

**AN EXAMINATION OF THE BIBLICAL ROLE OF WOMEN  
IN CONTEMPORARY CHURCH LIFE**

**by**

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## SUMMARY

This dissertation focusses on the biblical role of women in the contemporary church, taking into account God's original plan and purpose for women in **Genesis 1 and 2**, the changes which occurred as a result of the Fall in **Genesis 3**, and the influence of the various cultures and traditions, especially in the Old Testament period, on the attitudes toward and treatment of women. Jesus' apparently revolutionary attitude towards women challenged the Jewish status quo, directing the people back to His Father's original plan and purpose for the relationship between men and women. His attitude is reflected in the teachings of the apostles in the New Testament, women being spiritually equal before God, yet having different and complementary roles and functions to fulfil. The clear hierarchical structure of authority which was laid down by God in the beginning, is therefore reinforced through Scripture.

The strong influence of feminism over the past century is investigated, where women are demanding equal rights in all spheres. As a result, the call for full ordination of women within the church is now widely accepted, even in evangelical circles. It appears that women are "abandoning" the biblical role which God ordained for them. The aim of this study is to explore the validity of women in leadership roles within the church and whether this practice deviates from God's original plan revealed in His Word or not. The research seeks to trace this tendency in some mainline churches and to prove the hypothesis that this is due to a misinterpretation of the Scriptures and a lack of biblical teaching on this subject. The central finding is that there certainly is confusion among today's Christians on this issue, and that feminist thinking has drawn both pastors and laity alike away from the biblical principles of authority.

The study concludes that women do have a very crucial role to play in the contemporary church, a vast number of ministries being open to them, allowing them to exercise *all* their spiritual gifts. The only biblical restraint and prohibition, however, is that they are not permitted to preach, teach, lead or rule over men in any way within the church, such positions of authority being reserved for men only. Women should therefore be discouraged from assuming leadership over men, and should spend more time encouraging men to lead in a godly manner, both in the home and in the church, so that they might fulfil their God-ordained purpose. My submission is that if men and women live and serve Him within the authority structure which He has set in place, God will surely be glorified and His kingdom extended.

## DECLARATION

I, Sharon Anne Rees, declare that this dissertation entitled "An Examination of the Biblical Role of Women in Contemporary Church Life" represents my own work, both in conception and execution.

Signed : *SA Rees*

Date : *15 March 2003*

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I wish to also thank all those who have so willingly participated in, and contributed towards, the research related to this project. This involved a survey done in three local congregations, as well as interviews with men and women in local church leadership. Their views and experience are highly regarded and much appreciated.

A special word of thanks must go to my supervisor, Professor A Song, for his endless patience, his valuable suggestions, detailed comments and his ongoing assistance that helped shape this dissertation.

## LIST OF TABLES

	Page
<b>Table 7.1</b>	Study and ministry experience of pastors 98
<b>Table 7.2</b>	Are men and women equal before God? (Q1) 106
<b>Table 7.3</b>	Did God put man in authority over the woman? (Q2) 107
<b>Table 7.4</b>	Must the woman submit to male leadership? (Q3) 107
<b>Table 7.5</b>	Is the Bible clear regarding the husband/wife relationship? (Q4) 108
<b>Table 7.6</b>	In your culture is it acceptable for a women to preach? (Q5) 109
<b>Table 7.7</b>	Have you ever sat under a woman preacher? (Q6) 110
<b>Table 7.8</b>	Do you agree with women preaching in a mixed congregation? (Q7) 111
<b>Table 7.9</b>	Should specially-gifted women be allowed to preach? (Q8) 112
<b>Table 7.10</b>	Does the church offer enough opportunities for women? (Q9) 112
<b>Table 7.11</b>	Do men enjoy being in authority over women? (Q10) 113
<b>Table 7.12</b>	Summary of responses to survey questions 118

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

### CHAPTER

Page

SUMMARY (ii)

DECLARATION (iv)

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS (v)

LIST OF TABLES (vi)

1 MOTIVATION AND MODUS OPERANDI 1

1.1 Statement of problem 1

1.2 Aims and objectives of the study 7

1.3 Methodology 11

2 OLD TESTAMENT TEACHINGS AND CONSIDERATIONS 14

2.1 Introduction 14

<b>2.2</b>	<b>God's original plan and purpose for woman (Gen. 1 &amp; 2)</b>	<b>17</b>
2.2.1	Genesis 1 - Equality before God	17
2.2.2	Genesis 2 - Difference in responsibility, role and purpose	18
<b>2.3</b>	<b>The changes as a result of the Fall (Gen.3)</b>	<b>22</b>
<b>2.4</b>	<b>Women in Israelite Culture</b>	<b>25</b>
2.4.1	The patriarchs - from Abraham to Joseph	27
2.4.2	The prophets - from Moses to Samuel	30
2.4.3	The kings - from Saul to Zedekiah	32
2.4.4	The priests - from Zerubbabel to Caiaphas	33
<b>2.5</b>	<b>Women in other cultures of the day</b>	<b>36</b>
2.5.1	Babylonian culture (c.1775 BC)	37
2.5.2	Assyrian culture (c.1450-1250 BC)	38
<b>3</b>	<b>WOMEN IN NEW TESTAMENT TIMES</b>	<b>40</b>
<b>3.1</b>	<b>The Jewish world</b>	<b>40</b>
3.1.1	Basic attitudes towards women	41
3.1.2	Women in marriage and sexuality	43
3.1.3	Women in public life	45
3.1.4	Women in religious life	45



<b>3.2</b>	<b>The Graeco-Roman world</b>	<b>47</b>
3.2.1	Ancient Greece	48
3.2.2	Ancient Rome	48
<b>3.3</b>	<b>A brief overview</b>	<b>49</b>
 <b>4</b>	 <b>WOMEN IN THE MINISTRY AND TEACHING OF JESUS</b>	 <b>51</b>
<b>4.1</b>	<b>Jesus and His culture</b>	<b>51</b>
4.1.1	His conformity to it	51
4.1.2	His non-conformity to it	51
<b>4.2</b>	<b>Jesus' ministry to women</b>	<b>54</b>
4.2.1	Through public teaching	54
4.2.2	Through private instruction	56
4.2.3	Through miracles	57
<b>4.3</b>	<b>Women's ministry to Jesus</b>	<b>58</b>
4.3.1	From His mother	58
4.3.2	He accepted help from women	59
4.3.3	Those participating in His ministry	60
<b>4.4</b>	<b>Jesus' teaching concerning women</b>	<b>61</b>
<b>4.5</b>	<b>Jesus and women in leadership</b>	<b>63</b>

<b>5</b>	<b>WOMEN IN THE LIFE OF THE APOSTOLIC CHURCH</b>	<b>66</b>
<b>5.1</b>	<b>Women as people</b>	<b>67</b>
<b>5.2</b>	<b>Women in the life of the communities</b>	<b>69</b>
<b>5.3</b>	<b>Women in the organised ministries of the church</b>	<b>70</b>
<b>5.3.1</b>	<b>As fellow-workers</b>	<b>70</b>
<b>5.3.2</b>	<b>As prophets</b>	<b>72</b>
<b>5.3.3</b>	<b>As apostles</b>	<b>72</b>
<b>5.3.4</b>	<b>As deacons</b>	<b>73</b>
<b>5.4</b>	<b>A general overview</b>	<b>75</b>
<b>6</b>	<b>NEW TESTAMENT TEACHINGS AND CONSIDERATIONS CONCERNING WOMEN</b>	<b>77</b>
<b>6.1</b>	<b>Galatians 3:26-29</b>	<b>77</b>
<b>6.2</b>	<b>Ephesians 5:21-33</b>	<b>80</b>
<b>6.3</b>	<b>I Peter 3:1-7</b>	<b>83</b>
<b>6.4</b>	<b>I Corinthians 11:3-16</b>	<b>85</b>
<b>6.5</b>	<b>I Corinthians 14:33-40</b>	<b>90</b>
<b>6.6</b>	<b>I Timothy 2:8-15</b>	<b>92</b>

<b>7</b>	<b>RESEARCH FINDINGS ON THE ROLE OF THE WOMAN IN CONTEMPORARY CHURCH LIFE</b>	<b>96</b>
<b>7.1</b>	<b>Interviews with pastors</b>	<b>96</b>
7.1.1	The questionnaire	97
7.1.2	Background of the pastor	98
7.1.3	Analysis of responses	99
<b>7.2</b>	<b>Survey in local congregations and general public</b>	<b>103</b>
7.2.1	The target groups	103
7.2.2	The questionnaire	104
7.2.3	Analysis of the responses	105
<b>7.3</b>	<b>Interpretation of research findings</b>	<b>113</b>
7.3.1	Interviews with pastors	114
7.3.2	Survey of congregation members and general public	116
<b>8</b>	<b>CONCLUSIONS AND PRACTICAL RECOMMENDATIONS</b>	<b>120</b>
<b>8.1</b>	<b>The problem</b>	<b>120</b>
<b>8.2</b>	<b>A brief summary of biblical teaching</b>	<b>122</b>
<b>8.3</b>	<b>Application for the church today</b>	<b>126</b>
<b>8.4</b>	<b>The way ahead</b>	<b>137</b>

<b>8.5</b>	<b>Ministry opportunities open to women</b>	<b>141</b>
8.5.1	Women as prayer warriors	142
8.5.2	Women as witnesses	143
8.5.3	Women as teachers	143
8.5.4	Women as mothers and wives	145
8.5.5	Women as care-givers	146
8.5.6	Women as communicators	147
8.5.7	Women as social "activists"	147
8.5.8	Women in missions	148
8.5.9	Closing comments	149

## **APPENDICES**

<b>A</b>	-	The Story of CESA	151
<b>B</b>	-	Danvers Statement	154
<b>C</b>	-	List of pastors interviewed	158
<b>D</b>	-	Interview Schedule	159
<b>E</b>	-	Survey schedule	161
<b>F</b>	-	Opportunities for [Women's] Ministry	163

<b>BIBLIOGRAPHY</b>	<b>164</b>
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## 1. MOTIVATION AND MODUS OPERANDI

### 1.1 Statement of the problem

It appears that as far back as the Fall of man, there have always been gross injustices and inequalities on numerous levels in society. They include inequalities between the rich and the poor, the slave and the free, the educated and the uneducated, the upper-class and the working-class, those who owned property and those who did not. In many cultures, women have also over the centuries been despised and demeaned by men. John Stott<sup>1</sup> (1984: 234) makes the following very strong statement:

... men have regarded them [women] as mere playthings and sex objects, as unpaid cooks, housekeepers and child-minders, and as brainless simpletons incapable of engaging in rational discussion. Their gifts have not been appreciated, their personality smothered, their freedom curtailed, and their service in some areas exploited, in others refused.

During the socio-political changes of the nineteenth century, however, philanthropists, many of whom were evangelical Christians, worked hard to eradicate injustices not only within society but also relating to gender. The first attempts to alleviate gender-based inequalities were made by introducing universal suffrage and allowing women to be admitted to universities. In many countries, women began to receive equal pay for equal work. In fact, in Britain the "Sex Disqualification (Removal) Act" of 1919 opened them to almost every public function, profession and civil post. This "first wave" of feminism had

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<sup>1</sup> John Stott's book, *Christians facing Christians Today* (London: Marshalls, 1984) has been very useful, and will be referred to often.

practically ended by the 1920's.

Modern feminism claims to be a continuation of this first wave. The publication of Betty Friedan's book "The Feminine Mystique" in 1963 popped the lid off "Pandora's Box", releasing the Women's Liberation Movement. Germaine Greer, the authoress of "The Female Eunuch" in 1970, saw women as being unhappy and "oppressed" in socially-sanctioned relationships like marriage and motherhood. She called women to reject both of the above, and to seek economic independence. Janet Radcliffe Richards, the authoress of "The Sceptical Feminist" was convinced that "women suffer from systematic social injustice because of their sex" and therefore feminism is "a movement for the elimination of sex-based injustice" (in Stott 1984: 236).

The US Civil Rights Act of 1964 introduced legislation for women in the workplace, demanding that those with equal training, education and experience should have equal pay, regardless of race, nationality, religion or gender (de Haan 1989: 2). By the late 1960's only two professions were still closed to women in Britain, namely the Stock Exchange and the ordained ministry of the traditional churches. To be sure, both First Wave and modern feminists have helped identify some terrible injustices against women and have over the years worked to alleviate these. They have accomplished things which Christians should support, such as achieving the vote for women, denouncing violence against women, working to support abused or abandoned women and single mothers, and much else.

Over time, the impact of this way of thinking has radically affected the structure of western society. The claim that women have been exploited, undervalued and enslaved for untold ages, and now need liberating from the status of "second-class" citizens, has led to what appears to be a drive for a unisex society where

all distinctions will be obliterated (Hurley 1985: 17)<sup>2</sup> Our post-modern society today, with its philosophy which rejects all absolute standards, and which governs each situation by its own merits, seems to have become obsessed with equal opportunities for men and women.

A paradigm shift has thus ensued, the role and place of women within the contemporary church community becoming a very real and, often heatedly-debated issue. Harper (1994: 5)<sup>3</sup> calls it a "theological *imbroglio*", which literally means "a confused situation, usually involving disagreement". Men and women have hurt each other in the process, often failing to understand and affirm the other's distinctive sexuality. This debate has mostly been very negative in tone and content. Some have turned it into a power issue and some base their arguments on false ideas of leadership. Others have become caught up in "traditionalism", which in actual fact is a "cover-up" for blind prejudice. Emphasis has been laid almost entirely upon what is forbidden, the argument focussing on areas of ministry which women may or may not enter and responsibilities which they may or may not undertake (Donnelly 1989: 2). It seems that the pressure for the ordination of women is a direct outcome of this movement. In fact, in Craston's opinion (1973: 4), "Women's Lib extremists see the priesthood as one of the last bastions of male supremacy and mean to storm it".

Synan (in Harper 1994: 55) believes that it was the evangelical revivals of the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries that first opened the way for women to be ordained. Under Charles Finney, women were allowed to address public meetings. The first co-educational college in America was founded by him, and the first woman to be

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<sup>2</sup> James B Hurley's book, *Man and Woman in Biblical Perspective* (Leicester: InterVarsity Press, 1981) has proved to be most informative and useful and will be referred to often.

<sup>3</sup> Michael Harper's book *Equal and Different - Male and Female in the Church and Family* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1994) has proved to be a great source of useful information.

ordained in 1853, albeit illegally, in America was Antoinette Brown, one of Finney's former students. This was probably the first in the world. It was about a century later, in the 1950's, that the first mainline churches did the same. Today we see Methodist, Baptist, Presbyterian, Episcopal, Lutheran and United Reformed churches all having women ministers. Some Pentecostals have long had women pastors. Aimee Semple MacPherson was one of the best known. The Church of England (worldwide) now ordains women to the diaconate, which is the last hurdle before full priesthood. It should be noted that the Church of England in South Africa (CESA), which is distinct from the Church of the Province in South Africa (CPSA)(see **Appendix A**), does not ordain women to the ministry. Quite suddenly a number of new "house" churches are appointing women. It is also interesting to note that, traditionally, women's leadership has been a characteristic of cults e.g. Christian Science under Mary Baker Eddy, SDA under Ellen G White, and Spiritism under the Fox sisters.

Inevitably such thinking from society has now also penetrated the evangelical and fundamental church. A small but perhaps growing number of evangelicals is beginning to feel it may now be the will of God for women to take a full share in the ordained ministry of His Church. Although these "evangelical feminists" still identify themselves with evangelicalism by personal commitment to Jesus Christ and profess their belief in the total truthfulness of Scripture, yet they give "new interpretations" of the Bible to support their claims (Piper & Grudem 1991: xiii)<sup>4</sup>. Others are confused, uncertain how to interpret Pauline teaching on this matter (Craston 1973: 3). The net result has been a division amongst the Lord's people, and in many cases, a sense of bitterness and frustration on the part of many Christian women. In fact, most Christians will admit that the traditional patterns of how men and women relate to each other, have often been contaminated by

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<sup>4</sup> The authors contributing to Piper & Grudem's book *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood - a Response to Evangelical Feminism* (Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway Books, 1991) have been a great inspiration to me.



selfishness, irresponsibility, passivity and abuse.

Many theologians and writers have over the years tackled the whole question from two points of view. On the one hand, those of a reformed or evangelical stance are persuaded that a woman's role is a secondary one. They believe that Christian women may be actively involved in the everyday running of a church, may devote their time to visiting the sick, their money to worthy projects, and their energies to the effective operation of missionary outreach. But they maintain that the decision-making process of the church should be assigned to men, as well as any teaching or preaching ministry which is conducted from the pulpit.

However the liberals or feminists view the situation from a different perspective. They believe that Christian women should share with men the decision-making processes and should participate freely in the teaching and preaching ministry of the church, in addition to the activities mentioned above (Howe 1982: 15).

Pritchard (1986: 19) believes that:

... women are free to be and to do everything for which God has called and equipped them. And it is my observation that God has equipped and called women to a wide variety of roles, including those of pastor, elder, teacher and leader . . . Are those who would restrict the ministry of women in danger of teaching that all gifts are given by the Holy Spirit who **'apportions to each one individually as He wills'**, and then preventing women exercising their gifts if they happen to be gifts of preaching, teaching or leading?

In the face of criticism about the role of women in missions, Hudson Taylor (Tucker 1983: 184) wrote: "I think women may do what God has given them gifts for, if they do it in a womanly way . . . ". Later he described the work of women in CIM as "the most powerful agency at our disposal". He once advised potential candidates, "unless you intend your wife to be a true missionary, not merely a

wife, homemaker and friend, do not join us". Stott (1984: 252) says there are situations where it is permissible for a women to teach a man, if it does not mean taking improper authority over him and thus destroying the headship principle. Howe (1982: 9) feels that we are being forced to re-examine the traditions, prejudices and presuppositions which have been held to so tenaciously for generations. She feels that over a long period of time the church may have been denying women the place assigned to them by God. She also feels that the church must "come to maturity" on this issue. Elliott, however (in Piper & Grudem 1991: 395) feels that "this business of roles is nearly always, to put it bluntly, a power struggle . . . If we really understood what femininity is all about, perhaps the question of roles would take care of itself".

All those holding the opinions above, are convinced that they are structuring their church community in accordance with the principles of Scripture. This is confusing. How could such a situation arise? Are the biblical documents so unclear that they lend themselves to two opposing interpretations of the role of women within the church and how the membership of a church community should be organized? Smith (1986: 20) says, "Either God is saying different things to different denominations, or denominations are interpreting wrongly what God is saying about women's ministry". I believe that it is possible that *not* every church which claims to be basing its structure and beliefs on the teachings of the Bible, is in fact doing so. I believe that only one of the two interpretations is correct. Accurate and correct interpretation of Scripture is therefore of utmost importance.

In my view, one of the clearest summaries of the contemporary developments which are causing such controversy amongst Christians today is found in the "Rationale" of the Danvers Statement (see **Appendix B**), published by a group of evangelical leaders in 1987. It recognises with deep concern the widespread uncertainty and confusion in our culture regarding the complementary differences between masculinity and femininity and the tragic effects of this confusion (Piper

& Grudem 1991: 469). I, too, strongly believe that the issue we are dealing with here has far-reaching implications, not only for all Christians, but also for every living person on the face of the earth, whatever their colour or creed. I agree with the three authors quoted by Harper (1994: 5) that the issues pertaining to gender and the leadership role of women in the church, especially their ordination, are primarily a ***theological issue***. These men have made profound statements in this regard. First, Father Thomas Hopko wrote that "it is a matter which affects much of what we believe. The controversy shows what a person believes about ***everything*** . . . I believe the very faith is at stake here". He adds that just as Arianism was the most important controversy in the fourth century, so our present controversy may well be the same in the twentieth century. Manfred Hauke says that this subject "cannot be considered in isolation . . . the topic is connected in many ways to the organic totality of the religious life of the Church". In addition, Michael Novak (in Harper 1994: 55) has written the following:

One cannot yank the thread of sexual differentiation from the Christian faith without unravelling the whole. A weakening of the integrity of the mysteries of the Trinity, the Incarnation, the Church, Christian marriage and family life, and much else besides, must inevitably follow.

## **1.2 Aims and objectives of the study**

Controversy in the church is always distressing because it splits churches, fellowships, families and friends. Therefore I believe this whole argument regarding the woman's role in the church needs to be urgently addressed. It is not just a "biblical idea whose time has come", like the abolition of slavery. I believe that we, as evangelical Christians, are in great danger of being conformed to the world and its post-modern philosophy on this issue. We ought to be concerned not merely with the behavioural roles of men and women, but

also with the underlying nature of manhood and womanhood themselves. Biblical truth and clarity in this matter are important because error and confusion over sexual identity leads to many problems. These include marriage patterns that do not portray the relationship between Christ and the church, parenting practices that do not train boys to be masculine and girls to be feminine, increasing attempts to justify homosexual tendencies, and patterns of unbiblical female leadership in the church.

We therefore need to carefully address questions like, "What are women's rights?", "Wherein lies a woman's essential identity?", "How is that identity either discovered or destroyed?" "What, according to Scripture, is the status which God gives to women?" and "What is the work to which He calls them?" I believe we need to discover what the Holy Spirit is saying to the churches. In order to do this, we need to get back to the most important question of all: "***What is the Christian's authority today?*** From where do we get our teaching?"

Some would say that because believers are indwelt by the Holy Spirit, the Spirit will guide us by our instinctive ***feelings or impressions***. After all, as 1 John 2:20<sup>5</sup> says, ". . . you will have an anointing from the Holy One, and all of you will know the truth". However, we do not have the right to decide on anything in the Christian faith according to how we feel. The Holy Spirit does give discernment, but 2 Timothy 2:15 shows that God requires us to be diligent and very careful in the study of His Word, so that we may find answers there to difficulties in the faith, and may be found to be "**a workman who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the Word of Truth**". 2 Timothy 3:16-17 underlines just how seriously we are to take the Word of God. The Holy Spirit, Himself God, will therefore never give us a "feeling" about something that is contrary to Scripture. Indeed, to go against Scripture is unacceptable to the

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<sup>5</sup> The Bible version which will be referred to throughout this dissertation will be the *New International Version (NIV)*

evangelical Christian.

Others say that **culture** ought to be our guide to truth. Unfortunately, the Church has been influenced too often by cultural patterns, rather than influencing them! Hurley (1985: 16) notes that our 20<sup>th</sup> century culture is moving farther and farther away from the cultural patterns and thought forms of the times in which the books of the Bible were written, and asks whether it is therefore possible for the Bible to speak to our social customs today? Because society changes all the time and the Bible does not, is it possible that the Bible is becoming more and more out of date and that an effort to live a "biblical" lifestyle is in fact an effort to put the clock back a few millennia? Should not each generation of Christians think through for itself the application of biblical faith for its own life situation? The solutions of past generations may be useful, and will often be adopted, but ought they not to be reconsidered at points of cultural change?

As an evangelical Christian, however, I believe that **God's Word alone** is the Christian's true authority. I believe that every word is inspired by God Himself, is infallible and is inerrant. **2 Peter 1:20-21** is clear regarding the inspiration of Scripture, namely,

**Above all, you must understand that no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet's own interpretation. For prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.**

I believe the Bible is able to guide God's people today, just as it did thousands of years ago when it was first written. I believe that **"All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness"** (2 Timothy 3:16). The message is simple, clear and logical.

Scripture is God's Word and **"cannot be broken"**, said Jesus. Jesus Christ the Lord, God's Son, said that! He is infinitely superior to my whim, personal preference or cultural conditioning. As 2 Peter puts it, **"Men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit"**. In other words, every one of the over forty human authors used by God to pen His Word over a period of about sixteen hundred years, wrote down exactly what God wanted each successive generation to know about Himself and His purposes for mankind. Jesus Himself said, **"I tell you the truth, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished"** (Matthew 5:17-18).

According to 1 Timothy 3:15, **"the church of the living God"** is the **"pillar and foundation of the truth"**, therefore it is most important that the church reflects biblical truth about the woman's role (Baird 2001: 1). Paul urges us in 2 Thessalonians 2:15 to **"stand firm and hold to the teachings we passed on to you, whether by word of mouth or by letter"**. He warns us later in 3:6 to **"keep away from every brother who . . . does not live according to the teaching you received from us"**.

The gospel of Christ comes couched in a hierarchy of authority: **"Now I want you to realise that the head of every man is Christ, and the head of the woman is man, and the head of Christ is God"** (1 Corinthians 11:3). What we believe concerning the role of women in the church will, I believe, reveal whether we have been able to resist the "spirit of our age", and whether we come under God's divine authority in our lives or not. We have a choice. Obedience to God's Word or submission to the spirit of our age? The heart of the matter is really the authority of Scripture. Holdt (1989: 1) believes that we must be valiant for truth and resist every incursion of error before it is too late.

### 1.3 Methodology

As we have seen above, there has been much discussion and controversy over the roles which the sexes should play in the Church today. Does the Bible distinguish between the sexes? How does the place which women were given in the church compare with that which they had in the Old Testament and in the Jewish culture, namely Judaism, of Christ's day? Should we make distinctions today? What did Paul mean when he said that in Christ there is no more "**male nor female**" (Galatians 3:28)? How does that square with his insistence that women may not "**teach or . . . have authority over a man**" (I Timothy 2:12)? Such questions have practical implications for the Christian church and for Christian marriages. Should we have women pastors? Should the husband be "head" of the home? Should women teach in Sunday School? Are men superior beings? Does masculinity automatically make a man more authoritative and spiritually superior in the teaching of God's Word? Is it biblically acceptable for women to teach the Scriptures? Should she teach men or when men are present? Paul Jewett (in Piper & Grudem 1991: 34) says that "sexuality pervades one's individual being to its very depth . . . Our self-knowledge is indissolubly bound up not simply with our **human** being, but with our **sexual** being".

It must be noted that this dissertation is written from an evangelical perspective. I receive the Bible as the written Word of the living God whom it proclaims and whom I have come to know, to love and to worship<sup>6</sup>. I believe the Word of God is worthy of our closest attention and demands our obedience. Because the Holy Spirit spoke through men who lived in specific historical and cultural settings, and spoke specific languages, I therefore believe we need to study and attempt to

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<sup>6</sup> I reject the Higher Criticism which relates to the Creation account as a myth, and which suggests that there may be geographical and other problems with the non-mythical interpretation. I accept the **Genesis** account of Creation as absolutely true and real, because I believe the Word of God is inspired by God Himself.

understand the various backgrounds of these human authors. This study is intended to present a careful examination of the relevant biblical texts within the context of the day, and to discuss their relevance to the present. Pawson (1988: 9) calls us to all emulate the Bereans, who tested Paul's words by the touchstone of Scripture, hopefully with the same result (**Acts 17:11**).

**Chapter 1** reviews the origin and outcome of the controversy concerning the role of women within the contemporary church. **Chapter 2** looks at God's original plan and purpose for women, as illustrated in **Genesis 1-3**, the roles of women in the Israelite culture, as well as those of women in the life of Israel's neighbours, namely Assyria and Babylon, during the Old Testament period. **Chapter 3** is devoted to an examination of women in Judaism and in Graeco-Roman culture at the time of Christ. Their place in the ministry and teaching of Jesus is dealt with in **Chapter 4**. Jesus' view of women contrasts sharply with the cultures of the day and provides the foundation on which the early church is built. **Chapter 5** examines the role of women in the life and teaching of the apostolic church, whilst in **Chapter 6** we consider the debated passages in detail which examine basic apostolic attitudes to women and to marriage, relations between marriage partners, the role of women in worship, and the role of women in church offices.

Field research was conducted relating to the role of the woman in the church in **Chapter 7**. Interviews were conducted with eight pastors, two representatives from each of four denominations. A survey of ten questions was designed and administered within my local church as well as in two other churches, representing denominations other than my own. A fourth denomination declined to participate in the survey. An additional survey involving forty members of the public at large was also conducted. The aim of these field studies was to ascertain, if possible, to what extent the thinking of modern day Christians, as well as the general public, has been affected by feminist ideas, to what extent Scripture is taken as a basis for such thinking, and to what extent Scripture has



been interpreted correctly. Data analysis showed that the feminist demand for the equality of women is very evident in the contemporary church, especially with regard to woman preachers. In conclusion, **Chapter 8** encompasses a final analysis of the problem and the application of biblical principles to the whole issue of the role of women in the church, with particular reference to women in leadership positions. Recommendations and suggestions are then made concerning the many opportunities open and available to women for ministry, allowing them to exercise **all** their spiritual gifts to the full within the church.

I confess that when I began to study this controversy, I did not realise how much was at stake. What looks like a simple difference over the **interpretation** of Scripture, easily slips into a subtle debate about its **authority** - and behind it all, the very nature of the Godhead is being questioned. In a sceptical age which views "truth" as subjective, relative, and reached by cultural consensus, people find it hard to conceive that sincere conviction can be based on the revealed mind of God rather than the concealed motives of people.

From a personal point of view, I recognise that no person infallibly interprets God's Word. The attitude of John Calvin (Hurley 1985: 14) is a great example to me. He said, "I have said what I can say. Others may be able to say more. Let us all beware lest we say more than that which God has said". I trust that somehow, through the reading of this dissertation, the Holy Spirit will lead us **"into all truth"** on this controversial matter.

## **2. OLD TESTAMENT TEACHINGS AND CONSIDERATIONS**

### **2.1 Introduction**

There has been ample anthropological and historical evidence over the centuries to indicate that cultures vary widely with respect to the roles they assign to the sexes. Anthropologists and social scientists have developed several theories about how family structures and functions evolved (Encarta Encyclopaedia 2001). Traditional roles, it appears, stem from women being child-bearers, and therefore less mobile than men. Tasks like gathering and preparing food and tending to children were therefore allotted to them which made it possible for them to be close to home. This seems to have been the one constant factor which has influenced the division of labour in pre-industrial societies.

As societies have become more complex and technological, individual talent and initiative have become more important. The result is that traditional roles of women have been played down and demeaned by society as well as the church. Some of our early church fathers were particularly critical of women. Tertullian called women "the mother of all ills" and "the devil's gateway . . . the unsealer of that [forbidden] tree . . . the first deserter of the divine law" (Stott 1984: 235). Chrysostom wrote of women as a "natural temptation and a desirable calamity, a deadly fascination". Augustine agreed with Graeco-Roman tradition that a woman's sole function was procreation. It is appalling too, that as late as in the 1900's, women were treated as second-class citizens without the right to vote, to hold property or to go to court. There is no doubt that these injustices experienced by women contributed to the rise of movements like the Women's Liberation movement.

