

## **A Theological Position Paper on Women in Ministry**

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For the Course:  
Women in Ministry  
PAST 5110  
Anderson University School of Theology  
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October 19, 2009 (Updated June 16, 2010)

From Romans 8:19-22<sup>1</sup> we glean that there is more to the Incarnation than reconciling humans to God. The Incarnation is about setting the entire universe right—restoring creation to what God intended it to be. That being the case, what then were the pre-Fall relationships between humans and God, men and women, and humans and the rest of creation?

Genesis 1:26-31 does not seem to indicate any hierarchy between men and women. Instead, a reading of Genesis 1:26-31 suggests that there were only three levels at the end of the sixth day—God, followed by humans, followed by the rest of creation. We do not read of women becoming subject to men until after the Fall. God informs the woman that as part of the curse for the man and the woman disobeying God her desire shall be for her husband, and he shall rule

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<sup>1</sup> All biblical references refer to and biblical quotations are taken from the NRSV.

over her (Gen 3:16). This comes to fruition in verse 20, where the man names his wife. Prior to verse 20, the man had called his wife *ishshah*, which is translated “woman” and means “like me”. Further, the Hebrew word *cezer*, almost universally translated “helper” in Genesis 2:18, is used to describe God in relationship to us elsewhere in the Old Testament (OT) (Ex 18:4; Is 30:5; Ps 146:5).<sup>2</sup> It is unlikely then that such a term for the woman is meant to denote that she is somehow inferior to the man. Moreover, the Hebrew word *kenegdo* found in the same verse means “equal”.<sup>3</sup> This has led one scholar to offer the following alternate translation of Genesis 2:18, “It is not good for the man to be alone; I will make a power equal to him.”<sup>4</sup> That the woman came from the man’s rib—was taken out of him—also demonstrates the equality of men and women (Gen 2:21-23). A point which will be made in greater detail when we look at 1 Corinthians 11 and 1 Timothy 2. What is important at this moment is that out of the Fall, as part of the curse, came the patriarchal structure of society.

Despite this now existent patriarchal society, we read in the OT of God calling women to be leaders and prophets. Firstly, Miriam is recognized as a prophet called by God, along with her brothers Moses and Aaron, to lead the Hebrew people up out of Egypt (Ex 15:20-21; Mi 6:4). Deborah was called by God as a judge, and she led the Israelites to victory over the Canaanites (Jgs 4—5). It was Huldah’s inspired word from the LORD which led to King Josiah instituting religious reforms and the resultant revival (2 Kgs 22). In both the cases of Deborah and Huldah, God used women when men like Barak and Jeremiah were available. Lastly, Nehemiah

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<sup>2</sup> Juanita Evans Leonard, *Called to Minister...Empowered to Serve* (Anderson, Ind.: Warner Press, 1989), 29.

<sup>3</sup> R. David Freedman, “Woman, A Power Equal to Man,” *Biblical Archaeology Review* 9 (1983): 57.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 58; Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., a distinguished Old Testament professor, author, and scholar, affirms R. David Freedom’s translation of Genesis 2:18 on pages 92-94 of his book *Hard Sayings of the Bible*.

acquaints us with a prophet named Noadiah (Neh 6:14).<sup>5</sup> God will not let the curse of a patriarchal society prevent God's intention for God's creation.

This is also shown in the story of Esther. If it was not for God placing Esther in the position of Queen of Persia and not for her courage and willingness to face the possibility of being put to death by approaching her husband in the manner in which she did, in the only manner available to her at the time, her people, the Jews, would have suffered unspeakable harm at the hands of Haman (Esther 4—7).

