

Women and Men In Ministry

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Issue for young people

Taking the good news of Jesus Christ is the challenge before every Christian but for many young women the institutionalised church is anything but good news. Young women today are encouraged to pursue careers, be strong, independent, think carefully before having children and not to be tied down by family if they become mothers. To many the church appears to be a place where women are second-rate citizens. Men have the public roles of speaking and leading; they have the authority in the church and home. Women are to follow, to support, to make tea, organise creche rotas and arrange flowers. Women allow others to make decisions for them. Seemingly the most important calling for a Christian woman to have is to be the wife of a church leader.

The role of women in the church is an issue that needs addressing for the young people of today. Elaine Storkey speaks of a close female friend, an atheist, who would attend church services and constantly ask 'What's in it for the women?' Her theory was that church was a place for women who liked to be told what to do, who needed father figures and men to do their thinking for them.¹ Pete Ward took a group of teenagers along to his church, one that would normally be considered lively and go-ahead. Amongst many things that made them feel uncomfortable and out of place they commented on the perceived sexism of men leading songs and women echoing.² Young people are finely attuned to what they perceive to be injustice. As a backslidden teenager rebelling against a strict upbringing, my denomination's treatment of women was a large factor in my rejecting the church at that stage.

The question we need to ask and answer is what roles did God intend men and women to have in bringing in his Kingdom. If the opportunities women have for using their gifts and working out their callings are really as limited as outlined above then we should make it clear what we are calling young women to. If, as I believe, the good news of the Kingdom of God is that of liberation for men and women from stereotypes and prescribed roles to be able to work out their callings according to their gifts rather than their gender then this is a gospel worth proclaiming from the rooftops!

What the bible says

We need to engage in a fresh study of the biblical material pertaining to men and women - the 'difficult' New Testament passages as well as the themes running through the whole of the Old and New Testaments. Scholars agree that certain NT passages are hard to interpret³ and with a superficial reading even Paul appears to contradict himself, in one place telling women to keep quiet in church (1 Tim 2v11,12; 1 Cor 14v34,35) and in another giving guidelines for speaking out loud (1 Cor 11v6-10). As with the interpretation of any passage of Scripture we must take care that we do not impose on the text our cultural and inherited expectations of what men and women should be like. We must make decisions as to which passages have greater significance - which text should be understood in the light of each other. We must hold to the important principle of comparative exegesis: no passage should be interpreted in a way that seems to contradict another passage. As Christine Noble says, 'We all have to face a great danger when we are anxious to prove things even from the Bible. It is possible, if we have the will and the determination, to find texts and isolated verses that will support any idea'.⁴ That is not what this paper is about! We need to look at the bible picture as a whole and ask 'What is God's heart in this matter of women in ministry?'

Let's start at the very beginning

Firstly, rather than starting with the passages on which so many disagree, it seems sensible to me to start at the very beginning in Genesis. These are key texts in the debate on the roles of men and women. This is where male and female were first created and under the 'principle of first mention' the creation accounts should form the basis for our understanding of what God intended for men and women.

There are two accounts of the creation in Genesis 1 and Genesis 2, the second one elaborates on the first. From Genesis 1 v 26 - 28 we get a sense of the unity of men and women and the partnership God intends.

Then God said "Let us make man in our image, in our likeness, and let them rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the livestock, over all the earth and over all the creatures that move along the ground." So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him,; male and female he created them. God blessed them and said to them, "Be fruitful and increase in number;

fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over every living creature that moves on the ground."

Both men and women are made in God's image; neither one reflects it on his or her own. Together they are given the cultural mandate, the task of filling the earth and subduing it. God did not say 'Have babies', to the women and 'Do the gardening', to the men but the unfolding and developing of creation was a task they were to do in partnership. There is no hierarchy in this passage unless you want to find it.

Genesis 2 fills in a few more details of this account and should be read in the light of it. In verse 7 we are told that God makes a man from the dust of the earth and puts him in the garden of Eden. In this beautiful environment the only restriction was to keep away from the tree of knowledge of good and evil. God looks at Adam on his own and for the first time sees something in his creation which is not good, everything else having met with his approval. *The Lord God said, "It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper for him".* (2v18) And so God makes Eve, from Adam's rib so that she would be like him. Adam had just named all the animals and experienced the loneliness of realising that none were like him. When he sees Eve however he bursts into poetic raptures: *"This is now bone of my bone and flesh of my flesh.; She shall be called woman for she was made out of man"* How much can we read into the fact that Eve was made from Adam's rib? John Stott quotes Matthew Henry as writing 'She was not made out of his head to top him, nor out of his feet to be trampled on him, but out of his side to be equal to him, under his arm to be protected and near his heart to be beloved.'⁵ One thing is certain she is his missing part, together they can do what man could not do alone. Their relationship was one of intimacy and vulnerability as they stood naked together and felt no shame (v25)

Eve is to be Adam's helper. The understanding I grew up with was that she is there to support Adam, to look after him and do all the things he doesn't like doing or is too important to do. She is to be a 'lady working hard behind the scenes' - however this is not very biblical. The word helper in Hebrew is 'ezer', meaning a counterpart, expected to engage fully in the same activities. Imagine sawing a huge tree trunk on your own with a large two handed saw. You would have to pull it across one way, leap over the trunk, pull it in the opposite direction, leap back and continue until the task is finished or you are in an exhausted heap on the floor. What you need is a helper, a counterpart to stand at the other end and work with you. The word 'ezer' stresses both distinctiveness and complementarity of work, not subordination or inferiority. In fact in many places in the Old Testament, God is described as our helper - the same word 'ezer'. For example, Psalm 70v5 reads *You are my help and deliverer, O Lord do not delay.* What heresy would we be getting into if we were to suggest that helper is a subordinate role! Men and women are to be a partnership. One without the other is not good; both are needed to reflect the image of God. Again. I can see no hierarchy here, no boss and secretary roles, only complementarity.

Then comes trouble. Into this paradise comes the voice of temptation. The serpent twists God's words and makes him out to be an unreasonable tyrant. *Did God really say, ' You must not eat from any tree in the garden?'* Eve was not there when God originally gave Adam the command to stay away from the tree of knowledge of good and evil and we are not told whether God reiterates the command to her or whether she hears second-hand from Adam. In any case she gets it slightly wrong, adding *'and you must not touch it'* (3v3) Having listened to the serpent she eats of the fruit and gives some to Adam. The impression I grew up with was that Eve was a bit of a gullible bimbo, not to be trusted, a bit thick. She ate of the fruit and went off to find Adam, apple in hand, saying 'Try this, darling'. He eats not really knowing what it is all about. Consequently all women are untrustworthy and likely to lead men astray. Again, this is not at all biblical! Where was Adam when Eve ate the fruit? Right beside her (3v6) just as responsible. Together they disobey God and instantly everything is tragically and catastrophically changed. They realise they are naked and hide. Shame, secrecy and fear enter the once perfect relationship between man, woman and God.