Just as those early church fathers were influenced by their society to speak in a derogatory fashion about women, we as Christians have to recognise that we are also influenced by the ethos of our own age. However, as Christians, God has given us **His Word**, so that we do not have to rely on our own perception of things. As evangelical Christians, we firmly believe that:

- **all** Scripture is inspired by God (**2 Timothy 3:16**), and if correctly interpreted, has binding authority on Christians at all times and in all places;
- the Spirit **never** contradicts Scripture, since He would be contradicting Himself;
- where Scripture is clear, no **further** revelation is needed from the Spirit; and
- to be truly biblical, any part of Scripture must be understood in the context of the **whole**. This principle is summed up in the well-known saying used in evangelical preaching circles, "a text out of context is pretext". For example, the use of **Galatians 3:28** and **I Timothy 2:12** as "proof-texts" for feminism and sexism, are classic examples of the abuse of Scripture.

If the authority and inerrancy of God's Word are doubted, even if only in minor passages, major problems arise because we are back to the position of man being the judge of what ought to be the norm. I believe that every spiritually-minded person desires truth on the subject of womanhood, and we, as Christians, therefore ought to yearn diligently to study the Scriptures on this subject. Best (1986: 4) says the following:

Since God is one and His plan is one, any deviation from the original purpose of God is departure from the standard that was established at the beginning for man and woman. Consequently, to know the truth on this subject, one must begin at the beginning.

I too believe it is crucial to look at God's **original** plan and purpose for women and take that as our guide in this discussion. Harper (1994: 19) suggests that the first three chapters of **Genesis** are the benchmark for discovering what the Bible teaches on the gender issue. **Genesis 1** and **2** provide us with a picture of creation **before** sin entered the world, and therefore it is not culture-bound in any way. Cultural principles had not influenced mankind at this point. Both our Lord Jesus and the apostle Paul referred to God's original plan for men and women in these first two chapters, to substantiate their arguments. They refer to the perfect conditions in the garden. For example, when referring to divorce, the Lord said, "**It was not this way from the beginning**" (**Matthew 10:8**). As will be seen later in this dissertation, Paul also refers to creation in some of his major passages on women.

By concentrating on what **the Bible** is saying, we avoid the major pitfall of our modern times - pragmatism. This is the philosophy which says, "It works, therefore it must be right". Or, "It feels good and has good results, therefore it must be good and right". When it comes to women and their position in the church, it is often said, "Look at their successful ministry and how many people have been blessed by their preaching. Do you mean to say that it is wrong?" Using such reasoning, we ought to therefore conclude that despite God's command for Moses to **speak** to the rock (in **Numbers 20**), God must have approved of his **striking** it, because water actually did come gushing out. Not at all. Positive results are only evidence of God's **grace**; they do not mean that God's servant will not ultimately have to answer to Him for his disobedience to His Word. Let us look more in depth at God's original plan and purpose for women and the changes which occurred as a result of the Fall.

## 2.2 God's original plan and purpose for woman (Genesis 1-2)

### 2.2.1 Genesis 1 - Equality before God

The account of creation in **Genesis 1** and **2** is not just a myth, but a historical record of what actually happened. **Genesis 1** stresses God's shaping of His creation and His creation of mankind for a particular role in it. When the rest of creation was complete, God declared, "**Let *Us* make man in *Our* image, in *Our* likeness, and let them rule . . . over all the earth, and over all creatures**" (v.26). We, as evangelicals, believe "**Us**" and "**Our**" refers to the Godhead as a plurality i.e. Father, Son and Holy Spirit, existing in eternity in relational loving harmony. We believe that God is One and His plan is one, and that as Scripture is unveiled, God reveals Himself and His plan to man. We believe that all things proceed from Him and ultimately bring glory to Him.

God's Word tells us that men and women are **both** made in the image of God. **Genesis 1:27** says, "**So God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them**", reflecting the same unity-plurality motif in the Godhead i.e. male and female in relationship. Harper (1994: 21) says, "The likeness of human beings to God is one of the most fundamental of theological statements. It carries with it immense comfort". They are created with the capacity to communicate and relate intelligently and lovingly, just as the Godhead does. The fact that God, when He made man in His own image, made him male and female, suggests that there is something within the Being of God Himself, which corresponds to the "feminine" as well as the "masculine". Stott (1984: 239) says that "Whatever is essentially human in both male and female, reflects the divine image which we equally bear". **Both** are called to show forth the image of God in their daily lives. This fact gives their lives meaning and dignity. Elliott (in Piper & Grudem 1991: 397) reinforces this view when she says, "Neither one nor the other was adequate **alone** to bear the

divine image". Whenever this basic truth is overlooked, humans will exploit, abuse and slander one another (Pawson 1988:16).

Just as the three members of the Trinity are equally God, male and female are created equally human, equally precious, equally capable, equally accountable. In relation to God, they are equally sinners, equal in value, potential and destiny and are given equal responsibility for dominion over God's creation and for procreation (**Genesis 1:28**). Just as the members of the Trinity are of the same essence, yet are very different in their functions, so too, women are of the same **essence** as man. Men and women are equal in **soul**, in terms of human life and new spiritual life (**Galatians 3:28** - "there is neither male nor female"), but in **role and function** there are differences (**Ephesians 5:23; 1 Timothy 2:12**). They are incomplete without one another and therefore work in partnership with each other and are interdependent, but their roles are **not** interchangeable. God and man can relate face-to-face because they bear the same image, yet man is subordinate to God. The same dual aspect applies to men and women. Paradoxically, they are the same, only different; they are both like God, but unlike each other; they are equal, yet unequal (Pawson 1988:17).

### 2.2.2 **Genesis 2** - Difference in responsibilities, roles and purpose

**Genesis 2** focuses and expands on **Genesis 1**. Whereas **Genesis 1** focuses on those things **common** to both sexes, **Genesis 2** highlights those features **not** shared by both sexes. Yoder (in Stott 1984: 241) wrote, "Equality of **worth** is not identity of **role**". They were not created at the same time, they were not created in the same way, and they were not created for the same purpose. First, male and female were not created at the same **time**. Adam was created first, and Eve was made after him. The Bible teaches that being the "firstborn" carried with it privileges and responsibilities which were different to those of the other children (**Deuteronomy 21:15-17**), as Paul indicates in **1 Timothy 2:13**. The original

readers of the Scriptures would have understood this. The fact that Christ was **"the firstborn over all creation"** (**Colossians 1:15-18**), gave Him authority over creation. Paul infers this same principle when He speaks of men and women in **I Corinthians 11:8 and 12** when he says that **"man did not come from woman, but woman from man"**. Later, in **Genesis 3**, the Lord approaches Adam first after the pair had sinned, even though it was Eve who ate the fruit first. It was he who had authority over her and therefore had to take responsibility for her actions. This points to headship even before the Fall. Notice that their eyes were opened only after Adam had eaten.

Second, they were not created in the same way. They were created from different **material**. While man was created from dust, woman was made from man. Paul uses this fact to support the headship of the man (**I Corinthians 11:8**), possibly recalling that she came from his **"rib"** (**Genesis 2:21-22**). Stott (1984: 243) mentions a man by the name of Peter Lombard, who in about 1157 wrote, "Eve was not taken from the feet of Adam to be his slave, nor from his head to be his lord, but from his side to be his partner". He also mentions Matthew Henry who reinforced the above statement by Lombard:

She was not made out of his head to top him, nor out of his feet to be trampled upon by him, but out of his side to be equal with him, under his arm to be protected and near his heart to be loved.

Third, they were not created for the same **purpose** (Harper 1994: 21). Woman was made **for** man. Her primary function is in relation to him; his function was already established without reference to her. Adam was given the responsibility to **"work"/cultivate** and **"take care of"/keep** the garden (**Genesis 2:15**). Thus, in performing these tasks, Adam and Eve display their worship of God and their obedience to Him.

Adam was also given the responsibility of naming the animals (2:19-20). In the Ancient Near East, name-giving was a task that carried authority. The name-giver had authority over the recipient (Harper 1994: 23), and it was usually done by the father, not the mother. God here gives Adam authority over the animals and even over the woman: **"This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called 'woman', for she was taken out of man"** (2:23, 3:20). In recognising her as **"taken out of man"**, and giving her a name which proclaims this (*ishshah*, 'woman'), the man declares that in this kindred being, given him to be his helper, he sees a missing part of himself, with which he *desires* to link up again (2:23). Best (1986: 5) explains it as follows:

His [Adam's] nature required partnership for completeness. His whole being aspired to another person, a counterpart . . . Adam needed another person who was not himself, but at the same time was part of himself. Woman was the companion whom God gave man to enhance his existence.

Eve's role on the other hand, is seen as a **"helper"** to Adam. The seriousness of Adam's solitude is revealed when **"the Lord God said, 'It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him' (2:18)**. The word **"helper"** is not a menial or degrading term and in no way implies inferiority. In fact, it is often used of God Himself as the Great Helper of His people (1 Samuel 7:12; Psalms 22:11,19; 33:20; 46:1). It does not mean that He substitutes for man in his task, but **"helps"** by providing support, sympathy and strength - supplying that which the individual is incapable of supplying for himself. The word **"azar"** ("helper") is used fifteen out of nineteen times in the Old Testament in reference to God (Harper 1994: 22). To be a helper is therefore a divine as well as a human task. The phrase literally means **"a helper as his counterpart"**, that the woman will complement and correspond to the man. Therefore, what man lacks, woman can supply and vice versa. Together, they make a whole complete



unit. There is no suggestion here of the devaluation of women, but rather it is an affirmation of the woman, as having an equally dignified though different role.

Now creation is complete, **"God saw all that He had made"** and He pronounced it to be **"very good"** (Genesis 1:31). It was **"for this reason"** that God said, **"a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh. The man and his wife were both naked, and they felt no shame"** (vv. 24-25). The woman is thus essential in order to accomplish God's will on earth. Nowhere is there any hint of inferiority. As man's complement and corresponding part, the woman must be equal. She corresponds perfectly because she was taken from man. Both the man and the woman share the joy of being God's special handiwork; both share the same spiritual and moral imparted by God. She corresponds to the man in every area, thinking, feeling, imagining or reasoning as he does. In fact, her union with her husband is so close "that he cannot disparage her without depreciating himself" (Best 1986: 7).

It can therefore be concluded that the "helper" pattern belongs to the order of creation and is a standard by which all male/female relationships should be tested. The man ought always to be felt to be initiator and leader, and the woman to be helper, encourager and supporter. Woman is needed by man; he is not self-sufficient, but dependent on her as she is on him. She is his associate, companion and helper, adequate and appropriate for him. She is part of "man", the female counterpart of the male.

For man and women to be free and fulfilled, it is important that these psychological dynamics always be kept right. Where this is not the case, the relationship will fall short of being, at the deepest level, a fulfilling one. This relational pattern matters most, of course, in marriage, the closest and richest of man-woman relationships, but it is also important **wherever** men and women work together (Packer 1973: 23).

God has set this authority structure in place from the beginning. Steven Goldberg (in Harper 1994: 27) says, "All anthropologists agree that there has never been a society which failed to associate hierarchical authority and leadership with men". It does not, however, imply superiority on the part of the man or inferiority on the part of the woman. Subordination, therefore, does not automatically or inevitably imply inferiority. Jesus Himself is subordinate to the Father, yet He is His equal.

### 2.3 The Changes as a Result of the Fall (Genesis 3)

The Garden of Eden has disappeared and, with it, the original order of creation. We find that the hierarchical relationship that was good and proper in **Genesis 1** and **2** is now marred by sin. The Fall had a three-fold effect on mankind:

- man's relationship with God was disrupted;
- man's relationship with creation was disrupted; and
- man's internal relationship between male and female was disrupted i.e. the "Fall" from innocence has distorted all relationships, particularly between men and women, destroying primeval harmony (*shalom*) (Pawson 1988: 22).

How did this all come about? Chronologically, it is clear that Eve was the first to sin. She acted outside her God-appointed role in life. Adam was not deceived, whereas Eve was (**I Timothy 2:14**). She was therefore more vulnerable to being seduced in mind. Later, in the New Testament, Paul seems to be saying that Eve, as typical woman, was more liable to be misled and therefore more likely to mislead. It may have been for this reason that Paul put restrictions and prohibitions on women teaching within the church.

Eve acknowledged her "deception" and even used it as an excuse (**Genesis**

3:13). Made in God's own likeness, she was fooled into a desire to be like God. She recognised the serpent's *distortion* of God's Word ("any" tree - 3:1), but failed to spot an outright *denial* of it ("you will not die" - 3:4). Pawson (1988: 23) feels that she did not discern or understand that the underlying appeal was to be morally autonomous and unilaterally independent. She took immediate action based on her own judgement, not even consulting her husband, much less her Maker. Her "insubordination" was the cause of Adam's transgression, "bringing reproach upon all women following her" (Best 1986: 11).

Adam followed her with neither argument nor protest. This put him in the feminine role, which may explain why, *theologically*, Adam was the first to sin! He listened to Eve rather than God. The New Testament holds *him* responsible for introducing sin and death to the human race (**Romans 5:12**), rather than Eve. He carried the prime responsibility in the partnership and therefore for the whole situation, for her as well as for himself. He could and should have rebuked her and interceded for her. Instead, he tried to shift the blame onto her (**Genesis 3:12**), not realising that "*she led me*" implies "I followed her". In taking a "feminine" role, Adam was abdicating his position. Elliott (Piper & Grudem 1991: 397) says:

Eve, in her refusal to accept the will of God, refused her femininity. Adam, in his capitulation to her suggestion, abdicated his masculine responsibility for her. It was the first instance of what we would recognise now as "role reversal" . . . This defiant disobedience ruined the original pattern and things have been in an awful mess ever since.

The Fall introduced "struggle" into their respective spheres of activity. Where there had been harmony, now there would be hostility. Order gave way to opposition, accord to alienation. The Fall damaged their already separate "spheres of activity" as man and woman: Adam would be affected in his daily

work. He would only survive with great effort against opposing factors, which included thorns and thistles. No mention is made of his marital relations, nor is he told to **"rule"** his wife.

Eve too, would be affected in her family relationships (**Genesis 2:15, 18**). In child-bearing", namely, the birth process, her physical pain is to be increased. In relation to her husband, her **"desire would be to him"** (**Genesis 3:16**). This is an unusual Hebraism which means an ambition to control, manipulate, possess someone (see **4:7**). Having led her husband into sin, she now would live with "the continuing urge to subordinate him to her wish and will" (Pawson 1988: 25). There would now be an ambition to dominate their relationship - in effect, to usurp his divinely appointed headship. Best (1986: 14) sums it up when he says the following:

Instead of her desire being toward her husband, woman has become restless. Her submissiveness has been turned to domination. She has become haughty rather than humble. Her gracefulness has become flirtatious. Her love has degenerated into self-will. She seeks to glorify herself rather than her husband. She delights more in the flattery of a stranger than in the approval of her husband. Her search is for interests outside of her home.

The man's reaction to the above will be not only to resist this take-over, but to use his greater strength to "rule" or master her (**Genesis 3:16** - **"he will rule over you"**). Male domination is the inevitable result of this "struggle" for supremacy of wills. After sin entered the world, God's structure of subordination now changed to become a painful, depriving state of affairs. For unredeemed mankind this has become the norm. In **Genesis 3:16** lies the real explanation for the centuries of exploitation and suppression of women, against which feminism is validly protesting. To **"rule"** (**Genesis 1:28**) is now used to describe marriage, whereas before it was used only for *other* creatures and of *both* man and woman.

Responsibility for direction in the male, became reaction and degenerated into domination. Each gender now sees the other as an object, rather than a subject, to serve their own purposes.

From the above, it seems clear that the relationship that existed before the Fall was replaced by a relationship of self-seeking authority on the part of man and manipulation on the part of women. Marriott (2002: 3) feels that "feminism and chauvinism are both human philosophies expressing frustration with the male tendency to dominate and the female tendency to reject male leadership". Stott (1984: 239) writes:

In place of the equality of the one with the other, and of the complementarity of the one to the other . . . there would come the rule of one over the other. Sexual complementarity was intended from the beginning to include masculine "headship", as Paul argued, but by reason of the Fall, "headship" degenerated into "domination".

This situation can only be remedied by divine grace, by redemption rather than legislation or revolution. God's strategy is to plant on earth a community of men and women who will live as Adam and Eve did, in His creation order. The first such "people" was the nation of Israel, to which we now turn. Were the social roles of men and women equal and interchangeable among them? Or hierarchical? To answer this, we look at four periods, each with a different category of leadership, namely, the patriarchs, the prophets, the kings and the priests.

## **2.4 Women in Israelite Culture**

The nation of Israel was called to be a demonstration of the saving work of God. In their daily life, in their relations to one another, and in their relations to the

nations around them, Israel was to show the fruits of godliness and the power of God. Within this framework, each Israelite had a place. The laws of the nation guided the people in their relations - each person, living out his or her daily life, made a contribution to the statement of the nation concerning faith in God. The whole Old Testament shows detailed concern for the treatment of one Israelite by another. A special concern was to be shown to the weak and powerless, for example the stranger, the widow and the orphan, by those in positions of strength and power. Throughout the Old Testament we are reminded that Israel has known weakness and suffering, and that God has delivered His people from them. Israel is called to show a similar mercy, to image or reflect God, in her relations to such people. Sadly, the prophets tell us that she **failed** to reflect the love, justice and mercy of her Lord. **Jeremiah 9:2-3** tells us,

**... they are all adulterers, a crowd of unfaithful people. They make ready their tongue like a bow, to shoot lies; it is not by truth that they triumph in the land. They go from one sin to another; they do not acknowledge Me", declares the Lord.**

They had **"exchanged their glory for worthless idols ... forsaken Me the Spring of living water, and have dug their own cisterns"** (2:11, 13). Similar descriptions of Israel's failure can also be seen in many other texts, including **Ezekiel 18:31** and **Daniel 9:4-11**.

We know the customs and cultures of Assyria and Babylon (Israel's neighbours) primarily through their respective law codes. The Law Code of Hammu-rabi (1792-1750 BC) describes the role of Babylonian women at about the time of Abraham's departure from Ur. The Middle Assyrian Law Code (1450-1250 BC) describes the role of Assyrian women at the time of Moses and the Exodus. But the Old Testament offers us a variety of sources of information about the relation of the sexes within Israel i.e. narrative portions, poetry, prophetic literature and proverbs. These add to the knowledge which we gain from the legal codes of

Israel's neighbours. What then, were the roles of men and women as they imaged God within the nation of Israel?

#### 24.1 The Patriarchs - from Abraham to Joseph

The importance of the family in Hebrew society could never be emphasized enough. In the semi-nomadic days of Israel's history, the life of the family, as we understand it, was inevitably bound up with the life of the larger "family" of the clan or tribe, upon which it depended for protection. The Israelite family pattern was patriarchal, with God as the "God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob", not the God of "Sarah, Rebekah and Rachel". The nation itself was related by blood ties and called "children of Abraham". Harper (1994: 31) says, "It is important to know that the word **Abram** means 'the father is exalted'". The tribes traced their relationships through their patriarchal fathers, and within the tribes, individuals identified themselves by their "father's house", which is the equivalent of "family". Within the family the husband and father was the undisputed head or *baal* i.e. lord or ruler (Deuteronomy 21:13; 24:1; Isaiah 54:5; Malachi 2:11; cf. Isaiah 26: 13) (Stott 1984: 239).

The stability of the family was founded on the absolute leadership and authority of the father, the term "father" implying authority. Wight (1953: 103) says it was consistent with the Oriental custom that the family was a little kingdom within itself, over which the father is the supreme ruler, who ruled his wives, children, servants and household like a king - the family was his property and subject to his sovereign will. Legally the man "owned" his wife (Heaton 1957: 69) and she was regarded as his possession.

However, this position of authority and responsibility was open to serious abuse and misuse. Because he "owned" her, as he owned his sheep and goats, she could not leave him, although she could be sent away by him at a moment's

notice. He could divorce his wife without giving any explanation and without accepting any responsibility for her maintenance. When he took a second wife, she would be exposed to the humiliation of playing "second fiddle" to the new wife whom the husband preferred. Examples of such misuse of authority can be seen in Abraham's lies in **Genesis 20** and Judah's moral failure in **Genesis 38**. The father could also sell his daughters into slavery and have any disobedient children put to death. He could not, however, sell his sons. We see, therefore, that although male headship often failed, this did not destroy the man's role or his responsibility to be patriarch. What it does show is how perversely power can be abused.

In the majority of cases, the great authority which the father had, was handed down to his eldest son, who took over the position of leadership upon the death of his father. On occasions in the Bible, however, the father bestowed the succession of authority on one other than the eldest son, for example, Jacob instead of Esau (**Genesis 27**). Inheritance passed through the sons, the woman legally being unable to inherit property. This resulted in the twelve sons of Jacob becoming the twelve tribes of Israel, just as later the twelve apostles of Christ became the founding fathers of the Christian Church. Male heirs usually perpetuated the family name and property. In order to prevent the inheritance being lost to the tribe, property was inherited by daughters only in the absence of sons (**Numbers 36:1-9**). The father was also generally the one to arrange marriages, both for sons and daughters (**Genesis 24**; **Exodus 22:17**), although sometimes wives were consulted (**Genesis 24:50-52**; **Judges 14:1-4**).

Many Israelite men had more than one wife, because polygamy was recognised as a normal and legitimate practice. However, those who were loyal to the Law of Moses married only one wife. Payment had to be made for a bride to her father or guardian, which was sometimes "worked off" as in the case of Jacob, who served Laban fourteen years for Rachel and Leah (**Genesis 31:41**).



God's Word reveals that in everyday life, however, the women in this period were not despised or ill-treated as badly as it seems. They were regarded as an integral part of the covenant community. In the family circle it is evident that the mother as well as the father received the respect and affection of their children. Wight (1953: 104) says that "reverence of children for their parents, especially the father, is well-nigh universal in the East down to modern times". Hebrew children in general held their mothers in great respect, even when they became adults. This may be illustrated by the great influence exerted by queen mothers on the kings of Judah and Israel (**I Kings 2:19; 2 Kings 11:1; 24:12**).

Apart from bearing and raising children, wives of these patriarchal nomads evidently managed and ran whatever size of household their husbands had, including the domestic servants (**Genesis 16:6**). The capabilities of a good wife were praised (**Proverbs 31**) and godly and enterprising women like Hannah, Abigail, Naomi, Ruth and Esther were held in high honour. They were involved in field work, often of necessity rather than by choice (**Ruth 2**). It appears that the patriarchs' wives were often attractive, as were Sarah (**Genesis 12:11**), Rebekah (**Genesis 24:16**) and Rachel (**Genesis 29:17**). They appear to have happily accepted the subordinate position relative to their husbands ("lord and master"), although the Old Testament does not picture the wife as a mere slave of her husband. She is seen to exert tremendous influence for good or ill over her husband and he showed great respect for her in most cases (**Proverbs 31:11, 26, 28**). In fact Sarah was treated by Abraham as a queen. Although both Sarah and Rebekah manipulated and deceived their husbands, the headship of the man was never questioned by them.

The qualities expected in a godly woman in both the Old and New Testaments were meekness, submissiveness and gentleness (**Proverbs 12:4; 14:1; 31:30; I Peter 3:1-6**). These may not summarise contemporary ideals of womanhood, but that does not invalidate their relevance to us as God's chosen people. These

qualities were perfectly exemplified in Jesus Christ, who was both meek, submissive and gentle, a model for both men and women, as He submitted His life totally to the Father.

The Israelite women was certainly better off than her contemporaries in Assyria, and also than many other women in some parts of the East today (Heaton 1957: 69). She was never segregated and made to live in stultifying isolation. Rather, she shared many of the feasts and celebrations which the rest of the family enjoyed. The **"men, women and children"** were together assembled to listen to the public reading of Torah and to share in the worship (**Deuteronomy 31:12**). The rights of the widow and those of women taken captive in war were protected by the Law (**Exodus 22:22-24** and **Deuteronomy 21:10-14**), together with the alien, the hungry, the orphans and the poor.

In Israel, marriage was considered sacred and was therefore respected, held in high honour and protected by Jewish laws. Stott (1984: 239) tells us that it was modelled on Yahweh's covenant love to Israel and the beauty of sexual love was celebrated, as in the Song of Songs. The violation of the rights of fathers and husbands was punishable. Prostitution, both sacred and profane, had no place among God's people (**Deuteronomy 22:22-24**; **Exodus 22:16-17**; **Leviticus 19:29**; **21:9**). Apart from the ambiguous words in **Deuteronomy 24**, divorce was not an option. The husband's role in the home is presented in the Old Testament as a matter of **divine appointment** rather than the consequence of either sociological or psychological assumptions.

#### 2.4.2 The Prophets - from Moses to Samuel

Although there were prophets before Moses (**Jude 14**; **Genesis 20:7**; **Psalms 105:15**) and many after Samuel such as Elijah, Elisha, Isaiah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel, it was during this period that they became national leaders. Moses

himself was one of the greatest leaders of all time, although called “a very humble man, more humble than anyone else on the face of the earth” (Numbers 12:3).

At Sinai, divine laws were given to the Israelites to guide their communal life. There was a major change in the status of Jewish women when compared with the contemporary pagan Hammu-rabi and Egyptian Codes of Law. Women were now treated as persons rather than possessions. These laws, however, fall short of God’s original plan for man and woman in **Genesis 1** and **2**, in that there are more male than female “rights”. This was presumably because restoration could not be total until the full grace of salvation was available. These inequalities were however excluded in the new covenant.

Moses delegated his authority to seventy elders, all men (**Genesis 18: 21-26**), thus continuing the “patriarchal” structure. However, prophecy was a ministry of both men and women, including Miriam, Aaron’s sister. Already there seems to be a distinction between the human authority inherent in an “office” of leadership, and the divine authority of a revelation, whoever communicates it. To pass on a message from God, as He has given it without expansion, explanation or application, is *not* seen as exercising leadership authority.

When Moses “numbered” Israel, only the men over twenty, able to serve in the army, were counted for compassionate reasons (**Numbers 1:3**). Those in their first year of marriage were excluded from service. The census totalled about 600 000 men. If women and children had been included it would have been over 2 000 000 people. It was never considered the responsibility of women to defend themselves or their families, in contrast to the modern Israeli army.

It was at this time that a woman became nationally prominent. The period of the judges seems to have been an interim arrangement, with men being raised up to

deal with national defence (**Judges 2:16**). They had a moral as well as a military function, namely, to uphold and protect that internal holiness that prevented external attack (**vv.17-19**). The judges' role was more prophetic than judicial. All of them were men, except Deborah. She was a "wife" of Lappidoth as well as a "prophetess" who passed on divine words (**Judges 4:4**). Apart from averting external dangers, she also settled disputes. She was able to bring an inspired word of wisdom or knowledge to bear on each case. But unlike other judges, she did not "lead" when invasion threatened, but delegated this task to the man Barak. Lacking masculine courage or chivalry, he insisted on taking her into battle, forfeiting the honour of victory (**Judges 4:6-9**). In the end she praised the Lord that the "**princes of Israel**", namely ruling men, had taken the lead (**5:2**). This indicates that her attitude was maternal as "**a mother of Israel**" (**5:7**), rather than matriarchal.

#### 2.4.3 The Kings - from Saul to Zedekiah

When Israel began to appoint kings, under the reluctant oversight of the prophet Samuel, male leadership was assured. While their neighbours had ruling queens, including Sheba and later Cleopatra of Egypt, in Israel there was an absence of queens in this period. Mosaic law made provision for kings (**Deuteronomy 17:14-20**; **I Samuel 8**). To ensure a succession of kings, God would have to ensure the birth of **sons** (**I Kings 2:4**). Women have always been eligible as prophetesses, and though there were no ruling queens, there continued to be prophetesses like Huldah, who influenced the king (**2 Kings 22:14-20**). In fact Manfred Hauke (in Harper 1994: 32) says, "Without her [Huldah's] God-empowered contribution, the five books of Moses, which are the core of the Old Testament, would probably not exist as we know them today".

Miriam also appeared as a prophetess and placed herself on a level with her famous brother, Moses (**Exodus 15:20-21**). Noadiah was a woman prophet who

tried to intimidate Nehemiah (**Nehemiah 6:14**), and Isaiah goes to a prophetess (**Isaiah 8:3**), although she may have been the wife of a prophet. Joel's prophecy (**Joel 2:28**) which was fulfilled at Pentecost includes women as well as men in the ministry of prophecy. These examples all confirm that women in the Old Testament religion were not in an "inferior position". Other women who also had an influence on the kings, for better and worse, were for example Jezebel and Athaliah, the "queen mother" (**2 Kings 11:3**).

**Proverbs 12:4** describes a woman of noble character as her husband's "crown". From King Lemuel in **Proverbs 31** came the glowing account of the "perfect" wife. In **v.10** he states that a wife of that sort is "worth far more than rubies". This chapter stands in stark contrast to earlier warnings in **Proverbs** about women to avoid! It is important to note that she was involved in many activities outside the home - and in making money as well as showing mercy.

#### 2.4.4 The Priests - from Zerubbabel to Caiaphas

After the exile there were prophets from **Ezekiel** to **Malachi**, and some Maccabean and Hasmonean kings, but the continuity of national leadership now lay with the high priests. Of necessity, by divine law, all were male. The priesthood was of all ministries the most carefully guarded, and sometimes terrible judgement came on those who presumed to take the law into their own hands. When Uzzah tried to steady the sacred Ark, he died instantly (**2 Samuel 6:6**), and when King Uzziah entered the sanctuary in the temple illegally, he immediately became leprous (**2 Chronicles 26:16-21**).

The reason for this was that the temple was the symbol of the presence of God, especially the Holy of Holies. It was the place where people met with God. The priests and Levites were to conduct the public worship of God, involving the various sacrifices and festivals. This was the very centre of the life of the

community. God was their total reason for existence. They were the peoples' representatives before God, and they represented God to the people. The other important function for the priest was teaching. In Israel this was always done by men (**Hosea 4:6; Micah 3:11; Jeremiah 18:18**), specifically the descendants of Aaron from the tribe of Levi. All around Israel in nations like Egypt, Mesopotamia and Canaan had numerous female priests. But, as C.S. Lewis (in Pawson 1988: 20) points out, "priestesses were for pagans, not for God's people".

To summarise, then, the equality expressed in **Genesis 1**, both men and women being created in the image of God, was seen in the life of Israel. Many laws gave men and women equal status (**Exodus 21:15, 17; Leviticus 20:9**). Women were regarded as full members of the Covenant, even though they were not circumcised. The high status of the married woman is celebrated in various passages. As a mother and wife she is on the same footing as her husband (**Exodus 20:12**). She is never a mere chattel. She is under her husband's authority, but protected against unreasonable jealousy and capricious divorce action (**Numbers 5:11-30**).

Personal experiences of God are enjoyed as much by women as men. Together they take part in important national occasions like the return of the Ark to Jerusalem (**2 Samuel 6:5**) and worship recorded in Ezra (**Nehemiah 8:2**). Women could swear oaths in God's Name (**Ruth 1:17**). Amazingly, both Ruth the foreigner and Rahab the harlot were included in the genealogy of Jesus Christ (**Matthew 1:5**). The law basically applied to both sexes, although only men were its interpreters and teachers.

