

Shall We Ordain Women?

While on vacation recently, I glanced at the Saturday church page of a large metropolitan newspaper. Among the perhaps 20 display ads for services that were the next day, I noticed three churches pastored by women. Two could be called mainline churches; the other, ~~was~~ a cult. (Others in that group undoubtedly ~~had~~ had women on their staffs.)

This is doubtless a typical sample. ~~Evangelical churches are ordaining women as pastors~~ Though women have long served on the ~~some of these~~ staffs of evangelical churches, now these same churches are ordaining or discussing ^{The question of} ordaining women as pastors.

We've come a long way. In 1958 I published ^{with} a book called The Role of Women in the Church. I can think of 4 publishers who turned the manuscript down because it was not a relevant subject before I could find one that would accept it. ^{They all are now in the same category} Today the book sells better than ever, an indication of the increasing interest among evangelical in this subject, aided and abetted no doubt by the secular women's lib movement.

It goes without saying ^{there it} (or does it?) that for the evangelical, the teaching of the Bible is authoritative on this subject as all others.

But in all fairness, the question for which we seek the biblical answer ^{proper role} should not be limited to ordaining women as pastors but includes ^{can} the of women C.E. workers, missionaries, church visitors, deaconesses, Etc.

In addition (to recognizing the Bible as our ~~basic~~ authority on this subject), we should also acknowledge that the Bible ~~has no~~ presents the ideal and does not deal with all the ^{that exist in contemporary life} exceptional situations we can think of.

The early church apparently had one meeting each week, probably at night in order to accommodate the slaves who could not be free any other time.

They did not have S.S., youth meetings, women's Bible studies, mid-week prayer meeting, summer camps and conferences, Young Life or Campus Crusade.

Therefore the biblical teaching concerns the church in its principal meeting. ^{what would be today}

Application of that teaching to other church activities and to extra-church groups is certainly ^{advisable} ^{perhaps} proper, though not always clear.

What clear principles does the N.T. give?

First, in the unity of the body of Christ, the position of men and women is equal. There are no "second class" Christians. This is the meanin of Gal. 3:28. To the Jew, the Gentile^s was second-class. To the slave owners, their slaves were second class. To men, women were second class. But in the body of Christ, all are united euqally. But this verse ~~must mean~~ obviously cannot mean that distinctions or limitations of sex are erased in the Christian community any more than it can mean that a Christian Jew is somehow no longer racially a Jew or a Christian slave ~~was~~ suddenly and miraculously freed from slavery when he accepted Christ. Peter recognized a physical difference between the sexes when later he wrote of women as weaker (1 Pet. 3:7). ~~Sexes should not be surprised if~~ ^{the concept}

Equality of position is not incompatible with differences and limitations. The mentally retarded believer has an euqal position in the body with the Christian with the highest I.Q. But their functions will be different ^{because} of God Himself has ~~made~~ given a different combination of natural, acquired, and spiritual gifts to believers and by so doing distinguishes the ministries they can have. So we shouldn't be surprised if we discover a limitation on ~~the~~ ministry because of sex. All the members of ~~the first~~ ~~string~~ of a team are equal in that they belong equally to that team, but all do not function ^{of equal} ^{in the same position} equally. Some are limited in what they do because of physical differences; others, because of intellectual; others because of lack of experience. But all belong to the team. Likewise, limitations on ministry within the body of Christ do not affect the equality of citizenship we all possess.

Second, the N.T. placds the responsibility for leadership in the ^{first echelon of leaders} local church on men, not women. The N.T. called its leaders elders and its second echelon, deacons, and both groups were composed ^{of} men only.

This is rather obvious since one of the qualifications for both ~~office~~ elder and deacon is to be the husband of one wife! (1 Tim. 3:2, 12).

Some churches today have both elders and deacons, some only deacons, some call ~~their governors~~, ^{and} stewards, some have an executive board. But whatever label is put on these men, the N.T. says they should be men. ~~This~~ Since in almost all churches the pastor is ~~the~~ executive leader and ~~usually~~ ^{the governing} member of one of these boards, then it appears that he should be a man and we should not ordain women to this office.

