



First Bible Church

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Gender-Specific Roles in the Church

GLORIFYING GOD BY
HELPING PEOPLE
KNOW, LOVE, OBEY
AND EXALT
JESUS CHRIST



GENDER-SPECIFIC ROLES IN THE CHURCH

A Position Paper
First Bible Church of Decatur

Introduction

Enormous pressure is being placed on the church to conform to the world. In examining issues like the downplaying of the exclusive claims of Christ, acceptance of homosexuality, the rise of divorce, and the idolizing of psychology, the church has not recently exerted as much influence on the world as the world has on the church. Too often, the church, wanting to be liked, respected, and considered wise, strong, and up-to-date by the world, compromises the teaching of Scripture to be more popular.

This is especially true when it comes to Feminist Theology. The Feminist Theologian comes in a variety of forms. The Radical Feminists discount Paul as a sexist and thus destroy the authority of Scripture, replacing it with all manner of New Age nonsense. The more moderate Evangelical Feminists, seeking to preserve Scripture's authority, have found novel ways to re-interpret Paul. As in other issues, these interpretations are without serious precedent in church history, but have arisen recently, coinciding with various other feminist and New Age movements in Europe and North America.

At the heart, it is a theological crisis; how we understand God. God has chosen to describe himself in masculine terms (our Father), refer to himself in masculine pronouns (He,Him), and when he became flesh, he walked the earth in a masculine gender. In the words of Ben Patterson, "A mother god is a radically different god". Male headship, which requires men to represent the family to God, and represent God to the family, in the home and church, nonverbally teaches a proper theology every time the family or the family of God gathers together.

Yet we are not unaware that God's people are not in total agreement on this controversial issue. Yet we are satisfied that our position is consistent with sound exegesis and the precedent of two thousand years of church history.

Key Verse in 1 Corinthians

Now I want you to realize 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 11:4

Comments on Key Verse

"Head" refers to authority, and just as Jesus Christ voluntarily submitted to the loving leadership of the Father, so should every man voluntarily submit to the loving, servant-leadership of Jesus Christ. And likewise, a wife should voluntarily submit to the loving, servant-leadership of her husband. This is the principle of male headship, or leadership.

In creation, God revealed his ideal order for families, both biological and spiritual. God created Adam first, and then Eve as his "helper suitable for him" (Gen. 2:18). Adam was to strongly and tenderly lead his wife; to provide for and to protect her. In turn, she was the answer to his loneliness who would bear children and nurture the family. God's

intention here is supported by the fact that even though Eve sinned first, it is Adam, her head, who is held responsible (Romans 5:12).

Male headship in the home is to be mirrored and supported by male headship in the church. The church is a family; the household of God, that needs strong and wise leadership (1 Tim. 3:5,15). This is the thrust of 1 Corinthians 11: in the church, women may exercise their gifts in ministry only in such a way that honors the principle of male headship.

What Paul Does *Not* Say

Women are excluded from ministry. Actually, women are never prohibited from exercising their spiritual gifts in ministry, even the gift of teaching or shepherding. Rather, the exercise of their gifts, like men, have instructions about the proper exercise of the gift.

Women cannot pursue careers outside the home. Actually, the male headship principle is only applied in the Bible to the church and the home. Dogmatic assertions about women in the workplace are unwise.

Women are not capable or competent to teach, lead, or manage. Actually, women are equally competent in intellect and capable in management.

Women are less valuable to the church. Actually, Biblical and Church history proves that women are invaluable to the church and the fulfillment of the Great Commission.

Women can never take part in public worship. Actually, Paul encourages women to participate in public worship.

What Paul Does Say

Men and women are equal in essence. They are equally valuable and have equal access to God, their Father, through Jesus Christ (Galatians 3:28). Does becoming a Christian change your race, gender, or social status? No. Does the Bible assign specific roles based on race or social status? No. Does the Bible assign specific roles based on gender? Yes.

Men and women are different in function. They have equal value and different roles, and this distinction must be clearly maintained, even in the way they dress (1 Cor. 11:2-16). If this order is only for 1st century Corinth, why didn't Paul say so?

When spontaneous revelation is being evaluated for theological soundness in public worship where men are present, women should voluntarily refuse to participate (1 Cor. 14:34,35).

Women should not seek positions in the church which require them to teach men the Bible or to exercise authority over a man because this violates the created order (1

Timothy 2:11-15). If men and women are equal in function, why did God create them in sequence?

Women should not seek the office of overseer (also called elder or pastor) which would require them to lead, serve, protect, rebuke, confront, and discipline men (1 Timothy 3:2,5,14; Titus 1:9-11).

What Paul Says By Not Saying Anything

If Paul ever considered the possibility of a woman holding the office of elder or pastor, it seems odd to us that he not instruct the church to look for a qualified woman, or at least train women who could become qualified. We do not accept that the apostle was so fearful of culture and tradition that he refused to teach people God's truth about this matter. The best direct Biblical evidence that evangelical feminists can offer for women elders is 2 John 1 and Romans 16:1,2. But the case is unconvincing that the "chosen sister" and Phoebe are leaders in the church who exercise authority over men.