In religious matters the wife was subject to her husband (**Numbers 30**). In some instances there was discrimination against women e.g. female babies needed a longer purification time (**Leviticus 12**), only firstborn males were regarded as redeemed (**Exodus 13:2**), a lower value was placed on the vow of the woman

(**Leviticus 27**) and woman priests were prohibited. However, they brought sacrifices themselves (**I Samuel 2:19**), could minister at the door of the tent of meeting (**Exodus 38:8**), could take a vow as could a male and could hear the Law (**Deuteronomy 31:12**). Although Israelite women were familiar with veiling, there was no legislation in the Old Testament in this regard. They did not follow the model of the Islamic and Assyrian practice of the day, although this changed later in rabbinic Judaism.

Her activities are varied and while they do benefit the home, she is a person in her own right and has great freedom of movement (**Proverbs 31:10-31**). Little in the Old Testament suggests the inferiority of the woman, although sometimes in practice women were regarded in this way. According to J. Doller (in Harper 1994: 35), women in Israel "had a status found among few other people". Contrary to what many people might think, the Bible presents women and their work in a very favourable light. In the Old and the New Testaments, women are spoken of with deep appreciation and respect for their persons and their work. Generally-speaking, then, Old Testament society was patriarchal, and normal leadership was male. To be "ruled by women" was regarded as a symptom of moral and spiritual decadence (**Isaiah 3:12**).

Once the one major spiritual ministry of women, namely prophecy, was closed, God remained silent for four centuries and the whole religious scene became exclusively male. Study concentrated on the *written* Word of the Lord, resulting inevitably in the increase of legalistic rather than humanitarian attitudes. Division between the liberal and conservative interpretation of Scripture led to differences in doctrine and ethics. But the debate remained exclusively *male*. Women were not even taught by the rabbis. They were segregated in worship, both in the synagogue and to the court of women in the temple area. In a traditional Jewish prayer, men may have thanked God they were "not born a Gentile, a slave or . . . a woman". However, the simple, poor folk treasured the predictions of earlier

prophets, two in particular:

- that there would one day be another **prophet** like Moses, to lead the people into full freedom (**Deuteronomy 18:15**).
- that the Spirit would be poured out on the whole people of God (**Joel 2:28**).  
The prophetic ministry would be restored on an unparalleled scale: to **all** men and women and not just **some**, as had been the practice till then.

The stage was set for the coming of the King and, therefore, the Kingdom. What changes would He make? In particular, would He abolish the patriarchal pattern of leadership that had prevailed for so many centuries? Would the outpouring of the Spirit on all **women** significantly alter their place in the redeemed community?

## 2.5 Women in other Cultures of the day

Societies differ in the way they do things and in the different roles assigned to men and women. It is interesting and helpful to look at the roles of women in some of the cultures which surrounded ancient Israel through the eyes of law codes from that period. This will help us understand the role of the woman in the Old Testament and to overcome the vast differences between our twentieth century western society and that of the Ancient Near East (ANE).

The role of the "nuclear" family in ANE society was closely tied in with other family units to form a clan or tribe. People were seen as members of such groupings rather than as individuals. For example, if a member of one clan harmed or killed a male member of another, this would be seen as an attack of one clan upon another. Vengeance would be sought (**Genesis 34**). As with the Israelites, the patriarch of the clan functioned as judge and head, as legal spokesman and representative, often making decisions for the whole group. The husband's authority over his wife and family was entrenched in civil law. Fathers had



jurisdiction over wives and children, were regarded as their "owners" and were financially obligated concerning them (Hurley 1981: 22). Although the civil codes treated relationships in a way which seemed formal and cold, the actual relationships between spouses, parents and children were probably warmer and more affectionate (**I Peter 3:1-6**).

#### 2.5.1 Babylonian culture (c.1775 BC)

Babylonian women were legally subordinate to their fathers and husbands. Marriage contracts were drawn up between the fathers of prospective husbands and brides, long before they had reached adulthood. This contract protected the widow in the event of the husband's death, until the time of her own death or remarriage. The children would then inherit the father's estate. Wives and daughters therefore enjoyed rights of inheritance alongside sons and brothers. However, in the event of the remarriage of the widow or divorcee, causing her to leave the clan, she could not take any material resources with her except her dowry. Whereas husbands needed no reason to divorce their wives, wives had to demonstrate wanton behaviour on the part of their husbands which had resulted in their own public disgrace.

Socially, women were sheltered. Although a widow was entitled to manage her estate alone, implying her right to engage in commerce, the laws presume that most women would delegate this duty to her brother or appointed manager. Women were sometimes deeply involved in the life of society, that is, in trade and commerce, dealing with servants, goods, money, etc. Careful measures were taken to guard the women from attack and from shame.

In their religious life there was a complex hierarchy of priestesses and devoted women, ranging from royalty to the daughters of poor free men, but nothing is revealed about their priestly life. Babylonian worship often included cultic

prostitutes, women through whose body a male worshipper might commune with the deity. Although they were not considered inferior beings, women enjoyed inferior legal rights. Widows and priestesses enjoyed a greater degree of liberty and legal privilege than most other women, as they had no husband over them.

#### 2.5.2 Assyrian culture (c.1450-1250 B.C.)

The Assyrian laws were markedly harsher than either those of Babylon or the Old Testament. The leadership of the family was also vested in the patriarch. The women were regarded as property, companions and clan members. The husband had wide powers of retribution and punishment. With regard to marriage, the bridegroom himself or his father, and the father of the bride would draw up a contract. Unless the marriage contract specified otherwise, the wife could be sent away with only her dowry and private property, without any divorce money, depending on the husband's will. There was no provision for a wife to divorce her husband.

The sons had to support a widowed mother, but neither she, nor any daughter, could inherit a portion of the estate. The legal interests and preferences of the husband and father were placed before those of his wife and children. Adultery was viewed as a violation of the husband's rights and he could punish his wife "as he will". But sexual relations with unmarried women, even by married men, were not regarded as adultery. Within Assyrian and Babylonian culture, as distinct from Israelite culture, sex was not regulated by religious belief, but rather by civil law, as a matter of property or guardianship rights (Hurley 1981: 27).

Veils were a sign of rank and dignity. The veiling customs distinguished prostitutes and slave-girls who were unveiled, from married women, concubines and single women of high birth who were veiled. It is not known to what extent Assyrian women actually entered into contemporary social life, although they

seemed to have been more restricted than Babylonian women. In fact it is likely that most women, apart from the wealthy, lived a completely secluded life. The craftsman and farmer probably included the women of his household in the work-force.

The Assyrian laws do not mention women in religious life. A woman who uttered blasphemy was responsible for her own sin. There seems to have been a period of sacred prostitution for women prior to marriage. It is generally assumed that Assyrian women played cultic roles similar to those of Babylonian women, bringing offerings to the temples of the various deities of the Pantheon, serving as priestesses, and sometimes becoming sacred prostitutes. The general status of women in Assyrian and Babylonian culture appear to be similar.

Generally-speaking, then, in the Orient it was common to degrade women. For centuries, in many cases she was treated more like a "drudge, or a slave, or a plaything for the man", rather than as a man's companion. But the position of Hebrew women was far superior to that of heathen women, long before Christianity had its origin among them. Concerning this superiority in relation to the Arabs, Dr Thomson (in Wight 1953: 106) testifies:

The position of women among them was far higher than with the Arabs, and the character of Hebrew women must have been, on the whole, such as to command and sustain this higher position. The Arabs can show no list of *pious and illustrious ladies like those who adorn the history of the Hebrews*. No Bedouin mother ever taught, or could teach, such a "prophecy" as King Lemuel learned from his; nor could the picture of a "virtuous woman", given in the last chapter of **Proverbs**, have been copied by an Arab. The conception by him of such a character was a moral impossibility.

When we compare these cultures with the Old Testament, a significant difference appears. The Old Testament law is theologically based. This in turn affects the understanding of personal relations and circumscribes individual rights.

### **3. WOMEN IN NEW TESTAMENT TIMES**

#### **3.1 The Jewish world**

The Old Testament canon closed after the Babylonian exile (586 BC). The Jewish people returned to the Promised Land 70 years later under Zerubbabel, Nehemiah and Ezra, but they had become poor and weak. Four hundred years later, however, the Jews in the New Testament became a large nation living in relative wealth under Rome. Groups such as the Pharisees and the Sadducees now had authority. Previously they had had no role at all in the ancient state of Israel.

The Jewish people now lived in a society with Greek and Roman overlords. Bouquet (1963: 13) tells us that the Emperor's government "was supreme everywhere, and it really did govern and keep order, and strove to put down lawlessness on sea and land". The Romans built and maintained an excellent system of roads, some of the finest ever constructed. The Jews had to adapt to and make decisions about their relationship with the Romans and to their different cultural patterns. There were continual squabbles between the stiff-necked Israelites and their rulers. This became more difficult after the destruction of the Jewish state in AD 70. From that time Judaism had to adjust to the loss of the temple, the loss of the sacrifices and their existence as a nation.

The most extensive material concerning the period before and after the events of AD 70 are contained in the Mishnah and Talmud. They were compiled between two and six centuries after Christ. To determine which traditions in these works date from the time of Jesus, comparisons can be made with earlier datable materials such as the Apocryphal books, the writings of Philo and Josephus, and

the New Testament itself.<sup>7</sup>

### 3.1.1 Basic attitudes towards women

In the Old Testament, only specific texts in the opening chapters of **Genesis** give any indication regarding a basic attitude towards women; but the role of women in marriage, social life and religion is referred to in inter-testamental Judaism, between the close of the Old Testament and the start of the New Testament, and post-New Testament Judaism. Throughout Jewish literature, from the Old Testament to the present, the virtuous wife is highly praised and the wanton or faithless one is condemned. One of the earliest inter-testamental statements on women comes from the Apocryphal book of the Wisdom of Jesus ben Sirach, written about 190 BC. He appears to value a wife highly when he writes:

Happy the husband of a really good wife; the number of his days will be doubled. A perfect wife is the joy of her husband, he will live out the years of his life in peace. A good wife is the best of portions . . . A woman's beauty delights the beholder, a man likes nothing better. If her tongue is kind and gentle, her husband has no equal among the sons of men. The man who takes a wife has the makings of a fortune, a helper that suits him, and a pillar to lean on (Ecclus. 26:1-3, 36:22-27, [JB]).

However, he regards a poor wife with a correspondingly negative intensity.

Any spite rather than the spite of woman! ... I would sooner keep house with a lion or a dragon than keep house with a spiteful wife ... No wickedness comes anywhere near the wickedness of a woman, may a sinner's lot be hers! ... Low spirits, gloomy face, stricken heart: such the

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<sup>7</sup> All references in Chapter 3 to the Talmud, Mishnah, Apocryphal writings and the writings of Philo and Josephus are taken from James B Hurley's book *Man and Woman in Biblical Perspective* (Leicester, England: Intervarsity Press, 1985).

achievements of a spiteful wife ... Sin began with a woman, and thanks to her we all must die. Do not let water find a leak, do not allow a spiteful woman free rein for her tongue. If she will not do as you tell her, get rid of her (Ecclus. 25:13, 16, 19, 23-26 JB)

By the beginning of the first century AD, women in Jewish circles had come to be regarded as intrinsically inferior beings, largely as a result of rabbinic tradition. This is very clear in the writings of Philo and Josephus, who were contemporaries of Paul. They provided two samples of Jewish attitudes toward women in general at the time of Christ. Philo, who was deeply influenced by Greek thought, wrote from Alexandria and Josephus tried to justify Jewish ways to the Roman audience. Their views may therefore not be completely typical of Judaism in Palestine, although they agree with both ben Sirach and the subsequent rabbis or Pharisaic scribes. Philo believed that "the attitude of man is informed by reason (*nous*), and [that] of woman by sensuality (*aisthesis*)" i.e. she is the less rational sex. Josephus (in Hurley 1985: 61) believed that

... the woman is inferior (*cheiron*) to the man in every way ... Let her, accordingly, be obedient (*hupakoueto*), not for her humiliation, but that she may be directed; for authority has been given by God to man!

From his perspective, women were inferior to men in every area, and were to submit to the better judgement of men when it came to decision-making. William Barclay (1982: 199) sums up the low view of women expressed in the Talmud in these words:

In the Jewish form of morning prayer ... a Jewish man every morning gave thanks that God had not made him 'a Gentile, a slave or a woman' ... In Jewish law a woman was not a person, but a thing. She had no legal rights whatsoever; she was absolutely in her husband's possession to do with as he willed.

In the Talmud women are frequently classed with children and Gentile slaves. Undesirable traits were often portrayed in women. They were avoided, for fear of sexual impropriety. Women were believed to be unable to learn serious matters. Rabbi Eliezer said, "There is no wisdom in woman except with the distaff [spindle]. Thus also does Scripture say, *'And all the women who were wise-hearted did spin with their hands'*" (bYom. 66b). The rabbis generally assumed that women were persons incapable of learning about religious things. Some rabbis actually forbade instructing them in religious affairs.

### 3.1.2 Women in marriage and sexuality

Sexual temptation was of great concern for the Jewish community of the post-Old Testament era. Contact between sexes was therefore reduced to the minimum and women were isolated as far as possible. The virtuous urban woman was expected to remain indoors. The Talmud declares, "The world cannot exist without males and females - happy is he whose children are males, and woe to him whose children are females" (bKidd. 82b). However, apart from those wealthy enough, it was not practical for most Jews to keep women entirely indoors. The menial tasks were usually left to them, doing farmwork, working in the fields and running the shops. These tasks were presumably done under the authority of her husband, unless she was a widow. Therefore the Talmud and the Mishnah deal with relations of women **outside** the house as well.

The woman's role was primarily in the home, doing farm work and running shops. It was disreputable for a rabbi to speak to or greet a woman in public, even his own wife, daughter or sister. The Talmud said, "Let a curse come upon the man who must needs have his wife or children say grace for him". Rabbi Jose said: "He that talks much with women brings evil upon himself and neglects the study of the Law and at the last will inherit Gehenna" (mAb. 1.5). It was improper not only for a man to speak to women but also to be alone with women, especially married

ones. Bouquet (1963: 144) says that "it would have been a serious breach of etiquette for a man to speak to a woman who is a stranger, except in an emergency to ask for a drink of water". It was, therefore, correct enough for Jesus to ask the Samaritan woman for a drink, but it was "scandalous" to be found by His disciples engaging in a long conversation with the woman afterwards, especially since she was a Samaritan.

The Old Testament nowhere requires the veiling of women as a general custom, but assumes that a woman's hair will be put up. Veiling involved either full facial veiling or veiling with a shawl over the head when out of doors. This may have existed to demonstrate Jewish piety in the first century. It is most unlikely that Jews of the time of Christ practised the full facial veiling of women after the pattern of Islam. However, in less wealthy areas and in areas of weaker tradition, more lax piety, or of either Greek or Roman influence, it is likely that veiling by shawl would have been a matter of either indifference or neglect. Among Jews, Greeks and Romans alike, loosened hair was a sign of distress for adult women. Women of all three societies put their hair up and decorated it in various, sometimes expensive, ways. Their hair, so done, was a sign of their dignity and honour. These observations concerning veiling are important because they relate directly to the New Testament practice which is referred to by Paul in **I Corinthians 11:2-16**, and which will be dealt with later in this dissertation.

Judaism was overwhelmingly in favour of marriage. Marriage was almost universal. There was no such thing as voluntary celibacy, except among the peculiar sect known as the Essenes and perhaps the Nazarites. The blessings of marriage were appreciated and the command to reproduce and to fill the earth was taken seriously. Within Jewish marriages the husband had the authority and was in charge. A woman was under her father's authority until the age of twelve and a half. This was the age when she "came of age" and could decide for herself whom she would marry; however, she was mostly given in marriage before this



age, by her father or her relatives, placing her under the husband's control. Bouquet (1963: 145) says that first cousins were preferably chosen as marriage partners, with no fear of the dangers of inbreeding. The wife was paid for, just as though she were a chattel. There was no preliminary courtship and, it was believed that, proverbially speaking, "love comes after marriage, not before".

### 3.1.3. Women in public life

The Talmud has very little to say about women in public life (Hurley 1985: 70). It was generally assumed that they would stay at home or work under their husband's authority, unless widowed. Both prophetesses, Deborah and Huldah, presented notable problems for the rabbis. Deborah is only mentioned four times in the Talmud, and twice she is criticised for boasting and haughtiness. Huldah was also a problem. She lived while there were male prophets alive. How could Josiah have sent a word from God through her instead of through Jeremiah?

Rabbi Nahman said:

Haughtiness does not befit women. There were two haughty women, and their names are hateful, one being called a hornet [literal meaning of Deborah] and the other a weasel [literal meaning of Huldah] ... (bMeg. 14b)

### 3.1.4. Women in religious life

When it came to personal worship, the commands of the law were generally regarded as applicable to men and women, the exception for women being during their monthly menstrual period, when they were regarded as ceremonially unclean (Hurley 1985: 70). Although it was expected that women live obedient pious lives and they were allowed to attend worship and individually pray to and obey God, they were shut off from almost all other aspects of religious life. Things were different with respect to matters of public worship. When the temple of Herod was still standing, the women were restricted to the court of the Gentiles and the court

of women (Josephus, *Antiquities*, XV.418). During their menstrual and post-natal times of ceremonial uncleanness, they were not allowed to enter the temple area at all.

Although women had only a bit more freedom in the synagogue than in the temple, the presence of women, slaves or minors was not significant there, and did not constitute a quorum. Ten free adult males were required for a quorum. Regular attendance at the synagogue was not compulsory for women, although they were allowed to attend any services and were expected to attend some. They were frequently seated in separate sections. Their part in the service was strictly receptive. The oral reading of the Scripture was not for women, although they were regarded as being "qualified". The Mishnah mentions, "All are qualified to be among the seven who read, even a minor and a woman, only the Sages said that a woman should not read in the Torah out of respect for the congregation" (bMeg. 23a).

With regard to teaching and learning in the synagogue, it was accepted that the women were to hear the Scriptures and the exposition of it, but were not expected to learn or to gain deep understanding. Rabbi Eliezer ben Azariah, when reflecting on **Deuteronomy 31:10-13**, commented, "The men came to learn, the women came to hear", and "Rather should the words of the Torah be burned than entrusted to a woman. Whoever teaches his daughter the Torah is like one who teaches her lasciviousness". The synagogue instruction was designed for and taught only to men (Josephus, *Antiquities*, xvi. 164). The rabbis opposed women as teachers in schools and even in homes, except as teachers of their own children.

It seems that the subordinate role of women within patriarchal and Israelite society had hardened to a considerable degree. As rabbinic tradition developed, the rabbis continued many old traditions and produced new ones, which they thought

would guard their people from sin. Increasingly, this meant separation of the sexes. Rabbi Judah ben Elai in AD 150 initiated this orthodox morning prayer, which was for men only: "Praise be God that He has not created me a Gentile, praise be God that He has not created me a woman; praise be God that He has not created me an ignorant man" remains today as part of orthodox morning prayer (Hurley 1985: 74). Rabbinic sayings about women abound, for example, "It is well for those whose children are male, but ill for those whose children are female"; "At the birth of a boy, all are joyful; but at the birth of a girl, all are sad"; "Even the most virtuous woman is a witch"; and "Four qualities are evident in women: they are greedy at their food, eager to gossip, lazy and jealous".

Of course, not every Jewish man or every rabbi subscribed to this kind of statement, but they are sufficiently common to indicate a general consensus of opinion. Women were inferior, unfit to be taught religious truth or to be conversed with seriously. In effect, the Jewish world was made for men!

### **3.2 The Graeco-Roman world**

About 330 BC, three centuries before the New Testament era, Alexander the Great linked the eastern regions from Greece to India and Egypt and introduced a simplified Greek as the common language. In the middle of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century BC, the Roman Empire came into being. By the time of Christ, there had therefore been more than two centuries of cultural exchange between Greece and Rome. In many respects these cultures became indistinguishable. The major cities of the Mediterranean world shared a common culture.

Evidence concerning the role of the average woman in this culture is difficult to ascertain because much of the information comes from the more wealthy classes. The poorer people left no literature and had no rabbis to record the values and details of life. Also, the rapid rate of change created a situation of virtual chaos

with respect to customs.

### 3.2.1 Ancient Greece

Hurley (1985: 75) tells us that the ancient Greeks thought very little of women and treated them as chattels, possessions, instruments only of value in relation to men. They were inferior, under the complete authority of father or husband, largely uneducated with no knowledge of the affairs of the world. They had no place in public life. Their purpose was to produce legitimate offspring. Other women or men served for pleasure. Sexual expression was not restricted in Greece, as it was among the Jews. A man's wife was for him only, but extramarital activity on his part was fully expected and institutionally provided for through male and female prostitutes.

### 3.2.2 Ancient Rome

Just prior to the New Testament era, the dominant Roman culture saw a progressive improvement in the lot of its women. Rome was also male-oriented, as in the case of Ancient Greece, but had a more restrained attitude toward sexuality. Women were subject to the authority of their father, and then their husbands. Within the family, however, they enjoyed a strong role. They were considered mistresses of the household. They had inheritance rights, which produced many wealthy widows. Marriages were indissoluble from the woman's side and difficult for men to dissolve, resulting in a more secure role for the woman. Although men enjoyed extramarital relationships which were forbidden their wives, homosexuality was not accepted as it was in Greece. They held an ideal of loyalty to one's spouse, reflecting a better quality of personal relation between husbands and wives than in Greece and the Orient. Wealthy Roman women were educated to some degree. This was very different from most Greek and Oriental women.

Although wealthy ancient Roman women were subject to their husbands, whose rights over them extended to even execution, they enjoyed the most favourable and respected position of all Mediterranean women. Women of lower classes, however, probably enjoyed fewer benefits. They were generally more integrally involved in the daily lives of their husbands, but had less access to education and fewer opportunities for independent lives.

There was, in general, more freedom for women, more education and importance in the world of Roman culture than in the Greek world. They enjoyed independent legal rights and commanded their own property. Many aristocratic Roman wives had a finger in the political pie or were active in the literary world. In some parts of the Roman Empire, such as Macedonia and Asia Minor, they were active in business and public affairs. But still in the eyes of the law they had little standing; a wife was a piece of property belonging to her husband.

The older Roman world had upheld high moral standards as the ideal, but by the time of Christ this situation has deteriorated. Roman society was much more liberal regarding sexual *mores*, and divorce became much easier as a result of new forms of marriage, which either party might dissolve. Political marriages helped to contribute to the deteriorating situation, because these marriages didn't last long. The old standards were mocked and, particularly in the cities, there was an assertiveness of female sexuality in the worst sense, often in the name of religion.

### **3.3 A brief Overview**

Without exception, the above cultures assumed male leadership and legal responsibility, although exercise of that role differed greatly. The Assyrian and Roman husbands held virtually unrestricted rights with respect to their wives. The Babylonian and Israelite husband was limited by law or by custom in the exercise

of his authority. Women were often considered to be inferior, not only with respect to legal rights, but also as human beings.

Women had differing roles in the social lives of the different cultures. They participated in commercial life everywhere, although they often played subservient roles. Only in Roman culture were they given public office, and then only seldom. Within Judaism and the Greek culture they were considered unfit for public life. Graeco-Roman worship at the time of Christ was very diverse - women functioned as worshippers and sometimes as priestesses in various cults, whilst others excluded them. Jewish society was the only one which was integrated around the worship of a single deity. Their whole life was understood within this religious framework. The religious commitments of Jews brought the marriage relation, and its sexual aspects in particular, into a sacred realm. As a result, the Jews stood alone in opposing prostitution. Amongst each of the other cultures, sexual fidelity was demanded by wives but was not expected of husbands. Sexual regulation was more a matter of personal property rights and the guarding of the family through the production of legitimate offspring, than a matter of religious or even moral import. Increasingly, the wealthy Romans and those Greeks influenced by them, accepted looser marital ties, and an increased measure of promiscuity by women as well as men.

It is against the transitional cultural situation of the Roman era that we must evaluate the New Testament teaching about the role of women. In order to see Paul and Jesus in their proper perspective, we need to understand the increasingly chaotic social structures of Roman society, and the increasingly conservative tendencies developing in Judaism. Paul and Jesus' teachings are not in line with the Judaism of their day, nor are they an adaptation of the Greek and Roman practices. Their views are closer to those of the Old Testament, and yet they are shaped by something quite new. The distinctive element in their views came from the new phenomenon which they proclaimed, the arrival of the kingdom of God with power.

## 4. WOMEN IN THE MINISTRY AND TEACHING OF JESUS

### 4.1 Jesus and His Culture

#### 4.1.1 His Conformity to it

The culture into which Jesus was born was that of the Old Testament, which, as we have seen in Chapter 2 of this dissertation, was clearly patriarchal. Jesus was a Jew **"born of a woman, born under the Law"** (Galatians 4:4), restoring to women "that measure of dignity lost by the fall" (Stott 1984: 240). From a tender age He was nurtured in a pious Jewish home. He went by custom on the Sabbath Day to the synagogue, He worshipped at the temple, and He drew heavily upon the Jewish Scriptures.

He knew the Scriptures well and often quoted from them, convinced that **"Scripture cannot be broken"** (John 10:25) and that **"Salvation is from the Jews"** (John 4:22). Pawson (1988: 34) notes that according to patriarchal laws and traditions normal leadership was male, and to be ruled by women was regarded as a symptom of moral and spiritual decadence (Isaiah 3:12).

#### 4.1.2 His Non-Conformity to it

Although patriarchy was rooted in the Old Testament and its roots spread deeply through the life and ministry of Jesus to the Church of the New Covenant, He was not always conventional. Both continuity and discontinuity with His past and His contemporaries seem to have characterized Him. He was like, yet unlike. Jesus' teaching often broke from that of Judaism in His day and He repeatedly crossed well-established conventional lines. Not only His words, but also His behaviour frequently raised questions or called upon people to revise their ways of thinking,

to think new thoughts in new ways (Hurley 1981: 79). He showed no respect for certain bizarre aspects of the Jewish culture, which had become a mockery of the truth. They deeply affronted Him. Some examples include the hypocrisy, legalism and prejudice of the Pharisees and the scribes (**Matthew 23:1-39; 9:9-13; Mark 12:1-8**) and their fanatical practice of the Levitical laws (**Matthew 15:1-20**).

Jesus' contemporaries expected the messengers of the kingdom of God to behave in a particular way and could not understand John's austere call for repentance, nor Jesus' demonstration of concern for and rejoicing over the repentance of tax collectors and "sinners" in **Matthew 11:18-19**. That is why in **Luke 4:16-30** Jesus was bodily evicted from His home synagogue. He was crucified by the Romans and by His own people (**Mark 15; 1 Thessalonians 2:15**). We see in **Mark 3:31-32** that His own family seemed not to have understood Him or to have been fully supportive during His lifetime. Even Peter in the inner circle of the Twelve openly opposed Him (**Mark 8:27-38**).

In particular, He went out of His way to treat women differently, however much it offended His peers. His relationships with women were unique in the annals of religious history, and in stark contrast to the Jewish rabbis of His day, who looked down on women and treated them as inferior. Evans (1993: 45) tells us His approach to women was "revolutionary for His era". He recognised women as fellow human beings, as genuine persons, to whom and for whom He had come, not simply as the objects of male desire. Hurley (1985: 83) says, "He did not perceive them primarily in terms of their sex, age or marital status; He seems to have considered them in terms of their relation, or lack of one, to God".

The Jewish man was forbidden to talk to a woman on the street and in public, even with one's own wife, daughter or sister. Imagine what a scandal it was when Jesus engaged in conversation with women who were strangers, like the



Samaritan woman (**John 4:7-26**) and the adulteress (**John 8:10-11**). When guests came, the wife did not even share in the meal, or serve at the table. It was also regarded as impious to teach a woman the Law, it would be better for the words of the Law to be burned, said the Talmud, than that they should be entrusted to a woman (Stott 1984: 240). Therefore it was completely unprecedented when Mary of Bethany sat at His feet listening to His teaching, and even more so when He commended her for it. We know too, that the witness of a woman was not acceptable in court, which underlines what a revolution took place when Jesus witnessed first to women after His resurrection, and encouraged them to share what they had seen and heard with others.

Evelyn and Frank Stagg (1978: 106) said, "In a real sense, Jesus has enabled woman to stand up with a proper sense of dignity, freedom and worth . . . a woman was a person first". He showed a deep respect and compassion for women and treated men and women as equals, encouraging them to be part of His team. Never once did He utter a derogatory word about women. His teaching established new roles for women in the life and the worship of the people of God, roles which are closer to the Old Testament than to Judaism. In fact, He did not announce any radical departure from the characteristic patriarchal government of God's chosen people. Jesus came to fulfil, not by-pass, the law (**Matthew 5:17**), and part of that mission was to restore the teaching of the equality of men and women in **Genesis 1 and 2**, where women and men are created in the image of God, with different roles and functions. He demonstrated these convictions throughout His life, by His love and acceptance of women, and by giving a special role of headship only to men. Stott (1984: 240) sums it up when he says, "Without any fuss or publicity, Jesus terminated the curse of the Fall, re-invested woman with her partially lost nobility, and reclaimed for His new Kingdom community the original creation blessing of sexual equality".

Is it then true that Jesus came to emancipate women totally and abolish distinction

and discrimination against them, as the feminists claim? Did He come to proclaim the “**law of liberty in Christ**” (I Corinthians 9:21; James 1:25), and replace the Laws of Moses? Surprisingly, Jesus said absolutely nothing on the subject of women. This is an astonishing omission in view of His criticisms of other aspects of Jewish tradition. Apart from granting equal non-rights of divorce and re-marriage to husbands **and** wives (Mark 10:11f), He made no specific reference to feminine “rights” at all. He was therefore not introducing a new feminist gospel. He was simply restoring the sexual equality enshrined in **Genesis 1** and **2**. He saw God as much in women as He did in men; and as much in Gentiles as He did in Jews. He actually said little or nothing about sex discrimination. He said it all by His actions (John 4:7).

## **4.2 Jesus’ ministry to women**

### **4.2.1 Through public teaching**

Jesus preached His message to the **whole** of society, including lepers and young rulers, Pharisees and tax collectors, prostitutes and young girls, mothers-in-law and single women. He saw them as **people** for whom He had come and He saw them in relation to God, regarding each one as being a valuable part of humanity.

In His **public** teaching, Jesus drew illustrations from the experience of both men and women. He appeared to be harsh, condescending and denigrating toward a Gentile - the Syro-Phoenician woman - as He first denied her request for help for her daughter. He did this to test her motives and her earnestness. He said, “**First let the children eat all they want ... for it is not right to take the children’s (the Jews’) bread and toss it to their dogs (the Gentiles)**” (Mark 7:24-30; Matthew 15:21-28). Yet this foreign woman came out victorious and vindicated. Jesus responded positively to her firm faith.

