

# TRUTH FOR LIVING

## "WOMEN'S ROLE IN THE CHURCH"

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As with all issues for Christians, the role of women in the church needs to be decided by what is stated in the New Testament. There are some very clear statements made about the topic in the Scriptures, but, there are also a number of passages that are open to different interpretation.

These different interpretations are to be listened to, respected and must not be allowed to become a means of division. Christian grace and love should rule all our discussions and deliberations on such an important topic. This is not a subject that is essential to our salvation! The old dictum: "In the essentials unity; in non-essentials liberty and in all things love" is a necessary and helpful reminder for us all.

In keeping with sound hermeneutical principles about this or any other important issue, it is important to read all texts within their immediate context; to find out the normal meaning of the Greek words for the writers in those days; and to remember that the letters were written to deal with specific issues and so did not spell out what everyone then knew, but which we don't clearly know today. In addition, the entire body of God's Word should be the foundation for interpreting the individual passages. 'A text out of context is a pretext.' We must not arrive at any conclusions that contradict other passages of Scripture. In other words the Scriptures are to be interpreted wholistically and thematically.

Therefore, I will be seeking to summarize the biblical principles revealed in the Scriptures. I will seek to address the major passages that come under consideration when discussing this topic. I have felt for many years there have been double standards in the churches about the understanding of women's role and ministry.

Finally, this is a working document. It is not a definitive or final treatise on what has become a controversial subject. It is open to scrutiny, development, refinement and change. It is my attempt to grapple with an important issue and to provide some sense of direction to our leadership and Christ Centred Community.

### CREATION

1. The Bible teaches that both male and female were created in the God's image (Genesis 1:26-28). Several points emerge from these verses...
  - Male and females were equal as created beings – God says "*Let us create man... male and female he created them.*" (v27)
  - Male and females were the bearers of the divine image – God revealed Himself in both masculine and feminine attributes. (v27) EG. Luke 13:34.
  - Men and Women were equally blessed by God. (v28)
  - Men and Women received a joint commission from God to rule over the earth, not just the man! (v28)
2. The Bible teaches that woman and man were created for full and equal partnership. The word "helper" (*ezer*), used to designate woman in Genesis 2:18, refers to God in

most instances of Old Testament usage (e.g. 1 Samuel 7:12; Psalm 121:1-2). Consequently the word conveys no implication whatsoever of female insubordination or inferiority. The analogy is summed up in a question... "Could Israel function without YAHWEH?" No. YAHWEH, the helper, came alongside and enabled Israel to function.

3. The Bible teaches that the forming of woman from man demonstrates the fundamental unity and equality of human beings (Genesis 2:21-23). In Genesis 2:18, 20 the word "suitable" (*kenegdo*) denotes equality and adequacy. Stuart Briscoe said, "Some people have argued that because woman is made from man, she is in some way inferior to him. But man was made from the dust of the earth. Are we to conclude that he is inferior to dust?"<sup>1</sup>
4. The Bible teaches that man and woman were co-participants in the fall: Adam was no less culpable than Eve (Genesis 3:16, Romans 5:12-21; 1 Corinthians 15:21,22).
5. The Bible teaches that the rulership of Adam over Eve resulted from the Fall and was therefore not a part of the original created order. Genesis 3:16 is a prediction of the effects of the Fall rather than a prescription of God's ideal order! This is a very important point. If we believe it is prescriptive – then God is saying something like, "All right woman, you misbehaved; therefore you will be cursed. You will desire your husband, but he will rule over you – and it's your fault! It's part of the curse."

On the other hand, God may be saying, "As a result of what you have done, all mankind will get fouled up. Relationships will become a mess, especially between men and women. And women will particularly be affected by male abuse and domination." Those who hold to a descriptive interpretation of Genesis 3:16 believe that the Fall so perverted the 'headship' of 1 Corinthians 11:3 that it has degenerated into all manner of confusing and inappropriate relations between men and women with primarily the woman becoming the chief victim.

What do we do for women in child birth? We relieve and alleviate the symptoms of the Fall! What do we do for the gardener? We give him weed killer etc. We give the overworked a computer, a blender, a microwave etc. All these things are designed to alleviate the consequences of the Fall. The Bible teaches that woman was a magnificent part of God's creation. If that is the case, the question for a Christ Centred Community should be, what are we going to do about it?