~~That~~ But, someone may ask? ^{that open the door for the ordination of women} are there not exceptions in the Bible?

Miriam (Exod. 15), Deborah (Judg. 4) and Huldah (2 Kings 23) had the true gift of prophecy in O.T. times ("prophetess" in Isa. 8:3 was probably an honorary designation for the wife of a prophet, and Noadiah in Neh. 6:14 was a prophetess-for-hire). Of these only Deborah occupied an official and public place of activity though her ~~is~~ position as judge of Israel was a civil, not a

ministerial, one, and in a time of apostasy, not normalcy. Anna, who was ^{The function!} ~~are~~ mentioned in the N.T. ~~there~~ ^{In the N.T.} certain prophets are mentioned:

present at the time the Lord was circumcised was a prophetess (Luke 2:36); none of whom ~~we~~ were official leaders ~~in the church~~ among the people. Philip's four daughters (Acts 21:9), Priscilla (called Paul's helper in Rom.

16:3), Phoebe (Rom. 16:1) and Junia (Rom. 16:7) are sometimes cited as examples of women leaders in the churches, but ~~the~~ such a conclusion is

debateable at best. Priscilla evidently did have the ~~the~~ gift of teaching but she did it at home, not in the public meetings of the church (Acts 18:26).

Phoebe is called a "deacon" of the Cenchrea church, but it is very questionable that the word is to be understood in its technical official sense. ^{Rather} ~~that this refers to~~ ~~the~~ the office of deacon or, more likely, to the general

it is more likely being used in the general sense of ministry. ~~She~~ ~~was~~ served the church but did not lead it. Her designation as a "helper" (v. 2) is also

^{official} non-technical since the word was used outside the N.T. as an honorary title in the synagogues. ^{In connection with} conferred on women ~~for~~ usually for their works of charity. ~~As for~~ Junia,

there are two problems: The form in the text could come either from a feminine noun, Junia, or from a masculine noun, Junias. So we cannot be sure if a man or a woman is referred to here. Further, the phrase "of note among the apostles"

may just as well be translated either "~~distinguished as apostles~~" or "well-known to the

apostles." The point of this rather technical discussion is this: none of the women cited as possible examples for ordaining women today ~~were~~ exercised public leadership except Deborah who did so in the civil realm and in a time of apostasy.

~~Third, women did not teach publically in the meetings of the local church.~~

~~Or did they?~~

But didn't the early church have deaconesses? The answer to this question depends on the sense in which you are using the word deaconess. *Does it refer to a woman who is an official - recognized officer?* Deaconess is simply the feminine form of the masculine word deacon, and the word deacon is used for all kinds of ministry: the service of governments (Rom. 13:7), the ministry of Christ (Gal. 2:17), Paul's apostolic ministry (Eph. 3:7), Timothy's ordained ministry (2 Tim. 1:6; 4:5), Stephanus' unordained, general service (1 Cor. 16:15), and service in an official capacity (Phil. 1:1). ^{1 Tim 3:10}

There is no conclusive evidence that Phoebe was an official deaconess or an ordained woman. But what about the women mentioned in 1 Tim 3:11? ~~Were~~ Did they constitute ~~a~~ group of official leaders in the church, ordained or unordained? The Greek word is simply ^{used} ~~that~~ for women, and can refer to women officials (deaconesses) or to the wives of the deacons. The argument that it refers to deaconesses is usually based on the fact that there would obviously have been a ~~need~~ for women workers in the church and one would expect to find them listed in a passage like this one where other groups of leaders are mentioned. ^{does not}

The argument it refers to ~~women~~ deaconesses is based on the sequence of these verses. If this was a third ^{group} ~~of~~ ^{official} ~~in~~ the church, then we would expect that ^(after deacons & deacons)

Paul would finish listing qualifications for deacons before introducing deaconesses, and thus v. 11 should be expected to follow v. 13. But ^{set} ~~set~~ in the middle of the qualifications for deacons may argue that ^{seem to} ~~this~~ is a reference to the wives of deacons ~~who would naturally be expected to help their husbands~~. Furthermore, if this refers to deaconesses why didn't Paul use the word deacon with a feminine article ~~the~~ or why didn't he use the perfectly good word for deaconess, diakonissa.

