesthood of all believers that Peter writes about :- “You are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God’s own possession.” (1Pet.2:9).

However, this does not change the natural order that Paul speaks of - “ Christ is the head of every man, and the man is the head of **a** woman, and God is the head of Christ,” (1Cor.11:3) but we need to understand this refers to the headship of a man over his wife not men over all women. Paul also speaks of this headship in his letter to the Ephesian church - “Wives be subject to your own husbands, as to the Lord for the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is head of the church,” (Eph.5:22&23). Women are therefore not subject to every man, only their husbands, and then only “as to the Lord“. This is no blind subjugation but a submission or subjection just as the church is commanded to be subjected to one another. (Eph.4:21). There is no hierarchy in the Church which is a level brotherhood, not even between male and female, the hierarchical order Paul is referring to refers to the family and not to the church. **We need to take care that we do not build a new clergy class consisting of the men.**

We can now look at the practicalities that Paul speaks of in his letters to the church in Corinth and his personal letter to Timothy.

Paul’s Letters To The Corinthians

Paul spoke to the Corinthian Church regarding proper Christian order when they

assembled, for it seemed they were far from being orderly. He begins by dealing with 'head covering', another controversial subject which I will consider later. When speaking of this Paul says, "However, in the Lord, neither is the woman independent of man, nor is the man independent of woman, for as the woman originates from the man, so also the man has his birth through the woman, and all things originate from God." (1Cor.11:11&12). We see in this passage that women are allowed to pray in the church meeting - "Judge for yourselves is it proper for a woman to pray to God uncovered?" (1Cor.11:13).

In these instructions regarding the church gathering together Paul goes on to exhort 'all' to desire earnestly spiritual gifts, especially that we might prophesy, (see 1Cor.14:1) making no reference to this not applying to women. Indeed, Paul says that when the "whole church should assemble together" if "**all** should prophesy and if an unbeliever or ungifted man enters he is convicted by **all**, he is called to account by **all**." (1Cor.14:24). No mention of the 'all' being restricted to only the men. He goes on to say, "When you assemble, **each one** has a psalm, has a teaching, has a revelation, has a tongue, has an interpretation," making no reference to this only being applicable to only the men either. (See 1Cor.14:26). Paul goes on, "You can **all** prophesy one by one so that **all** may learn and **all** may be exhorted," (v.31).

It is at this point, however, Paul may seem to contradict himself by saying, "Let the women keep silent in the churches, for they are not permitted to speak, but let them subject themselves, just as the Law says," (v.34) This 'woman' by context is a wife asking questions in the assembly, seemingly out of order, for Paul goes on, "And if they desire to *learn anything*, let them ask their own **husbands** (their own men) at home, for it is improper for a woman (wife) to speak in church." (v.35). Can we truly say that this is a blanket command for all women never to speak in church with so many other scriptures speaking of 'all' participating in the assembly of the saints? If it were such a command wouldn't Paul have spoken of only men prophesying, speaking in tongues, etc. when the whole church should assemble?

What Does The Law Say?

Paul refers to the 'Law' as regards 'subjecting themselves' but it is unclear which Old Testament scripture he is referring to. Earlier, in 1Cor.14:21 he speaks of his quote from Isaiah 28:11, regarding speaking in tongues, as being from the Law also, although we might consider this to be from the 'Prophets'. He could be referring to the subjection of the woman to the man in Genesis, the order that should prevail in the marriage bond but not in the church. As to the Law, it is certainly not regarding being silent but only being subject.

What Is This Silence?

If we wish to find a reason for what Paul is actually saying attention to context is crucial to rightly interpret this passage of Scripture and so remove the contradiction. Otherwise, for Paul to suddenly say that women must never say a word in the church meeting is to

completely contradict himself in the space of a few words. Attention to context, however, seems to resolve the apparent discrepancy.

If we look at the whole of 1 Corinthians 14, the following picture emerges: The meetings in Corinth were in disorder with many of the saints speaking in tongues at the same time whilst no one was interpreting what was being spoken; both men & women. Some were prophesying at the same time as one another and what some of the prophets were saying was in dire need of evaluation yet this was not being done. The Corinthians, it would seem, were also doubting the resurrection (1Cor.15) whilst others were under the impression that visiting prostitutes and committing incest were acceptable. To their minds, since these things were done with the body and not the spirit, they were innocent activities (1Cor.5-6). Additionally the women were also interrupting those speaking with questions. Their motivation may have been to learn but they were seemingly adding a further distraction to an already disruptive meeting.