Jesus' encounter with the Canaanite woman in **Matthew 15:22-28** and **Mark 7:24-30** shows His willingness to deal with women and His respect for them. In **Luke 7:36-50** we see the devotion and faith of the sinful woman, putting to shame the Pharisee Simon and showing his lack of trust in and love for Jesus. **John 8:1-11** tells of a woman being brought into the temple area while Jesus was teaching. She had been taken in the act of adultery and the Pharisees wanted to trap Jesus. In His answer Jesus compelled them to judge themselves and find themselves guilty - of this sin and others. None could pass the test, so they slipped away one by one. Although He did not condone adultery, He did not condemn her but told her to "**leave your life of sin**" (v.11). She was encouraged to admit her sin and turn from it. His manner with this sinful woman was such that she found herself challenged to a new self-understanding and a new life.

On another occasion, He even set aside Sabbath laws in order to heal a hunch-backed woman in the middle of a synagogue service (**Luke 13:10-17**). He showed a particular concern for mothers and widows. When mothers wanted to bring their children to Him, He rebuked the fussy, protective attitude of His disciples and welcomed them (**Mark 10:13-15**). It was a poor widow whom He singled out for special praise (**Luke 21:3**), and another whose son He raised from the dead (**Luke 7:11-17**). It is reported that "**His heart went out to her**". Women were even among the first to be saved (**Acts 16:13-15**). The main point in the story of the widow's offering in **Mark 12:41-44** and **Luke 21:1-4** stresses the praiseworthiness of the sacrificial giving of a woman, not that of the rich contributors or the religious "holy" priests of the day. Jesus used the story of the five foolish and five wise maidens in **Matthew 25:1-13** to show that they were persons, subject to the strengths and weaknesses characteristic of the human race. Jesus was capable of speaking to or about woman without apparent prejudice or preferential protection. His basic assessment of any person was in terms of personal qualities that have no sexual identity. Without denying the distinctions that were real, He affirmed the personhood that was common to all

(Stagg 1978: 143).

#### 4.2.2 Through private instruction

Jesus also ***privately*** instructed women. First of all, there were three reasons why Jesus, a Jewish rabbi, ought not to have spoken with the Samaritan woman - she was a Samaritan, a woman, and immoral. She had had five former husbands and was currently living with a man who was not her husband (**John 4:5-30**). Yet Jesus did two things that were highly unconventional and astonishing in His culturo-religious milieu: He talked theology as a man openly with her, and as a Jew He asked to drink from the ritually unclean bucket of a Samaritan. He did not see her primarily as a Samaritan, a woman or a sinner, but as a person. This evangelized woman subsequently became an evangelist herself, proclaiming Jesus as "**the Saviour of the world**" (**John 4:42**), and bringing many Samaritans to faith. Jesus liberated her and awakened her to new life in which she not only received salvation but also gave herself to a life of obedience.

Jewish women were not permitted to touch the Scriptures, and they were not taught the Torah itself, although they were instructed in accordance with it for the proper regulation of their lives. Yet in **Luke 10:38-42** we see Mary sitting at Jesus' feet listening to what he said instead of helping Martha with the housework. Her choice was not a conventional one for Jewish women. Jesus commended her for making the right choice, implying that other things could wait and that she should learn from the Lord while He was there. The implication was that a woman had a right to study and discuss the Law. He considered women to be important hearers of His Word. So too, when Lazarus, the brother of Mary and Martha died in **John 11:1-44**, Jesus carefully brought Martha to confess that He was the Messiah, the source of resurrection from the dead.

The fact that women were present among the followers of Jesus and came under His serious teaching constitutes a break with tradition which has been described as being “without precedent in [then] contemporary Judaism” (Hurley 1981: 82).

#### 4.2.3 Through miracles

In **Mark 5:25-34** the woman who had suffered for years with haemorrhaging, and therefore regarded for years as being ceremonially unclean, implicitly trusted that even the touch of Jesus would heal her. Jesus touched her and in the process became “unclean” Himself according to Jewish tradition. He did not rebuke her for having defiled Him. Rather, He treated her not only as having worth but as responsible and He relieved her of any sense of guilt for her seemingly rash act. He healed her and called her “**daughter**” and sent her on her way in peace. The same result would come from his contact with Jairus’ daughter in the same passage, namely **vv.35-43**.

In **Luke 13:10-17** on the Sabbath day while He was in the synagogue preaching, Jesus healed the crippled woman by touching her saying, “**Woman, you are set free from your infirmity**” (v.12). He restored her physically, but in a very real sense, He enabled her to stand up with a proper sense of dignity, freedom and worth. To the consternation of the synagogue leaders, Jesus referred to this woman as “**a daughter of Abraham**” (v.16). Jesus measured people by their faith and spoke of her as though she belonged to the family of Abraham, just as did the “sons” of Abraham (Stagg 1978: 106). Considering the fact that men and women sat in separate sections of the synagogue, Jesus had to **go to her** by crossing the floor, which was unheard of in His day. This implies His readiness break down the cultural barriers in order to evangelise this woman, and the fact that she was a woman did not deter Him at all.

The gospels clearly ascribe to Jesus two miracles of raising persons from the dead, where the dead are restored to women. Jesus restored to a widow of Nain her only son (**Luke 7:11-17**). He was moved with compassion for her, for the dead boy was **"the only son to his mother"** (**Luke 7:12**). To the Jew, a corpse was the most defiling thing of all, but Jesus **"touched the coffin"** (v.14). Upon raising the boy from the dead, **"Jesus gave him back to his mother"** (v.15). In each of the above cases, the compassion of Jesus for the grief-stricken women is stressed. Harper (1994: 43) comments, "Jesus never once spoke a denigrating word to women or about women. He never did anything unjust or contemptuous to them. No wonder women worldwide and through all the centuries have loved and served Him with remarkable devotion".

### **4.3 Women's ministry to Jesus**

#### **4.3.1 From His mother**

This began before His birth. Women were mentioned in His genealogy (**Matthew 1:3, 5, 6, 16**). He suckled at Mary's breast, had his swaddling clothes changed by her. Mary's eager search for her missing boy implies her deep concern, and her reproach upon finding Him is a normal parental reaction (**Luke 2:44-48**). Although some tension is evident between Jesus and Mary in His reply to her, **"Why were you searching for Me? . . . Didn't you know I had to be in my Father's house?"** (v.49), it appears that He respected Mary and Joseph and submitted to their parental authority after this incident (v.51a), and His maturation continued with no further mention of tension (v.52).

From the onset of His public ministry at the wedding in Cana (**John 2:1-11**), Jesus declared His "vocational independence" of her, although He did not actually renounce the mother-son relationship as such (Stagg 1978: 104). In reply to her expectation that He do something about the shortage of wine, His reply was curt,

**"Dear woman, why do you involve Me? My time has not yet come".** Within proper limits, the relationship of mother and son was honoured to the last (**John 19:25-27**). He did not reject Mary nor she forsake Him, as we see from their encounter at the Cross. Whatever her misunderstanding, disappointment, shame or fear, she was there. But their relationship was not permitted to interfere with His Father's business.

When the woman in **Luke 11:27-28** lauded Him, **"Blessed is the mother who gave you birth and nursed you"**, Jesus' answer was once again curt, **"Blessed rather are those who hear the Word of God and obey it"**. Compliance with the Word of God makes one blessed, not motherhood as such, even the motherhood of Jesus. He did respect the roles of wife and mother, but He perceived woman as more than womb. She, as well as man, may be a hearer and doer of the Word of God. He said that His **"brother"**, **"sister"** and **"mother"** is anyone who does the will of God (**Mark 3:35**). Ethnic, racial, cultic, sexual and other distinguishing factors were secondary to Jesus. Personhood, faith and obedience to God are primary and sufficient.

#### 4.3.2 He accepted help from women

In **Luke 7:36-50** the tears of the woman, probably a prostitute, who planned to anoint Him with ointment from the alabaster box, fell upon His feet. She wiped the tears with her hair, expressing her gratitude to Jesus. Jesus' host scorned Him for allowing this to happen, suggesting that if He were a prophet, He would know what kind of woman she was and would not let her touch Him, as this would defile Him and render Him ritually unclean. Jesus showed His prophetic power of discernment by reading his host's mind and exposing it. He made the point in **7:47** that her love for Jesus resulted from her sense of being forgiven and because He saw her not as a sex object to be exploited, but a person to accept as having worth.

A special and deep friendship existed between Jesus and Lazarus and his two sisters, Mary and Martha. Here were four people of two sexes whose mutual respect, friendship, and love carried them through experiences of tension, grief, and joy. Apparently Jesus was secure enough to develop such a relationship with two sisters and their brother without fear for His reputation. They provided a home for Him on His travels and faithfully met His physical needs. Jesus had much to do with the liberation and growth of Martha and Mary. **John** identifies this Mary as the one who had anointed Him at Bethany, and we know that Jesus lauded her sacrificial love.

#### 4.3.3 Those participating in His ministry

Although we know that none of the apostles were women (**Matthew 10:2-4**), some of Jesus' closest disciples and travelling companions were, as mentioned in **Luke 8:1-3**. Luke indicates that there were many of them and that these included women prominent in the public life of the state, for example, "**Joanna, the wife of Chuza, the manager of Herod's household**" (v.3). These women included "**Mary (called Magdalene) ... Joanna ... Susanna ... and many others**". They had benefited from His ministry and contributed to the financial support of it (**Mark 15:41; Luke 8:4**). Their ministry was probably of a practical nature, doing things like cooking, washing, etc.

The presence of these women must have caused much comment, speculation and misunderstanding as Jesus travelled, because it went totally against all rabbinic tradition. They had an open, active and prominent part in the ministry of Jesus. In many ways their role paralleled the role of the disciples, who listened and ministered to Jesus' needs. Apparently the women were especially active when Jesus ministered in the north, near their homes. They had come down for Passover with the party which accompanied Jesus.



Significantly, they were also present at His crucifixion and resurrection. **Matthew 27:55-56** and **Mark 15:40** mention the names of the women who were standing at a distance watching the crucifixion. Mark adds, **"In Galilee these women had followed Him and cared for His needs. Many other women who had come up with Him to Jerusalem were also there"**. They continued to care for Him as they removed His body after the crucifixion. Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of Joseph watched Him being placed in the tomb, and returned after the Sabbath to anoint His body, thereby becoming the first witnesses of the resurrection (**Matthew 27:61; 28:1-7; Mark 15:40-16:7**), appearing directly to Mary (**John 20:10-18**). The irony is that Jewish women were prohibited from acting as witnesses. These women were also present among the disciples in the period between His resurrection and Pentecost, and presumably were among those upon whom the Holy Spirit came on that day (**Acts 1:12-14; 2:1-4, 14-47**). Jesus made no distinction between men and women. The gospels record the names of women just as much as the men, indicating that they were equal with men.

#### **4.4 Jesus' teaching concerning women**

This study is generally concerned about authority relationships, within the church in particular. Jesus' teaching does not help us in this regard. He does not discuss marital authority, nor lay out a hierarchy for the church. Yet His words form the foundation and framework of the apostolic teaching. The gospel-narratives inform us of the Lord's teaching about the man-woman relationship in four crucial areas, namely, marriage, divorce, celibacy and lust. In each of them Jesus stands in stark contrast to the thought of His day.

In **Matthew 19:3-12** Jesus strongly affirmed marriage as a union between a man and a woman, He believed in the permanence of marriage, and that husband and wife should live according to the pattern of a "one flesh" relationship, reflected as the original will of God (**Genesis 1 and 2**). However, He also commended a life

of celibacy, suggesting that for some, it was better.

Due to the hardness of their hearts, Moses permitted divorce in **Deuteronomy 24:1-4**. In the Jewish world, divorce was a man's prerogative. According to Jewish law a man could, for example, divorce his wife "**for any and every reason**" (**Matthew 19:3**). But Jesus changed the rule-book as far as divorce was concerned. He speaks of the absolute prohibition of divorce, tracing it back to the original will of God in **Genesis (Matthew 5:31-32; 19:3-9)**. According to Him the marriage bond is broken only by sexual infidelity. In three other passages in the gospels, namely **Mark 10:1-12, Matthew 19:1-12** and **Luke 16:18**, He refers to divorce. One thing in common to all passages is the absence of the double standard that discriminated against women. He made no place for the subordination of one to the other in marriage, and clearly supported equal rights - justice for men as well as women. Where there is failure in marriage, He found husband and wife equally responsible.

Jesus spoke directly to the matter of lusting after a woman and reducing her to a sex object (**Matthew 5:28**). In the Jewish and Graeco-Roman world adultery was not a crime against a woman, but a crime of the wife and her lover against her husband - it was a sin against the rights of a *man*. But Jesus extended the understanding of adultery in that He clarified that it could be committed against a woman and that it could be committed *in the heart* even if not given overt expression. To look upon a woman with a view to lust is to commit adultery *against her*, not just against her husband. Conversely, a woman is as capable of committing adultery in her heart against a man, reducing him to a sex object. This was something new. Apart from the primary concern to internalise sin, this text represents woman as having rights in her own right. She is not a thing to be used.

#### 4.5 Jesus and women in leadership

Jesus' attitudes towards and relationships with women, provide an impeccable example for social and spiritual relationships between the sexes, but they don't provide specific guidance for leadership and ministry in the Church. Apart from two isolated, but significant, references to the universal church (**Matthew 16:18**), and the local church (**Matthew 18:17**), and His choice of twelve *men* to be her foundation, He gave no direct teaching on ecclesiastical structure.

Jesus' own attitudes and actions were totally consistent with His Father's original creation. The patriarchal nature of government among the people of God continued from the old into the new covenant of Jesus' day. Throughout His teaching He confirmed the creation truth that men are called to be heads of their families (**Genesis 2:18-25; Ephesians 5:22-33**). So it was natural for Him to appoint twelve *men* to be His apostles (**Mark 3:13-19; Matthew 10:1-4; Luke 6:12-16; Acts 1:13**). From among these apostles came the first pastors and preachers. They were to be the models for all future headship in the Church. Peter, Paul and the other apostles affirmed this through their teaching. Apostleship was therefore a primary role characteristic in the early church. This was the nearest Jesus came during His lifetime to giving leadership structure to His Church. The foundation of the New Testament Church was therefore male from the beginning (Pawson 1988: 42).

Furthermore, Jesus only invited men to the Last Supper, where the new covenant was inaugurated. This was contrary to Jewish practice, because the Passover meal would normally be shared by the whole family. As He Himself said, **"I have not come to abolish them [the Law and the Prophets] but to fulfil them"** (**Matthew 5:17**). He therefore must have had a very good reason for choosing only men to witness this very solemn occasion. Only men were invited to witness the Transfiguration. In the parables, where leaders are mentioned, they are

always male. Sixteen parables refer only to men, and only four to women, these four all being domestic in nature. The "secret sign" of the arrangements for the Passover was to be a **man** carrying a pitcher of water, which was highly unusual. Only men were present in Gethsemane and Luke's language implies that only men witnessed the Ascension (**Acts 1:11**).

In my view it is significant that although women showed their love by washing His feet, accompanying Him to the Cross, and being the first to meet the risen Lord and be witnesses of His resurrection, and they were often more faithful, believing and dedicated than men, Jesus did **not** appoint any of them as apostles, not even His mother. The word "disciple" is never specifically used of women, even of those who "followed" Him. There is no trace of Jesus "calling" women to follow Him, though He allowed them to do so (**Matthew 27:55; Mark 15:41; Luke 23:49**), nor did He ever "send" them out on missions. Most importantly, they **never preached or taught in public**. We can only deduce that He was, as ever, placing His stamp of authority on the norms established in Old Testament times. It is one thing for Jesus to teach women the Law, but it is quite another thing for women to become teachers of the Law. It is one thing for women to be objects of Christ's mercy and salvation, but it is quite another thing for them to be the heads of their homes and officers ruling in His Church. Jesus never put women into a position of directing men.

There is no record that one of these women ever complained, nor did the Church for the next sixty generations ever question Jesus' judgement on the matter of excluding women from all of the above. They simply followed His example and only appointed men to positions of headship in the Church (Harper 1994: 40). There are those that argue that the maleness of the apostles was determined by Jesus's cultural conditioning, and is therefore not binding for all future generations. Yet we now know that Jesus was constantly **confronting** the culture of His day, especially in His behaviour toward women (Clark 1980: 156).

Although Jesus saw men and women as of **equal worth** and never treated women in an inferior manner, He **did** distinguish between the different **roles** that men and women should fill.

As the Son of God, He Himself exercised such a clear mandate of leadership and authority. So much so, that in **Luke 7:8** a Roman army officer compared Jesus' authority with his own. Jesus was the perfect example of the true spirit of leadership. He refers in the above passage to the "**one who rules**", thus affirming that some do have rule; but He says that a person called to rule should see it as service, not as an opportunity to be "**the greatest**" and to control people. We know from God's Word that His authority came from His heavenly Father.

He was fully human, yet in His humanity He was fully in touch with the Father, and fully inspired and empowered by the Holy Spirit. He was also fully divine. He existed with the Father and the Spirit from eternity, and He had been involved with the Father in creating the world. He had voluntarily accepted the weaknesses and limitations of the flesh, yet He was completely untainted by sin. All He knew was true, not false. All He taught, and what is recorded of His words, is free from error. He was in touch with His Father at all times, spending hours in prayer each day. His Father was outside time, and could see the end from the beginning. His Father knew things that Jesus did not know, for example, the time of His return (**Matthew 24:36**). It was after a night of prayer that He appointed His male apostles (**Luke 6:12**). I believe it was therefore within God's will that no female apostles should take on such a leadership role, because Jesus always did the will of His Father perfectly.

## 5. WOMEN IN THE LIFE OF THE APOSTOLIC CHURCH

The four gospels teach the complete “salvation history” of the Cross, resurrection, ascension and Pentecost, yet they are “transitional” in many aspects of Christian teaching (Pawson 1988: 44). Although His attitude toward and relationships with women provide an impeccable model for social and spiritual intercourse between genders, they provide very little guidance for leadership and ministry within the church. He did not announce any radical departure from the patriarchal government of God’s holy people characteristic of Israel. Therefore His attitude in the gospels **cannot** be made a final or the complete basis for Christian doctrine. Rather, the church is to be **apostolic**, resting squarely on the deeds of the apostles (in **Acts**) and their word (in the **Epistles**).

For nearly two millennia the true church has regarded the explicit teaching of God’s Word not only as the expression of the religious experience of previous generations, but more importantly, as God’s divine revelation of a norm for faith. Some, however, have questioned the purpose and nature of the apostolic practice and teaching in the New Testament. Is it a pattern for the church in every place and every age or does the New Testament speak only to its own culture and time, therefore not being binding today?

In this chapter we consider the **evidence** of the practice of the early church. What did women do in the churches according to the testimony of the New Testament documents? The next chapter will consider certain crucial didactic or teaching passages which speak to the **role of women** in the various spheres of life and about the relation of women and men. The early church continued steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine. Since the book of **Acts** follows the gospels and precedes the **Epistles**, it is appropriate to begin here. This book gives us a picture of the church as it really was, as it was meant to be throughout church history and as it

could be today by the power of the Spirit of Jesus.

## 5.1 Women as people

One of the most remarkable aspects of the role of women in the life and teaching of Jesus as seen in Chapter 4, was their very presence. Similarly, in the New Testament churches, women were highly visible and active in the life of the church. Luke commences **Acts** with the ascension of Christ. The little group which had watched the ascension of its Lord, returned to Jerusalem to await the Holy Spirit (**Acts 1:13**). After the list of the apostles, we are told of another group which joined together with them in prayer: “. . . **the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and His brothers**” (v.14). These women, in the very first accounts of the new community, had played a significant role in the community while Jesus was with them. They had previously been accepted into and now continued as part of the inner circle.

A short while later the Holy Spirit came upon them at Pentecost (**2:1-4**). The list of participants is not given, although we are told that the tongues of fire settled on each of them, and that all of them were filled with the Spirit and began to speak in tongues (v.3-4). Peter's explanation of these events implies that women also spoke, as he quoted from Joel, “**Your sons and your daughters will prophesy . . . on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days . . . and everyone who calls on the Name of the Lord will be saved**” (**2:17-18, 21**). From its very beginning, therefore, women played a significant, vocal role in the church. In **Acts 1** they were praying with the men and in **Acts 2** they were prophesying with the men. Paul condones and accepts both activities by women when he said, “**And every woman who prays or prophesies with her head uncovered ...**” (**1 Corinthians 11:5**).

As the church expanded, Luke makes it clear that women were included (1:14; 2:18; 5:14; 6:1; 8:3, 12; 9:39-41; 16:13-15; 17:4, 12, 34; 18:2, 26; 21:5, 9; 22:4; 25:13; 26:30). Acts 5 tells us that despite official disapproval, the group of believers grew and **“more and more men and women believed in the Lord and were added to their number” (v.14)**. When the gospel is taken by Philip to Samaria, the result is similar, **“When they believed Philip ... they were baptised, both men and women” (8:12)**.

Later as Paul, the former Pharisee, set off on his missionary journeys, he understood that the gospel was for *all* persons, Jews and Gentiles, men and women. We read in Acts of women participating in church after church. They joined the church as readily and acceptably as men, sometimes being founder-members, as in the case of Lydia in Philippi (Acts 16:13-15). So also the churches in Thessalonica (17:4), Berea (17:12), Athens (17:34) and Corinth (18:2) all included noteworthy women.

The term “disciple” is occasionally used exclusively of males (21:5 and possibly 19:1-7), but it is clearly now used of women (9:36), and of resident rather than itinerant followers of “The Way”. Men and women together “suffer” discipline inside the church (5:1-11) and persecution outside (8:3 and 9:2).

The apostolic communities therefore continued the practice of their Lord in the inclusion of women. They were taught as honoured recipients of the gospel, received as honoured members of the Church, and accepted as honoured workers in the life of the church. But what was the role of these women within their communities?



## 5.2 Women in the Life of the Communities

On the day of Pentecost, Peter preached the gospel to the crowds which would hear him. Women were among their number. This growing assembly of believers **"devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship"** (Acts 2:42). From this we learn that the women of the church were taught. We see, for example, Paul teaching the women at Philippi (Acts 16:13) and we see that both Priscilla and Aquila were involved in the instruction of Apollos (Acts 18:26). The church had left the pattern of the rabbis for the pattern of Jesus (Hurley 1981: 118). Not only was the gospel preached and taught to women, but women participated in the worship (I Corinthians 11:5) and brought their offerings (Acts 5:7-10). Sapphira was personally judged by God because she had wilfully joined in her husband's deception concerning the sale of their property (Acts 5:9-10).

The church recognised the need of its poor and organised care for them, particularly its widows (Acts 6:1-6). The women of the church, especially widows, were active in the life of the body, communicating the love of Christ by deeds of mercy and hospitality (I Timothy 5:10). We read, for example, of a disciple named Tabitha, or Dorcas, who provided various services for the poor at Joppa and was raised from the dead by Peter (Acts 9:36-43). Paul commends her for her faithful, loving service (Acts 9:36-39).

Women were hosts to Paul and his helpers. Lydia, for example, was a woman of great hospitality, "constraining" Paul and his company to stay in her house (Acts 16:1-15). So too, Phoebe is described as a **"servant of the church that is in Cenchreae"** (Romans 16:10). Churches also met in the homes of various women, for example in the homes of **"Mary, the mother of John, also called Mark"** (Acts 12:12), Priscilla and Aquila (I Corinthians 16:19), Nympha (Colossians 4:15) and Apphia (Philemon 2).

Before beginning to examine the teaching of the apostles in the epistles concerning the role of women, we need to investigate whether there is any evidence in the practice of the early church which suggests that women were involved in the more formally organised ministries of the day.

### **5.3 Women in the organised Ministries of the Church**

#### **5.3.1 As fellow-workers**

Even before Paul became an apostle, while he was still a Pharisee, he was very much aware of the women of the church. He considered them to be members of a dangerous sect and had them, as well as men, thrown into prison (**Acts 8:3**) Later, however, women became very much part of his ministry as his "**fellow-workers**". It is evident that Paul had a high regard for women and that they were persons worthy of note. In **Romans 16** eight of the twenty-six persons mentioned are women and six of these receive special commendation. Mary, Tryphena, Tryphosa and Persis are all said to have laboured in the Lord, but the specifics of their work is not known.

Priscilla stands out among the women of the New Testament. As a woman she was deeply involved in Paul's labour and she was prominent in the church. She and her husband Aquila met Paul while in Corinth (**Acts 18:2**) and sailed with him to Ephesus, where they set up in business together (**18:18-19**). It was in Ephesus that the couple met and worked **together** in teaching Apollos about the faith (**18:24-26**). This was probably in the private context in their home, not a public one in church.

Significantly, Luke mentions Aquila's name first, but as the account progresses, Priscilla's name takes precedence. This change is not explained by Luke, but commentators have inferred that she was the more prominent, perhaps indicating

a high social origin (Pawson 1988: 47). When they reappear in the letter to the **Romans**, Priscilla continues to be mentioned first and we learn that they have continued in the faith. Paul says of them,

**Greet Priscilla and Aquila, my fellow-workers in Christ Jesus. They risked their lives for me. Not only I but all the churches of the Gentiles are grateful to them. Greet also the church that meets at their house (Romans 16:3-5)**

We do not know the exact nature of their risk for his sake, but Paul obviously thought it a great thing for the churches as well as for himself. It is also clear that the couple were once again hosting another church.

In **Philippians 4:3** we learn of Euodia and Syntyche, two women with a quarrel which needed to be resolved. Paul warmly identifies them as persons who have **"contended at my side in the cause of the gospel . . . whose names are in the book of life"**. Most commentators consider it likely that these women were his former companions, prominent in the church and fighting side by side with him in spreading the gospel. Their quarrel would therefore have been particularly detrimental to the church and needed to be dealt with.

The fact that a significant number of women who were involved in Paul's ministry were regarded as **"fellow-workers"**, signifies that it was now regarded as appropriate for women to be involved in missionary enterprises. But what was their role in his ministry? Did they teach, preach, pastor or teach women? Did Priscilla, for example, hold "office" in the church? Did she teach? Did she act as an elder or teacher in a formal sense? From Paul's words we simply cannot say. We need to therefore turn to other texts, for example in the epistles, to enquire about the more detailed functions of these **"fellow-workers"** within the congregational structures of the New Testament church. We will do this in Chapter 6.

### 5.3.2 As prophets

The coming of the Spirit at Pentecost was also the coming of the Kingdom with power (**Mark 9:1**). It was not a new thing that **women** were prophesying, but that **all** flesh was doing it, regardless of age, sex and class - a change in degree, not kind. Paul recognised that there were women in his congregations who prayed and prophesied (**I Corinthians 11:5**). It appears that they had a place among those recognized as being gifted by the Spirit in this area. In this respect they stand parallel to the prophetesses of the Old Testament. They exercised a particular verbal gift. There had been prophetesses before Pentecost, for example Anna in **Luke 2:36**, and there would be prophetesses after Pentecost, for example the four daughters of Philip the evangelist in **Acts 21:9**.

It appears that the main work of the New Testament prophets was both the foretelling of future events, as well as to instruct and comfort the converts. A New Testament prophet was an inspired teacher and exhorter, whose purpose it was to reveal God's will. It appears that women were actively involved in this kind of church-work in the first century.

### 5.3.3 As apostles

In **Romans 16:7** Paul sends greetings to, "**Andronicus and Junias my relatives who have been in prison with me. They are outstanding among the apostles, and they were in Christ before me**". They were believers before Paul himself and shared in his imprisonment. Their service made them "**outstanding among the apostles**". Have we here an example of a woman, Junias, being counted an apostle?

First, it is not clear if **Junias** was a man or a woman. Second, the term "apostle" is used in several senses in the New Testament. It can be used in the narrow sense

to designate **"the twelve"**, as for instance when Matthias was chosen to replace Judas and was **"added to the eleven apostles"** (**Acts 1:26**). Paul also uses this sense with reference to himself, regarding himself as **"one born out of season"** but still an apostle alongside the others (**1 Corinthians 15:7-9; 2 Corinthians 12:11-12; Galatians 1:17,19**).

However, the term is also used more generally to indicate one "sent out" by a person or body as a representative, assigned to a specific [variable] task. Thus Paul and Barnabas were sent out by the church at Antioch in response to the call of the Spirit (**Acts 13:2-3**) and were called "apostles" by Luke (**Acts 14:4, 14**) to spread the gospel. Junias (male or female) and Andronicus were probably similarly "sent out" by a church, were outstanding in the appointed task, and had probably, at least for a time, assisted Paul. Did this involve "preaching" or "teaching"? They would almost certainly been involved in communicating the gospel, although the women "apostles" probably taught the women, because in many settings men doing so would have been highly suspect (**Titus 2:3-5**). Therefore it cannot be concluded that Junias was an example of a "woman preacher" or "woman elder". I believe that other clearer texts must guide our decisions.

#### 5.3.4 As deacons

Phoebe (**Romans 16:1-2**) is the most controversial female figure in Paul's letters. He writes of her,

**I commend to you our sister Phoebe, a servant of the church in Cenchrae. I ask you to receive her in the Lord in a way worthy of the saints and to give her any help she may need from you, for she has been a great help to many people, including me.**

Phoebe, whom many believe to have been the bearer of Paul's letter (**Romans**) was introduced to the Romans in terms of her relation to her church and further commended on the basis of her past service to God's people.

She was a **diakonos** of the Cenchreaean church. In the vast majority of the New Testament and in Paul's letters this term means "servant" or "one who ministers" to another. Some have suggested that Phoebe might be an example of a woman elder, in other words, a leader in the Church. But the word is used in the wider sense here and does not mean that she held an office. Paul does, in texts like **Philippians 1:1** and **I Timothy 3:8-13**, use the term to speak of church officers or "deacons", but these verses in **Acts** certainly do not point to her being an elder.

She was also the "**prostatis**" of many, the feminine form of this word meaning "protectoress, patroness, helper" (Hurley 1985: 123). Paul's request for hospitality for Phoebe was based on her own generous hospitality. Cenchrea was a busy sea-port through which many travellers would have passed. Clearly, the need for hospitality for Christian travellers would have been great. Phoebe was one who opened her home and met this need. She was one of many women who voluntarily devoted themselves to teaching and helping those who preached. They would also wait on the sick and do all kinds of work in helping to spread the gospel. She was therefore called a minister just as all labourers were appropriately called. It is thus likely that she was in Rome in some sort of official capacity, as a **diakonos** of the church at Cenchreae<sup>8</sup>. Based on other passages in Paul's letters, she was probably prohibited from holding the office of deacon.