God comes looking for them and demands an accounting. Adam blames God and Eve (*The woman you put here with me gave me some fruit and I ate it* v12), Eve blames the serpent but admits she was deceived and so God announces sentence on all three of them. It is important to understand the nature of these curses. They are descriptive, describing what will happen as the natural consequence of their disobedience, rather than prescriptive, God saying I want this to happen, I'm going to make it happen.⁶ The punishment they reap from their sin is alienation from God, from the creation, and from each other.

It is in these curses (3v14-19) that we find the roots of the struggle for power between men and women. This is where roles enter the scene. The woman is addressed in terms of relationships and family life. The consequences for the man are seen in work and the environment. The mandate meant to be worked out in partnership is divided as a result of the fall and the areas with which men and women will be obsessed are described.⁷ We need to see the work of the enemy for what it is in the breakdown of partnership between men and women. At one extreme we have sexism and chauvinism that belittles women and dominates them, treating them as inferior and deficient. At the other we have a radical feminism that rejects men, even in the area of conception! In between are countless men and women who are damaged by attitudes and stereotypes. We are not in a battle for supremacy - we are meant to be on the same side against our common enemy.

Fortunately all is not lost. Our gracious, compassionate God sent Jesus as our Redeemer to restore everything affected by the fall. *Through the Son then God decided to bring the whole universe back to himself. God made peace through his son's death on the cross and so brought back to himself all things, both on earth and in heaven.* (Col 1v20, GNB) Jesus came not only to restore our personal relationship with God but also to restore and renew the creation itself so that ultimately we will be living as God originally intended us to. Jesus came to see these curses undone, to see enmity and competition eliminated and partnership restored between men and women. As heralds of his Kingdom we need to see God's rule and God's ways restored in all areas, including relationships between men and women. We need to be prophetic people living out the partnership and trust God first created. Although we will not get it completely right we need to be a signpost to the Kingdom in this and other areas, proclaiming that this is what God originally intended.

Jesus - Our role model

The second factor we need to take into consideration is the way that Jesus treated women and as he is our role model we should seek to emulate him. It is true that Jesus did not make any statements about the roles of men and women. But then neither he nor Paul announced an end to slavery which was around in their time and we do not use that as a reason to justify the practice! Roger and Faith Forster point out that Jesus did something far more radical than just making statements. His actions and teaching about human relationships, if rightly received and heeded, will strike at the roots of a traditional hierarchical view of men and women, causing it to wither.⁸ What Jesus did was to treat women in a radical way for his culture as a sign of the renewed relationships there will be in his Kingdom. Even radical feminists who would challenge the patriarchy in the church and Old Testament recognise that Jesus was different.

The culture that Jesus was born into treated women as second class citizens, the possessions of their fathers and husbands, not worth teaching. The Talmud said it would be better for the law to be burned than entrusted to a woman. A Jewish male was forbidden to talk to a woman in public even if he were related to her. Pharisees would pray 'Thank you God that I am not a woman or a gentile.' And yet Jesus spent time with women, he valued them and treated them as equal to men. When he visited the home of Martha and Mary, he gently rebuked Martha for being preoccupied with the housework and missing the opportunity of learning at his feet with Mary and the male disciples (Luke 10v38-42). He had a theological discussion with the woman at the well, someone that society considered beneath contempt, much to the amazement of the disciples (John 4). He was supported financially by women (Luke 8v1-3), told parables about them (Matt 13v33, 25v1-13; Luke 15v8-10, 18v1-8), and allowed a prostitute to anoint him much to the horror of his host and disciples (Luke 7v36-40). Martha's confession that Jesus is the Christ (John 11v27) parallels that of Peter (Luke 9v20). A woman caught in adultery is brought to Jesus by a group of men, wanting to catch him out, using her as the bait. (Where was the man she sinned with?) When they leave one by one, she stays although presumably she could have run away too, perhaps because Jesus is the one man she feels safe with. He does not condemn her as all the others had done but tells her to sin no more (John 8v1-11) And as many have commented, women were first at the cradle and last at the cross. When all the disciples ran away and deserted Jesus, it was the women who came to anoint Jesus for burial. (Luke 23v55-24v1). In a culture that refused to recognise women as witnesses in court, he allowed women to be the first witnesses of his resurrection (Matt 28v1-10) and to take the news to the other disciples.

Jesus's only seemingly discriminative action was in appointing 12 male apostles. If he wanted women in leadership, it is argued, why did he not have a female apostle or two so settling the issue? He flouted many of the culture's conventions so surely he could have included a woman if he had wanted to even though it would have been radical at the time.⁹ Should we conclude that because Jesus only

chose male apostles that all church leaders should be male? That would not be consistent with the Old Testament or Paul's practise as we shall see. One suggestion is that Jesus was choosing 12 new patriarchs to establish the new Israel, that he was symbolising a new people in God.¹⁰ Only these 12 men took part in the last supper but no one would exclude women from taking part in communion on that basis. Jesus did not include any Gentiles among the apostles although he did minister to them too, but that does not mean Gentiles were excluded from the early church or from leadership. Peter had to be persuaded in a pretty dramatic way that the gospel was for Gentiles as well, and had to defend his actions to the others. (Acts 10 and 11) Fortunately for us he obeyed even though it seemed to go against 'tradition', the majority view and his understanding of scripture. The fact that Jesus chose 12 male apostles and no female ones does not need to exclude women from church leadership.

When church leaders and other Christians refuse to take me seriously because I am a woman, I take heart from the example of Jesus. He treated women in a radical way that challenged the traditions of the culture and the church. He demonstrated by his words and his actions that he valued and respected them.

Women in the history of the church

Thirdly we must look at history - at the way God has used women to bring about his purposes since the beginning of the bible. True, they are not mentioned as often as men, but they exercised leadership and authority and had their part to play in the unfolding of the biblical drama.

Miriam was a prophetess (Ex15v20) and a leader (Micah 6v4). Deborah was a judge, a leader of the Israelite people, holding a position of authority greater than her husband. She settled disputes and delivered Israel from their enemies.(Judges 4 & 5) Huldah was a respected prophetess(2 Kings 22v14) whose words carried weight. These women and others led and used their gifts even though they were in a very patriarchal society. As a teenager I noticed with frustration that the only place women seemed to be mentioned in Genesis was in connection with whether they had children or not! Abraham twice treats Sarah very badly in pretending she is his sister to save his own skin (Gen12v11-13; Gen 20v1-18) and Isaac does the same with Rebekah. Lot offers his two daughters to the perverted men of Sodom to protect his male guests (Gen 19v11). One can get the impression that it is OK to treat women in this way, that this is evidence of the inequality of the sexes. Gaebelin Hull, in her book 'Equal To Serve' calls patriarchy the 'true record of a false idea'.¹¹ Its inclusion in the bible does not mean that it is ordained by God, his norms for society. The bible uses many illustrations of one race dominating another, such as Egypt oppressing the Hebrews, Haaman seeking to eradicate the Jews, but no-one would suggest that we should emulate these examples. We need to recognise the oppression of women in the cultures of the Old and New Testament as sin and feel sorrow at the extent of the fall.