It was common, however, in the ancient world for hearers to interrupt someone who was teaching with questions. But it was considered rude if the questions reflected ignorance of the subject. It must be noted that women in the first century, whether Jew or Gentile, tended to be uneducated. Any exceptions were rare. Women were essentially trained to be home-keepers. Thus for a woman to query or challenge a man in public was an embarrassing thing in the Greco-Roman world. For when women interrupted the men with questions, the men were being interrogated by their social inferiors. Hence, it was considered shameful.

In 1Cor.14, Paul deals with this entire mess. First, he handles the abuse and misuse of tongues and prescribes guidelines for their proper use (1Cor.14:1-28). He then switches to the subject of giving and evaluating prophetic words (1Cor.14:29-34). So beginning with Chapter 14:29, Paul shifts his attention to the prophets and their role in the church. He tells the Corinthians that when the saints prophesy, they should not do so jointly. Instead, they should prophesy two or three at a time. Then they are to pause so the church may “pass judgment” on what has been prophesied.

Passing judgment involved asking the prophets questions. It involved quizzing and probing them so as to learn what it was they meant and whether or not it was valid. A practice we perhaps need to recover. This was the common way that both Jews and Gentiles learned in the tutorial settings of that era. It is within this very context that Paul shifts to the sisters and says that they are not to participate in this kind of quizzing-questioning exchange. That if they do not understand a prophetic word or have a question about what is said, they should ask their husbands at home. Their tutoring is to occur at home, not in the meeting. **Judging prophecy is not a question and answer session, querying what is meant, but a testing of whether it is scriptural and right.** This is the crucial difference.

Looking at the passage again with this thought in mind:

“And if they desire to LEARN anything, let them ask their own husbands

at home; for it is improper for a woman to SPEAK in the church.”

We notice the undeniable connection between “learning” and “speaking.” Thus the only kind of speaking that Paul is restricting in this passage is that of asking questions to learn, whether leading questions or ignorance based questions. Therefore, Paul’s injunction for women to “keep silent” does not possess an absolute sense but is rather his instruction to correct a specific problem. The context bears this out. Instead of publicly asking for explanations the women were to learn from their husbands at home. However, when it came to speaking in the meeting to edify the church, they were obviously free to speak in accordance with Paul’s other instructions (1Cor.11:5; 14:26, 31).

We see, therefore, Paul was instructing the brothers to handle the business of questioning prophetic words and teachings. This would spare the sisters from having to step into the unseemly role of correcting someone in the meeting. Paul reminds them that even the Law of God relieves women from exercising that sort of authority (v. 34).

Further, Paul lets them know that his instruction is not unique to Corinth. This is to be a practice “in all the churches” (v. 34) he says. It seems Paul then uses irony to chastise them for their inclination to depart from the Law - “was it from you that Word of God first went forth? Or has it come to you only?” (v. 36).

The Greek Word ‘Silent’

We also need to consider the word ‘silent’ as used here by Paul with regard to women keeping “silent in the church,” (1Cor.14:34). The Greek word “silent” in this verse is “sigao“. It means to **hold one’s peace temporarily**. The word has the flavour of being quiet so as to listen to what another has to say. Paul uses the same word twice more in Chapter 14 with regard to giving a tongue and interpretation in a meeting.

He first says that the person speaking in tongues should be silent (sigao) if there is no interpreter (v. 28). This does not mean that the one who speaks in tongues is never to speak in the meeting again. Paul uses the same word again when he says that if a person interrupts someone prophesying, the first one speaking should be silent (sigao) (KJV - “hold his peace“) so as to let him who has a revelation speak, (v. 30). This does not mean that the person prophesying should never speak again in the meeting after he has been interrupted. In the same way, when a sister has a question during the meeting, she ought to be silent (sigao). That is, she should hold her peace (v. 29-34). **This does not mean the sisters are never to speak in the meeting.**

So, the silence spoken of in 1Cor.14 does not indicate that women are never to speak in the meeting. This would mean Paul was contradicting himself (1Cor.11:5; 14:26, 31). We need to note that the “silence” here has a restricted meaning. It applies to those times when a sister is confused by something spoken or when she overtly challenges a prophetic word. When this happens, the sisters should hold their peace and give way to the brothers and she should then inquire of her husband at home. To read more into this instruction of Paul’s seems to add a meaning that is both out of step with what he has just

said, and what other scriptures would indicate. Here are some of them :-

That the prophetess Deborah was a judge in Israel needs to be noted: “Now Deborah, a prophetess... was judging Israel at that time... and the sons of Israel came up to her for judgement” (Judges 4:4&5)

Both the Twelve and the Women were among the 120 who waited for the coming of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost (Acts 1:14). The Women, along with the men, spoke in tongues, declaring the “great things of God” (Acts 2:1-11).