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<sup>8</sup> See Hurley, p.123

## 5.4 A general overview

Our survey of the role of women in the practice of the New Testament church has shown that the apostolic churches followed the pattern established by their Lord by including women as members. Women attended worship, participated vocally, were taught, learned the faith and shared it with others. They also played an active part in the daily life of the community, teaching one another and caring for the poor.

Although no mention is made of women travelling with them, this may be inferred from the **Epistles** (**I Corinthians 9:5**; **Philippians 4:3**; **Romans 16:3**) and would be consistent with the example of Jesus Himself. However, what we do know is that they played a significant role as “fellow-workers” alongside men. The available texts do not make it clear what the specific tasks were of male or female fellow-workers. Further light on this subject must wait until we study Paul’s teaching. Our study has thus far provided no clear information about women in formal leadership positions within the church. Nor have we examined any specific evidence about the marriage relationships of the believers. These two areas will receive special attention as we turn now to the role of women according to the teaching of the apostles.

Regarding leadership in the early church, Pawson (1988: 47) makes the following observations. Only **men** were present at the ascension, or at least, only men were addressed by the angel in **1:14**. Judas had to be replaced in his ministry by a **man** (**v.21**) in spite of women having been the first witnesses of the resurrection. At Pentecost, though men and women “prophesied”, only a **man** preached, while eleven **men** “stood” with Peter. In fact there is no record of any woman preaching or teaching in the book of **Acts**. The **Epistles** confirm that this was not an accidental omission. Seven **men** were chosen to cater for the needs of the widows (**Acts 6:1-7**) rather than allow the apostles to spend time “serving tables”,

possibly because the widows needed men to defend their rights (**Psalm 68:5**). Early apostolic missionary teams were made up of a minimum of two men (**Luke 10:1**). We know that Paul always travelled with at least one other, for example with Barnabas, with Mark, and with Silas.

We have seen that in both the Old and New Testaments men play the major role. There appears to be no radical change in gender *roles* subsequent to Pentecost. Pawson (1988: 49) concludes therefore that leadership is still male.



## 6. NEW TESTAMENT TEACHINGS AND CONSIDERATIONS CONCERNING WOMEN

### 6.1 Galatians 3:26-29

Recent debate over the rightful role of women in the life of the church has centred on the interpretation of the writings of the apostles, particularly of Paul. Stagg (1978: 162) feels that no one is more controversial than this man. No Pauline text has been more quoted in relation to the whole issue of women in leadership than **Galatians 3:26-29**. In fact, Pawson (1988: 54) calls it the "Magna Carta" of the Christian feminist cause.

**You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus (v.26), for all of you who were baptised into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ (v.27). There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus (v.28). If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise (v.29).**

Our study will begin with these verses, particularly **v.28**, which is Paul's clearest statement that men and women are together "heirs" of God's promised inheritance. These words of Paul totally contradict the stand he would have taken regarding women when he was Saul, the rabbi. Proponents of the feminist cause claim that "**neither ... male nor female**" recognises *no differences* in nature between men and women and that their roles are totally interchangeable in marriage and in ministry. We disagree with their claim, and therefore will endeavour to seek the true meaning and application of this verse, because we can only understand it in the full context in which these words were written.

In the first part of **Galatians 3**, Paul stresses that faith, not works, provides the basis for salvation. Anybody, whether Jew or Gentile, who approaches God by faith will be blessed with the same blessing given to Abraham (**3:6-14**). The latter part of chapter 3 argues that the law was not intended as a way of salvation. Because the law came *after* God's promise to Abraham, no works of the law are required for salvation. **Galatians 4** discusses the implications of our new relationship with Christ, apart from the law.

Within the context, therefore, **Galatians 3:28** addresses the question, "Who may become a son of God, and on what basis?" Paul insists that salvation is by grace alone, and that all men, regardless of race, sex or civil status, may do so by faith in Christ. They stand before God on an equal footing. By total identification with Christ, anyone can claim the inheritance. It is "**through faith in Christ Jesus**" (v.26), it is by being "**baptised into Christ**" (v.27), being "**clothed with Christ**" (v.27), being "**in**" Christ Jesus (v.28) and belonging "**to**" Christ (v.29). This verse therefore deals with *oneness* in Christ and not equality with Christ. This is exactly what Jesus prayed in **John 17:21**.

Paul is therefore talking here about *spiritual privileges*. We are all bought by the blood of Christ, all born of the same Holy Spirit, all in Christ have the same destiny. We believe in the priesthood of all believers. Men and women alike have *access* to God through Christ. This is the glorious truth. So *all* believers are "**sons**" in Christ and therefore all are "**heirs**", which daughters previously, in the Old Testament, could never be. The miracle of Christian unity, as pointed out in **Galatians 3:28**, is that "God brings together people who are naturally unequal, and welds them together in harmony with a love, which because it comes from God, transcends all natural inequalities" (Harper 1994: 50). Our common humanity and oneness in Christ are not to be obscured by such secondary distinctions as ethnic identity, legal status or sexuality (v.28). "**In Christ**" these distinctions are transcended. Stott (1984: 241) puts it well when he says:

This does not mean that Jews and Greeks lost their physical differences or cultural distinctiveness - they still spoke, dressed and ate differently; nor that slaves and free people lost their social differences, for most slaves remained slaves and free people free; nor that men lost their masculinity and women their femininity. It means rather that ***as regards our standing before God*** (Stott's emphasis), because we are "in Christ" and enjoy a common relationship to Him, racial, national, social and sexual distinctions are irrelevant.

The immediate context of this verse therefore has ***no*** reference to the roles or ***horizontal*** social relationships of men and women, nor are they mentioned anywhere else in this **Epistle** or in other Pauline texts such as **Colossians 3:11; Romans 3:22; 10:12; 1 Corinthians 12:13** and **Ephesians 2:15**. Rather, **Galatians** is primarily concerned with the ***vertical*** spiritual relationship between God and man, as established in **Genesis 1**, where both man and woman stand equal before a holy God. **Genesis 2**, on the other hand, stresses the "horizontal inequality" of men and women and this is confirmed by **1 Corinthians 11** and **1 Timothy 2** in the New Testament. Marriott (2002: 3) says that men and women are equally dignified, significant and valuable in God's eyes because we are equally made in His image (**Genesis 1:26-28**), and equally redeemed in Christ (**Galatians 3:28**). The underlying principle here is that the gender differences at the beginning of creation, remain as a feature of the redeemed community. Sexual equality, established by creation but perverted by the Fall, was recovered by redemption through Christ. Stott (1984: 241) says that "nothing can ever destroy it . . . it is an indestructible fact".

If this verse is taken out of its "inheritance" context and taken to abolish all sexual differences, as well as social and racial distinctions, it would contradict Paul's teaching on homosexual relations (**Romans 1:24-27; 1 Corinthians 6:9**), on the duties of husbands and wives (**Ephesians 5:22-23; Colossians 3:18-19**), on slaves' attitude to their masters (**Ephesians 6:5-9; Colossians 3:23-4:1**), on

God's future plans for Jewish people (**Romans 11**) and, in particular, on his qualifications of women's ministry in the church (**I Corinthians 11:3-16; 14:33-38; I Timothy 2:11-14**). To accuse Paul of such inconsistency is a grave charge, with implications concerning the inspiration of Scripture, as well as his personal integrity. If, therefore, we want to know who among God's children are to **serve** as ministers or elders in the Church, then we must go to other portions of Scripture.

Pawson (1988: 57) comments, "To enlarge one verse of Scripture, namely **Galatians 3:28**, into a social or ecclesiastical manifesto is unwarranted and misleading", especially in view of Paul's other specific teaching on the subject. He adds that "if ever a text was used out of context as a pretext, this is it!" Harper (1994: 50) has this to say:

To deduce from this text that women can be ordained as well as men is a feat of cerebral gymnastics. The text, the context, and the whole letter having nothing whatever to do with the matter of headship and office in the church - these issues are dealt with in other Bible texts.

## 6.2 Ephesians 5:21-33

We have noted in Chapters 4 and 5 of this dissertation that both Jesus and the apostolic church considered that women should be included among the people of God in a way which set the church apart from the Jewish community. Women learned, joined in worship and served in the church. Marriage was held in honour. Both the Old and New Testaments view marriage as being ordained by God at creation, carrying with it a particular structure (**Genesis 1-2**). Throughout the Old Testament God's relation to His people is also likened to that of a husband to a wife, for example in **Hosea** and the **Song of Solomon**. This parallel is consistently drawn upon in various New Testament passages which discuss marital roles.

Paul illustrates this in **Ephesians 5:21-33**. But first, it is important to look at these verses in context. In **Ephesians 1-3** Paul deals with the great doctrines of election, predestination and adoption. Then he moves on to conduct, or behaviour, in the light of that doctrine. From **5:21-33** he gets specific and very clearly discusses the relationship between husbands and wives. The women of Ephesus were to understand their relation to their husbands in terms of their relation to Christ:

**Wives, submit to your husbands as to the Lord (v.22). 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 (v.23). Now as the church submits itself to Christ, so also wives should submit themselves to their husbands in everything (v.24)**

Wives are called upon to submit themselves to their husbands as the church subjects itself to Christ. Paul uses the verb *hypotasso* to describe this submissive relationship i.e. "to put in order under", "to subordinate", "being subordinate to one placed over him", "yielding to the authority of another". It has never been suggested that the church is *not* to be subordinate to her Head. The Greek verb is used more than forty times in the New Testament and always carries with it an overtone of authority and subjection or submission to it (**Romans 13:1, 5; I Corinthians 14:32, 34; 15:27**)(Hurley 1985: 142).

Husbands are not told to *make* their wives be subject. Wives are not asked to submit for the sake of the superior wisdom of their husbands, but to submit "**out of reverence for Christ**". **Colossians 3:18** stresses the same thing, "**Wives, submit to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord**". To do otherwise is rebellion against God. Her subjection or reverence ought to be inward and outward, a humble acknowledgement of the husband's right by God's ordinance. This issue frequently arose in the early church, indicating that women in many

congregations had problems submitting to their husband's judgements (**Genesis 38; Judges 11:30-40**).

The husband is to be head of his wife in exactly the same manner **as** Christ is Head of the church. Paul's use of "head", which in Greek is **kephale**, is more complex than his use of **hypotasso**. It can refer to a literal, physical head (**I Corinthians 11:7**) or to a person possessing authority (**Ephesians 1:22**), or to something which is the source or beginning of something else (**Colossians 1:18**). Submission is a perfectly natural response to authority. **Ephesians 1:22** says "God placed all things (**hypotasso**) under His feet and appointed Him to be head (**kephale**) over everything for the church, which is His body" i.e. Christ is appointed to be head (**kephale**) over everything, and His headship is responded to by subjection. This model provides the pattern for a wife's relation to her "head". Christ's actions as head provide the pattern for the husband (Hurley 1985: 147).

**Ephesians 5:25-33** rightly emphasizes the balancing obligation of the husband **also** to love his wife **as** Christ loved the church. He must develop as well as direct her, love as well as lead her, sanctify as well as superintend her, give himself as well as guide her. The difference in responsibility is clear. In the "one flesh" of marriage, the husband is the one "head" (**v.23**) and the wife is the one "body" (**v.28**), just as Christ is the head and the church, His body. Wives should therefore submit to their husbands in **everything**, which includes in and outside the home, as well as in the church (Pawson 1988: 63).

Jesus taught that authority was **not** a way of setting ourselves above others, but authority was for the purpose of service: the greatest should be like the least and the one who rules like the one who serves (**Luke 22:24-27**). So also Paul calls husbands to imitate the Lord, not by setting aside authority, but by serving the needs of their wives. Husbands must learn that form of sacrificial leadership

which fosters the growth of others. Wives must learn that form of active obedience which is not self-demeaning, but joyfully upbuilding. Among fallen humans, even those in whom the image of God is being restored (**Colossians 3:10**), this process calls for humility and mutual encouragement (Hurley 1981: 148).

Male headship was therefore created by God. It was affirmed by the early Church and by many centuries of Christian experience. Roger Beckwith (in Harper 1994: 52) has put it well:

What man has created, man can abolish, for example slavery. But he cannot abolish what God has created i.e. headship. Since the church and the family remain and can never be abolished, neither can the principles of headship and submission which go with them.

### **6.3 I Peter 3:1-7**

**Wives, in the same way be submissive to your husbands so that, if any of them do not believe the word, they may be won over without words by the behaviour of their wives, when they see the purity and reverence of your lives. Your beauty should not come from outward adornment, such as braided hair and the wearing of gold jewellery and fine clothes. Instead it should be that of your inner self, the unfading beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is of great worth in God's sight. For this is the way the holy women of the past who put their hope in God used to make themselves beautiful. They were submissive to their own husbands, like Sarah, who obeyed Abraham and called him her master. You are her daughters if you do what is right and do not give way to fear. Husbands, in the same way be considerate as you live with your wives, and treat them with respect as the weaker partner and as heirs with you of the gracious gift of life, so that nothing will hinder your prayers.**

The apostle Peter shared Paul's view. In **I Peter 3:1-7** Peter wrote to a suffering church about the meaning of Christian life under oppressive governments, slave masters and husbands. He exhorts Christian wives to live a life of **"purity and reverence"**, so that their unbelieving husbands can see Christianity in them, rather than simply hear about it (**v.1-2**). She is called by God to **"be submissive"** to him. In this way she will be faithfully demonstrating the obedient love of the church for Christ (**Ephesians 5:22-24; I Peter 3:4-6**), as well as the willing suffering and love of Christ for His church (**I Peter 2:21-25**). Take note, he never calls upon husbands to submit to their wives.

Peter compares the wife's behaviour to **"the holy women of the past"**, particularly that of Sarah, who understood her relation to Abraham as the master of the house. She called Abraham her **"master"** (or "lord"), which would be unthinkable to modern wives. This was a social role and it implied authority, though Peter is talking about her loving respect toward him, rather than blind, servile or fearful obedience (**I Peter 3:1-2, 6**). It is interesting to note that the model for a Christian wife is taken here from the patriarchal period of the Old Testament.

This passage clearly speaks of the different roles of the spouses. The husband is to treat his wife not with contempt, but **"with respect as the weaker partner"**, yet at the same time as **"heirs with you of the gracious gift of life"** (**v.7**), which is a further ground for respect. **"Weaker partner"** indicates not only physical weakness but, more likely, that hers is the subordinate position, and that the husband is not to abuse his stronger position of authority. Their roles are different in this world, but they will be the same when the kingdom is finally and fully inherited (**Matthew 25:34**).

Previously in **I Peter 2:13** Peter calls on Christians to **"submit yourselves for the Lord's sake to every authority instituted among men"**. One of these "institutions" is marriage and he goes on to tell wives to **"in the same way"** submit



to their husbands. Wayne Grudem (1991: 205) says about this:

In an age when submission to authority is frequently denigrated and thought to be degrading and dehumanizing, Peter's words remind us that submission to rightful authority is beautiful and right in God's world . . . In God's sight it is **"of great worth"**.

Paul and Peter spoke in two different situations in **Ephesians 5** and **I Peter** respectively, but both present a hierarchical view of marriage which was not culturally bound. So too, parental authority is not culturally relative. Children need their parents' leadership. The New Testament treats both parent/child and husband/wife relations as ordained of God. The conduct of Christians in their various relationships is therefore regulated (Hurley 1981: 161). He feels that the relationship between men and women both in marriage, as well as in the Church, should be neither a dictatorship, nor a democracy! The exercise of authority and leadership in any organization will be most effective if it is done in such a way that the abilities of those under authority are developed to their fullest, rather than suppressed. The church is made up of families and if it is improper for the wife to exercise dominion over her husband in the privacy of the home, it is improper for her to exercise dominion over her husband outside of the home in the Church. If she cannot be the head of the family, she cannot be the head of the church, which is made up of a number of families.

#### **6.4 I Corinthians 11:3-16**

Now I want you to realise that the head of every man is Christ, and the head of the woman is man and the head of Christ is God (v.3). Every man who prays or prophesies with his head covered dishonours his head (v.4). And every woman who prays or prophesies with her head uncovered dishonours her head (v.5) . . . A man ought not to cover his head, since he is the image and glory of God; but the woman is the glory of man (v.7). For man did not come from woman, but woman

from man (v.8); neither was man created for women, but woman for man (v.9). . . In the Lord, however, woman is not independent of man, nor is man independent of woman (v.11). For as woman came from man, so also man is born of woman. But everything comes from God (v.12) . . .

Paul comes to a new major section in his letter to the Corinthians (**I Corinthians 11:2-14:40**). In this section of Scripture, he deals with various disorders concerning men and women in public worship (**11:3-16**), concerning the Lord's Supper (**11:17-34**) and concerning the gifts of the Holy Spirit (**12:1-14:40**).

He begins in **I Corinthians 11:2-4** by setting out a definite hierarchy of authority: God, as the ultimate Authority, is the Head of Christ, Christ is the head of man, and man is the head of woman. As we have already seen, "head" implies leadership, authority and provision, but it does not mean dominance. Jesus Christ is not inferior to the Father, but together with the Holy Spirit is *equally* God (**Ephesians 1:3**; **Hebrews 1:8**; **Acts 5:3-4**). However, God sent His Son to carry out the plan of redemption. There was, therefore, an order of *function* here, not status.

In the same way, in marriage as well as in the Church, man and woman are equally children of God (**Galatians 3:28**), but in function the man is the leader (Eaton 2000: 27). Scripture clearly distinguishes between men and women, each having a particular function and different role. We have already seen in our discussion, that women are not inferior in any way, but it is essential for the smooth functioning of the home and the local church that the man and the woman should fulfil the *roles* which God has ordained for them. I submit that where congregations do not submit to this order, confusion and disorder will reign.

It is clear from our passage that women were permitted to participate in public worship with men, hence Paul explains how women should behave **when** they pray or prophesy i.e. whether their heads should be covered or uncovered. MacArthur (1984: 256) states that some women in Corinth were clearly excited by the idea of equality of the sexes in their equal **salvation** (**Galatians 3:28**) and subsequently, in their leadership roles. He says, "They would often take off their veils or other head coverings and cut their hair in order to look like men . . . some women were demanding to be treated exactly like men". This was a mistake and Paul was correcting it. Eaton (2000: 90) says that "neither Paul nor the churches [would] accept the ambitions of the Corinthian women to break out of the order of God's creation". Karl Barth (in Harper 1994: 60) describes it as

. . . a commandment which for all eternity directs the man and the women **to their proper place**, and forbids all attempts to violate the ordinance that governs the relationship of the sexes . . . There is an irreversible order in the man/woman relationship".

The woman covering her head was a cultural expression of her subjection and reverence to the man, expressing her acceptance of male governmental responsibility within the assembly. It was a sign of modesty. By **not** covering her head, the woman was in effect assuming authority for herself, and therefore "**dishonouring her head**". The man, on the other hand, as God's representative, was **not** to have his head covered. This was a sign of his authority over women, as well as expressing his acknowledgement of the need to submit to the authority of Christ while he fulfils his role in church (MacArthur 1984: 254).

The absence of a veil, in the case of a man, and the presence of a veil, in the case of a woman, therefore symbolized different roles - primarily the different roles in marriage - and the submission of the wife to her husband is therefore to be reflected in the worship meetings. Gender must not be confused in gatherings for

worship. The gender difference is to be visibly acknowledged, the sex of the worshipper being perfectly obvious to a person in the pew behind! Paul argues from nature: **"Does not the very nature of things teach you that if a man has long hair, it is a disgrace to him . . ."** (v.14). Hodge (1974: 213) says that wearing long hair was contrary to the custom of both the Hebrews and the Greeks of the day, and Wilson (1978: 159) tells us that "Long hair is felt to be a 'dishonour' to man because it is a contradiction of his manliness, whereas it is the glory of a woman: 'What is discreditable in the one is delightful in the other' (Findlay)".

This **cultural expression** of the spiritual principle of male headship as it was required to be shown in Paul's society is **not** relevant in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. However, the **spiritual principle** of male headship still does remain relevant today. Paul substantiates what he has said in **vv.2-7** by appealing to timeless principles in **v.8** - **"For man did not come from woman, but woman from man"**, referring to **Genesis 2:8-17**. In **v.9** he stresses that the woman was created to be a helpmate for the man, and not the other way around (**Genesis 2:18-25**). They were created out of different material for a different purpose. Both men and women are created in the image of God, and part of that "image of God" is dominion over creation. Generally, men and women were created equally in the image of God, and they are equally given the original dominion mandate (**Gen. 1:27ff**). Both of them, therefore, have authority, but they are also **under** authority. Frame (in Piper & Grudem 1991: 231) reminds us that:

Jesus Himself is both Lord and servant. A man rules his family, but he is subordinate to his employer and to the civil magistrate. A woman may have legitimate authority over her children (**Exodus 20:12**), her household (**I Timothy 5:14**), other women (**Titus 2:4**), a business (**Proverbs 31:10-31**), and the earth as part of Christ's body (**Genesis 1:28**; **I Corinthians 3:21**), even [in some sense] over everyone in her ministry as a prophet of God (**Judges 4:1**; **Acts 2:17**; **21:9**; **I Corinthians 11:5, 10**). But these facts

do not conflict with the rule that a wife must be subject to her husband in the home and to male elders in the church.

Paul does not allow the woman to be despised. The biblical idea of leadership is a humble and tender one. The woman is not inferior to man. **"In the Lord, however, woman is not independent of man, nor is man independent of woman. For as woman came from man, so also man is born of woman" (v.11-12).** Man and woman need each other, they need to build each other, encourage each other and strive together. They are not sufficient unto themselves. Waldron (2001: 3) says that male headship is functionally necessary. It is rooted in the natures with which God has created men and women and is therefore good for the women, as well as men. **Verse 16** suggests that this issue of authority should not cause contention, as it was doing in Corinth. Biblically, it is beyond argument - **"We have no other practice - nor do the churches of God"**.

We ought to thank God, in fact, for the feminists in Corinth. They provoked Paul to make important and definitive statements, which are as relevant today in our dispute with modern feminism, as they were in the first century. I submit the many ills that beset families in the modern world are frequently attributed directly to the failure of the man to fulfil his God-ordained role as head. As Bible-believing and Bible-loving Christians, we ought to reject the attempts of feminism to evade this clear teaching in the Bible. MacArthur (1984: 253) says:

The principles of subordination and authority pervades the entire universe. Paul shows that woman's subordination to man is but a reflection of that greater general truth . . . If Christ had not submitted to the will of God, redemption for mankind would have been impossible, and we would forever be doomed and lost. If individual human beings did not submit to Christ as Saviour and Lord, they are still doomed and lost, because they reject God's gracious provision. And if women do not submit to men, then the family and society as a whole are disrupted and destroyed. Whether on a divine or human scale, subordination and authority are indispensable elements in God's order and plan.

## 6.5 I Corinthians 14:33-40

**For God is not a God of disorder but of peace. As in all congregations of the saints (v.33), women should remain silent in the churches. They are not allowed to speak, but must be in submission, as the Law says (v.34). 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 (v.35). Did the Word of God originate with you (v.36)? ... Therefore, my brothers, be eager to prophesy, and do not forbid speaking in tongues (v.39). But everything should be done in a fitting and orderly way (v.40)**

It is true that the surest indication of a perverted and false use of Scripture is one which fails to carefully take into account the context of the statement it is using. Heretics have always quoted Scripture, but they have always quoted it out of context. The above statement is particularly important in the present debate with feminism. Let us look therefore at the context of the above-mentioned text.

These verses must always be seen in the light of **I Corinthians 11**, which deals with the general doctrine of male headship. This doctrine is implemented in, and applied to the church in **I Corinthians 14**. In the larger context, **chapters 12-14** deal with the subject of spiritual gifts: the *unity* of the Spirit and spiritual gifts (**ch.12**), the *superiority* of love and spiritual gifts (**ch.13**), and the *regulation* of the assemblies and spiritual gifts (**ch.14**). Paul structures **chapter 14** on two principles which regulate the exercise of the gifts in the assembly,-namely, the principle of the *edification* of their exercise (**v.1-26**) and the principle of *order* to their exercise (**v.27-40**)

It appears that at the time the Corinthian worship was in a chaotic state. For further information, see the comments on **I Corinthians 11** above. Paul's limitations on the role of women do not only apply to this local church in Corinth. The reasons Paul gives are not something temporary or passing, but rather, "as

the Law says". The Law is the Old Testament (**Genesis 2 and 3:16**), and the Law does not change with passing customs and cultures. It is added that "**it is disgraceful for women to speak**" (**v.35b**). **Verse 36** implies that it is a shame in God's eyes, because it is a manifestation of an ugly deviation from the divine order. God has an order which He laid down in creation and which is meant to govern our relationships to the end of time. These commands are not just for one situation, but are to be **universally** observed in all the apostolic churches (**v.33**) which encompass many different cultures.

The basic teaching, therefore, in this passage is that God is a God of order, not disorder. Some say that Paul was telling the women to "**keep silent**" to prohibit them from contributing vocally in any part in the service. But we only need to turn back to **1 Corinthians 11:5** to see that Paul expects women to have the priestly ministry of prayer, in church and aloud, and that of prophecy. Both prayer and prophecy, vital ministries, were open to women in the Old Testament as well. It is hardly likely that Paul would have reversed this and prohibited them in the New Testament. Others say that Paul was seeking to prevent women from chatting in church or "fellowshipping". But surely Paul would not have made such a big issue, invoking the Law and the authority of Christ Himself, for such a mundane matter as women conversing during a church service. Rather, what Paul was requiring was a voluntary submission to the principles of authority. It was to be the kind of behaviour that ensured the edification of the whole church. Women wishing to learn must ask their husbands at home (**v.35a**). It is possible that women were taking their husbands to task in the open debates. Women were therefore allowed to deliver prophecies, but not debate them. Paul excludes women from dialogue with teachers in a church gathering, even to simply ask questions! Husbands are the right ones to engage in such dialogue and that should be done in the private context of the home. It is not so much the "**silence**" which the law demands, but the principle of subordination to male authority.

When Paul speaks of the silence of women, he is speaking of it being exercised **"in the churches"** (v.34a). This does not refer to just **any** meeting that takes place in the church building, but the gathering of the whole church for the purposes of corporate worship. Paul, both in this passage and in **1 Timothy 2:8-15**, regards such things as the proclamation of the Word, leading in prayer, and even asking didactic, directive questions, as acts of headship or leadership. It is therefore a violation of the divine order for a women to engage in these or any other activities involving leadership in the assembly.

## **6.6 1 Timothy 2:8-15**

**I want men everywhere to lift up holy hands in prayer, without anger or disputing (v.8). I also want women to dress modestly, with decency and propriety, not with braided hair or gold or pearls or expensive clothes (v.9), but with good deeds, appropriate for women who profess to worship God (v.10). A woman should learn in quietness and full submission (v.11). I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man; she must be silent (v.12). For Adam was formed first, then Eve (v.13). And Adam was not the one deceived; it was the woman who was deceived and became a sinner (v.14). But women will be kept safe through childbirth, if they continue in faith, love and holiness with propriety (v.15).**

This is widely considered to be the passage most offensive to Christian women in the writings of Paul, if not the whole New Testament. It has certainly drawn the most feminist fire. They feel that it imposes severe limitations on their public ministry and perpetuates a male-dominated Church. However, once again we need to look at the context of this passage and we need to see it in the light of the previous Pauline passages we have already studied.

Paul is giving Timothy advice as to how to run the churches. The Ephesian church was plagued with false doctrine and false leaders as well as with struggles over gender roles. Some women were leading impure lives (**1 Timothy 5:6, 11-**



15; 2 Timothy 3:6) and their indecency was carried over into the worship service. According to MacArthur (1995: 78), women were flaunting themselves and becoming serious distractions from worship, under the pretence of gathering to worship God. This needed to be dealt with. Following his discussion of the role of men when the church is called to evangelistic prayer (2:1-8), Paul turns to the subject of women in worship. He addresses their appearance (v.9a, c), testimony (v.10), role (v.11-12), design (v.13-14) and contribution (v.15). This dissertation deals with the *role* of the woman within the church.

In v.11-12 Paul defines the role of women as learners rather than teachers during public worship. They are not to be shut out of the learning process, as was generally the case in ancient times. In fact, Paul does not request, but rather *commands*, that women be taught. She is to listen to the men and “*learn in quietness and full submission*” (v.11). She is to “line up under” the man’s teaching and is to be content in the role of learner. Women are to keep quiet in the sense of not teaching or preaching the Word to men in public worship under any circumstances. Paul does not allow any exceptions. Schreiner (in Perriman 1998: 126) believes that women are by nature ill-equipped for the task of teaching Christian doctrine. They are to demonstrate their subjection by not usurping the authority of the elder or preacher. This is because God’s Law commands it (I Corinthians 14:34).

In summary then, when *public* teaching in a mixed congregation is taking place, women are to accept it without answering back or even asking questions (cf. I Corinthians 14:34-35). The modesty expressed in dress and adornment must extend to their learning attitudes also. Debate and dialogue are to be left to the men. Both I Corinthians 14:34-35 and I Timothy 2:11-14 make it clear that women are to be silent within the church, women are not to take a position of authority over the man, and they are to be in subjection to the man. This means that it would be wrong for a women to teach a class with adult Christian men

present, to preach before an audience containing men, to take a leading role such as leading prayer or leading singing with men present, and to have any kind of leadership role in a congregation where she would be in a position of authority over men.

Paul's prohibition is not based on culture, but it is clearly a command for all time because it is based on creation principles (**v.13-14**). Harper (1994: 58) says, "If you say, as some do, that Paul must have been culturally conditioned, you are bound to notice that He invokes the law (**1 Corinthians 14:34**), God's creative acts (**1 Timothy 2:13**), and the command of the Lord Jesus Christ Himself (**1 Corinthians 14:37**). You can't go higher than that!" For a woman to direct a man is an act of "violence" because it violates the order of creation. Adam was created before Eve. Eve was the one who "**was deceived**" and "**became transgressor**", although Adam is not absolved from the responsibility of his fall (**Romans 5:12ff**). Her assuming the role of leadership also had disastrous consequences and must not be followed by other women.

However, Paul adds that the woman's role remains vital. She must not be despised. She has a unique role in the home. Woman alone can give birth to children (**v.15**), and is in fact "saved through child-bearing", on condition that "they continue in faith, love and holiness with propriety". The man must care for and provide for his wife and love her as Christ loved the church (**Ephesians 5:25**). The woman's willing submission to her husband is most likely to call forth the best of his care (**Ephesians 5:22, 33**). In order for there to be the greatest amount of happiness in the home, God has established different roles for men and women in the home. This difference is likewise to be reflected in the church.

Brown (1996: 5) says that if man had not sinned, he would always have ruled with wisdom and love. If the women had not sinned, she would always have obeyed with humility and meekness. But both Eve and Adam sinned (**Genesis 3:16-17**).