Into the New Testament: Anna, a prophetess rejoiced at the birth of Jesus (Luke2v36-38). Priscilla, a fellow worker of Paul's preached the gospel and taught(Acts18v26). Dorcas was known for her acts of mercy and help to the poor, her gift of service. (Acts9v36) Phoebe was a deaconess, a minister, commended by Paul in Rom 16. An early church historian notes that 'the fame of Phoebe was spoken of throughout the world.'¹² Paul greets a host of friends in Romans 16, one third of whom are women,. When you look at those who are mentioned in connection with their ministry, there are more women than men. Junia was most probably a woman apostle, although her gender has proved embarrassing to many who do not allow women that role. In the early church were many women who spread the faith and were persecuted as a result. Kari Malcolm devotes 3 chapters of her book Women at The Crossroads to recording how women have been involved in ministry from the first century to the present day. It makes fascinating reading and the contribution of these women to the spread of the Christian faith cannot be ignored.¹³

In the early nineteenth century women went overseas as missionaries when they were not allowed to serve God in this country and others, and it is a good job they did. Florence Nightingale went to nurse the wounded in the Crimean War after the church could find no place for her. 'I would have given the church my head, my heart, my hand. She would not have them. She told me to go back to do crochet in my mother's drawing room; or marry and look well at the head of my husbands table. "You may go to Sunday School if you like it," she said, but gave me no training even for that. She gave me neither work to do for her, nor education for it.'¹⁴ How many other gifted women have been thwarted in their attempts to serve God?

Hudson Taylor took 2 married couples, 5 single men and 9 single women to China at the start of the

China Inland Mission. Later Maria Taylor left her sick husband and 6 children in London and went into a famine area with 2 young single women to start an orphanage. Gladys Aylwood, Jackie Pullinger and many others have done pioneering work in the kingdom of God.

To say that God uses women only because there are no strong men around at the time to me seems a rather desperate and offensive attempt to explain away the Deborahs, Miriams and Huldahs of the world. Well, God spoke to Balaam through a donkey, so at a push he can use women too! God chooses and equips the right person for the right task. He is not content with second best and is prepared to wait to bring about his purposes. If God does not want women to lead then that stands for all time, and cannot be 'forgotten' when its convenient. God has used women throughout history in different roles to bring about his purposes. I see this as a sign of his redemptive intent for the partnership of men and women.

Moving on to the 'difficult' passages

With this foundation - the partnership of men and women intended by God in creation, the liberating example of Jesus, and the history of women used by God in the church - we will turn to the New Testament passages that have been used to contradict this, describing hierarchy and roles.

God's word is always communicated with reference to particular events. Hermeneutics is the complex process of relating a text from the past to a contemporary reality. When we read the bible we must ask 'In what culture and context was it written? What was going on at the time?' For example the parables and stories of Jesus would have had a far greater impact on the people of his time because they would have immediately understood what he was talking about. I need to learn about sheep and how they were looked after in the first century before I can fully understand Jesus calling himself the Good Shepherd.

We need to look at these New Testament passages with the 'glasses' of complementarity and partnership on, bringing to them the foundation already found. In a paper of this length it is not possible to do these texts full justice - please look into it further.

Headship

There are two passages in the New Testament where the husband is referred to as the head (*kephale*) of the wife, Ephesians 5 v 23 and 1 Corinthians 11 v 3. From these comes the doctrine of headship although it should be noted that that particular word does not appear in the bible, nor does it say that the husband is the head of the family or the household. The traditional understanding of headship is that the husband is the leader of his family, exercising loving authority over his wife and children. The wife should submit to her husband being careful not to take the lead in anything, helping him to fulfil his calling. Some have extended this as meaning all men have authority over all women and even single women need to have a man as their head.

This does not fit with the partnership found before the fall and seems to be more a product of the results of the fall - *your desire will be for your husband and he will rule over you*. Roy McCloughry says 'I cannot see how we can talk about a man's authority over a woman being 'natural' since there is nothing natural about a distorted relationship which came about through disobedience. If we persist in sanctifying the pervasiveness of male power in our world we turn the outcome of the fall into the norm enshrining that which is evil with sacred power.'¹⁵

Our understanding of what head means in this context is affected by the contemporary use of the word. In the Pocket Oxford Dictionary there are 20 possible meanings of the word head, 2 of which have to do with authority and come 14th and 15th in the list. There are many possible uses of the word in the English language and the meaning traditionally associated with this verse is that of head as 'boss', as in headmaster or head of an organisation - the husband has authority over the wife and she is subject to him. We need to ask what did the word head (*kephale*) mean at the time of Paul's writing? What would his original audience have understood by it?

Firstly *kephale* does mean 'physical head' - the part of your body on top of your neck that contains your brain! That is the way *kephale* is most commonly used in the New Testament and the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Old Testament. The problem comes in translating its metaphorical meaning. There is no one figurative meaning of *kephale*, it can mean different things.

An essay in Equal to Serve by Catherine Clark Kroeger¹⁶ looks at the concept of head as 'source' which was used in ancient times. We use the word head with this meaning when we talk about the head of a river, the

source that water comes from. Kroeger argues that around the time of the New Testament 'head' could be used to mean source of life, source of supply for the body, or source of a river or stream. She says that in the New Testament era *kephale* rarely had the sense of boss or chief as it does in English. This is confirmed by Berkely and Anna Mickelsen¹⁷ who have studied the use of *kephale* in early Greek-English lexicons. The most complete English - Greek lexicon was published in 1843 (and therefore has not been sabotaged by contemporary feminist thought!) It gives 25 possible figurative meanings of *kephale* as well as the literal meaning of physical head. This list does not include authority, superior rank, leader, director or any such meaning. They have also looked at the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Old Testament. There is a Hebrew word *rosh* which does mean head or boss. The Septuagint translators only used the Greek word *kephale* for 4% of the translations of *rosh* because they recognised that it did not carry the Greek meaning of leader, authority or superior rank.¹⁸ They conclude that the normal Greek meaning of *kephale* would have been source of life or top/crown.

So if 'having authority' is not the meaning of *kephale*, what does it mean in these two passages to translate it as 'source' What about the other places in the New Testament where Paul talks about Christ being the head of the church?

First let us look at the other places where Paul uses *kephale*. In Col 2 v 19 we are warned against losing connection with the head *from whom the whole body, supported and held together by its ligaments and sinews, grows as God causes it to grow*. Paul uses *kephale* here to mean source of life. Ephesians 4 v15 is very similar *We will in all things grow up into him who is the head, that is Christ. From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love as each part does its work*. Again Christ is presented as the nourisher and source of life and growth. Col 1 v 15 -20 speaks of God creating all things through Christ *He is the head of the body, the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy* (v18). Again head as source would be a consistent interpretation especially in the light of the context of the passage. Paul practically defines the meaning of head here as the beginning, the origin. Indeed if head did mean here, 'having superior rank' would Paul have needed to add 'in everything he might have the supremacy'?