Anna, who was a prophetess, spoke in the Temple when Jesus was presented there by Mary just after His birth: “..She came up and giving thanks to God, and continued to **speak** of Him to all those who were looking for the redemption of Jerusalem,” (Luke 2:36-38).

The Holy Spirit has been poured out upon women and men alike . . . the result being that “your daughters shall prophesy” (Acts 2:17-18).

The beginning of the church when Paul and Silas were in Philippi begins with all women. Lydia is one of them, and she hosts the church meetings in her home. It is inconceivable to think that the women in the church in Philippi could not speak or function in the meetings as the church was made up mostly of women (Acts 16:12ff.).

Priscilla and her husband, Aquila, taught Apollos the way of the Lord more fully (Acts 18:26). It is noteworthy that four out of the six times that Priscilla and Aquila are mentioned in the NT, Priscilla’s name appears first (Acts 18:18, 26; Rom.16:3; 2Tim.4:19). It is considered that this signifies that Priscilla was more spiritually prominent. The fact that her name appears first when she and her husband instructed Apollos seems to indicate that she led in that exchange (Acts 18:26, NASB and NIV).

Philip the evangelist had four daughters who were prophetesses (Acts 21:9). This means they prophesied. If a woman is prophesying by God’s Spirit and revealing Jesus Christ would a man be barred from hearing it?

In 1Cor.11:4-5, Paul states that women may both pray and prophesy when the church comes together - “Every woman who has her head uncovered while praying or prophesying...” In 1Cor.11:1-34 the context makes it clear that Paul is referring to public meetings where both men and women are present.

We can see that women played a significant role in the early church. When Paul wrote his letter to the Roman Christians, he honoured the following women for their service in the church: Phoebe, Priscilla, Mary, Tryphena, Tryphosa, Persis, Julia, and the sister of Nereus (Romans 16). In this chapter, Paul lists about twice as many men as women but he commends more than twice as many women as men.

In Phil.4:2-3, Paul makes special mention of Euodias and Syntyche who helped him in the work - both women. Significantly, the church in Philippi began with women and met in a woman’s home (Acts 16:13ff). Women were prominent in the Philippian church.

The Context Of Paul's Letter To Timothy

Let us now turn our attention to the other “limiting passage” in 1Tim.2:11-14. Before we look at the text, it must be understood that 1st and 2nd Timothy are personal letters Paul is writing to an individual whom he has known for about fifteen years. As such they are sometimes referred to as ‘low context.’ because the author can assume an intimate knowledge of the reader’s understanding of any particular statement he makes. Because Paul had a close relationship with Timothy, he could say things to him that he knew Timothy would understand.

In our passage Paul’s statement had a particular context to it with which Timothy was familiar. 1st and 2nd Timothy are very difficult books to interpret, therefore, because they are full of “low-context” statements; statements that have a context that only Paul and Timothy were privy to. Timothy had been left in Ephesus (1Tim.1:3) and it may be helpful to try to piece together the exact situation that Timothy faced there.

Five years earlier Paul had forewarned the Ephesian elders “that savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock, and from among your own selves men will arise speaking perverse things to draw away the disciples after them.” (Acts 20:29-30). In his letter to Timothy Paul exhorts the young Timothy, “upon my departure for Macedonia remain at Ephesus in order that you may instruct certain men not to teach strange doctrines, nor to pay attention to myths and endless genealogies which give rise to mere speculation rather than the administration of God which is by faith.” (1Tim.1:3-4; also see 1Tim.6:3-5). Paul does not say more, suggesting Timothy is well aware of the heresy. Timothy was battling in Ephesus a form of gnostic heresy it seems: “Turn away from godless chatter and the opposing ideas of what is falsely called gnosis.” (1Tim.6:20). It seems that according to the false teaching, both eating meat and engaging in marriage were forbidden (1Tim.4:1-3). The historical records suggest that the Gnostics perverted the creation account. Eve was regarded as both a mediator and redeemer figure. The temple of Diana or Artemis was located in Ephesus, of course. Paul’s statement in 1 Tim. 2:5: “There is one God and one mediator also between God and men, the man Jesus Christ,” has, therefore, great significance. This heresy stated that Eve pre-existed Adam, man coming into existence because of woman, and he was given enlightenment through woman. Since Eve was the first to take a bite from the Tree of Knowledge, she was regarded as the bearer of special spiritual knowledge, or ‘gnosis’ by the heretics. It is for this reason that those who accepted this heresy preferred the leadership of women over that of men. The heresy taught that women could still lead people to the illuminating gnosis that was represented by the Tree of Knowledge. It was further believed that redemption completely reversed the effects of the fall so that men were no longer subject to earthly authorities and women were no longer subject to their husbands.

