

## **Women Elders: *to be or not to be!* What does the Bible say?**

1. These are not exhaustive notes, mere brush strokes to cause us to look further.
2. An important guideline from WBC booklet "about church membership":  
*In key areas we have unity, in non-essential beliefs we have freedom, in all our beliefs we show love.*
3. We all have our biases and have an idea of where we want to end up! We are capable of being selective with biblical material. This is an emotive issue and can often be in danger of wanting please! Beware.
4. We need discernment to recognise eternal (unchanging) principles from cultural (changing) principles and not to superimpose them on to the scriptures.
5. Let us remind ourselves of some simple guidelines in biblical interpretation, a) from the general to the particular and b) the OT is the NT concealed and the NT is the OT revealed.

So we approach prayerfully, humbly and openly (*where angels fear to tread!!*)

**There are essentially 2 main views of the subject of women as elders;  
Egalitarianism and Complementarianism**

Our approach will be 1. An overview. 2. Some supporting rationale. And 3. Some objections and responses.

### **1. The Egalitarian Position An Overview:**

- Male and female created equally
- Hierarchy and disorder because of the fall
- Equality restored through redemption in Christ

### **The Egalitarian Position - Supporting Rationale:**

#### **A. Evidence for equality.**

**1.** Genesis 1:26-27 *God said, "Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and..." So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.*

Both made in image of God, equal in nature and function.

**2.** Genesis 2:18 *God said, "It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him."*

Women as *helper* is not subordinate but an equal partner.

**3.** Galatians 3:28 *There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.*

God through salvation abolishes distinctions, inequality and hierarchy that came by sin.

4. 1Corinthians 12:7-11 *to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good. To one there is given through the Spirit a message of wisdom, to another... All these are the work of one and the same Spirit, and he distributes them to each one, just as he determines.*

God gives his gifts with no reference to gender and expects them to be used in the church.

## **B. Biblical examples of female equality.**

### **1. Female leaders in Israel.**

Although largely patriarchal God let Israel have some expressions of female leadership. Miriam (Exod. 15), Huldah (2 Kings 22) who were prophetesses and Deborah (Judges 4-5) was also a judge in Israel

### **2. Female participation in Jesus' ministry.**

Although unacceptable to the culture of the day Jesus endorsed women and their desire to minister. *Luke 8:1-3, Luke 10:38-42, Matt. 15:21-28*                      *John 4:39-42, Matt. 28:1-10, Mark 16:1-8, Matt. 28:18-20 and Acts 1:8*

### **3. Female involvement in early church.**

*Acts 2 (esp.v17-18)* recipients of the Holy Spirit.

*1 Cor. 12* Holy Spirit gifted, *1 Cor. 11:5* women prophesy, a speaking gift used to instruct the church.

*Acts 18:26* Priscilla was exercising a teaching gift and instructing a man. (*cf. Rom. 16:3-5*)

*Rom. 16:1, 7* – Paul commends Phoebe, who is a servant, perhaps a deacon; and Junia, (if a woman) is named as "*outstanding among the apostles.*"

## **Objections/Responses to the Egalitarian Position:**

**A.** An almost exclusive male leadership of Israel by God's call. If he wanted female leaders he could have done so!

**Response:** This was God tolerating the pervading patriarchal culture of the time.

**B.** If Jesus broke cultural norms in permitting women in his ministry, why didn't he break with convention and appoint female disciples?

**Response:** Jesus was only beginning the process that went on into the early church.

**C.** Ephesians 5 tells women to submit to their husbands. How can Paul be right do this if any sense of hierarchy (the result of sin) is now abolished in Christ?

**Response:** 5:21 *submit to one another.* 5:22 then is illustrative, and is not meant to single out wives as subordinate to their husbands.

**D.** References to male headship means the man has a position of authority and responsibility over the woman.

**Response:** Greek *kephale* *head* is a term widely used in Greek literature outside of the NT to mean "source" (as in the "head" of a river). So a woman owes her existence to the man who was created first she was "sourced" in man.

**E.** 1 Tim. 2:11-15 *A woman should learn in quietness and full submission. I do not permit a woman to teach or to assume authority over a man; she must be quiet. For Adam was formed first, then Eve. And Adam was not the one deceived; it was the woman who was deceived and became a sinner.*

1 Tim. 2:11-15 says that women are to learn in submission and not exercise authority over men, based on the order of creation and Eve's fall into sin.

**Response:** Paul's instruction was specific to one particular church situation and is not normative to all churches at all times.

## **2. The Complementarian Position - An Overview:**

- Male and female created equal in essence but different in role.
- Abusive relationships as a result of the fall.
- Redemption in Christ restores rightful role differentiation.

### **Supporting Rationale :**

#### **A. Evidence of equality of essence.**

**1.** Genesis 1:26-27 *God said, "Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and..." So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.*

Male and female are equal in essence, both fully human and of equal value and worth to God.

**2.** Galatians 3:28 *There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.*

God's salvation involves no gender distinction.

**3.** 1 Corinthians 12:7-11 *to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good. To one there is given through the Spirit a message of wisdom, to another... All these are the work of one and the same Spirit, and he distributes them to each one, just as he determines*

Women and men alike are recipients of all of God's gifts, but it does not preclude the possibility that God may prescribe just how those gifts are to be used in the Church.