The two other places that Paul uses head in conjunction with Christ are Eph 1 v 22 and Col 2 v 10. Here *kephale* should be translated as 'top' or 'crown'¹⁹ Col 2 v 10 says *For in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form, and you have been given fullness in Christ, who is the head over every power and authority*. Head meaning top or crown emphasises Christ's position at the top of all power and authority in creation because of his death and resurrection. Eph 1 v 20 and 21 establishes the absolute authority of Christ over everything: *That power is like the working of his mighty strength, which he exerted in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at this right hand far above all rule and authority, power and dominion and every title that can be given, not only in the present age but also in the one to come*. In v 22 and 23 Paul uses his head - body metaphor and affirms Christ's position as the crown of authority and power for the church. P B Payne points out that it is the context of these verses that make it clear that Christ's being top entails having authority, rather than the use of the word *kephale*. In other words *kephale* shows that Christ is in the highest position; the rest of the verse shows what he is top of.²⁰

This understanding of *kephale* meaning source or top does not detract from Christ's rule or authority over creation and the church but we must look elsewhere to see that rule established. In Matthew 28 v 18 Jesus says *All authority on heaven and earth has been given me*. In Matthew 9 v 6 he says *So that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins...* John 5 v 27 *[the Father] has given him authority to judge because he is the Son of Man*. John 13 v 3 *Jesus knew that the Father had put all things under his power, and that he had come from God and was returning to God*. Philippians 2 v 9 *Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord*.

Back to 1 Corinthians 11 v 3 - 16. Does it make sense to interpret head as source here? The fact that Paul says twice in this passage that woman came from man (in v8 and v12) would strongly suggest that this is the sense in which *kephale* is used. *The head of every man is Christ* - Christ as agent of creation is the origin of man (Gen 2 v 7; Col 1v 16; John 1 v 3) - *the head of the woman is man* - man is the source of woman in that Eve was formed from Adam (Gen 2 v 21) - *and the head of Christ is God* - God is the source of Christ in the incarnation (John 8 v 42; John 1 v 14) in that Christ came from the Godhead. This passage does not teach a hierarchy of command : God over Christ who is over man who is over woman, but it is correct chronologically. In Greek thought, women were held in very low esteem. They were considered to be made of a substance inferior to man, incapable spiritually and intellectually. Consequently homosexual love was considered the highest form of love. Plato held that the truly noble soul was masculine and would seek another male as the

object of its love. To declare that man was the source of woman, that they were made of the same substance was radical. This and the Ephesians passage is a positive affirmation of heterosexual marriage.²¹

In Ephesians 5 the interpretation of head as source again makes sense. v23 says *For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the saviour.* Christ is the source or origin of the church, and the husband is the source of the wife as before. Paul also refers to part of the Genesis account in this passage (v31). Here the relationship between husband and wife is compared to that of Christ and the church. This is obviously a simile - husbands are not divine, like Christ. In any simile the two objects being compared do not mirror each other exactly so we must look to see how the relationship between a husband and wife does mirror that of Christ and the church. Husbands are told to love their wives as Christ loved the church, being self-sacrificing, loving them as their own bodies (i.e. as their equals, nurturing and empowering them.) Wives are to mirror the church by being prepared to be of service, submitting in everything. Christ is portrayed as saviour in this passage, not Lord. So husbands are to be like Christ in his sacrificial love, not his authority; the husbands headship is not lordship. As we have seen that does not take away any of Christ's power and authority, but stresses his unity with the church.²²

This view of headship as meaning source is consistent with the creation account studied earlier and with an understanding that the domination of men and subordination of women came in at the fall.

All this has implications for marriage and a full discussion is beyond the scope of this paper. Traditionalists argue that a marriage of mutual submission, where the husband is not the leader cannot work, and such a departing from traditional roles is responsible for the breakdown in society - we need to get back to basics! Obviously there are marriages that follow the traditional role outlined previously that work very well and where both partners are happy - I would not dare to suggest that these marriages should change. I think there has been a lot of confusion as to what headship in marriage actually means and some advice given to husbands and wives just leads to elaborate game playing. Some people will find the understanding of headship outlined here very threatening. Others will find it liberating as it is the pattern they have instinctively followed in their marriages, and have struggled with trying to make the husband the boss. They have parcelled out duties and responsibilities according to gifts, abilities and interests, perhaps sharing the jobs that neither particularly wanted to do, rather than rigidly following prescribed roles of what men and women 'ought' to be like.

The marriage relationship should be one of partnership and mutuality. Ephesians 5 v 22 calling wives to submit should not be divorced from the previous verse which says submit to one another out of reverence to Christ. The NIV unhelpfully adds a sub-heading and a new paragraph in-between these verses when in fact they are in Greek one sentence with only one occurrence of the verb submit. We shall look further at the issue of submission later in this paper. Whole books have been written on the subject of partnership in marriage²³ so I shall leave the subject here!

The rest of 1 Corinthians 11

A couple of generations ago in certain strands of the church a man would always wear a hat to church so that he could symbolically uncover his head in church, while his wife kept her hat firmly on her head. Few churches now teach that women should wear hats; most are happy to dismiss headcoverings as something relevant only to New Testament culture.

Having studied many books for this paper and for my own interest, the only thing that seems clear is that this is a very difficult passage to understand! Nobody seems to know exactly what the customs concerning headgear were at the time²⁴ and we do not know exactly what situation Paul was addressing in the church. He had begun the church two years earlier and it is obvious from the rest of 1 Corinthians that there were many problems that needed sorting out. In this letter we have a similar situation to listening to one side of a telephone call - we can only guess at exactly what was going on at the other end.

Clearly there are cultural elements to this passage. It is no longer a disgrace for a man to have long hair (v14) or for a woman to have her hair cut short (v 6) and we do not particularly value long hair in a woman (v15) Paul refers to women covering their heads as a custom that other churches in the area followed (v16) This is not a command of the Lord for all time but a recommendation how other churches were handling the same problem.²⁵ Paul himself had taken a vow previously, presumed to be a Nazirite one, and had allowed his hair to grow (Acts 18v8)so even in his culture there were times when long hair was not disgraceful for a man.

The context of this passage is order in worship - chapter 11 is the first of 4 chapters of Paul's instructions for church meetings. In the previous three chapters Paul has talked about the need to be aware of other's weaknesses and not do anything that would cause another Christian offence or shake their faith (8v9-13;

10v27-11v1) Greek men never had their wives with them at public feasts; they were accompanied by professional escorts who would not cover their heads as loose hair was a sex symbol.²⁶ Jewish women on the other hand tied up their hair to show their changed status from virgin to married woman.²⁷ One can imagine how upset they would have got with each other if some women, celebrating their new-found freedom in Christ, no longer felt the need to wear the old symbols of marriage. To some they would have appeared like prostitutes, to others as if they were rejecting their marital status. Paul is appealing for appropriateness and for them to realise the effect of their behaviour on others present. The women are liberated from the old restraints of culture and tradition; they are now given equal status and worth with their husbands but they are not to act as if they are not married. Perhaps a modern equivalent of headcovering would be a wedding ring, or calling oneself Mrs! Paul reminds them that woman came from man and was created for man (v8,9); so too they are partners for their husbands in marriage and must honour them. He also stresses the interdependence of man and women in v 11 and 12. In struggling free from oppression it is easy to swing to the other extreme, as can be seen in the anti-men attitudes of some extreme feminists. Paul is saying there should be balance!