The first role reversal in the marital relationship came when Eve submitted to the serpent and not God or her husband, and when Adam obeyed Eve and not God. As a result God said that the husband would rule over his wife and she was to submit to his headship. The word “**rule**” means to govern or to have dominion.

Paul’s overall objective was positive, namely, that both men and women should have the **right** attitudes to each other and engage in the **right** activities appropriate to their gender. This is what **righteousness** is all about (Pawson 1988: 76) Since Paul’s letters are Scripture (**2 Peter 3:16**) and all Scripture is inspired, his reasons for laying down these conditions must also be inspired. They are not therefore to be treated lightly. The principle as spoken here by Paul is intended to be permanent and still applies to the church today.

## **7. RESEARCH FINDINGS ON THE ROLE OF THE WOMAN IN CONTEMPORARY CHURCH LIFE**

In this dissertation we referred to the impact which the feminist movement has had on society over the past century, and especially on the church in recent years. We have seen that the “traditional” roles of women have been reversed, with women now aspiring to equality with men in every field, including positions as ordained ministers. Those advocating such “liberation”, have interpreted certain Scriptures to justify and reinforce their views. An attempt has been made to look at the biblical principles in God’s Word right from **Genesis** to prove that while God created women in His image to be positionally absolutely equal before Him, He also created them functionally different, each having a different purpose, complementing each other as they fulfil their God-ordained roles.

In the first part of this chapter data is presented which has been collected from interviews with local ministers from four different denominations. In the second part of this chapter, a survey was also conducted within the local church of some of these pastors, as well as among the public at large in the city of Pietermaritzburg, Kwazulu- Natal. The third part of this chapter interprets the data and explores to what extent the Church has been influenced by feminist ideas and to what extent the principles laid down in Scripture are understood, correctly interpreted or misinterpreted.

### **7.1 Interviews with pastors**

Field research was conducted in Pietermaritzburg, KwaZulu-Natal. Eight pastors, two from each of four denominations within the city, were chosen as interviewees. The denominations represented were:

- the Church of the Province in South Africa (CPSA)
- the Church of England in South Africa (CESA)
- the Baptist Union of South Africa (BU)
- the New Covenant Ministries (NCF)

Among those interviewed was one female pastor in the CPSA (for the list of the pastors interviewed, see **Appendix C**). Each pastor was contacted either telephonically or in person. Permission was requested for the interview, and a specific date and time were arranged. A brief explanation of the topic of the interview was given. This was repeated to them before the actual interview was undertaken. Permission was also requested to use a tape recorder, to ensure the accuracy of the details of the interview. Assurance was given that the anonymity of the respondent would be protected and that private data would not be reported.

#### 7.1.1 The questionnaire

A questionnaire containing nineteen open-ended questions (**Appendix D**) was divided into two sections:

- Introductory questions concerning the background of the pastor (seven questions)
- Specific questions regarding the roles of men and women in the church (twelve questions).

Certain questions were geared to establish the pastor's personal opinion on a matter, others were aimed at establishing his/her understanding of Scripture, while still others investigated the views of the particular denomination which they represent.

### 7.1.2 Background of the pastor

Information on the pastor's background is important to this research. The average age of the seven male pastors was 44 years, all were married, but only five of them had children. The only female pastor was 30 years old and unmarried (Q1).

According to **Table 7.1** below, the pastors have considerable ministry experience, with four of them having been involved in ordained ministry for an average of 25 years (Q5). However, apart from one pastor who has shepherded his church for over 25 years, the average years spent in one congregation was only 7 years (Q6). Church membership in their churches varied from 100 to 1 500 (Q7), most of the larger churches functioning with two pastors. It is worth noting that the two ministers with the largest congregation, had spent only one year in theological training (Q4).

**Table 7.1** Study and ministry experience of pastors

	Age	Years of study	Years in ministry	Years in local church	Size of church
<b>CPSA</b>					
Pastor 1	44	4	14	1	400
Pastor 2	4	6	6	1	170
<b>CESA</b>					
Pastor 1	51	12	25	25	600
Pastor 2	46	9	10	5	600
<b>Baptist</b>					
Pastor 1	65	9	41	3	100
Pastor 2	46	11	20	2	180
<b>NCF</b>					
Pastor 1	31	1	11	11	1 500
Pastor 2	24	1	7	7	1 500

### 7.1.3 Analysis of responses

Pastors were unanimous in their understanding that positionally, in terms of salvation, men and women were created equal before God, although functionally they are different (Q8). It was generally agreed that Christians were unclear regarding the roles which each sex is to fulfil (Q9). Some felt that different traditional and cultural backgrounds were the main reasons for this. Others acknowledged that feminism has impacted the church and that Christians have been absorbed into the secular thinking of our society. Only one pastor felt that the confusion was a result of the lack of strong, sound and biblical teaching in the churches on the issue.

When asked whether it was acceptable for women to preach in their respective denominations (Q10), 50% of the respondents responded positively and the other 50% negatively. The CPISA was very enthusiastic in support of women preachers, while the Baptist pastors commented that although the ministry was open to women and some had been ordained, it was still a controversial issue and not encouraged within the denomination. They felt that the reason for this opposition was tradition- and not doctrine-based. The CESA representatives felt that it was totally unbiblical and unacceptable for women to preach based on biblical principles, whereas NCF pastors agreed that women are free and encouraged to preach, as long as the content of their sermons does not deal with what they call “the three-D’s”, namely “doctrine, direction or discipline”.

Twenty-five percent of the respondents interpreted **Galatians 3:28** to mean that there ought to be no discrimination based on gender when it comes to the roles which men and women fulfil, while the remaining 75% were clear that this particular text was not relating to the roles of men and women, but rather their spiritual status before God (Q11).

Only 63% agreed that the calling of the man is to bear “primary responsibility” in the home as well as in the church (Q12). Those that agreed, felt that biblical evidence pointed to the husband being the “head” of the wife, the leader who was expected to give direction. This principle was taken for granted in the Old Testament and then underlined in the New Testament. However, it was to be a servant-leadership, following the example of Jesus Christ. It was felt that in cases where there is weak male leadership or where the woman is forced to take the lead for some other reason, the biblical principle remains the same. The man ought still to be encouraged by the woman to take the lead. The remaining 37% felt that this “primary responsibility” was given to man only through the “traditions” of our Judeo-Christian heritage, which has resulted in male domination. However, it was felt that men and women in 2002 should share responsibility, and that if the woman had the stronger personality, she should be encouraged to take on leadership. One respondent even claimed that the Bible was ambiguous in this matter.

The majority of the pastors (75%) felt that biblically the husband and wife ought to “submit to one another” (Ephesians 5:21) and that the woman ought to submit to male leadership “as to the Lord” (v.22)(Q13). It was felt that where the husband leads well and loves sacrificially, the woman will *want* to yield and submit to him. However, this submission does not apply in the case of male “domination”, or when the man requires the woman to do something which is contrary to the Law of God or the law of the land. One pastor felt that submission transcends obedience, implying that the woman can submit to the man without necessarily obeying him. However, the remaining 25% which represented the CPSA, felt that the New Testament “submission” passages ought not to be taken literally, that they were generally “out of context”, and that they should “not necessarily be taken as the words of Jesus”. They felt that this passage did not apply to us in 2002.



Sixty-three percent of the respondents agreed that only men could biblically be elders in the church (Q14). They felt that the clear teaching of the Creation account and of the New Testament reveal that leadership was for men alone, and therefore eldership in the church was for men only. They are responsible for the spiritual direction, discipline and doctrine of the church. One respondent remarked that it was possible to be a pastor without being an elder, and that a pastor does not govern unless he/she is part of the eldership team. The other 37% disagreed strongly that only men should be pastors or elders. They felt there was no clear biblical evidence to support this idea, that men are restricted in their ministry without the gifts of women, and that if God calls a woman to be a pastor, it is acceptable. One pastor commented, "Spirituality far exceeds gender in Christian service" and claimed that some women in church leadership are spiritually far more qualified to be in their positions than some men are.

In response to Question 15 (Q15), only 25% of the respondents felt that female leadership involving preaching and eldership in the church was unbiblical. They based their views on the teaching of Scripture, which they believe is inspired by God and which clearly reveals that women ought not to lead men because biblical leadership is male. They believe that women are, however, encouraged to teach women and children. The remaining 75% said that it was *not* unbiblical for a woman to preach. One respondent claimed that authority does not rest in the "maleness" of the preacher, but in the Word of God. The preacher is purely the messenger of that Word, and therefore can be male or female. The NCF respondents felt that women can preach, but only under the authority of the elders of that church, which is reserved for the men.

When asked how the respondents interpreted Paul's statement about women remaining "**silent in the churches**" (1Corinthians 14:34), 75% said that Paul directed these words to a local cultural situation at Corinth where the worship service had degenerated into conflict, rivalry, chaos and disorder (Q16). They felt

that Paul was calling women to be silent with regard to gossiping, chattering and having private conversations. However, the remaining 25% believed that Paul was reminding women of the biblical principle for women to willingly submit to the leadership of men in the worship service, to never be the cause of division within the church, and certainly never to be in a position of authority over men in a local congregation.

If a woman has the gift of preaching, the exercise of this gift for the edification of the church ought not to be denied her (**Q17**). This was the opinion of 75% of all the pastors interviewed. Considering that two-thirds of most congregations are female, there is a need for female preachers to address the needs of women. It was felt that denial leads to "spiritual frustration", and that a gifted woman ought to be encouraged to preach. It was noted by one respondent that although a woman may be gifted in this area, and may be offered leadership or preaching responsibilities, in practice she may often decline. On the other hand, 25% felt that if the woman has the gift of teaching, she is free to exercise it through the many opportunities open to her in working with women and children. They felt that within the church an authority structure has been set and that men have been appointed by God as stewards and managers and protectors of God's Word. Their opinion was that women must exercise the gift of teaching in a biblical setting, under the authority of the man.

In response to Question 18 (**Q18**), 100% of the respondents said that their churches offered a wide spectrum of opportunities for women to exercise their various gifts. Many of those mentioned are listed in **Appendix E**. However, 75% of the respondents felt that this freedom included the exercise of the gift of preaching, either ordained or lay-preachers. Women are encouraged to exercise their other spiritual gifts in these local congregations, in ministries which include prophesying, speaking in tongues and preaching, and are permitted to become deacons, worship leaders, counsellors and teachers of mixed Bible study and cell

groups.

Most respondents (75%) were of the opinion that it was inconsistent for churches to forbid women opportunities to preach in their own local congregations, and yet to send them out as missionaries to preach to the unconverted (Q19). It was mentioned that some women, having been denied preaching opportunities in their local church, have deliberately chosen to go onto the mission field in order to exercise their gifts of preaching and teaching. However, some felt that any preaching by women on the mission field ought to come under the eldership of the home church, where leadership was male. The remaining 25% felt that it is acceptable for missionaries to go out to the unreached peoples because they go as evangelists, preaching the gospel and teaching them Scripture. However, once a new church is established, the missionary must ensure that the new local Christians are taught, trained up and equipped in the things of God. Leadership of that church must then be handed over to the local men.

## **7.2 Survey within local congregations and general public**

### **7.2.1 The target groups**

A survey was conducted to determine the influence of feminist thinking on modern day Christians and on the general public, and to determine to what extent *Scripture is understood and interpreted correctly with regard to the woman's role in the church*. Permission was granted from three of the four of the pastors interviewed in 7.1 above, to conduct a survey amongst their church members. Sadly, the New Covenant Fellowship (NCF) declined to allow their members to participate. Their inclusion in this survey, I believe, would have added an extra dimension to the results. One local church from each of the remaining three denominations was chosen to participate. All of these local congregations are in Pietermaritzburg, KwaZulu-Natal. They are:

- St Alpheges - Church of the Province in South Africa (CPSA)
- Holy Trinity Church - Church of England in South Africa (CESA)
- Pietermaritzburg North Baptist - Baptist Union

Forty members from each of the three denominations were chosen to form the following four categories:

- 10 men in leadership (Category A)
- 10 women in leadership (Category B)
- 10 laymen (Category C)
- 10 laywomen (Category D)

In addition, there were two extra categories, respondents being randomly approached in a shopping centre setting, namely:

- 10 men (general public) (Category E)
- 10 women (general public) (Category F)

The survey therefore covered the opinions of a total of 140 respondents, 87% representing the churches and the remaining 13% representing the general public.

### 7.2.2 The questionnaire

A questionnaire consisting of 10 questions was compiled (see **Appendix E**). Some of these questions were based on and/or adapted from those found in Piper and Grudem (1991: 60-92). The aim and purpose of these questions was to ascertain the influence of feminist thinking on the attitudes and understanding of the respondents with regard to:

- women in general
- the role of the women (female) in relation to her husband (male)
- the role of the woman in the church
- the acceptability/unacceptability of women in leadership and in positions of authority, especially preaching.
- their biblical knowledge (or lack of it) relating to the role of the woman in these different areas.

Respondents were asked to make one of three choices, namely, “Yes”, “No” or “Unsure”, indicating their choice with a cross. The responses to the 10 questions by the various categories of respondents are recorded in **Tables 7.2 to 7.11** below. These responses are analysed individually in consecutive sequence (Q1-10) and comments made with each analysis. The overall results gleaned from this original data are summarised in **Table 7.12** and will be interpreted in **7.3** below.

### 7.2.3 Analysis of the responses

It was interesting to note that 100% of both categories A (men in leadership) and D (laywomen) were very clear regarding men and women being absolutely equal before God (**Q1** - see **Table 7.2** below). However, a total of 6% from category B (women in leadership) and 7% from category C (laymen) either disagreed or were not sure. Worth noting is that 100% and 80% from categories E and F respectively (men and women from the general public) agreed that women were equal to men before God.

On average, only 67% from category A felt that God has put man in authority over the women (**Q2** - see **Table 7.3** below). Within this group, CESA leaders seemed convinced that this was biblically correct (90%), Baptist leaders were not as sure (70%) and only 40% of CPSA leaders were sure.

Only 57% of women in leadership (category B) were clear on this issue and 53% from category C (laymen). However, 60% from category F (general women) and 70% from category D (laywomen) and agreed to the man's authority. Within the latter group, 100% of the CESA ladies agreed unanimously. Interesting to note is that 70% of the men in category E did **not** believe the man was in authority over the woman.

Regarding the question of whether the woman ought to submit to male leadership (Q3), once again there was a lack of absolute clarity, especially amongst the women in leadership (category B) (see Table 7.4 below). This was surprising and concerning, because only 50% felt it necessary for women to submit. The majority of respondents from Categories E and F also felt that women ought not to submit to men (20% in each). In category A, 67% believed in female submission, although 100% of the CESA respondents within that group agreed and 50% of the CPSA men disagreeing. Laymen (category C) and laywomen (category D) appeared to have mixed feelings on the issue (63%), with a tendency to support female submission.

**Table 7.2** Are men and women equal before God? (Q1)

DENOMINATION	CATEGORY	Yes	No	Unsure
CPSA	A	10	0	0
CESA		10	0	0
Baptist		10	0	0
CPSA	B	10	0	0
CESA		9	0	1
Baptist		9	1	0
CPSA	C	8	0	2
CESA		10	0	0
Baptist		10	0	0
CPSA	D	10	0	0
CESA		10	0	0
Baptist		10	0	0
Men (public)	E	10	0	0
Women (public)	F	8	2	0

**Table 7.3** Did God put man in authority over the woman? (Q2)

DENOMINATION	CATEGORY	Yes	No	Unsure
CPSA CESA Baptist	A	4 9 7	5 0 3	1 1 0
CPSA CESA Baptist	B	4 7 6	5 2 3	1 1 1
CPSA CESA Baptist	C	1 7 8	7 2 2	2 1 0
CPSA CESA Baptist	D	4 10 7	6 0 3	0 0 0
Men (public)	E	3	7	0
Women (public)	F	8	2	0

**Table 7.4** Must the women submit to male leadership? (Q3)

DENOMINATION	CATEGORY	Yes	No	Unsure
CPSA CESA Baptist	A	4 9 7	5 0 3	1 1 0
CPSA CESA Baptist	B	3 5 7	4 1 1	3 4 2
CPSA CESA Baptist	C	3 8 8	7 0 1	0 2 1
CPSA CESA Baptist	D	4 10 5	5 0 3	1 0 2
Men (public)	E	2	4	4
Women (public)	F	2	7	1

In response to the question whether the Bible is clear regarding the roles within the husband/wife relationship (Q4), the majority of men and women from categories A to D answered in the affirmative (A - 87%; B - 70%; C - 90%; D - 97%). Only in the category B was there a strong negative response from the CPSA women (60%). What was astounding, once again, was a 100% and 70% "Yes" response from the men and women of categories E and F respectively (see Table 7.5 below).

Categories A to D generally appeared to find it acceptable for a woman to preach in a public/mixed meeting (A - 57%; B - 63%; C - 74%; 60% - D) (Q5). However, *within* these four categories, the CPSA (male leaders and laymen) and Baptist laymen were very strongly in favour of female preachers (100% and 90 % respectively).

**Table 7.5** Is the Bible clear regarding the husband/wife relationship? (Q4)

DENOMINATION	CATEGORY	Yes	No	Unsure
CPSA	A	8	0	2
CESA		9	0	1
Baptist		9	0	1
CPSA	B	3	6	1
CESA		10	0	0
Baptist		8	1	1
CPSA	C	8	1	1
CESA		10	0	0
Baptist		9	0	1
CPSA	D	10	0	0
CESA		10	0	0
Baptist		9	0	1
Men (public)	E	10	0	0
Women (public)	F	7	0	3



Apart from the clear negative response by the CESA men in category A (70%), in all other categories there was a mixed response. Only 10% of categories E were not in favour, while 3% of category F were unsure (see **Table 7.6** below).

**Table 7.6** In your culture is it acceptable for a woman to preach? (Q5)

DENOMINATION	CATEGORY	Yes	No	Unsure
CPSA CESA Baptist	A	10 2 5	0 7 4	0 1 1
CPSA CESA Baptist	B	7 7 5	3 2 5	0 1 0
CPSA CESA Baptist	C	10 3 9	0 3 1	0 4 0
CPSA CESA Baptist	D	9 3 6	0 6 1	1 1 3
Men (public)	E	9	1	0
Women (public)	F	7	0	3

It appears that 100% of all CPSA respondents in categories A to D have sat under women preachers at one time or another (Q6 - see **Table 7.7** below). However, due to the responses of respondents from other denominations and groups, the average in all these categories was reduced to 73% - category A; 70% - category B; 83% - category C; 67% - category D; 50% - category E; and 70% - category F. Only 27% of the total number of respondents (140) had never sat under a woman preacher before.

In general, men in leadership (category A - 50%) and laymen (category C - 47%) appear not to be too supportive of women preaching (Q7 - see **Table 7.8** below).

However, within these categories and including categories B and D, there was overwhelming support (100%) from the CPSA respondents alone.

**Table 7.7** Have you ever sat under a woman preacher? (Q6)

DENOMINATION	CATEGORY	Yes	No	Unsure
CPSA	A	10	0	0
CESA		5	5	0
Baptist		7	3	0
CPSA	B	10	0	0
CESA		7	3	0
Baptist		4	5	1
CPSA	C	10	0	0
CESA		8	2	0
Baptist		7	3	0
CPSA	D	10	0	0
CESA		4	5	1
Baptist		6	4	0
Men (public)	E	5	5	0
Women (public)	F	7	3	0

Contrary to this, the CESA leaders and laymen in A and C (80%) were adamant that the woman should not preach. Women within the CESA and Baptist denominations appear to have mixed feelings on this issue (50% - category B; 40% and 60% respectively - category D). 70% and 80% of men and women from categories E and F were in favour of women preaching.

When asked whether a specially-gifted woman ought to be allowed to preach (Q8), the results were similar to Q7. According to the general results in the tables, 81% and 70% of the women in categories B and D agree, while only 67% and 74% of the men in categories A and C agree. However, the CPSA and Baptist groups in categories A to D were once again overwhelmingly supportive (100% and 70% respectively), as well as the CESA women in leadership (category B - 80%). Contrary to the response of male leadership of CESA to the question in

**Q7**, there appeared to be some hesitation among them on this question (category A - 3% agreed). Once again there was also very strong support in favour of women exercising their gift of preaching by categories E and F (80% and 90% respectively) (see **Table 7.9** below).

**Table 7.8** Do you agree with women preaching to a mixed congregation? (**Q7**)

DENOMINATION	CATEGORY	Yes	No	Unsure
CPSA	A	10	0	0
CESA		1	8	1
Baptist		4	5	1
CPSA	B	10	0	0
CESA		5	3	2
Baptist		5	4	1
CPSA	C	9	1	0
CESA		0	8	2
Baptist		5	3	2
CPSA	D	9	0	1
CESA		4	6	0
Baptist		6	3	1
Men (public)	E	7	2	1
Women (public)	F	8	2	0

Responding to **Q9** (see **Table 7.10** above), it appears that respondents in most categories were not as enthusiastic about the opportunities open for women to use their gifts within the church. In category C only 67% agreed, and the results of the other groups were also rather negative (57% - category A; 53% - category B; 47% in category D). Only 30% and 50% respectively were in agreement in categories E and F.

When asked whether men in general enjoyed being in a position of authority over women (**Q10** - see **Table 7.11** below), on average 61% from category A agreed. It is interesting to note that 70% CESA men and 60% Baptist leaders agreed, while 50% from the CPSA group either disagreed or were not sure.

**Table 7.9** Should specially-gifted women be allowed to preach? (Q8)

DENOMINATION	CATEGORY	Yes	No	Unsure
CPSA CESA Baptist	A	10 3 7	0 6 3	0 1 0
CPSA CESA Baptist	B	9 8 7	0 1 1	1 1 2
CPSA CESA Baptist	C	10 5 7	0 3 1	0 2 2
CPSA CESA Baptist	D	10 4 7	0 4 2	0 2 1
Men (public)	E	8	0	2
Women (public)	F	9	1	0

**Table 7.10** Does the church offer enough opportunities for women? (Q9)

DENOMINATION	CATEGORY	Yes	No	Unsure
CPSA CESA Baptist	A	3 7 7	2 3 3	5 0 0
CPSA CESA Baptist	B	5 3 8	3 6 2	2 1 0
CPSA CESA Baptist	C	7 6 7	3 4 3	0 0 0
CPSA CESA Baptist	D	3 6 5	4 4 4	3 0 1
Men (public)	E	3	5	2
Women (public)	F	5	3	2

However, 74% of ladies in leadership and laymen (categories B and C) appeared to identify this attitude among men. CESA women in category D (50%) did not agree or were not sure of how they felt. Once again, when compared with categories E and F, the difference was astounding. 90% of the men and 60% of the women agreed that this statement was true.

**Table 7.11** Do men enjoy being in authority over women? (Q10)

DENOMINATION	CATEGORY	Yes	No	Unsure
CPSA CESA Baptist	A	5 7 6	4 3 3	1 0 1
CPSA CESA Baptist	B	7 6 9	0 3 0	3 1 1
CPSA CESA Baptist	C	7 8 7	3 2 1	0 0 2
CPSA CESA Baptist	D	6 5 9	2 3 1	2 2 0
Men (public)	E	9	0	1
Women (public)	F	6	0	4

### 7.3 Interpretation of research findings

As was noted on page 2 of Chapter 1, over the past forty years the world has become almost "obsessed" with equal opportunities for men and women. There has been an increased acceptance of this view within the church in general, and in recent years it has penetrated the evangelical and fundamental church, resulting in pressure for the ordination of women. Some denominations freely allow and even encourage women to preach and to teach men, while some still hold to the "traditional" view, believing in the biblical hierarchy of authority (I

**Corinthians 11:3**) which God has set in place from the beginning (**Genesis 1 and 2**), which is revealed clearly in Scripture and which, they believe, ought to be reflected in and through His true church. The interviews and survey which were conducted, reflect the influence that feminism has had on the church and its leaders, even within the four denominations canvassed in Pietermaritzburg.

### 7.3.1 Interviews with pastors

On average the pastors interviewed have been in the ministry for about 16 years, with the two longest-serving pastors serving the Lord in full-time ministry for 25 and 41 years respectively. These two pastors must have seen significant changes in the churches over these years, especially Pastor 1 of the Baptist church, whose denomination now, after much controversy, has agreed to the ordination of women. At the other end of the scale is a female pastor (Pastor 2 of the CPSA) who has been in the ministry only 3 years, but in full-time service for a total of 6 years. I think it is significant to compare the years which these pastors have spent in full-time study, the point being that the more time spent in studying God's Word, the more clarity there is on the whole issue of the role of women in the church. As mentioned in 7.1.2, what is disconcerting is that two of the pastors of one of the largest churches in Pietermaritzburg, have only spent one year each in full-time study of God's Word.

It is interesting to note that Question 8 (**Q8**) and Question 9 (**Q9**) were the only questions on which all interviewees unanimously agreed. However, their reasons given were different. The CPSA pastors (25%) felt that the equality of men and women before God (**Q8**) is linked to **Galatians 3:28** in **Q11**, indicating no discrimination in male and female roles based on gender. The other three denominations (75%), however, stressed that this equality is a spiritual equality as a result of salvation through Christ alone (see **Q11**).

Although they all agreed that Christians in general were unclear and confused about the roles to be played by the two sexes (Q9), some felt the reason was because their "traditional" and cultural backgrounds were being challenged by feminist demands. They felt that secular (feminist) thinking was having a great impact on the attitudes of Christians today. However, Pastor 1 from CESA was convinced that if the people were receiving clear and solid biblical teaching on this issue, there would be no confusion at all. I submit that some pastors may themselves be confused because they have given a "new interpretation" to God's Word, as was suggested on page 4 of Chapter 1.

There was no hesitation whatsoever between the CPSA and NCF pastors (50%) when it came to acceptability of women as preachers (Q10), whereas the other 50% of respondents (Baptist and CESA) were either hesitant or adamantly against it. However, there seems to be some contradiction on the part of the Baptist group, because in both Q15 and Q17, they indicated their support of women exercising their gift of preaching. The CESA pastors remained convinced that this was unbiblical in the local church. They viewed the role of the female missionary as that of an evangelist rather than a preacher, proclaiming God's Word to the unconverted and drawing them into God's kingdom. Their responsibility would then be to teach and equip the local male converts, so that they, in turn, could take on biblical authority and leadership within their congregations.

There was, however, a distinction made between preaching and eldership by the NCF pastors. They insisted that while a woman is permitted to preach, she can only do so under the authority of male eldership in the church. This includes women going out onto the mission field (Q19). Their high and biblical view of eldership corresponded with that of the CESA pastors, which office they regard as being set aside specifically for men. Once again the Baptist pastors were inclined to agree with the CPSA, claiming that it was acceptable for a spiritual woman to even take on the office of eldership within the church. It appears, therefore, that

once biblical principles have been sacrificed in order to compromise with the pressures and standards of our feminist-influenced and saturated society, it is very difficult to take a biblical stand on any other related issues. Having allowed women into the pulpit, one wonders how long the NCF group will hold out, before they too give in to female eldership?

In view of the fact that there seemed to be a definite shift towards allowing women into leadership positions such as preaching and eldership within the church, the responses to **Q12** and **Q13** reflected a somewhat more “conservative” and biblical view. With 63% agreeing that it was the man’s calling to bear “primary responsibility” in the home and in the church, and 75% agreeing that biblically the woman ought to “submit” to male authority, it appears that despite the apparently strong feminist influence in the church today, there is still an inclination towards the biblical structure of authority. All the respondents quoted the familiar **Ephesians 5:21-33** passage to substantiate their views, although the CPSCA pastors, who were the only ones who disagreed, claimed that these verses were “out of context” and not to be taken literally.

### 7.3.2 Survey of congregation members and general public

The overwhelming majority of the respondents in categories A-D seemed very clear as to the equal standing of men and women before God (**Q1**) (97% - see the averages in **Table 7.12**). Interesting to note was that categories E and F from the general public were also convinced of this, bringing the average down only slightly (95%), indicating that it is not necessarily only people with a church background who perceive God to have created the two sexes to be equal in His sight. However, we cannot be certain whether these respondents in fact do have a church background or not; and if, in fact, one needs a “church background” to believe that men and women are equal before God.



Although some individual respondents in **Table 7.3** responded very positively in their conviction that God has put man in authority over the women (**Q2**), especially the CESA and Baptist respondents, the results in **Table 7.12** indicate that the average was brought down to 62% for the church-goers, and 45% for the general public (E and F), bringing the total average to only 56% those who believe that man has been put in authority over the woman.

The responses to **Q3** are, it appears, inextricably linked with those in **Q2**, with only 61% of the church communities agreeing to female submission. This was despite the strong positive response of the CESA and Baptist respondents in A, C and D. Due to the very adamant response of the general public (20%) that women ought *not* to submit to male leadership, the total average was brought down to 47%. This is a very clear indication of the influence of feminism, not only on the church but also on society at large.

The response to **Q4** was encouraging in that 86% of the “churched” (categories A-D) respondents felt that there was clarity in the Bible concerning the husband/wife relationship. In addition, responses from categories E and F was astonishingly positive, and together, this seems to indicate a basic knowledge of the Bible in this matter (a total average of 86%).

However, these results seem to contradict the responses in **Q2** and **Q3**, where there was a resistance to the idea of male authority and female submission. This could indicate that the respondents *know* what the Bible teaches on the issue, but that they reject it in favour of the views of the world.

Questions 5 to 8 (**Q5-8**) all are concerned in one way or another with the views of the respondents towards women preaching and teaching God’s Word to mixed audiences. If one takes the four averages of categories A-D (64%, 73%, 57% and 73%), one finds that on average 67% of all “churched” respondents were in favour

or women preaching. When the responses of the general public were added, the **total average** was raised by another 3% (to 70%)(Table 7.12 below).

**Table 7.12** Summary of responses to survey questions

QUESTION	CATEGORY							
	A	B	C	D	Average	E	F	Total average
1	100	94	93	100	97	100	80	95
2	67	57	53	70	62	30	60	56
3	67	50	63	63	61	20	20	47
4	87	70	90	97	86	100	70	86
5	57	63	74	60	64	90	70	69
6	73	70	83	67	73	50	70	69
7	50	67	47	63	57	70	80	63
8	67	81	74	70	73	80	90	77
9	57	53	67	47	56	30	50	51
10	61	74	74	67	69	90	60	71

Thus it seems that the occurrence and the acceptance of women preachers is becoming more and more widespread, indicating on the one hand, a departure from the clear biblical principles discussed in previous chapters of this dissertation, and on the other hand, indicating a clear movement towards the distinctive roles of men and women within the leadership of the church being obliterated - with the approval of the church members. I truly believe that the reason for this is the lack of clear and bold biblical teaching on the whole issue of the roles of men and women in the church.