Whether or not this a correct assessment of the heresy that Paul refers to there were certainly male teachers spreading heretical doctrine (1Tim.1:20; 2 Tim. 2:17) and it seems to have found fertile ground among the women in the church - “For among them are those who enter into households and captivate weak women weighed down with sins, led on by various impulses, always learning but never able to come to a knowledge of the

truth, and just as Jannes and Jambres opposed Moses so these men also oppose the truth, men of depraved mind, rejected as regards the faith.”(2Tim.3:6-9). Perhaps because women were not educated, they were susceptible to being idle, being malicious gossips talking about things that were not proper. (1Tim.3:11 & 5:13-15). This is the context in which Paul writes the passage:1 Timothy 2:11-14

“Let a woman learn in silence with full submission. I permit no woman to teach or to have authority over a man; she is to keep silent. For Adam was formed first, then Eve; and Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and become a transgressor.” (NRSV).

There are seven parallel words that appear in both this text and 1Cor.14:34-35. Two of them are ‘learn’ and ‘silent’. In both passages, the word ‘learn’ is translated from the same Greek word:

1Tim. 2:11: “A woman should LEARN (manthano) in silence and full submission.”

1Cor.14:35: “And if they desire to LEARN (manthano) anything, let them ask their own husbands at home.”

In the Timothy passage, Paul says that the sisters in Ephesus should learn in silence and full submission. Is this because they were just poorly educated or because they had been deceived by false teaching? **The Greek word for silence in this passage is “hesuchia” and it means a temporary quietness, as in yielding the floor to let someone else speak.** It also has the flavour of listening with studious attention. It is the same word that is used in Acts 22:2, which says, “When they heard him [Paul] speak to them in Aramaic, they became very quiet (hesuchia) or silent.”

In effect, 1Tim.2:11 is the same instruction that Paul gave to the sisters in Corinth. Namely, the women ought not to disrupt the meeting with questions and challenges but in the meeting they should learn in silence or temporary quietness. But Paul goes on and says, “I do not allow a woman to teach and exercise authority over a man,” (1Tim.2:12). The original Greek is in the present active voice. It literally reads: “I am not now permitting a woman to teach...” It seems that Paul is dealing with the specific situation in Ephesus rather than drafting a universal rule for women.

Timothy had known Paul for around fifteen years and he had travelled with the aging Paul on two missionary trips. He had visited all the churches Paul had been involved with. If Paul had universally banned women from teaching and speaking in the church meetings Timothy would have already known this and he would not have to explain this to Timothy in his letter. But in his instruction Paul goes on to say that no woman in the church is to “have authority over a man.” **Let us remember that in the level brotherhood that the Church is there should be no authority anyway, one over another, whether male or female** so it seems Paul is addressing a different thing here. The Greek word translated “have authority” is ‘authenticio’. This is the only time in the entire NT this word is used. Significantly, Paul did not use the usual word for authority

(exousia) that he uses in his other epistles. 'Authenteo' is an obscure term that can either mean "to exercise authority over on one's own account", "to domineer over" or "to seize authority over." It seems Paul is dealing specifically with the danger in Ephesus that was perhaps being caused by the heresy there.

This would seem to be the case because after Paul instructs Timothy that the women can no longer teach in the church, he immediately makes mention of the heresy being perpetrated:

For Adam was formed first, then Eve; and Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and became a transgressor. (1Tim.2:14).

Here Paul plainly states that Eve did not pre-exist Adam. He also states that it was Eve who was blameworthy being deceived just like the women in Ephesus. In all of Paul's other writings Paul always blames the fall on Adam but in this particular situation he is identifying Eve as the transgressor. Perhaps this to deal with the false teaching that certain Ephesian women were promoting.

Not A Universal Rule

The understanding of this passage in Timothy's letter has to be in agreement with Paul's other teaching on women in meetings and cannot be a new universal rule when we consider :-

In 1 Corinthians, Paul states numerous times that women may prophesy in the church (1Cor.11:5; 14:26&31), Paul instructing, "for you can all prophesy in turn so that everyone may be instructed (taught) and encouraged" (1Cor.14:31).