When Paul says that man is the image and glory of God he does not mean to imply that the woman isn't because that would be untrue (Gen 1v27) What does it mean to say that the woman is the glory of man? This same statement is used of God in 1 Samuel 15v29 to say that he is the Glory of Israel. Paul explains his statement by alluding to the Genesis account. In Gen 2 v 18 we are told that it was not good for the man to be alone. Woman was created as a distinctive, complementary partner to fill the gap. Nik Ansell suggests that when Paul calls woman the glory of man he is trying to capture her importance as man's partner. Only with her can man be fully man and only with him can she be fully woman.²⁸ In this passage Paul stresses the difference between men and women. Women are not deformed men - they have their own identity as co-partners in the cultural mandate. Because of this the woman ought to have a sign of her own authority on her head, although what this means in our culture I am not sure. Perhaps the angels are mentioned because they need to recognise the status of women, as one day they will be judged by men and women (1 Cor 6 v 3)

No, this is not an easy passage to understand! It's relevance today seems to be that men and women are different but equally good. We should not try to blur this distinctiveness by violating the customs of today because this dishonours us and our Creator.²⁹

1 Corinthians 14 v 33 - 35

Again these verses are in the context of worship and dealing with the chaos that had arisen in church meetings. As Paul has earlier given instructions on how women should pray or prophesy aloud, it cannot mean that a woman should never say anything in church. There are three instructions for people to keep quiet in this passage: to someone speaking in tongues if there is no interpreter (v28); to a prophet if someone else gets a revelation(v30); and to women(v34). The other two silences are qualified so under what conditions should women be silent? The church at Corinth came out of the Jewish synagogue (Acts 18 v 7ff) where women would not have been taught and would have sat separated from their husbands. They would have got into the habit of chatting or gossiping and the word *lalao* translated speak here can mean gossip or prattle. It has been suggested that men and women were still separated in the Corinthian church. The women would have been excited at their new found freedom and equality in Christ, after years of not being taught or given recognition in public meetings. However they needed to learn to behave in appropriate ways . Paul tells wives to ask their husbands questions at home which implies they were shouting them across the church, adding to the chaos. This situation has happened in other areas of the world where missionaries have taken the gospel to places where women have not been allowed a public place.³⁰

There is a connection between v32 that says *the spirit of the prophets are subject to the control of the prophets* and v34 which says *[the women] must be in submission as the law says*. The same verb *hupotasso* is used in both verses and is apparently in the middle voice, indicating self control. Verse 34 should therefore read 'let them control themselves as the law also says'.³¹ That latter phrase has in itself caused problems as there is no text in the old Testament law that forbids women from speaking. Roger Forster suggests that we should look for a law concerning the conduct of worship as that is the context of the passage, and that it means that worship should be orderly and glorifying to God as it was in the Old Testament.³²

My understanding of this passage then is for women to learn in quiet, with self-control, asking questions at home so as not to disturb the public meeting.

1 Timothy 2 v 11 - 15

This is the most infamous of Paul's instructions on women and the one that has done the most damage! A whole book has been written just on this passage, looking at the culture and context to which it was written.³³ We will now have a fresh look at it!

Paul's command *I do not permit a woman to teach or have authority over a man* seems clear and straightforward and is interpreted that way by traditionalists. Women are not to teach or be in authority because they are easily deceived and were made to help and support men. However if women are not to teach, to which areas does this apply? Only to the church? Michael Harper holds this view for example and does not see his inconsistency.³⁴ Surely God's laws do not just apply to the narrow area of church and family but to the whole of life? If women are only allowed to teach women and younger children (Titus 2 v 4) then they should not be secondary school teachers, headmistresses, university lecturers, train nurses, or hold any other training post. If a reason for not letting them teach is that they are easily deceived as has been argued from this passage, why on earth let them loose on vulnerable children? And if women should never have authority over men they should not be doctors, politicians, managers, and so on unless of course they work in an all female environment when presumably they can exercise leadership, make decisions and use their gifts without restraint. No Christian should have voted Conservative in the years that Margaret Thatcher was Prime Minister because she was a leader with authority over men (quite apart from any considerations of her politics!) And what about the irony of those women who write books drawing the conclusion that women cannot teach? Surely they are reaching a far wider audience than any man speaking to a church congregation? Perhaps the books should have a 'public doctrine warning' on the front to ensure that no man buys a copy and is enlightened by it.³⁵ And what about Priscilla who taught and Phoebe who had authority in Paul's own circle of friends? He would not write a letter that contradicts his own practise so this command cannot be as straightforward as it first seems.

The passage starts with an imperative - Let a woman learn in quietness and full submission. We have already seen that women were not taught in the synagogues, and so this is a radical command. The women had a lot of catching up to do with the men and so needed to learn, as does anyone, in submission to their teachers. Paul is writing to a church in difficulties where they were susceptible to false doctrines (1v3; 4v1; 6v3) In 2 Tim 3v6 he mentions some women who were weak willed and easily swayed by false teaching - surely all the more reason why they should be taught, and they should have the right attitude for learning.

Verse 12 is not 'easily' translated as we have seen. Firstly the word 'silent' is the same as the word translated 'quiet' in verse 2 of this passage so Paul is not saying women should never speak. Is his injunction for women not to teach a universal command applicable for all time or a temporary one for that time and place? The tense of 'I do not permit' is the present indicative which could be translated ' At the moment I am not allowing ... ' ³⁶ but only the context can confirm that. The fact that Priscilla taught and Phoebe exercised authority, and the fact that the next chapter could refer to women deacons would also indicate it could be a temporary command. In 1Tim 1 v 7 Paul talks about those who want to be teachers but do not know what they are talking about. The women must gain understanding before they can impart it. In other places where believers are encouraged to teach one another (Col 3 v 16; Romans 15 v 14; 1 Cor 14 v 26) there is no indication that the instructions implies only to men, but are addressed to all believers male and female alike. If one starts to restrict general instructions to the church like these as only applying to men then how does one decide what does or does not apply to women? ³⁷

The other problem in this verse is the word *authentēin* translated here as to have authority over. It is a rare Greek word that occurs only here in the New Testament, and is not interchangeable with the more common word for authority, *exousia*. It has vulgar connotations and can sometimes mean to murder.³⁸ Surely it is dangerous to build a doctrine on a verse appearing only once with such a rare word in it? The sense is that it is not authority in itself that is the issue but the way the women were exercising it, in an aggressive, domineering way with sexual connotations ³⁹. My understanding of this verse is that women should not teach because their teaching was false. They should learn with a right attitude towards their teachers and then perhaps they would be allowed to teach again. This is similar to the command given to some men who were teaching false doctrines (1 Tim 1 v 3)

Paul then returns to Genesis to back up what he is saying. What point is he trying to make? Some would say that he is referring to the 'natural' order of things in that Adam was created first and therefore has dominion. This is not consistent with the reading of Genesis we have done. The Kroegers point out the prevalence of false doctrines at the time that Paul is obviously concerned about. One such doctrine was Gnosticism whose earliest writings date from the 2nd century but whose roots go back further. Gnosticism is possibly referred to in 1 Tim 6 v 20 and was a distortion of the Old Testament and particularly the creation story.⁴⁰ Some of the Gnostic beliefs about Eve were that she pre-existed Adam and played a role in his creation. She possessed a special knowledge that she would impart to men. Paul could be giving a running commentary on Genesis to debunk Gnosticism and other distortions.