In general, it appears there were mixed feelings regarding the opportunities offered by the church for women to exercise their gifts through various ministries

(Q9). Only 56% of categories A-D felt that women were sufficiently catered for, and when combined with the responses of the general public, this was further reduced to 51%, implying that the remaining 49% were unhappy with the way things were at present in the churches. This is rather confusing, because according to the pastors interviewed, opportunities for women to get involved were plentiful in their local congregations. From this we may perhaps deduce that the unhappiness is caused not so much by a lack of opportunity or ministries for women, but rather by the fact that preaching opportunities are prohibited for women in these congregations.

Question 10 (Q10) was aimed at identifying any evidence of male chauvinism within the church as well as the general public (Table 7.11). However, although it was expected that most respondents would agree that men do enjoy authority over women, it appears that this is so in an average of 69% of the cases within the church (categories A-D). On the other hand, males from the general public were almost in total agreement (90%), and together with the response of category F (60%), the **total average** was increased to 71%.

The ultimate question to be asked, I believe, is what is our final authority? If we say we believe the Bible, but refuse to accept that **every word and every principle** written in it was written to teach **all** of God's children through **all** ages, then I believe we stand on very shaky ground. When we, as Christians, forsake God's Word and rather base our behaviour on the tradition, culture or philosophy of the day, or our own "natural" [and sinful] inclinations, we are destined to come under God's judgement (see **Romans 1:18-32**). And I believe this is what we are witnessing today, as more and more of God's people are accepting women into leadership positions over men - the biblical role and authority structures are being reversed, with disastrous consequences, as will be mentioned in Chapter 8.

## **8. CONCLUSIONS AND PRACTICAL RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **8.1 The problem**

We saw at the outset of this dissertation that men over the centuries, including some of the church Fathers, held very low views of women. The women's position in society was seen to be unequal to that of men, being politically, socially and economically to the detriment of women. As a result, the Woman's Liberation Movement has touched every facet of western culture, resulting in the world becoming almost obsessed with equal opportunities for men and women. Such thinking has penetrated the evangelical and fundamental church and an increasing number of evangelical feminists now feel it may be the will of God for women to take a full share in the ordained ministry of His Church, serving as elders, bishops, pastors or teachers. Christian feminism has become a major movement in all the churches at the present time, rejecting the subordination of women to men but rather promoting a "mutual submission and therefore equal opportunity for men and women to serve in the home, church and society" (Borland 1991: 113). The ongoing heated debate over this issue has caused much division amongst the Lord's people. MacArthur (1984: 78) is one of many who feel that the debate has unfortunately left the pages of Scripture to find its resolution:

The traditional doctrines are being swept away by the flood tides of evangelical feminism. Churches, schools, and seminaries are rapidly abandoning truth they have held since their inceptions. Many books are being written defending the new "truth" regarding the role of women. Ironically, some of the authors of those books formerly held to the traditional, biblical view . . . The biblical passages on women's roles are being culturally re-interpreted, ignored because of the alleged anti-female bias of the biblical authors, or dismissed as the additions of later redactors.

We ought not to be surprised at this. God's Word warns that this will happen. It is interesting to note what Peter says in **2 Peter 3:16-17**,

**There are of course things in Paul's letters which are difficult to understand and which, unhappily, ill-informed and unbalanced people distort as they do the other Scriptures, and bring disaster upon their heads.**

With Paul, Peter also clearly warned believers against heresies and false teachings that were coming in **1 Timothy 4:1**, **Acts 20:29-30** and **2 Peter 2:1**. The ordination of women may not specifically be mentioned as a heresy, but I believe that any deviation from the clear teaching of the Word of God, may ultimately lead in that direction.

Although it has always been a temptation to water down the gospel to make it more palatable to pagans, and to allow the spirit of the age to influence the teachings of the church, the Church Fathers over the centuries have consistently rejected heresies which have distorted the truth regarding the ordination of women. They have always drawn the strength of their arguments and the unanimity of their convictions from the Scriptures (Harper 1994:100).

It is this author's deep inner conviction and premise that our final authority is God's holy and precious Word. As evangelical Christians, we believe that the current feminist teaching which allows women to preach and teach in public and to exercise authority over men within the church, is totally unbiblical and undermines the authority of Scripture. We need to stand up for truth and resist the infiltration of error before it is too late. We need to be obedient to God's Word and not submit to the spirit of our age. Pastors need to not only mentally accept the inspiration and authority of Scripture, but through prayerful, faithful and labourious exegesis they need to expound the truth without compromise. We must correctly

handle the Word of Truth (**2 Timothy 2:15**), remembering that we will stand before the judgement seat of Christ (**2 Corinthians 5:9-10**). We need reliable men to teach the truth (**2 Timothy 2:2**) and in order that the next generation may possess it.

## **8.2 A brief summary of biblical teaching**

In this dissertation, the author has attempted to give a broad overview of the biblical role of the woman from creation through to New Testament teachings on the subject. Beginning with **Genesis 1** and **2** it was noted that male and female were both created in the image of God. They were created equally human, equally sinners, equal in value, potential and destiny. Yet they were given different roles and responsibilities to fulfil in relation to each other, the man being the initiator and leader, and the woman the helper, encourager and supporter. This authority structure was set in place by the Lord from the beginning *before* sin warped the relationships between men and women and *before* their relationships were influenced by cultural norms. These two chapters portray the very foundation of biblical manhood and womanhood, and were also used by both the Lord Jesus and the apostle Paul in the New Testament to substantiate their arguments concerning the God-ordained roles of men and women.

These roles were however corrupted by the Fall in **Genesis 3**, resulting in the tense relationship between men and women. Eve usurped Adam's headship and led the way into sin. Adam forsook his primary responsibility to lead their partnership in a God-glorifying direction. This was the first account of sex role reversal. Both were wrong, and both had to suffer the consequences, which included disharmony, opposition, alienation, manipulation and a desire to dominate one another. Instead of the perfect complementarity enjoyed by Adam and Eve, God's judgement resulted in subversion in the place of female submission, and dictatorship in the place of male direction. Marriott (2000: 3)

says, "Feminism and chauvinism are both human philosophies expressing frustration with the male tendency to dominate and the female tendency to reject male leadership".

God sought to restore His creation order by choosing the Israelites to be a community of men and women who would live by His divine Laws. In reviewing the position of women during the periods of the patriarchs, the prophets, the kings and the priests, it was noted that many laws gave them a status found among few other people. The Old Testament makes no suggestion that they were inferior, although often in practice women were treated as such. They were regarded as full members of the Covenant, they were persons in their own right and had great freedom of movement (**Proverbs 10-31**). However, in the home and in religious matters they remained under the authority of their husbands (**Numbers 30**). It was the *priests* who were given the privilege and the responsibility of teaching the people. Normal leadership was male, and to be "ruled by women" was regarded as a symptom of moral and spiritual decadence (**Isaiah 3:12**).

Jesus was born during the transitional cultural situation of the New Testament Roman era, where social structures were increasingly chaotic and where at the same time the rabbinic tradition within Judaism had become increasingly conservative. Although women were allowed to attend worship, to pray and to hear the reading and exposition of the Scriptures, they were not expected to learn or to gain deep understanding. They were shut off from almost all other aspects of religious life and relegated to a position of inferiority. In contrast, Jesus modelled a high view of women and the Scriptures affirm their precious value in God's kingdom. Church tradition, not the Bible, had been responsible for much unfair treatment of women, and Jesus rebuked those who "**set aside the commands of God in order to observe your [their] own traditions**" (**Mark 7:9**).

Jesus' teachings were distinctively new and different from the Judaism of His day. He came to fulfil, not by-pass, the Law and to place His stamp of authority on the norms established in Old Testament times. One way in which He did this, was by assigning only men to serve as His apostles with their primary tasks of preaching, teaching and governing. He taught them, with a view to their teaching others. They were to be the model for all future headship in the Church. Immediately after His ascension and the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, the apostles began to pass on what their Master had taught them. Women, however, served in other important capacities such as praying, providing financial assistance, ministering to physical needs, voicing their theological understanding and witnessing to the resurrection. What is significant is that women ***never preached or taught in public.***

The apostolic communities of the early church continued the practice of their Lord by the inclusion of women. Women were taught as honoured recipients of the gospel, received as honoured members of the Church, and accepted as honoured workers in the life of the church. Although they were largely excluded from patriarchal leadership structures, they were highly visible and active in the life of the church (Hurley 1981: 116). God did not use men alone to accomplish His purposes. Schreiner (in Piper & Grudem 1991: 215) says that the ministry of women is complementary and supportive, a ministry that fosters and preserves male leadership in the church.

Paul's attitude toward women was also markedly different from that of others trained in rabbinic traditions. He recognised the intrinsic worth of women as equal to that of man. Women are portrayed as being of considerable value to Paul in his ministry, supporting him and labouring with him, often becoming the chief support of the churches which he founded. He commended many women for their Christian service and in his epistles, he directed his teachings and admonitions to both men and women.



In Paul's view, men and women have a common humanity and oneness in Christ by grace, through salvation. Ethnic identity, legal status or sexuality were secondary distinctions (**Galatians 3:28**). The gender differences instituted at the beginning of creation, however, remain a feature of the redeemed community. Just as Christ is appointed to be head (*kephale*) over everything, and His headship is responded to by subjection (*hypotasso*), so the wife is to relate to her husband in perfectly natural humble acknowledgement of his authority over her (**Ephesians 5:21-33**). She is the "weaker partner", and the husband is therefore not to use his stronger position of authority as an excuse to treat her with contempt or abuse her (**1 Peter 3:1-7**).

This definite hierarchy of authority is also set out clearly in **1 Corinthians 11:3-16**, with God as the ultimate Authority, as the Head of Christ. Christ is the head of man, and man is the head of woman. Women were not prohibited from any part of the public worship service. Both men and women could pray and prophesy, sharing what they believed God had brought to mind for the good of the church. However, in order for them to retain their femininity, it was required of them to indicate their humility and submission to male authority by wearing head coverings or veils. Failure to do so was a signal that they were rejecting this authority, dissolving the distinction between men and women.

**1 Corinthians 14:33-40** stresses that women are also to "remain silent" when it comes to the proclamation of the Word, leading in prayer, discipline, or any other acts of headship or leadership. This is true not because women are in any sense inferior to men, but because it is "as the Law says" (v.34). The Law does not change with passing customs and cultures. There was to be a voluntary submission to the principles of authority (see also **1 Timothy 2:8-15**). The testing of the Word and the regular teaching ministry was the responsibility of the elders and teachers. They were to "teach what is in accord with sound doctrine" (**Titus 2:1**). Paul says about bishops that they must be "able to teach" (**1 Timothy**

3:2) and in **2 Timothy 2:2** Paul urges Timothy to pass on his teaching to “**reliable men, who will also be qualified to teach others**”. It was regarded as a violation of the divine order for a women to engage in these or any other activities involving leadership in the assembly.

It is interesting that Paul immediately followed the instructions in **1 Corinthians 14** by claiming that he was an inspired, Christ-appointed apostle with a Christ-given authority to teach the church (**vv.36-38**). He is claiming to be the authoritative communicator of the very Word of God to the Corinthians. I hold to verbal inspiration of the Bible, and therefore believe that to deny apostolic authority to Paul is to question the trustworthiness of about one quarter of the New Testament. His teaching as an apostle is part of the very foundation of the church (**Ephesians 2:20**). Jesus warns, “**He who has My commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves Me . . . If anyone loves Me, he will keep My Word ... He who does not love Me does not keep My Words (John 14:21-24)**”. I believe our ultimate reaction to God’s Word is an index of the state of our soul and our eternal destiny. It is no good claiming to love Christ when we only choose to follow certain of His teachings. Only love for the Christ of the Bible has the promise of eternal life.

### **8.3 Application for the church today**

Before I seek to discuss and apply the biblical principles which have been investigated above, I believe it is appropriate to remind ourselves as Christians of three important and sobering biblical truths. First, **Ephesians 2:8-9** reminds us that the church is a community entered through **grace**. We do not deserve to be Christians and part of the body of Christ, namely, the true church. We have also not earned our membership, and this therefore means that we do not clamour for rights and privileges. We do not push ourselves forward for what we imagine to be “promotion”. We are to accept with humble gratitude whatever role our Saviour assigns to us. Second, the church is a community **ruled by Christ**. He is our

Head (**Colossians 1:18**) and He rules His church by means of the written Word. The standard for all things must be the Holy Scriptures. Third, the church is a community ***designed for service*** (**Mark 10:45**). We therefore ought to be more concerned with what we give than what we get, with service rather than status. Any Christian who seeks his own interests or fulfilment, is denying our Crucified Lord. Christians are called to penetrate every area of human life, with all its complexity and variety, to share the good news of salvation with the lost and to bring glory to God. To this end, all the abilities and dedication of all the gifts of ***every*** Christian are required. And in that awesome task, the woman is not an auxiliary, not a second-rate helper, but a full and equal partner, needed, appreciated and honoured. Vanauken (in Harper 1994: 94) said that "men and women are . . . like a nut and a bolt that are of absolutely equal importance in holding something together, but are different and complementary".

With these above three truths in mind, we need to be reminded that God's design for the leadership of the church, and especially with regard to the role of women in the church, is based on the biblical principles which He sets out for men and women in the marriage relationship and how men and women relate to each other. From the study of the relevant Scriptures in previous chapters, it is clear that while God confers upon husbands and wives equal worth as His image-bearers He does not grant husbands and wives unqualified equal rights. In the home when a husband leads like Christ and a wife responds like the bride of Christ, there is a harmony and mutuality that is more beautiful and more satisfying than any pattern of marriage created by man. In fact, Piper (1991: 52) says that "biblical headship for the husband is the divine calling to take primary responsibility for Christlike, servant-leadership, protection and provision in the home. Biblical submission for the wife is the divine calling to honour and affirm her husband's leadership and help carry it through according to her gifts". This is the way of joy.

Mature masculinity expresses itself not in the demand to be served, but in the strength to serve and to sacrifice for the good of the woman (**Ephesians 5:23, 25**). Jesus said, "**The greatest among you should be like the youngest, and the one who rules like the one who serves**" (**Luke 22:26**). A man in leadership is not oblivious to the ideas and desires of others. He may be surrounded by much brighter people than himself, therefore he will listen and respond by often adopting their ideas. The aim of a good leader is not to demonstrate his superiority, but to bring out all the strengths of people, moving them forward to a desired goal. He need not initiate every action, but ought to provide a general pattern of initiative.

God loves His people and He longs for us to glorify Him in this way. Therefore, when we follow His idea of marriage, as seen in **Genesis 2:18-24; Proverbs 5:15-19; 31:10-31; Mark 10:2-12; Ephesians 5:21-33; Colossians 3:18-19** and **I Peter 3:1-7**, we are most satisfied and He is most glorified. Under God, a wife may not compete for this primary responsibility of leadership. It is her husband's responsibility, just because he is the husband, by the wise decree of God. Stagg (1978: 166) states categorically that male headship was created by God. It was affirmed by the early Church and by many centuries of Christian experience. Piper (1991: 33) says that "biblical manhood and womanhood is a deeply satisfying gift of grace from a loving God who has the best interests of His creatures at heart. If men and women conform to God's design for them, their relationship will be fulfilling in the deepest sense of the word. The natural outcome of godly male headship is female fulfilment, not a denial of female rights".

With the above in mind, we are reminded that those whom God appoints from amongst His people are responsible to pass on the teaching of the Scriptures from generation to generation. They are required to be faithful, neither adding nor subtracting from what God has revealed in His Word (**Deuteronomy 4:1, 2, 9**). For this to occur, the same principles of headship and submission in marriage are

applied in the order and structure within the church. Life in the early church was not highly organised, and formal ordination as we have it today probably did not exist, but authorities did exist and were recognised by the members. Persons were set aside for special leadership tasks, often by the laying on of hands, conferring on them the authority to take and to teach the Scriptures (**Acts 13:1-3**). Authority implies the right, power and responsibility to direct others; however, authority does *not* authenticate one's person. Feminists in the church need to remember that one's personal worth and significance are not measured by one's personal role or position, but rather by one's personal conformity to Christ (**Romans 8:29-30; 2 Corinthians 3:18**) (Ortlund, in Piper & Grudem 1991: 112). Our goal as believers is to hunger and thirst for true fulfilment in righteousness, rather than allowing it to degenerate into competition for power. Authority is a responsibility to be borne for the benefit of others without regard for oneself. It is a tremendous challenge for us to separate biblical principles from our cultural applications of those principles. Each generation needs to ask, "What does the Bible say?", and then, "How does this apply to my culture today?"

In both the Old and New Testaments it is clear that God ordained that such positions of authority and teaching within the church are to be held by men. Paul categorically reinforces this by saying, "**I do not permit a woman to teach**" (**1 Timothy 2:12**). For Paul the problem was not where women teach, who they teach or even what they teach, but rather the *position* they hold when they teach. They may not hold a position of authority in the Church so far as teaching is concerned. Women are *not* to be presbyters or bishops, who are the guardians of the truth, those who are entrusted with the responsibility of passing on the apostolic deposit, of maintaining the truth in the Church and of correcting error (Harper 1994: 69). God calls spiritual men to take *primary responsibility for such leadership and teaching*. Although Calvin (Weinrich 1991: 278) recognised that some women in the Old Testament were supernaturally called by the Spirit to govern the people, "extraordinary acts done by God do not overturn

the ordinary rules of government, by which He intended that we should be bound". He regarded the office of teaching as:

... a superiority in the Church ... [and therefore] ... it is inconsistent that a woman, who is under subjection, should preside over the entire body ... If the woman is under subjection, she is, consequently, prohibited from authority to teach in public.

Through the men whom God raises up, He equips and mobilises the *rest* of His people, and the church is called to honour and affirm the leadership and teaching of these appointed elders. We are to be willing to be equipped by them for the hundreds of various ministries available to both men and women in the service of Christ. However, the authoritative preaching and teaching ministry is not only closed to women, but also to *most* men, whom God has *not* called or gifted for this work.

What then, about the many women who do have the gift of preaching and teaching? These gifts are, after all, included by Paul amongst the charismatic gifts in **Romans 12:3-8** ("**prophesying ... serving ... teaching ... encouraging ... contributing ... leadership ... showing mercy**"). These are gifts given "**according to the grace given us**", and it is the responsibility of each recipient to exercise his or her gift within the church. Harper (1994: 53) draws our attention to the fact that there is an important distinction in the New Testament between the *charisms* of the Holy Spirit, which are given to all Christians as our birthright at Pentecost, and the *charisms* of office such as elders or bishops, which are given only to certain individuals. This distinction between a charismatic ministry like prophecy and an "office" like a king, a priest, a Levite or an elder, is carried over from the Old Testament where Scripture is clear that the ministries which bestow authority, in the teaching and overseeing office, were *only* given to men in the Church, from Jesus Christ onwards.

Only God appoints the spiritual gifts to people. It would be dangerous to confer an "authority" on the gifts, because they can often be counterfeit gifts. However, the Church has always appointed people to the office of bishop or elder, after discerning that they are called and equipped by God. The *charisms* of office are as much the work and inspiration of the Holy Spirit, as the gifts bestowed by the same Spirit. Cardinal Suenens (in Harper 1994: 54) has said, "We must never dissociate the institutional church from the charismatic church - these are but two aspects of a single reality". There is no evidence that a single woman held office as a presbyter or bishop.

This is not because males are innately superior to women. In fact, in many cases, there are women who are far superior to some men in abilities, intellect, maturity and spirituality. Their wisdom and spiritual insight is often of great value and can benefit both men and women as they share these through their special gifts and specific roles within the church. We saw that in the early church, and throughout church history, women did have a variety of positions of service, influence and even leadership and teaching within the church. However, the functions they assumed were done with modesty and order (1 **Corinthians 11:2-16; 14:40**) and they did not teach or exercise authority over men.

Is it inconsistent then, that we prohibit women from preaching in the local church and then send them out as missionaries to preach to, teach and convert the heathen? This is not inconsistent because these women are sent out as evangelists and church planters. The Bible does not forbid women to tell the gospel story and to win men, women and children to Christ. They are not, however, sent onto the mission field to become pastors or elders. Once a church has been established, the men of that community are to be trained up and taught in the Scriptures, so that they can take on these leadership roles.

God established the principle of male authority and female subordination for the purpose of order and complementation. MacArthur (1984: 254) names the example of an employee who may be more intelligent and more skilled than his boss. However, a company cannot be run without submission to proper authority, even if some of those in authority are not as capable as they ought to be. Within the church, elders and deacons are to be chosen from amongst the most spiritual men of the congregation, even though there may be other men, and even women, in the church who are more spiritual. Yet, for the very reason that they *are* spiritual, those who are *not* in positions of leadership will submit to those who are. Patterson (in Piper & Grudem 1991: 259) argues:

The church has never sought to suppress gifts God has given, but rather strives to ensure full and proper use of those gifts in a divinely given framework based upon natural order of creation and appropriateness of function within a master plan. One cannot accept the Bible as authoritative while rejecting its authority concerning home and church order. One cannot negate truths concerning the structure of the church and home, such as the image of the relationship between God and Israel and between Christ and the church, just to satisfy cultural whim or to accommodate higher plateaus of education and opportunity. One cannot lift outward manifestations, such as a man's prayer posture or a woman's head covering (**I Corinthians 11**), and use them to ridicule or belittle the ***timeless directives given to protect and edify men and women*** within the Kingdom.

The real problem today, I believe, is not so much that women are striving for equality with men, even within the church, nor that they strive to usurp the positions which God has created for male leadership only. Rather, it lies in ***the lack of spiritual leadership by men*** at home and in the church. Hardenbrook (in Piper & Grudem 1991: 378) says, "Men have abandoned their God-given role of fatherhood. They have discarded the notion of being responsible for the physical and spiritual well-being of those around them". I agree with Piper (1991: 53) who



believes the major issue is:

... the spiritual aimlessness and weakness and lethargy and loss of nerve among men ... Pride and self-pity as well as fear, laziness and confusion are luring many men into self-protecting, self-exalting cocoons of silence. And to the degree that this makes room for women to take more leadership, it is sometimes even endorsed as a virtue. But I believe that deep down the men - and the women - know better.

He feels that men have lost their moral vision for their families, their zeal for the house of the Lord, their commitment to the advancement of the kingdom, their dream for the mission of the church, and their tenacity and zeal to make it all real. Many husbands are spineless, unmotivated and apathetic, withdrawing emotionally from their wives and children and not taking the spiritual and often even the financial lead in their own homes.

Unfortunately more and more fathers are also absent from home physically due to a variety of reasons like divorce, death or military service. This results in the majority of little boys and girls now reaching maturity under the direct domination and supervision of ladies, women often having been "forced" into leadership as a result of either a weak or "absent" husband. Cole (1984: 142) calls the father's absence, both physical and emotional, "the curse of our day", having a dramatic effect on our children, especially our sons. Hardenbrook (Piper & Grudem 1991: 383) say that there is no hope for our children unless their fathers "return from the exile of self-serving behaviour and offer their souls to the mercy of the Father who created them". They need to know God as their own personal Father and to see His Fatherhood as the pattern for their own God-ordained role.

God's Word lays down clearly that men are to be the leaders in the **home, church** and **society**. The biblical role of women is a support role. But what happens

when men fail to fulfil their leadership obligation? **Isaiah 3:1-12** is a very sobering passage which answers this question:

**I will make boys their officials, mere children will govern them. People will oppress each other - man against man, neighbour against neighbour. The young will rise up against the old, the base against the honourable. A man will seize one of his brothers at his father's home, and say, 'You have a cloak, you be our leader; take charge of this heap of ruins!' But in that day he will cry out, '... do not make me the leader of the people' (v.4-7) ... Woe to them! They have brought disaster upon themselves (v.9) ... Youths oppress my people, women rule over them. O my people, your guides lead you astray; they turn you from the path (v.12)**

These verses indicate that when men fail to lead as they should, the results are disastrous. God sends His judgement when there is spiritual apostasy (**Judges 4:8-9; 1 Kings 18, 19, 21; 2 Kings 21:10-16**). Harper (1994: 198) comments:

When society forsakes God, life becomes unnatural. It is not just the moral laws which are broken, God's natural laws are also. Today the churches are as guilty of breaking these laws as the society within which it is meant to act as salt, leaven and light.

We see the "inversion of the natural, and so often its perversion". One of the results is role reversal. Women and children fill the vacuum, women becoming dominant and children becoming oppressive, "the young no longer submit to their elders, or women to men". Brown (1996: 7) feels:

... that this is why there are major problems in our homes, churches and government today. That is why the youth crime rate is going ballistic. That is why women are "wearing the pants" in the family and in the church. That's why more women are being elected to public office.

We are living in a period when there has been what Michael Novak calls "the intellectual shift in our thinking from "natural law" to natural rights" (in Harper 1994: 199). The ordaining of women is an example of this attempt to reverse the laws of nature and to ignore the principles laid down in both the Old and the New Testaments.

Sadly, this lack of male leadership has resulted in the ***confusion of sexual roles***. Those who stress the equality of men and women, are actually minimizing and depreciating the unique significance of our maleness or femaleness. We have increasingly lost our understanding of male headship. There are generations of young men and women who do not know what it means to be a man or a woman. Ortlund (in Piper & Grudem 1991: 105) says that the aggressive pursuit of feminist ideals throughout our society has resulted in an explosion of sexual exploitation, confusion and perversity. Over the years this loss of God-given identity has led to more divorce, more homosexuality, more sexual abuse, more promiscuity, more social awkwardness and more emotional distress and suicide.

He believes that male domination and feminism have "vandalized" God's creation and multiplied human misery. Satan always finds pleasure in destroying what God has created. In fact, Jepsen (in Piper & Grudem 1991: 390) is "convinced that the enemy has tried to destroy womanhood. Today he is breaking up marriages, denigrating the home, and trying to do us in, because he hates us". She feels that "Satan has diverted us" by causing us to view child-raising and homemaking as lesser occupations. He knows that insistence on equality between the sexes will weaken authority in the home - as it also will in the church. He has encouraged unilateral independence from the beginning. Women who seek positions as ministers in churches and bishops of dioceses are therefore greatly mistaken because this practice can only ultimately damage church life, family life, as well as the lives of the women themselves. Goldberg (in Harper 1994: 38) feels that if the feminist demands the right to meet men on male terms, she will lose. He adds

that "if the feminist believes that it is preferable to have her sex associated with authority and leadership rather than with the creation of life, then she is doomed to perpetual disappointment". He firmly believes that "patriarchy is universal". On page 94, Harper adds:

... women stand to lose most in this quest for equality in the pulpit and at the altar. Their gifts are wasted there. They have a far more important role to fulfil as women, whether they are married or not. They should leave the other part to the men, as the Scriptures indicate, and the Church Fathers affirmed.

There are a number of claims which feminism makes, but when subjected to scriptural scrutiny, fall short. For example, feminists claim that by freeing women from motherhood and marriage, women are now better off. However, even secular women's magazines today complain that women are often *more* stressed and disillusioned than ever before. As an ideology, it has not lived up to its promises (**Colossians 2:8**). Feminism also teaches that in order to realise her rights, a woman must put herself and her own needs first. However, this runs contrary to the Bible's teaching. We were created to serve God and one another, not ourselves (**Revelation 4:11; Mark 12:33**). The believer is to be characterised by love, and love is essentially other-person centred (**I Corinthians 13:1-7; John 15:13; Romans 5:8**). In addition, feminism sees complete independence as the ultimate value to be striven for. A woman ought to be able to "make it on her own". God's Word, however, writes about men and women needing one another (**I Corinthians 11:8-12**). Inter-dependence and complementarity are the key words in the male/female relationship.

It is fitting and sad to note at this point that in her later years Betty Friedan, the author of *The Feminine Mystique*, seemingly recanted from her original views. In her book *The Second Stage* she warns women not to be trapped by a "feminist

mystique" that could prevent them from experiencing the joys of a family (Harper 1994: 126). Ayers (1991: 330) has this to say:

The feminist viewpoint is destructive because it is grounded in a set of false pre-suppositions regarding the created order. It undermines the basic God-given hierarchical framework, and the defined roles of men and women as specified by the Scriptures. It leads to coercion, failure and censorship. It contributes directly and indirectly, to the growing uncertainty and confusion of the post-Christian world."

WE Best (1986: 8) concludes that "woman fulfils her role when she is essentially herself". He believes that when she tries to act the part of a man, it is a "sorry decline in womanhood". He feels that she cannot be true to her gender unless she fulfils God's original plan for her. Clark Pinnock (in Piper & Grudem: 256) that a case for feminism can only be made "hesitantly" and that "if it is the Bible you want, feminism is in trouble; if it is feminism you want, the Bible stands in the way".

#### 8.4 The way ahead

In conclusion, I believe that the true church ought to be teaching and upholding **God's Word** concerning this whole question. Jesus Christ Himself is our example. He came to show the right way, the way of co-operation, not competition, the way of peace, not war, between the sexes. He did not come to change the created order, which includes the headship of men and the submission of women, but rather to transform it by His love and grace, so that what God created can be redeemed and function properly. God calls us to hate evil and to bring ourselves, even our emotions, into subjection to His law. If we have the mind of Christ as we should, as believers we will not be able to keep silent and tolerate the gross violations of the divine order advocated by feminism.

Being opposed to women breaking loose from their assigned roles in the home and the church and, in particular, being opposed to the ordination of women, is bound to bring upon ourselves and the church the scorn and ridicule of the world. Yet we need to stay true to the Scriptures and to stand firm, regardless of what others are teaching and practising. If we as evangelical believers do not do this, both men and women of this generation as well as future generations will be the losers, and the truth will be hidden from the world (Harper 1994: 38) Martin Luther (in Waldron 2001:14) once said:

If I profess with the loudest voice and clearest exposition every portion of the truth of God, except precisely that little point which the world and the devil are at that moment attacking, I am not confessing Christ. Where the battle rages, there the loyalty of the soldier is proved, and to be steady on all the battle front besides, is mere flight and disgrace if he flinches at that point.

Regardless of whether there is a shortage of men on the mission field, or whether there is an unavailability and lack of strong men in pastoral work in the churches, or the fact that there are many outstanding examples of feminine leadership over the past few centuries, the real question which we need to address is not whether "it works", but whether "it is right"? The churches and people can be wrong; however the Bible, when it is correctly interpreted, **cannot** be wrong (Pawson 1988: 83). The Spirit is not likely to cancel or contradict the Scriptures which He Himself inspired! God created men to be men and women to be women. We need to understand for ourselves and be teaching the true meaning of what it means to be a man or a woman. What is the answer then, to the present imbalance? How ought the church be responding to this present controversy? I believe it is threefold:

- The churches must **strengthen the contribution of the men**. More training in leadership needs to be given. Local churches need to give top

priority to evangelising and discipling the men, as Jesus did. His investment of time and teaching in a handful of men, laid the right foundation for a church that experienced spectacular growth. Men need to be taught how to better lead their wives and families, rather than encourage women's meetings and youth clubs to compensate for a godless father. Men ought to be encouraged in "spiritual training camps" to be leaders in their families, churches, employment, communities and the nation itself. We need to pray that the Lord will raise up a mighty army of deeply spiritual men committed to the Word of God and to global mission. The vast majority of women would rejoice over the leadership of such men. Entering into a partnership which upholds and honours the biblical pattern of mature manhood and womanhood would bring much joy to most women.