All the saints, which includes the sisters, are to teach and admonish one another through psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs - "Let the Word of Christ richly dwell within you, with all wisdom, **teaching and admonishing one another** with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs..."(Col. 3:16) there being no mention of this applying to men only.

The manifestation of the Holy Spirit, which includes prophecy, words of knowledge, and words of wisdom, is given to the whole church for the common good (1Cor.12:1-12) and these gifts are to function in the church meetings (1Cor.14).

The author of Hebrews tells the whole church, with no exemption of women, that given their relative spiritual age, they all should be teachers - "by this time you ought to be teachers..."-(Heb.5:12-14).

The author of Hebrews also encourages the whole assembly - brothers and sisters - to exhort one another when the church gathers (Heb.10:24-25).

Paul's arguments, therefore, are to do with order in the meetings, arguing for proper order where disorder exists. He is issuing a corrective to, not a denial of, the public speaking of women. In both Corinth and Ephesus, Paul urges the sisters to give way to the brothers in

the area of **learning** because they were interrupting the meetings due to their lack of spiritual maturity and education, it seems. In Ephesus, they were even seizing authority over the men with a false doctrine.

Paul's message, not contradicting the gospel brought freedom rather than suppression and that freedom extends to women. It should be noted that it was revolutionary at the time for women to have this freedom. Whilst this may not deal with other dangers that we will discuss we should not now try to suppress women contrary to what the balance of New Testament teaching gives us.

Other Dangers - The Jezebel Spirit

Jesus' complaint against the church at Thyatira was that they tolerated the woman, Jezebel, who called herself a prophetess, and "she teaches and leads My bond-servants astray, so as to make them commit acts of immorality and eat things sacrificed to idols." (cf.Rev.2:20). This, of course, is extreme error. It sounds like it was similar to the problem in Ephesus, that Paul was addressing in his letter to Timothy, where he says he does "not allow a woman to teach or exercise authority over a man, but to remain quiet," (1Tim.2:12) as the unusual Greek word in that passage was 'authenticio' - to seize authority - that we have already discussed.

The Jezebel spirit seeks to reverse the natural order of man being the head of a woman and tries to invert this and then introduce it into the church bringing an authority structure that should not be there, and as a result of this introduce perversion. We may think that if women are allowed to speak in church meetings this spirit will be given access even though Jesus tells us the women have an equal place in the level brotherhood and tells us there should be no authority one over the other - and hence a hierarchy - even the men over the women. But we can equally look at the Nicolaitan problem that existed in Ephesus and Pergamum that Jesus addressed through the Revelation passed on to John (see Rev.2:6&15), and see men where usurping authority over the level brotherhood too. These spirits, for that is what is behind these problems, need discerning and dealing with. We need to know that spirits of control under the guise of religious spirits are as much a problem among men today in all denominational Christianity as among women. Jesus said, "The kings of the Gentiles lord it over them, and those who exercise authority over them are called 'Benefactors', but **not so with you**, but let him who is the greatest among you become as the youngest and the one leading as the servant," (Luke 22:25&26 and Matt.20:25-28). There should be no exercise of authority, not even seemingly beneficial, one over another, in the church (which create hierarchies). Jesus said that we "are **all** brothers," (Matt.23:8). We need to realise that if we even lift men above women in the church we create a clergy class of men.

Feminism

In recent times feminism has been introduced to the denominational church systems with women vying for the male priesthood and hierarchy therein. That this has gone hand in hand with the acceptance of homosexuality and lesbianism in these institutions is clearly

seen but let us be aware this is only a further aberration in these religious systems that already uphold an incorrect male priesthood and recognise a male leadership even though Jesus said, call no man 'leader'. (See Matt.23:10 but note 'leader' is incorrectly rendered 'master' in the KJV.) Leaders (titles) can only be found in hierarchies. There are only 'those leading' (function) in a level brotherhood. The church should be a level brotherhood where elders and ministry gifts function but do not hold position.