Verse 14 has been used to teach that Adam was not deceived but Eve was therefore Adam is a better teacher and leader. Hardly logical - why should a deliberate sinner be better qualified to teach than a deceived person?⁴¹ Is Eve's deception to be held against her for all time? Where then is God's grace and forgiveness which Paul appropriates for himself in 1 Tim 1 v 15 -16? If women have to 'pay for' Eve's deception by not being allowed to teach does that mean Jesus's redemption was not sufficient? If they are more susceptible to deception why should they be entrusted with teaching younger women and children? In 2 Cor 11 v 3 Paul uses this same passage and same argument to warn both men and women against being deceived. Elsewhere Paul attributes sin entering the world to Adam not Eve (Rom 5 v 14; 1 Cor 15 v 20). Eve here is being used as a warning - women should not assume they are above deception. Again this is another argument for them being allowed to learn.

Finally v15 is generally considered one of the most obscure in the bible. Women are saved by the death and resurrection of Jesus, not by having babies! Gnostics forbade childbirth and women who gave birth were therefore cursed. If Paul is addressing that here, he could be saying to women who had been converted from or influenced by a Gnostic sect: childbirth is not an unforgivable sin. You are not cursed and will be kept safe. If the verse means that women will be kept safe through childbirth, then it has not been fulfilled until relatively recently - many, many women throughout history have died giving birth. Perhaps it continues to refer to the Genesis text and the curse on the women, that childbearing is not a punishment.

The most popular interpretation seems to point to the birth of Jesus which again remains in the Genesis context. *I will put enmity between you and the women and between your offspring and hers. He will crush your head and you will strike his heel.* (Gen 3 v 15) A woman gave birth to Christ who brought salvation into the world.

In summary this passage is directed against false teaching and Paul argues that women need to learn in quietness and submission before they are allowed to teach.

Submission

The dictionary definition of submission is to 'surrender oneself to the control or authority of another'. This has contributed much to the understanding of a husband having authority over his wife because she is to submit to him. The Hebrew Testament contains one command for believers to submit to one another out of reverence for Christ (Eph 1 v 22) as we have seen and four commands for wives to submit (or be subject to in Titus) their husbands. (Eph 5 v 22; Col 3 v 18; 1 Pet 3 v 1; Titus 2 v 6) The Ephesians and Colossians commands come in the context of almost parallel passages. Ephesians 4 and 5 and Colossians 3 are calls to holy living which have marked similarities. In both passages there are lists of things to avoid, believers are exhorted to speak and sing to one another and give thanks in the name of Jesus to God the Father. In both passages Paul addresses in the same order and with almost identical instructions wives, husbands, children, fathers, slaves and masters. Is it unreasonable to suggest that even though Paul does not say 'submit to one another' in Col 3 that that is the context in which we should read those verses? Unless of course he had changed his mind! I shall look at the Ephesians passage here and I believe the Colossians passage is in essence the same. In each of the relationships he addresses - wives/husbands, children/fathers, slaves/masters - he speaks first to the partner without cultural power.⁴² What he said to them was really nothing new. The patriarchal structure of society regarded the wife as a possession of her husband.⁴³ In the Old Testament the wife was expected to sacrifice herself for her husband because his life was more valuable as can be seen in Abraham's treatment of Sarah (Gen 12 v 11 - 13; Gen 20 v 1 - 13). Paul tells the wife to love and serve her husband in everything. In contrast the instructions given to the husband is radical - he is to love her in a way that would transform the structures of patriarchal marriage. He is to love her as his own body, as his equal. He is to nurture and care for her. There is a hint that he should sacrifice himself for her as Christ gave himself up for the church (p25) Paul quotes the verse in Genesis where marriage is first mentioned in the bible - Gen 2 v 24. *For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to (cleave to) his wife, and they will become one flesh.* The Roman pattern of marriage was for the oldest male to be head of the family and all sons and their wives would come under his leadership.⁴⁴ Paul is saying that is not biblical - a man is supposed to leave his family, not his new wife to join it. Christian marriage is different to the cultural pattern. The two are to become one flesh. The submission of the wife and the love of the husband are grounded in their relationship with each other and are not dependent on the other partner fulfilling their obligation.

Because a wife is told to submit does that mean she is free not to love her husband? Because a husband is told to love, does that mean he does not need to submit.? No, especially as the exhortation for the wife to submit is part of the same sentence encouraging mutual submission. Paul reminds the wife to submit because Christian marriage adds in the submission of the husband rather than removing the submission of the wife. Paul deliberately chooses to emphasise what each person most needs to hear at that time. It should be noted

that to submit means to put yourself under someone's control - it is not something a husband can demand from his wife or force her into. The teaching on passages such as Ephesians 5 has been unbalanced with the greatest emphasis being put on the wife needing to submit, and putting greater responsibility for the marriage relationship on her obedience. James and Phyllis Alsdurf in their book *Battered into Submission* tell the heartbreaking stories of many Christian women who have been abused by their Christian husbands as a result of distorted teaching on these verses. They have been taught that if only they are more submissive the abuse will stop - they will be able to win their husbands over.⁴⁵ At the other extreme are women who have abdicated responsibility for their lives and their relationships with God by 'submitting' to their husbands and letting them make all the decisions. Sapphira was held just as accountable as Ananias in their disobedience of God (Acts 5) Submission is now a dirty word. We must remember that Jesus submitted to his Father and was not diminished in any way by it (Matt 26 v 36 - 46 ; Heb 5 v 7 - 10).

1 Peter 3 v 1 - 7

Peter wrote this book to a church that was being persecuted. He talks a lot about suffering undeservedly for the gospel, just as Christ suffered for them, which will bring blessing. He is concerned that the believers live exemplary lives so that the pagans around them would see Christ in them and have no grounds for criticism.

In chapter 2 v 13ff he gives instructions to 3 groups of people to submit. Firstly to the authorities, then slaves to masters and wives to their husbands. In those days as we have seen a husband had legal authority over his wife. She would without question accept his religion and way of life.⁴⁶ 1 Peter 3 v1 does not limit submission to wives of unbelieving husbands but the following verses are definitely addressed to Christian women married to men who are not believers. All three of these groups then are called to submit to those who had legal power over them, whether those in authority are righteous or not. The Christian women should not rely on outward image to attract and win over their husbands. They should have an inner beauty that displays the fruit of the Spirit (Gal 5 v 22, 23) which should be evident in all Christians.