## **B. Evidence of role differentiation.**

### **1. Genesis 2**

Male headship supported by:

- Order of creation, Adam first
- Adam's implied responsibility for Eve
- Eve as *helper* means under authority (cf. Paul and 1Cor 11:9-10)

### **2. Genesis 3:1-7**

Male headship supported by:

Eve sinned first but God holds Adam responsible. (cf. Romans 5:12ff, 1Corinthians 15:22 and 1Timothy 2:14)

**3. Genesis 3:16** *To the woman he said "I will make your pains in childbearing very severe; with painful labor you will give birth to children. Your desire will be for your husband, and he will rule over you."*

The curse shows that sin would bring about in Eve a wrongful desire to rule over her husband (contrary to God's created design), and in response, Adam would assert his rule over her.

So sin brought about abusive use of the God-intended role of the male-headship and female submission relationship. (compare Gen 4:7)

### **4. 1 Corinthians 11:1-16**

Women are to have a symbol of authority on her head (11:10), because she is the glory of man (11:7), because she originated from man (11:8), and because she was created for the man's sake (11:9).

Because Paul links the woman's submissive role in the church to God's created design, these instructions are applicable universally in the church.

**5. 1 Corinthians 14:34-36** *Women should remain silent in the churches. They are not allowed to speak, but must be in submission, as the law says. If they want to inquire about something, they should ask their own husbands at home; for it is disgraceful for a woman to speak in the church. Or did the word of God originate with you? Or are you the only people it has reached?*

Prohibition on women speaking is not absolute.

Either women were never involved in any official capacity of teaching, (presumably because men are present), or that women may not function in the elder role of leadership (and judging prophecies *a la* Grudem, Carson). The principle is that women display their submission to male headship.

**6. 1 Timothy 2:8-15** *....A woman should learn in quietness and full submission. I do not permit a woman to teach or to assume authority over a man; she must be quiet. For Adam was formed first, then Eve. And Adam was not the one deceived; it was the woman who was deceived and became a sinner*

Because Paul links his command that women not exercise authority over men with God's created design it is a universal instruction not specific to just that church.

**7.** Ephesians 5:22-33 *Wives, submit yourselves to your own husbands as you do to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the Savior. Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything. Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her.....*

There is a parallel between the headship of the husband with the headship of Christ. As the church submits to Christ as the one who has rightful authority over her, so the wife submits to her husband as her head.

## **8. The Trinitarian Analogy**

The three persons of the God-head are absolutely equal, sharing fully, simultaneously and without division one divine essence, but are distinct in function. Specifically, their distinction of function is marked by an intrinsic relation of authority within the God-head, by which the Son submits to his Father. In this way we are made in God's image

### **C. Biblical examples of role differentiation.**

#### **1. Male leadership in Israel**

God has called out men and held men responsible for religious leadership.

#### **2. Male leadership with Christ**

Jesus was not constrained by social convention but he never choose any women to be among the twelve though He clearly could have.

#### **3. Male leadership in the Church**

Paul explicitly restricts women from a certain level of leadership in the Church. *1 Cor 11:1-16, 1 Cor 14:34-36, and 1 Tim 2:8-15* consistently require that the church's ultimate human spiritual leadership be gender-restrictive.

#### **4. Male leadership in the Home.**

*Eph. 5:22-33, Col. 3:18-20, and 1 Pet. 3:1-7* each establishes male-leadership in the home. The 1 Peter passage is particularly instructive.

### **Objections/Responses to Complementarianism :**

**A.** Complementarianism is really a fully hierarchical view and as such it is intolerable and contrary to the freedom of the gospel.

**Response:** Relationships within authority structures surround us. Such authority structures do not mean there is greater human value or superiority of those in charge, or minimize the human value or imply the inferiority of those under their charge.

**B.** What difference does it make whom God created first? He had to create one or the other first, and it just happened to be Adam that doesn't make Eve subordinate.

**Response:** Those objections might have some force were it not for the fact that Paul understood Genesis 2 this way. It is Paul who observes the importance of Adam's creation first, and Paul who notes Eve was created for Adam's sake.

**C.** Gen. 3:16 says nothing about Eve ruling Adam, but explicitly to Adam ruling Eve. Sin caused in Adam a desire to dominate his wife.

**Response:** Explaining Eve's desire as a positive or caring desire fails to account for the fact that this is part of the curse on Eve. God would not give to her the curse of caring for Adam. Rather, her desire, because it is connected with what sin has done to her, is best understood as a negative, wrongful one.

**D.** It is not correct to say that the Bible exhibits a uniform pattern of religious male leadership. You have left out the many and significant examples of female leadership.

**Response:** Most of the examples of female leadership appear in roles other than those of highest human religious authority.

**E.** Your use of "male headship" and reference to passages like 1 Cor. 11:3 and Eph. 5:23 where "head" (*kephale*) is used, does not recognize the meaning of this term as "source."

**Response:** The strongest lexical evidence suggests that while *kephale* is sometimes used of impersonal objects to mean "source" but its exclusive use in NT as it relates to humans is as "authority over," not "source." Exegetically, it becomes difficult to understand how Paul could mean anything other than "authority over"