- The churches must ***stop putting women in positions of leadership over men*** in a "mixed" congregation. The complex programmes of church activity today which involve leadership in various forms, need to be carefully examined. Pawson (1988: 87) feels that the guideline for women's ministries ought to be "***function*** rather than office, ***relationship*** rather than title, ***responsibility*** rather than status". The question always needs to be asked, "Does her position foster unbiblical roles?"
- ***More opportunities of ministry need to be opened up*** for women. It is often frustration over the lack of these opportunities that has led to a demand for shared leadership. Many Christian women who accept that biblical leadership is male, rightly complain that avenues of ministry have been unnecessarily inhibited by male monopoly. The charge is often justified. Churches have been male-oriented rather than male-directed, with suppressed rather than expressed womanhood. However, the work of the kingdom needs both men and women as "fellow-workers" with each other (**Romans 16:3**) and with God. Some Christian women are capable of

working very hard for the Lord. Their selfless, sacrificial and often secret service is a special delight to the Lord.

John Piper (1991: 53) feels that for men and women who have a heart to minister, to save souls, to heal broken lives, to resist evil and to meet needs, there are fields of opportunity that are simply endless. God intends for the entire church to be mobilized in ministry, male and female. Nobody is to be sitting idly at home while the world "burns". And God intends to equip and mobilize the saints through a company of spiritual men who take primary responsibility for leadership and teaching in the church. The word "primary" is very important. It implies that there are different kinds and levels of teaching and leading that will *not* be the sole responsibility of men (**Titus 2:3; Proverbs 1:8; 31:26; Acts 18:26**). Mature masculinity will seek by prayer and study and humble obedience to discover the pattern of ministry involvement for men and women that taps the gifts of every Christian and honours the God-given order of leadership by spiritual men. They will not see women as a threat to their authority and leadership.

Feminism has helped identify some terrible injustices against women and worked to alleviate these. Christians should always oppose injustice, but must do so without "buying into" the feminist worldview, because feminism cannot be integrated with biblical Christianity, nor defended biblically. I believe God's Word provides a coherent and satisfying alternative to feminism in our understanding of human sexuality, ethics, relationships and personal fulfilment.

Elisabeth Elliott (in Piper & Grudem 1991: 398), I believe sums it all up when she says:

The world looks for happiness through self-assertion. The Christian knows that joy is found in self-abandonment . . . A Christian woman's true



freedom lies on the other side of a very small gate - humble obedience - but that gate leads out into a largeness of life undreamed of by the liberators of the world, to a place where the God-given differentiation between the sexes is not obfuscated but celebrated, where our inequalities are seen as essential to the image of God, for it is in male *and* female, in male as male and female as female, not as two identical and interchangeable halves, that the image is manifested.

## **8.5 Ministry opportunities open to women**

God has endowed women with spiritual gifts and calls them to exercise these gifts for the common good. The church must recognise God's gifts and His calling, and must make appropriate spheres of service available to women. After all, He wants His gifted people to be fulfilled and not frustrated or suppressed, and He wants His church to be enriched by their service so that His kingdom might be extended. Although there are some restrictions on women when it comes to the public (and therefore authoritative) preaching and teaching ministry, no woman need ever fear and say that there is no place for her and nothing valuable for her to do within the church.

There are hundreds of ministries open to both men and women. **Appendix F** includes a list of no less than 21 categories and 83 sub-categories, with many more ministries which could be added to this list. There is more work to do than can possibly be accomplished by men alone. Billions of people, within our own and other cultures, are without Christ and need to hear the gospel, most of them women and children, many of whom are hurting in innumerable ways. Many Christian women and children within our own congregations are at different stages in their walk with the Lord and need to be built up and encouraged spiritually. Jesus told us in **John 4:35**, "**Open your eyes and look at the fields! They are ripe for harvest**". Although some broad suggestions for ministry are mentioned in the following sub-sections (8.5.1 to 8.5.8), many other ministries do exist which are too numerous to mention individually.

### 8.5.1 Women as prayer-warriors

One of the most significant and crucial ministries that women can have for the work of God on earth, is **prayer**!<sup>9</sup> Without prayer, God's kingdom work on earth will not advance. Before anything is attempted in His Name, and before any ministry can be effective and blessed by Him, I believe we as Christians need to acknowledge our own spiritual weakness and inadequacy before Him. I believe the secret is first to **seek** His will, to **find** and come to **know** His will, and then to **submit** to and to **do** His will, and this can be done

- **individually** - in our regular, daily and disciplined prayer times, bringing our needs and the needs of others, our church, our country and the world before Him; and
- **corporately** - mobilizing and encouraging other women to attend regular prayer meetings, both in smaller or larger groups. Well-coordinated prayer chains have also proven to be very effective. Special prayer days, weeks or vigils can be organised to draw people together with the common purpose of prayer.

A deepening prayer life always marks the life of a person (or church) who is growing spiritually and who is becoming increasingly dependent upon our Lord. How we need revival of prayer in the church today, a seeking after God that is intense and full of faith. I am convinced that as women we are called to move the hands of God through prayer.

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<sup>9</sup> See E Christenson with V Blake, *What happens when Women pray* (Wheaton, Illinois: Victor Books, 1975)

### 8.5.2 Women as witnesses

Christians are in the world as **witnesses** to the living God. This work of personal evangelism is committed equally to men and women. Every Christian is to serve in society as the salt of the earth and the light of the world, to restrain the spread of evil and to exert a most profound and pervasive influence for good. Women are called to listen to God as He speaks to them through His Word and then to proclaim His Word to the lost. They are called to testify to the Christ and invite others to come to Him. The Christian woman therefore has a duty to witness, in a variety of areas:

- in her **personal relationships** with family, friends, neighbours, acquaintances and colleagues
- through **para-church groups**
- in **home bible studies**
- outreach to **children** e.g. holiday clubs
- **visitation teams** into the homes of church and community members
- **counselling** at meetings or evangelistic services, as well as telephone counselling
- **sports ministry** - organising teams and games within the church and the neighbourhood
- **pastoral care assistance** - welcoming and assisting newcomers, exercising hospitality, offering food, clothing and transportation.

### 8.5.3 Women as teachers

Every Christian is called to be a **prophet, a proclaimer and teacher** of God's Word. Women, as well as men, have the duty of studying the Bible, using every available help towards a fuller and deeper grasp of its meaning. They are to love the Lord their God with all their minds and to seek to become as competent and

well-equipped as possible in the teaching of His truth. In this regard, women have the vital and specific calling and responsibility of teaching women, young people and children. This includes ministries:

- **to women** - the older and more mature women are to train younger women in the principles and practice of godly living. I believe the church is in great need of women who are theologically and biblically sound to instruct younger women in the matters of the faith. They are to disciple them, teaching them to exercise self-control, to be affectionate and obedient to their husbands, to love their children, to be self-restrained in their passions and desires, and to be modest and upright in character. Any woman who has a gift for teaching will find great fulfilment in instructing other women in this way, through bible study groups, support groups, etc.
- **to young people** - in youth groups, teen church, high schools, colleges or universities. I believe Christian women have a vital role to play in teaching them the Scriptures, counselling and guiding them on moral and ethical issues and challenging them with biblical principles. Women can run discussion groups, arrange for speakers to address groups on relevant topics, open their homes for get-togethers and recreation, organise outings and trips and give academic assistance. But above all, the greatest influence will be by providing them with a godly example.
- **to children** - Women have a strategic role to play in influencing the next generation, and therefore have a very powerful ministry with children in the home and in the church. Children are to be instructed and grounded in the things of God. Churches are crying out today for women to work with children, to help mould by example and teaching, because I believe they are particularly fitted by God in this field. Our Sunday Schools are in desperate need of godly women who by example demonstrate a close walk with the Lord. Our children need to be taught to love the Word of God, to memorise it, meditate on it and apply it. I believe that traditionally there is

sometimes is too much shallow and repetitive teaching around the common Bible stories, and too little practical application of the Scriptures. Taking the children on trips, outings and camps in addition to their regular teaching times, provides an opportunity to informally apply what they have learnt.

- **Note** - I do *not* believe it is biblical for women to teach the Word of God at seminaries and universities, training up future (adult male) ministers in the Word of God.

#### 8.5.4 Women as mothers and wives

Although unusual opportunities for Christian service are open to the single woman, God's normal pattern for the Christian woman is to serve Him:

- **as mothers** - together with her role as wife, this sphere of responsibility is presented in the Bible as the woman's chief glory. Women are the ones who pass on our culture and our values, they shape and mould the youth of the nation. The profound influence of a godly woman upon her family is immeasurable and the people of God are infinitely in her debt. It is a task demanding the utmost ability, dedication and self-sacrifice. A godly woman will create in her children a love for God's Word, a desire and determination to memorise it and apply it, and she will create opportunities to teach them the moral and ethical principles from it. By her example, she can teach them how to relate to other people and difficult situations in a godly manner, and from her they learn respect for authority, good manners, etc.
- **as wives** - her attitude to her husband (their father), as she demonstrates godly biblical submission to him and comes willingly under his authority, will have a permanent and lasting effect upon her offspring, which they will one day hopefully emulate and pass on to the next generation. Many opportunities are open for her to practically exercise hospitality as well as tolerance and compassion for others. As she seeks to build a loving home,

based on the Word and the will of God, she will be a great source of encouragement and support for her husband. The gifted Christian woman may also have opportunities to join with her husband in giving informal, private explanations of the gospel, for example in their own home, remembering that the only limitation imposed in Scripture is that she should not teach authoritatively in the public assembly of the Lord's people.

#### 8.5.5 Women as care-givers

Every community has large numbers of hurting people, lonely, broken and neglected. They present the church of Christ with both a challenge and an opportunity. The gospel is a message of loving concern for the whole person, for body as well as soul. Any church which neglects the **ministry of caring**, has amputated one of the arms of its outreach. God has gifted godly women to play a vital role in the following areas of ministry:

- to the **handicapped** - the hearing-impaired, the blind, the lame and the retarded
- to the **sick** - providing specialised nursing and physician skills, assisting with nursing duties, hospital visitation, providing meals during and after hospitalization periods, praying with them, encouraging them from God's Word. The hospice care of cancer and AIDS patients.
- to the **bereaved** - providing practical and spiritual support and encouragement
- to the **elderly** - often feeling abandoned, lonely, depressed and unmotivated
- to those in **prisons** - to both women prisoners and their families, and then in their rehabilitation back to society
- to those **socially estranged** - those that are emotionally impaired, recovering alcoholics and drug-users, escaping prostitutes, abused women

- and children, runaways and problem children and orphans
- providing **therapeutic counselling** for and praying with the troubled, the confused and the grieving - independent, church-based or institutional
- to the **poor and homeless** - providing food and shelter
- extending hospitality to the **lonely**

#### 8.5.6 Women as communicators

Opportunities for women can also use their creative gifts to **communicate** are plentiful. Examples are:

- through **writing ministries** - freelance work for Christian magazines or newspapers, curriculum development in the Sunday School, Youth work or even in schools, writing fiction and non-fiction books and articles, scholarly writing about Scripture, and editing, using journalistic skills for publications and institutional communications. Several of today's most widely read Christian books have been written by women. Women also have unique gift to encourage, and they can do this verbally or by writing notes, letters, e-mails, etc
- through **radio, television, drama and theatre** - acting, directing, writing and scheduling.
- through **music** - composing, training and teaching others to play musical instruments, performing, using a good voice, singing in the choir, playing in a band.
- through **audio-visual** ministries - composing, designing, producing and distributing such apparatus and material

#### 8.5.7 Women as social "activists"

- fighting against **abortion**

- speaking out and acting against ***pornography***
- helping with ***literacy***
- ***writing to government leaders*** to support the cause of righteousness
- demanding adequate ***housing*** and ***sanitary conditions*** for all
- fighting for ***safety*** against crime on our roads, in our schools, etc.
- fighting against the ***abuse of women and children***
- canvassing for the ***beautification*** of our parks, cities, buildings, etc
- promoting ***drug and alcohol rehabilitation***
- acting as ***peacemakers*** to bring healing to our families and our society.

#### 8.5.8 Women in missions

- ***As missionaries themselves*** - women missionaries are of great value in the kingdom of God. Women proclaiming the gospel to men in various cultures constitutes evangelisation and does not go against Scripture. However, as soon as a church is established, converted men should be taught the Word of God and trained up to assume leadership roles in the governing and teaching ministry. This may take years of teaching by women missionaries, but it ought to be her ultimate goal.
- ***As missionary wives*** - they can assist their husband in innumerable ways in setting up a mission station. Such women can exert, by word and quiet example, a remarkable impact on a godless culture, especially since so many people in that culture are women and children. How we pray that more women would give themselves to the great work of God.
- ***As missionary supporters*** - both through their prayer support, regular communication with those on the field and their financial giving.



Our world today focuses almost totally on material things and on human achievement. In the past, Satan may have made us believe that women have been relegated to positions of lesser importance - and in recent years, he may have used feminism to convince us that child-raising and home-making are lesser occupations. But I believe that one of the most important things that any woman can discover is that Jesus values her as a woman. Women are important to Him, not because of their own merits, but because of the qualities and gifts which God has given them to use on His behalf. Most women have been endowed with an intuitive sympathy and sensitivity, a gift for personal relationships and hospitality and an immense fund of practical ability. That's part of what it means to be a woman. It is important that women are allowed to bring these womanly qualities into every area of life. The whole fabric of our society needs to be touched by the qualities women possess. God is asking us as women to play our part in His plan. Something vital will be lost if women fail to respond to God's call.

Christian women now have a choice: to **"conform to the pattern of this world"** (Romans 12:2), i.e. the influence of feminist ideas, or to be **"transformed by the renewing of our minds"**, i.e. through applying the biblical principles which were instituted by God at Creation. I am convinced that God wants us to stand up against the modern trends which we have seen creeping into our churches, and to get back to biblical truth on this matter. I believe He wants to raise up godly women to reflect His character within the church and to the world around them, and this can be done by upholding the biblical principle which teaches that the woman's role should always be complementary and supportive of the male leadership in the home and in the church.

Our society urgently needs the influence and action of Christian women. It has been said that if the women of the nation lose their virtue, the nation will lose

everything. Unfortunately too many women have been intimidated by the world, which "laughs" at virtue. Our society tries very hard to separate the sacred from the secular. But the nation without underlying spiritual values cannot endure long. As Christians we are supposed to be influencing the world, rather than being influenced by it. We ought to be demonstrating humility, but also a determination to do God's will in this matter, no matter what the cost to ourselves.

## APPENDIX A

### THE STORY OF CESA

#### (Church of England in South Africa)

(excerpts from the booklet written by Rev. BD Cameron, published in 1998)

### INTRODUCTION

In South Africa we have the unusual - but by no means unique - situation of ***two separate Churches coming from the same roots but in fact today being very different in their character and emphasis***<sup>10</sup>(my emphasis), namely the Church of England in South Africa and the Church of the Province of South Africa. This booklet is aimed at very briefly tracing these differences from the Church of England in South Africa (CESA) point of view, which will involve stating the position of this Church.

The Church of England is the oldest of the English-speaking Churches in South Africa. The first service on record was held at Cape Town on 20 April 1794. Regular services commenced in 1806 in Cape Town after the British occupation of this Colony. For 27 years these continued in the Groote Kerk, an early example of practical co-operation and basic doctrinal agreement between the Dutch Reformed Church (Protestant, Reformed and Presbyterian) and the Church of England (Protestant, Reformed and Episcopal).

After the arrival of the 1820 Settlers and subsequent immigration from England, the Church of England work expanded considerably and visiting Bishops held services on a number of occasions. In 1847 Robert Gray was appointed by the Crown in England as the first Bishop of Cape Town. Shortly thereafter, in 1853, Bishops Colenso and Armstrong were appointed to Natal and Grahamstown in the Eastern Cape, respectively.

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<sup>10</sup>

All words and sentences written in bold/italics are my own emphasis.

## THE EARLY HISTORY

In 1833 in England a new movement had started within the Church of England in England. Known variously as the Tractarian or Oxford or Anglo-Catholic movement, it was an attempt to instil new spiritual life into the ailing Church of England. Both in doctrine and worship the Tractarians rejected the teachings of the Reformers and leaned instead heavily towards the Roman Catholic Church. They believed that their pre-Reformation doctrinal beliefs and practices could be reconciled with the unequivocal Reformed and Protestant doctrines which were entrenched in the 39 Articles of Religion, formulated in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, and also the order of worship of the Book of Common Prayer of 1662. All clergymen ordained into the Church of England ministry were and still are required to sign full acceptance of both these documents.

The incongruity of this position finally led a number of Tractarians to leave the Church of England and join the Church of Rome. The most famous such person was the Rev. JH Newman who had written Tract 90, which *attempted to interpret the 39 Articles in a manner agreeable to Anglo-Catholic beliefs, a process only possible by taking the words in a sense contrary to their plain meaning*. John Newman was later made a Cardinal of the Roman Church, which shows where his true beliefs lay.

The defection of Tractarian clergy to the Roman Catholic Church did not prevent the growth and increasing influence of the movement within the Church of England. As late as 1877 the then **Archbishop of Canterbury described the movement as a conspiracy against the Church**. Nevertheless it became in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the dominant party within the Church.

Bishop Gray, who was a very gifted and energetic person, was single-minded in his determination to force the Church of England in South Africa into the Tractarian mould. He wanted to free it from the "bonds and fetters of the Reformation", as he put it. He wanted to be free and yet still "in communion" with the Church of England in England. He therefore rejected the jurisdiction of the tribunals of the Church of England, namely the Courts of the Realm, referring to the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council - the highest judicial body in England - as "that masterpiece of Satan for the overthrow of the

faith". Thus he clearly demonstrated his churchmanship.

It was therefore unavoidable that there should be conflict between Bp. Gray and those who held the teachings of the Reformation and the Church of England dear. After numerous battles and decisions of the Privy Council, Bp. Gray in 1870 established the Church of the Province of South Africa (CPSA), taking as another title "the Church of England as known in these parts". Not all the existing congregations joined this new denomination and so arose an anomaly which still persists today, namely ***two Churches from the same roots but going in different theological directions.***

During the years following, there were a number of court cases between the two Churches, the most notable of which was the Privy Council ruling in 1882 that ***there was not "Identity in standard of faith and doctrine"*** and that the divergence between the two churches was not merely potential, but "present and actual" . . . ***Doctrinally CESA has not deviated from its Protestant, Reformed and Evangelical position . . .*** A question that is frequently asked is whether CESA is recognised by the Anglican Communion. Without going into a detailed discussion of this question, the simple answer is No. However, warm relations continue to be maintained with the Diocese of Sydney and also with numerous like-minded individuals within the Church of England in England. It is hoped that these can be developed in the future.

## APPENDIX B

### THE DANVERS STATEMENT<sup>11</sup>

#### The Council on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood

##### Rationale

We have been moved in our purpose by the following contemporary developments which we observe with deep concern:

1. The widespread uncertainty and confusion in our culture regarding the complementary differences between masculinity and femininity;
2. the tragic effects of this confusion in unravelling the fabric of marriage woven by God out of the beautiful and diverse strands of manhood and womanhood;
3. the increasing promotion given to feminist egalitarianism with accompanying distortions or neglect of the glad harmony portrayed in Scripture between the loving, humble leadership of redeemed husbands and the intelligent, willing support of that leadership by redeemed wives;
4. the widespread ambivalence regarding the values of motherhood, vocational homemaking, and the many ministries historically performed by women;
5. the growing claims of legitimacy for sexual relationships which have biblically and historically been considered illicit or perverse, and the increase in pornographic portrayal of human sensuality;
6. the upsurge of physical and emotional abuse in the family;
7. the emergence of roles for men and women in church leadership that do not conform to biblical teaching but backfire in the crippling of biblically faithful witness;

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<sup>11</sup> The Danvers Statement contains the rationale, goals and affirmations of the Council on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood. This Council was formed in 1987 by concerned evangelical pastors, professors and lay people. It was first made public in November 1988 in Wheaton, Illinois and then published as an advertisement in *Christianity Today*, January 1989.

8. the increasing prevalence and acceptance of hermeneutical oddities devised to reinterpret apparently plain meanings of biblical texts;
9. the consequent threat to biblical authority as the clarity of Scripture is jeopardized and the accessibility of its meaning to ordinary people is withdrawn into the restricted realm of technical ingenuity;
10. and behind all this, the apparent accommodation of some within the church to the spirit of the age at the expense of winsome, radical biblical authenticity which in the power of the Holy Spirit may reform rather than reflect our ailing culture.

## **Purposes**

Recognizing our own abiding sinfulness and fallibility, and acknowledging the genuine evangelical standing of many who do not agree with all of our convictions, nevertheless, moved by the preceding observations and by the hope that the noble biblical vision of sexual complementarity may yet win the mind and heart of Christ's church, we engage to pursue the following purposes:

1. To study and set forth the biblical view of the relationship between men and women, especially in the home and in the church.
2. To promote the publication of scholarly and popular materials representing this view.
3. To encourage the confidence of lay people to study and understand for themselves the teaching of Scripture, especially on the issue of relationships between men and women.
4. To encourage the considered and sensitive application of this biblical view in the appropriate spheres of life.
5. And thereby
  - to bring healing to persons and relationships injured by an inadequate grasp of God's will concerning manhood and womanhood,
  - to help both men and women realise their full ministry potential through a true understanding and practice of their God-given roles,
  - and to promote the spread of the gospel among all peoples by fostering a biblical wholeness in relationships that will attract a fractured world.

## **Affirmations**

Based on our understanding of biblical teachings, we affirm the following:

1. Both Adam and Eve were created in God's image, equal before God as persons and distinct in their manhood and womanhood.
2. Distinctions in masculine and feminine roles are ordained by God as part of the created order, and should find an echo in every human heart.
3. Adam's headship in marriage was established by God before the Fall, and was not the result of sin.
4. The Fall introduced distortions into the relationships between men and women.
  - In the home, the husband's loving, humble headship tends to be replaced by domination or passivity; the wife's intelligent, willing submission tends to be replaced by usurpation or servility.
  - In the church, sin inclines men toward a worldly love of power or an abdication of spiritual responsibility, and inclines women to resist limitations on their roles or to neglect the use of their gifts in appropriate ministries.
5. The Old Testament, as well as the New Testament, manifests the equally high value and dignity which God attached to the roles of both men and women. Both Old and New Testaments also affirm the principle of male headship in the family and in the covenant community.
6. Redemption in Christ aims at removing the distortions introduced by the curse.
  - In the family, husbands should forsake harsh or selfish leadership and grow in love and care for their wives; wives should forsake resistance to their husbands' authority and grow in willing, joyful submission to their husbands' leadership.
  - In the church, redemption in Christ gives men and women an equal share in the blessings of salvation; nevertheless, some governing and teaching roles within the church are restricted to men.



7. In all life Christ is the supreme authority and guide for men and women, so that no earthly submission - domestic, religious or civil - ever implies a mandate to follow a human authority into sin.
8. In both men and women a heartfelt sense of call to ministry should never be used to set aside biblical criteria for particular ministries. Rather, biblical teaching should remain the authority for testing our subjective discernment of God's will.
9. With half the world's population outside the reach of indigenous evangelism; with countless other lost people in those societies that have heard the gospel; with the stresses and miseries of sickness, malnutrition, homelessness, illiteracy, ignorance, ageing, addiction, crime, incarceration, neuroses and loneliness, no man or woman who feels a passion from God to make His grace known in word and deed, need ever live without a fulfilling ministry for the glory of Christ and the good of this fallen world.
10. We are convinced that a denial or neglect of these principles will lead to increasingly destructive consequences in our families, our churches and the culture at large.

*The "Danvers Statement" was prepared by several evangelical leaders at a Council on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood (CBMW) meeting in Danvers, Massachusetts in December 1987. It was first published in final form by the CBMW in Wheaton, Illinois in November 1988. We grant permission and encourage interested persons to use, reproduce and distribute the Danvers Statement*

## **APPENDIX C**

### **PASTORS INTERVIEWED - LISTED ACCORDING TO DENOMINATIONS**

#### **BAPTIST UNION OF SOUTH AFRICA**

- |    |                    |   |                                       |
|----|--------------------|---|---------------------------------------|
| 6. | Rev. Andy Sullivan | - | Scottsville Baptist Church            |
| 7. | Rev. Hugh Wetmore  | - | Pietermaritzburg North Baptist Church |

#### **CHURCH OF ENGLAND IN SOUTH AFRICA - CESA**

- |    |                                    |   |                     |
|----|------------------------------------|---|---------------------|
| 1. | Rt. Rev. Dr. Warwick Cole-Edwardes | - | Holy Trinity Church |
| 2. | Rev. Luis Esteves                  | - | Holy Trinity Church |

#### **CHURCH OF THE PROVINCE IN SOUTH AFRICA - CPSA**

- |    |                  |   |                    |
|----|------------------|---|--------------------|
| 1. | Rev. Lloyd Smith | - | St Alpheges Church |
| 2. | Rev. Tracy Bell  | - | St Matthews Church |

#### **NEW COVENANT MINISTRIES**

- |    |                   |   |                               |
|----|-------------------|---|-------------------------------|
| 1. | Rev. Guy Veldman  | - | New Covenant Fellowship (NCF) |
| 2. | Rev. Steve Wimble | - | New Covenant Fellowship (NCF) |

## APPENDIX D

### INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

#### C. INTRODUCTORY QUESTIONS

1. What is your age, sex, marital status and children?
2. What denomination do you represent?
3. In which institution/s did you complete your theological training?
4. How many years in total did you study?
5. How long (if applicable) have you been serving the Lord in full-time ministry?
6. How long have you been serving in this local church?
7. What is the size of your church?

#### B. SPECIFIC QUESTIONS REGARDING MEN AND WOMEN IN THE CHURCH

8. In your opinion, were men and women created to be absolutely equal before God? Give reasons for your answer.
9. Do you think Christians, in general, are unclear about the issue of male and female roles within the church? Give reasons for your answer.
10. Is it acceptable in your denomination to have women preaching in the pulpit?
11. In Galatians 3:28 Paul said this, "There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus". Does this statement take away gender as a basis for distinction of roles in the church?
12. Do you agree/disagree that the calling of the man is to bear "primary responsibility" for leadership and authority in the church and in the home? Give reasons for your answer.
13. Would you agree/disagree that, biblically, the woman ought to submit to male leadership in every instance?
14. Would you agree/disagree that only men should be the pastors and elders of the church? Why do you say this?

15. Is it unbiblical to have female leadership in the church, such as in the preaching ministry, being an elder, etc? Explain.
16. What do you think Paul meant when he said in **I Corinthians 14:34**, "**women should remain silent in the churches**"? Explain.
17. If God has given His people spiritual gifts to be used for the edification of the church (**I Corinthians 14:5**), then do you think it is right or wrong for the church to deny women the right to use the gifts of which God has given them, especially the gift of preaching/teaching (**Romans 12:6-8, I Corinthians 12:1-11**)?
18. Does your church provide opportunities for women to use their gifts? Please list the opportunities and avenues available, if they exist in your church.
19. Do you think it is consistent for some churches to forbid the eldership to women in our churches, and then to send them out as missionaries to do the things, like preaching and teaching, which are forbidden at home? Please explain.

## APPENDIX E

### SURVEY SCHEDULE

The **PURPOSE** of this questionnaire is to gain understanding of the contemporary view *within the church* and the *general public* concerning the relationship between men and women, especially regarding women in leadership positions within the church. Please would you complete the following questionnaire, and return it to me as soon as possible. Mark the box containing your answer with a cross (X).

1. Do you believe that men and women are equal before God?  
Yes    No    Unsure
2. Do you believe that God has put the man in authority over the woman?  
Yes    No    Unsure
3. Do you believe that the woman ought to submit to male leadership?  
Yes    No    Unsure
4. Do you believe that the Bible is clear about the role a woman ought to play in her relationship with her husband?  
Yes    No    Unsure
5. In your culture, is it acceptable for a woman to preach in a public (mixed) meeting?  
Yes    No    Unsure
6. Have you ever sat under a woman preacher?  
Yes    No    Unsure
7. Do you agree with women being able to preach in a mixed congregation?  
Yes    No    Unsure

8. If a woman is specially gifted by God and feels "called" by Him, do you think she should be allowed into the public preaching/teaching ministry?
- Yes No Unsure
9. Do you believe the church offers enough opportunities for women to use their God-given gifts?
- Yes No Unsure
10. Do you believe that men (in general) enjoy being in a position of authority over women?
- Yes No Unsure

## APPENDIX F

### OPPORTUNITIES FOR [WOMEN'S] MINISTRY (see Piper & Grudem 1991: 58)

Ministries to the handicapped	High school
Hearing impaired	College
Blind	
Lame	Music ministries
Retarded	Composition
	Training
Ministries to the sick	Performance
Nursing	Voice
Physician	Choir
Hospice care - cancer, AIDS, etc	Instrumentalist
Ministries to the socially estranged	Evangelistic ministries
Emotionally impaired	Personal witnessing
Recovering alcoholics	Para-church groups
Recovering drug-users	Home Bible studies
Escaping prostitutes	Outreach to children
Abused children, women	Visitation teams
Runaways, problem children	Counselling at meetings
Orphans	Telephone counselling
Prison ministries	Radio and television ministries
Women's prisons	Acting
Families of prisoners	Directing
Rehabilitation to society	Writing
	Scheduling
Ministries to youth	
Teaching	Social ministries
Sponsoring	Literacy
Open houses and recreation	Pro-life
Outings and trips	Pro-decency
Counselling	Housing
Academic assistance	Safety
	Beautification
Sports ministries	Drug rehabilitation
Neighbourhood teams	
Church teams	Pastoral care assistance
	Visitation
Therapeutic counselling	Newcomer welcoming and assistance
Independent	Hospitality
Church-based	Food and clothing and transportation
Institutional	
	Prayer ministries
Audiovisual ministries	Praying
Composition	Mobilizing for prayer events
Design	Helping with small groups of prayer
Production	Coordinating prayer chains
Distribution	Promoting prayer days and weeks and vigils
Writing ministries	Missions
Free-lance	All of the above across cultures
Curriculum development	
Fiction	
Non-fiction	
Editing	
Institutional communications	
Journalistic skills for publications	
Teaching ministries	
Sunday school: children, youth, students, women	
Grade school	

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