## REDEMPTION

6. The Bible teaches that Woman's Identity was renewed in The Redemptive work of Christ as well as Men's. Through faith in Christ we all become children of God, one in Christ, and heirs to the blessings of salvation without reference to racial, social, or gender distinctives (John 1:12-13; Romans 8:14-17; 2 Corinthians 5:17 and Galatians 3:26-28).

Unquestionably, God had a number of intentions in redemption...

- (1) To counteract the effects of the fall
- (2) To restore the created order and
- (3) To bring back the glory of God to mankind.

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<sup>1</sup> Briscoe, Stuart: "What it means to be real".

At the very time God was outlining what would happen to women in the Fall, He also made the great redemptive statement that the seed of the woman would bruise the serpents head (Genesis 3:15).

## COMMUNITY

7. The Bible teaches that on the day of Pentecost the Holy Spirit came on men and women alike. Without distinction, the Holy Spirit indwells men and women and sovereignly distributes gifts without preference as to gender (Acts 2:1-21; Joel 2:28,29; and 1 Corinthians 12:7,11, 14:31). It was a fulfillment of the new covenant in the sense that God's Spirit was poured out on both men and women. Men and women were once again shown that they were equal in terms of blessing and opportunity.
8. The Bible teaches that both men and women are called to develop their Spiritual gifts and to use them as stewards of the grace of God (1 Peter 4:10-11). Both men and women are divinely gifted and empowered to minister to the whole body of Christ, under His authority (Acts 1:14, 18:6, 21:9; Romans 16:1-7, 12-13,15; Philippians 4:2-3; Colossians 4:15; cf. Mark 15:40-41, 16:1-7; Luke 8:1-3; John 20:17-18; c.f. OT examples: Judges 4:4-14, 5:7; 2 Chronicles 34:22-28; Proverbs 31:30-31 and Micah 6:4).
9. The Bible teaches that men and women in the New Testament economy exercise the prophetic, priestly and royal functions (Acts 217-18, 21:9; 1 Corinthians 11:5; 1 Peter 2:9,10 and Revelations 1:6, 5:10). I suggest therefore that the few problematic texts that appear at first glimpse to restrict the full redemptive freedom and ministry of women must not be interpreted simplistically or in contradiction to the rest of Scripture. Their interpretation must take into account the context and their relation to the broader teaching of Scripture (1 Corinthians 11:2-16, 14:33-36 and 1 Timothy 2:9-15).
10. The Bible teaches and defines that the function of leadership is the empowerment of others for service rather than the exercise of power over them (Matthew 20:25-28, 23:8; Mark 10:42-45; John 13:13-17; Galatians 5:13 and 1 Peter 5:2,3). This is a major issue for us to address in any truly Biblical Community.

## PROMINENT WOMEN MENTIONED IN THE SCRIPTURES

Throughout the Bible there is evidence of women's participation in teaching, leadership roles and vocal gifts in the church. The following are some examples:

- Miriam, the prophetess and sister of Moses (Exodus 15:20-21; Micah 6:4)
- Deborah acted as a leader and prophetess in Israel (Judges 4:4-7)
- Huldah the prophetess (2 Kings 22:14-20)
- Philip's daughter's who were prophetesses (Acts 21:9)
- Priscilla, instructor, church planter and fellow worker (Acts 18:2,18,26; Romans 16:3)
- Junias an outstanding Apostle (Romans 16:7) and
- Phoebe the deaconess church planter (Romans 16:1).

## SCRIPTURAL PRINCIPLES TO CONSIDER BEFORE LOOKING AT THE INDIVIDUAL PASSAGES

- Women did sometimes lead. Deborah ( Judges)
- Women did pray and prophesy (proclaim Gods word in the worship context (1 Corinthians 11:5)
- Women did bring words of instruction, a revelation, a tongue or an interpretation for the strengthening of the church (1 Corinthians 14:26)

## **CONCLUSIONS AND THEIR APPLICATION TO LIFESTREAMS CHRISTIAN CHURCH**

As a redemptive community of God we are seeking to restore things to God's original purpose and plan. We want His kingdom to come to earth - the church as a community is the closest demonstration of that on earth.

- This means - shared leadership
- Gift based leadership
- Open Ministry - God pours out His Spirit on his Sons and daughters - we have seen that the function of leadership is the empowerment of others for service rather than the exercise of power over them
- We may hold to different interpretations of the nature, makeup and shape of ministry but we will support the Lifestreams Christian Church's leadership position on the matter

Any exercise of leadership and authority must be marked by the attitude that Jesus required: *'The greatest among you should be like the youngest, and the one who rules like the one who serves'* (Luke 22:26).

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