However, even if N.T. churches did have deaconesses, they were a subordinate group

(elders are the principal group and most frequently mentioned, and deacons, second)

clearly
and they did not serve as pastors of churches.

were not permitted to were

Third, women did not teach publicly in the meetings of the church. Or did they?
Paul gives guidelines

1 Tim 2 gives some guidelines for public worship. He instructs concerning public prayer, ~~urging~~ directly the men (the Greek word is for males in v. 8) to lead in this. He writes concerning the deportment of women (evidenced in part by their dress), concluding that they are not permitted "to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man" (V. 14). This prohibition is not cultural for it is rooted in the creation order (anyway, who could infallibly select which parts of 1 Tim 2 apply today and in which cultures today, if the whole passage does not?)

But doesn't 1 Cor. 11:5 reveal that women were properly praying and prophesying in the early church? Perhaps so, but if so, then how is this verse to be reconciled ~~xxx~~ with 1 Cor. 14:34? which directs women to be silent in the public worship service? This is a very difficult interpretative problem. Let me summarize several of the suggested solutions.

It has been suggested that Paul changed his mind in ch 14 prohibiting there what he had permitted in chapter 11. Others suggest that Paul's prohibition was a kind of hangover from his rabbinical training. Both of these views are incompatible with verbal inspiration.

Others say that 1 Cor 14:34 refers to hysterical outbursts or to ~~xl~~women calling back and forth to each other and disturbing the service. [But orderly preaching would be permissible. It is true that the word "speak" does sometimes mean "chatter", but it is the same word Paul used of his own preaching in the same epistle (2:13) so it is difficult to prove that it has any out of the ordinary meaning in 14:34.

Still others believe that the command to be silent was what some in the congregations were trying to impose on women, and it was not Paul's command. But that is a completely artificial way of viewing ch 14.

Most likely the harmonization of 1 Cor 11:5; 14:34 and 1 Tim 2:14 is this:

Paul (and of course, the Holy Spirit ~~through~~ him) did not permit women to become teachers in the church. This is the clear sense of 2 of the 3 passages. When he wrote of women praying and prophesying in 1 Cor 11 he did so not with approval but simply recognizing that they were doing it, ~~the~~ albeit improperly. The Corinthian women had two strikes against them: they prayed and prophesied in the public meetings (which was in itself wrong) and they did so uncovered (which compounded the wrong). Prophesy women should not be involved in praying, prophesying or teaching in public worship.

~~Look~~ these three propositions seem to summarize the teaching of the NT concerning the public ministry of women. But lest they seem to prohibit any ministry or activity in the church for women, let me suggest some additional ^{considerations} propositions.

First, this does not mean women cannot teach. ~~It is important to distinguish~~ Indeed, the older women are commanded to teach younger women (Tit. 2:4-5). This may be done in church or in homes but it is restricted to a segregated audience! ^A Restrictions ^{do not prohibit} on the place or audience of a ministry ~~only proscribe that ministry but do not prohibit it.~~ And ^A always such teaching should be under the direction of the male leadership of the church/ and never in conflict with her duties to her family which ~~always~~ take top priority.

But what about single women and parachurch organizations? It's not a clear area There are no crystal clear answers since the Bible does not speak directly to these questions. But the guidelines are clear: male leadership and not an unrestricted ministry.