Sarah is an intriguing example of a submissive wife as she does not display the passivity that some associate with the concept. God tells Abraham to do what Sarah tells him when she wants to get rid of Hagar so in that instance he obeys her. Sarah is included in God's plan - her name is changed as well as Abraham's and she is to be the mother of nations (Gen 17 v 15) It was not enough that Abraham had a son, it had to be a son through Sarah.⁴⁷ There is only one instance where Sarah is recorded as calling Abraham her master which has nothing to do with obedience (Gen 18 v 12) and was apparently the usual way women would address their husbands.⁴⁸ The examples we have of her obeying Abraham are when he tells her to pretend to be his sister in order to save his own skin (Gen 12 and Gen 20). God protects her the second time certainly and Abimelech and Pharaoh face judgement for what they have done. It is dangerous to suggest that if a wife obeys her husband unquestioningly then all will go well with her. The testimonies of the women in the Alsdurf's book say otherwise and Sapphira's death if nothing else shows that God holds women responsible for their actions.

Peter tells the persecuted church to submit to the authorities even though he himself did not do that in Acts 5 when told to stop preaching about Christ. His reply was that he should obey God rather than men and that too is a Christian woman's first priority.

Husbands are to treat their wives with respect as the weaker partner. Different studies have been done to try and prove that women are intellectually inferior and so on but I think now we would recognise that this means physically weaker. Women do not have the muscle power of men although they are arguably stronger in other areas such as bearing pain! Peter stresses that women are joint heirs with men, again something that was not culturally recognised as women had no property or inheritance rights of their own. Men and women are heirs of the covenant and a wrong attitude towards this can hinder one's relationship with God.

Conclusion from new Testament passages.

My understanding of these passages in the New Testament is that they do not restrict and limit the role of women in the kingdom as many have used them to do. Women are to enjoy their newly discovered equal status in Christ. They are to learn, to mature as disciples and to take their place alongside men in serving God and bringing in his kingdom. Paul was not a woman hater, as has often been said of him, and his teaching is consistent with the partnership of men and women in creation.

If this is right then why has the bible been interpreted otherwise for so long? Surely our Christian ancestors can't all have been wrong? I believe that the rift between men and women at the fall was catastrophic and is a powerful stronghold of the enemy. It took 1800 years for slavery to be abolished and women were only given the vote and equal legal rights with men earlier this century. It is hardly surprising that it is only relatively recently that it has been addressed. We will look at one more passage in response to this.

Galatians 3 v 28

You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus, for all of you who were baptised into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female for you are all one in Christ Jesus. This must be the most quoted verse in the issue of women in ministry. Paul is not saying that in Christ gender differences are destroyed, that we become androgynous, identical beings. As we have seen, God created us male and female. The distinctiveness is meant to be there and is good. Paul is saying that all people are equal in God's sight and all can be redeemed by the blood of Christ. Race, gender, social status are no barriers to God's redemption. Much has been written about this verse but I want to make one point.

Namely that I see this passage as prophetic for the church. As already mentioned Peter struggled when the Lord told him to go to the Gentiles and preach the gospel. He had to face opposition from his fellow workers on their return from Jerusalem, but when they saw that God had ordained the change they rejoiced. Paul too challenged Peter over his attitude to Gentiles and his discrimination. The Jew/Greek distinction was one that Paul himself was struggling with at the time of writing some of his letters. One fact that they could not argue with was what God was doing amongst the Gentiles - they were being saved and filled with the Spirit. Now within the churches, ideologically at least, there is no distinction between Jew and Gentile. *There is neither Jew nor Greek...*

In nineteenth century Britain when Wilberforce was working to abolish slavery his greatest opposition came from Christians who were convinced that they could justify their practise from scripture. Fortunately he persevered and slavery was outlawed. I see a strong parallel between the issue of slavery and the oppression of women in society and church. The arguments used in favour of slavery were essentially the same as those used to argue for the subjection of women to men - the absence of any statement by Jesus, the teaching of the apostles seemed to uphold the master/slave relationship, no slave was numbered among the apostles and the need to maintain the current social order and not 'rock the boat'.⁴⁹ In every place where wives are called to submit to their husbands there is a parallel statement for slaves to submit to their masters. Slavery still does exist in some parts of the world, even in our own country, but which of us is not appalled at the practise, or would seek to try and justify it? *There is neither...slave nor free...*

The first two distinctions of this verse are gone and I believe the male/female issue will be the next to go. Like others, I believe and pray that there will come a day when we will look back on the church's attitude to women with horror and regret⁵⁰ *There is neither... male nor female*

I long for the day when gender will not be an issue, when we will no longer be told 'you can't do that you are a woman', when it will no longer be assumed that just because a man is male he automatically has leadership skills and authority. I long for the day when gender becomes invisible to both men and women, when we are able to work in the partnership and complementarity that God intended and when what qualifies a person for a job is their gifts and calling not their gender. I pray that my children will not have to wrestle with these issues because they will be settled and accepted.

Summary

From the opening chapters of the Bible it is clear that male and female were created equal to complement each other and work together in partnership. The existence of male and female living in mutual relationship together reflected the communion within the Godhead. As a result of the Fall, the relationship is marred; as a result of the incarnation, the relationship is being restored.

Within the Old Testament women were called by God into leadership, and in the New Testament Jesus affirmed women in a way that was radical in his society. As a result, women were an integral part of the leadership of the church from Pentecost onwards.

Whilst there are differences of interpretation over Paul's attitude to women, I believe that when set within the whole canon of Scripture, the biblical pattern is one in which women have a leadership role to play. I further believe that the biblical pattern for men is one in which they are not to overpower women as a result of the fall but are to empower them as a result of the redeeming empowerment of Christ. I believe that there is a clear biblical basis for partnership in ministry.

Implications

What are the implications of this position? How can we work towards partnership between men and women? What are the issues we need to address in order to move forward? Below are the

implications I believe we need to face. They are not in order of importance but we do need to start with the first one.

1 Listening to each other Many Christian women have felt oppressed at the traditional view of the roles of men and women and the fact that this interpretation has been stamped with the authority and approval of God. They have encountered chauvinism and misogyny in the church and have been hurt by it. Men too have had behaviour dictated to them and areas of life denied them.⁵¹ Unless this pain and oppression is felt and understood, much of this paper will seem like convoluted arguments to unnecessarily reinterpret biblical passages. We need to make ourselves vulnerable to one another and listen to where men and women have felt restricted by stereotypes and expectations.

2 Wrestling with theology Most of us do not know how to explain the theological positions we hold. I can remember as a teenager coming to the sudden realisation that almost everything I knew about the bible was second-hand, what other people had told me, rather than what I had read and discovered for myself. It is not enough to find an interpretation we like and stick to it without study, discussion and prayer. It can be threatening to have to rethink something you have always held dear, but it can also be liberating. We also need to have a right attitude to those who differ on this issue so we can still work together.

3 Heart attitudes I believe the biblical position of the equality of men and women is relatively easy to tackle. The key issue and the most difficult one to change is heart attitudes. One can know all the correct theology but still be sexist in attitudes and actions. Several years ago a friend of mine would agree that men and women were equal in God's sight but would still hit his girlfriend for whistling because it was 'unfeminine'. We need a heart conversion, to be challenged and changed by the Spirit of God. Nothing less will suffice.