Upholding a level brotherhood is not the same as advocating feminism which has no place in the church. The hierarchy in the family is clear, "Christ is the Head of every man, and the man is the head of the woman, and God is the Head of Christ," (1Cor.11:3)

Covering

In Paul's instruction to the church in Corinth he speaks of 'covering' immediately after explaining to them about this order that prevails in nature. He points out, "Does not even nature itself teach you that if a man has long hair it is a dishonour to him but if a woman has long hair it is a glory to her? For her hair is given to her for a covering?" (1Cor.11:14&15). It is essential, therefore, for the woman to be rightly submitted to man in this natural order before she prays or prophesies (1Cor.11:5). For some it seems that Paul is only advocating the wearing of a head covering (hat or scarf) for women to indicate this order but is he not making it clear that what we might now call 'feminism' cannot have a place in church?

Paul advocates that we should 'judge for ourselves' as regards head covering (1Cor.11:13) and on this point does not say this is a command saying, "We have no other practice, nor have the churches of God," (v.16). This perhaps was a culturally sensitive issue in Paul's time, cultural issues applying then that are no longer relevant today for most of us. But let us be clear the male headship in the family must not be usurped and women need to minister in the church with this correct attitude.

In addition to feminism, the spirit of religion also can operate through matriarchal spirits, another gender sensitive spirit, where the mother figure dominates a family incorrectly. Again the answer is not to subjugate women but uphold correct submission of the wife to her husband in the Lord. We therefore need to be aware that there is a difference between male and female in the natural whilst there is an equality in the spiritual. Scripture is clear that the woman is the weaker vessel (1Pet.3:7), and the headship of man in the family is sacrosanct. (Eph.5:23).

Eldership is Male

In all these problems the role of good eldership is essential assisting the church in discerning these spirits and endeavouring to guard the flock which they oversee in the Lord. But let us remember that elders can be wrong and there is a great danger if they become authoritarian. But we do need to note that **the role of elder is male**, Paul's qualifications of an elder in his letters to Timothy and Titus only refer to men (see 1Tim.3:1-7 and Titus 1:5-9) whereas the qualification of deacon or servant apply to male

and female. (Note: Paul goes on in his letter to Titus to speak of 'older men' and 'older women', but these are just groups in the church along with 'younger men' and 'bondslaves' that he is speaking of, having already dealt with the qualification of elders.)

A Prophecy

The churches that make up the systems of men have become an extension of the Old Covenant, where they have buildings as the temple and men as priests. Just because they change the name to 'Pastor', 'Vicar' or 'Elder', this has not changed their current role. The Body will be a much closer unified group of believers with group participation and contribution, humbled before God and humbled before each other, preferring one another, bearing one another's burdens, caring for one another **and desiring to be a holy habitation for God's Spirit**. Each wanting to give not receive. Wanting to serve, not be served, wanting to do their share, not be a passenger or a parasite. The nature of Jesus is to give, serve, care, heal, listen, help, love, and all those growing in Him will do the same things and walk as He walked. This 'order' will identify false brethren who will desire the two extremes, being 1) to rule and control or, 2) to be waited on and spoon-fed. To rule because they consider they are Lords rather than servants, or to be spoon-fed because they have the feeling of inadequacy or inability. The truth is neither, but we should all serve one another in love, counting each other's needs more important than our own.

Beware of those who desire the pre-eminence. Many desire to rule and control. They are ambitious and have no understanding of the church but confuse it with their earthly experience in the work place, club or society.

Now the church is My church and will grow in My nature and become like Me in love, in wisdom, in character, in power, and in nature. So that when they see Me as I am they will be like Me. Because I live in them they will be My habitation. Then, each will seek Me individually, one to one and face to face. And in that place they will learn of Me and become humble. This humility is the nature that allows My church to gather corporately without division and without controversy.

Humility will be the key for My church. That nature will be a foundation and pathway to My way and My heart. My church in My order will not be an institution of men with ambition and plans and thoughts of elevation. My church has one function – **to be My habitation** – for if I am there I will save, heal and touch those who I desire and nothing is impossible to Me. If I am in the midst you need no plans of men for it will be I who will do all things. I will build My church and prepare My bride. Your part is to be holy and humble so that I might manifest Myself among you, for in My presence you are changed and healed and do My works.

Conclusion

As we seek once more to gather in the Lord in line with scripture we need to allow Him to gather us in the power of His Spirit that He might truly be the Head. I believe we need

to learn again how to do this. The Lord must build His Church. He isn't even wanting us to build by some blueprint that we think we see in scripture, yet as *He* builds it will fit the blueprint we see there. If the Lord is wanting a freedom for women in the church and not a subjugated sisterhood we may never find that reality of 'church' that we long for if we have read the blueprint wrong and try to build according to our understanding. It is the hour to be hearing His voice and being led by Him. .

Colin Winfield - August 2007