Second, these guidelines do not prohibit a woman exercising the gift of pastor. So often people will say, If a woman has been gifted by God to lead a church or to teach, then what right has anyone to restrict her use of such gifts? This kind of reasoning ~~confuses~~ ^a obscures the meaning of spiritual gift ~~with~~ and confuses the gift itself with a place or type of ministry. Gifts are abilities God gives His people, men and women alike, ^{and} and the same God also directs where and they are to be used. The gift of pastor is the ~~gift of~~ ability to shepherd people. Such a gift can be used in what we called today the pastorate. But it can also be

in the home, in the Christian school, in a Bible class. It can be used with children, young people, older people. ^{And it can be used by women as well as men} Now, if God has restricted women from leadership positions in the church, ~~then~~ this does not close all the doors of opportunity for women to utilize gifts in other avenues of service.]

Hopefully, a dean of women in the Christian school would have the gift of pastor. ~~How~~ How appropriate for a mother to use that gift with her children. Older women, teaching younger women according to Tit. 2:4-5, could well exercise the gift of pastor on such a flock. The gift must be distinguished from the place of ministry, from the age group on whom it is used, and even from our modern day ecclesiastical organizational structure. A ~~pastor~~ may or may not have the gift of pastor. The gift of pastor may be ~~xxx~~ given to men or women, but women should not use it in the office of pastor. ^{we are called to}

Third, this does not mean that women cannot serve in the Lord's work. Though the ~~emphasis~~ ^{married} focus of the Bible is on the woman in her home, ~~xxx~~ Paul for one ~~xxxxxxxxxxxx~~ spoke of the ^{un}unmarried woman carrying for the things of the Lord in a context that must have included serving the Lord (1 Cor. 7:34). It is also clear that widows performed certain church-authorized and church-related functions including functions which today are part of the job description of a church visitor (1 Tim. 5:10). But it is equally true that none of the leaders of the early churches were women and those who had gifts of prophesy and teaching exercised their gifts in private, ^{or with other women} not in the ^{public or mixed} meetings of the church.

Fourth, this does not mean that women workers cannot be recognized in some way by the church,. Ordination ~~is~~ ^{acc to} our modern customs involves officially setting apart and authorizing a person to perform ministerial functions in the church including (and this is usually the hallmark) baptism and the Lord's supper. ^{a church or demon} In the NT this was often ~~xxxxxxxx~~ signified by laying on of hands, symbolizing the backing of the church. There are biblical examples of elders being ordained (Acts 14:23; Tit. 1:5), helpers or deacons being ordained (Acts 6:6), the disciples, ^{and} Paul (John 15:16; 1 Tim. 2:7) and Timothy (1 Tim. 4:14; 2 Tim 1:6). But no women.

But in ~~all~~ the biblical examples there is no prescribed ritual for ordination. Even laying on of hands apparently did ~~not always accompany~~ ^{was not always part of the} procedure.

the act. So when we ask the question of the title of this article we will have to

should understand ordination in its modern sense; i.e., the official recognition and authorization of a person to pastor a church or ^{and administer the ordinance} take a place of leadership, including authorization to perform the ~~ordinances~~.

In this sense, there is no biblical ~~examples of~~ warrant for ordaining a woman.

However, many churches will commission a woman worker (like a woman going to a mission field). Is this ^(though there is no biblical example either) ~~unwarranted?~~ ^{ill-advised!} Not necessarily so, if it be considered as a public acknowledgment that the church approves of and stands behind the ministry of that person. ~~and does not intend to~~

It is in the nature of a public dedication which is certainly appropriate in many circumstances.

Shall we ordain women? ^{Understanding "ordain" in its modern usage, we would}] We have to conclude, no, since the Bible ^{gives} places leadership in the church ~~as the responsibility~~ ^{to} of men, and since ordination today means induction into ~~the office~~ ^{pastor-} leadership such as into the office of pastor.

Shall we exclude women from Christian service? Again the answer is no, though we must recognize the Bible gives guidelines as to the ^{performance} place of service. ^{best}

Is this harsh? Again, no, not if we believe that God knows where each of us may ~~best~~ ^{appropriately} serve Him.