The accounts of God using women in spite of a patriarchal society extend into the New Testament (NT) as well. It is clear from the Gospels that God called women to play prominent roles during the time Jesus walked this earth. First, we have Anna, who gave thanks to the LORD for Jesus and prophesied of Him "to all who were looking for the redemption of Jerusalem" (Lk 2:36-38). The Samaritan woman at the well recognized Jesus as the Messiah (the first person to do so in John's Gospel), and Jesus came along side her and spoke into her evangelical ministry to her city (Jn 4).<sup>6</sup> Jesus' ministry was financially supported by women (Lk 8:3). Women were the last ones at the cross (Mt 27:55-56; Mk 15:40-41; Lk 23:49; Jn 19:25-27) as well as the first ones at the tomb (Mt 28:1-8; Mk 16:1-8; Lk 24:1-12; Jn 20:1-13).<sup>7</sup> Despite women being prohibited from testifying in court as witnesses simply because of their gender,<sup>8</sup> Jesus called Mary Magdalene to be His witness to announce to the disciples that He is risen (Jn 20:11-18). Jesus gave the honor of announcing the greatest news the disciples, and the world for that matter, could ever hope to hear first to a woman. This should not be that surprising though. The Gospels make

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<sup>5</sup> John E. Stanley, "Reclaiming the Church of God Heritage of Women in Ministry," (paper presented at the Doctrinal Dialogue of the 2009 North American Convention of the Church of God, Anderson School of Theology, Anderson, Ind., June 29, 2009), 9-10.

<sup>6</sup> Stanley, "Reclaiming the Church of God Heritage of Women in Ministry," 12.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 13.

<sup>8</sup> Leonard, *Called to Minister...Empowered to Serve*, 16.

reference to women at least eighty-eight times.<sup>9</sup> This is amazing considering women’s “cultural roles as subservient characters in Greco-Roman society which usually ranked people in a hierarchy based on gender, age, wealth, and social position,”<sup>10</sup> and it suggests, in no uncertain terms, that God never intended a patriarchal society for God’s creation.

What about the Roman household codes, did not the Apostle Paul adopt them in Ephesians 5:22—6:9 and Colossians 3:18—4:1? What Paul actually did was qualify these household codes for the purpose of evangelism. If we look closely, Paul pointed to a higher code of ethic. Instead of wives simply being subject to their husbands, husbands were to love their wives. Instead of children simply obeying their fathers, fathers were not to provoke their children. Instead of slaves simply obeying their masters, masters were to treat their slaves justly. The spirit behind these qualified Roman household codes is love, a love that provides the opportunity for the salvation of all.<sup>11</sup> Even before critiquing the Roman household codes, Paul reminded the Ephesians that Christians are to “be subject to one another out of reverence for Christ” (Eph 5:21). Moreover, the phrase “be subject” in verse 22 is not actually there in the Greek, it is borrowed from verse 21. Paul was instructing the Christians in Ephesus and Colossi on how to become all things to all people in order to proclaim the Gospel, a principle found in 1 Corinthians 9:19-23. As those in Ephesus and Colossi noticed that the Christians adhered to the Roman household codes in a different spirit, the spirit of love, they might inquire as to the Christians’ motivation for doing so. This would then present the opportunity to preach of the freedom to love found in Jesus Christ and the “God-given dignity and worth of [all] persons.”<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Stanley, “Reclaiming the Church of God Heritage of Women in Ministry,” 13.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Leonard, *Called to Minister...Empowered to Serve*, 24-27.

<sup>12</sup> Stanley, “Reclaiming the Church of God Heritage of Women in Ministry,” 16.

As those hearing this message opened themselves up to the Holy Spirit and God's revelation, they would come to understand more and more deeply that "where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom" (2 Cor 3:17), as well as that "there is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male or female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus" (Gal 3:28). They would also come to see that the Scriptures are meant to be lived, and Paul's practice was to affirm women and their prophetic call to leadership positions in the Church (Rom 16:1-16; 1 Cor 3:5; 11:5; 16:19; 2 Cor 3:6; Phil 4:7).<sup>13</sup>

That being said, the social revolution for gender equality, just like the social revolutions for race equality and love for your enemy, ignited by Jesus, the Holy Spirit, and Paul have yet to be fully realized.<sup>14</sup> Where we should see them the most realized though is in the Church, as this is the body which recognizes that the Incarnation is about setting the universe right. Unfortunately, in many congregations we still see aspects of the curse of a patriarchal society, and cloudy texts and a post-Fall view are still used to oppress.