4 Mutual respect Negative humour is all too easy and not really very funny. Disparaging remarks based on age, race, gender, size are frequent but no less painful because they are common. We need to build one another up in what we say. This is not 'political correctness' but goes to the heart of the gospel that God accepts and loves us no matter what value society puts on us. We are all fearfully and wonderfully made in the image of God. Let our creative humour reflect that!

5 Laying down of power in the home and workplace Men do not need to feel threatened by women in leadership and authority, using their gifts and ministries. There is more than enough room in the Kingdom of God, more than enough work for us all to do. For all of us, our security needs to be in Christ, rather than in what we do and how people perceive us. Men need to lay down power at work and allow women positions of responsibility without needing to retain ultimate control. Women need to lay down power in the home which has been traditionally the only place they have been allowed it. They need to allow husbands to be more involved in family and children and realise they do not have the monopoly on what constitutes good parenting.

6 Sacrifice Paul says that single people are more free to serve the Lord. They do not have as many ties restricting them. (1 Cor 7 v 32ff) Married people have to consider one another and so are not as available as before they were married. Once a couple have children they are even more restrained as to opportunities they can take and it is so important that children are nurtured and loved by parents for whom parenting is a priority. However, if a woman is involved in ministry before having children, her gifts and callings do not disappear when she gives birth. She still needs to be obedient to what God has called her to. Husbands and wives need to share the task of parenting and nurturing their children, and need to give opportunities for each other to continue to grow and develop. Traditionally women have made all the sacrifices for men to continue their lives virtually unchanged by the addition of children. I would like to encourage husbands to make sacrifices to enable their wives to use their gifts, and for couples to explore other models of work and parenting according to what is appropriate for them.

7 Role models Young people look to us as a model of what it means to be a Christian man or woman - a big responsibility. We need to make sure that we pass on the right messages concerning gender issues. My prayer is that future generations will not have to deal with this issue, just as slavery is largely irrelevant to us, because it will have been settled and accepted.

8 Partnership God meant men and women to work together in partnership, bringing complementary gifts and abilities to provide an enriched experience. Adam working on his own was 'not good'. Men

and women are different. Problems come when you try to define those differences and put value judgements on them. 'Men are rational; women are emotional' makes rational women an aberration, and denies men the need to be vulnerable. This is compounded when rationality is seen as a strength and being emotional as a weakness. And yet it is precisely because men and women are different that they should be involved in all areas of life. The men and women God calls together for a particular task will bring balanced experience and insights and produce enriched ministry.

9 Redressing the balance It is probably more true in the church than in any other area of society that women need to do a job twice as well in order to get half the recognition. Women need to be actively encouraged to pursue their callings and need to be given opportunities to develop their gifts. I am not advocating positive discrimination which does not do us any favours. I am not into tokenism! A woman should not be given a job just because she is a woman. However I think we need to recognise that women have had very few opportunities and very often suffer from a low self-esteem that makes it more difficult to hear and respond to God's call. Having been left out of certain areas for so long, women need active encouragement to redress the balance.

Notes

- 1 Elaine Storkey; Essay in Men, Women and God Editor Kathy Keay (Marshall Pickering 1987) p4
- 2 Pete Ward; Youth Culture and The Gospel (Marshall Pickering 1992) p22
- 3 Gretchen Gabelein Hull; Equal to Serve (Fleming Revell Company 1987) p183 and Appendix II
- 4 Christine Noble; What in the World is God Saying About Women? (Kingsway 1990) p76
- 5 John Stott; Issues Facing Christians Today (Marshalls 1984) p243
- 6 Kari Torjesen Malcolm; Women at The Crossroads (IVP 1982) p82
Roy McCloughry; Men and Masculinity (Hodder and Stoughton 1992) p64
Andrew Kirk; essay in Men, Women and God p33
- 7 McCloughry; op. cit. p68
- 8 Roger and Faith Forster; Is Leadership Male? (Icthus Media Services Ltd) p19
- 9 J David Pawson; Leadership Is Male (Highland 1988) p41
- 10 Forster; op. cit. p22
- 11 Hull; op. cit. Chapter 5
- 12 Faith and Roger Forster; essay in Men, Women and God p55
- 13 Torjesen Malcolm; op. cit. chapters 7, 8, 9
- 14 Valerie Griffiths; essay in Men, Women and God p64
- 15 McCloughry; op. cit. p65
- 16 Hull; op. cit. Appendix III By Catherine Clark Kroeger p267ff
- 17 Editor Alvera Mickelsen; Women, Authority and The Bible (IVP 1986) chapter 6
- 18 Michael Harper in his book Equal and Different quotes a scholar Grudem who disputes the use of kephale meaning source because of lack of evidence in Greek literature. This would seem to contradict studies that have found evidence (eg. P B Payne in Women, Authority and The Bible p) Harper does not comment on the fact that there is little or no evidence for kephale meaning authority outside of the scriptures!
- 19 Mickelsen; op. cit. p106
- 20 P B Payne; essay in Women, Authority and the Bible p131
- 21 Kroeger in Equal to Serve p278
- 22 Nik Ansell; Paper for The Institute of Christian Studies, Toronto 1987 p47
- 23 see for example Heirs Together Patricia Grundy
- 24 Mary Evans; Woman in the Bible (Paternoster Press) p82
- 25 Forster; The Role of Men and Women in the Church (Icthus) p7
- 26 Torjesen Malcolm; op. cit. p76
- 27 Noble; op. cit. p142
- 28 Ansell; op. cit. p25
- 29 Ansell; op. cit. p27
- 30 Torjesen Malcolm; op. cit. p73
- 31 Ansell; op. cit. p28
- 32 Roger Forster; The Role of Men and Women in The Church (Icthus) p13
- 33 Richard and Catherine Clark Kroeger; I Suffer Not A Woman (Baker Book 1992)
- 34 Harper; op. cit. p110
- 35 Nik Ansell makes these points in his paper p31
- 36 Evans op. cit. p102; Ansell op. cit. p34
- 37 Evans op. cit. p105
- 38 Ansell op. cit. p38
- 39 Torjesen Malcolm op. cit. p78
- 40 R and C Kroeger op. cit. p60
- 41 Hull op. cit. p186
- 42 Ansell op. cit. p45
- 43 Letha Dawson Scanzoni and Nancy A Hardesty; All We're Meant To Be (Abingdon Press 1986) p114
- 44 Hull op. cit. p279
- 45 James and Phyllis Alsdurf; Battered into Submission (Highland 1989) p84
- 46 Evans op. cit. p118
- 47 Scanzoni and Hardesty; op. cit. p116
- 48 Scanzoni and Hardesty; op. cit. p114
- 49 R and F Forster; op. cit. p19
- 50 Noble; op. cit. p76
- 51 This point is made by Roy McCloughry in Men and Masculinity and Dave Tomlinson in Men, Women and God p94