"The Bible is *not* a book of oppression—for women or anyone else. It has repeatedly proven to be an instrument of liberation for God's people.... It offers hope for the poor, comfort for the afflicted, identity for the disenfranchised, and justice for the dispossessed."<sup>15</sup> Accordingly, when we have Scriptures that seem to be in tension with this principle, we must continue to approach God by faith seeking guidance on how to interpret them in a non-oppressive way.<sup>16</sup> Sharon Pearson puts it well when she states, "Where the text speaks, we speak

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 15-16.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Richard Clark Kroeger and Catherine Clark Kroeger, *I Suffer Not a Woman: Rethinking 1 Timothy 2:11-15 in Light of Ancient Evidence* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Book House, 1992), 29.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

(without reservation). Where Scripture is silent, we speak only with a great deal of humility.”<sup>17</sup>

In other words, we let the clear texts interpret the cloudy texts, and seek God’s guidance as we do so.

The cloudy texts most often used to deny the calling of a woman by God to a church leadership position are 1 Corinthians 11:3-10; 14:33-36; 1 Timothy 2:11-15. In 1 Corinthians 11:3 the Greek word *kephale*, which is translated “head”, does not denote authority over, but instead “source” or “origin”.<sup>18</sup> Paul is showing that it was not Adam who came from Eve, but Eve who came from Adam. This is important because all other men have come from women. So, if it were true that Adam had come from Eve, then that would mean that all men came from women. If that were the case, then there is not and never was equality among the genders, as women would be superior. Paul’s argument leaves room for the position that Adam in Adam’s original form, like God, transcended gender; thus, the woman taken from Adam was already there. That being the case, there would certainly be a pre-Fall equality among the genders.

Paul makes a similar argument concerning Adam being the source of Eve and God the source of all in 1 Timothy 2:13-14. In 1 Timothy 2:11-15, Paul is also teaching Timothy how to combat myth. Gnosticism was an emerging and very real concern in Ephesus. Couple that with former dancers at the Temple of Diana/Artemis now coming to worship, and we have the perfect setting for the development of Eve worship. These former temple dancers, who are used to leading worship and have a background of the Great Mother Deity, certainly could have been asserting that Eve came before Adam; was not deceived by, but instead received wisdom from, the serpent; there was no resurrection of the body; and things of the body, such as childbirth,

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<sup>17</sup> Leonard, *Called to Minister...Empowered to Serve*, 15.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 20.

were to be avoided.<sup>19</sup> If this were the historical context present at the pinning of 1 Timothy and given that the Greek word *authentain* translated “authority” in 1 Timothy 2:12 is only used here in the NT (making the alternate translations of “proclaim herself author of a man” or “dominate a man” possible),<sup>20</sup> then 1 Timothy 2:11-15 can surely be read in conjunction with Galatians 3:28 without tension.

With regard to 1 Corinthians 14:33-35, order verses chaos seems to be the issue and not men verses women, especially when Paul’s concern in 1 Corinthians 11:5 is how women are prophesying in church and not that women are prophesying in church.

If we want to take these verses literally, without any context, then, among other things, we men must also be prepared to always pray with our hands held high (1 Tim 2:8). Instead, let us be the body that looks to the Incarnation as the event designed to set the universe right, the pre-Fall state of equality among the genders, the freedom found in Christ, and gift-based leadership. Let us be the body that does not deny the prophetic call of our sisters in Christ. Let us be the body that takes to heart the words of Charles E. Brown,

As a matter of fact, the prevalence of women preachers is a fair measure of the spirituality of a church, a country or an age. As the church grows more apostolic and more deeply spiritual, women preachers and workers abound in the church; as it grows more worldly and cold, the ministry of women is despised and gradually ceases all together.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Stanley, “Reclaiming the Church of God Heritage of Women in Ministry,” 17-18; Kroeger and Kroeger, *I Suffer Not a Woman*, 105-113.

<sup>20</sup> Stanley, “Reclaiming the Church of God Heritage of Women in Ministry,” 18.

<sup>21</sup> Charles E. Brown, “Women Preachers,” *The Gospel Trumpet* 59, no. 21, reprint ed. (May 27, 1939): 5, 13, quoted in Stanley, “Reclaiming the Church of God Heritage of Women in Ministry,” 21.

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