

The Truth About Women in the Church

By R.S. Neville

Defining the Issue

This is an explosive issue. Where ever women's role in Christian practice is discussed woman are suspicious in general. For at least a hundred and fifty years a woman's role in the church has been gradually redefined in light of our American culture and the rise of feminist ideology. A secondary factor where Christianity is concerned is the refusal of men to take the leadership in spiritual matters in the household. An abdication by the man and a usurpation by the woman.

To many this has been an indicator of progress. A freeing of the weaker sex so to speak from bondage to male dominance. The patriarchy has began its gradual decline into extinction. Even many Bible scholars view these changes as with a liberal eye toward cultural revolution. Scripture is losing its relevance and authority in the eyes of many, and thus is seen flexible in its judgments where what is considered culture is a factor. I believe we will find differently when scripture is examined closely. This is not a mere cultural phenomenon it is out right rebellion and contempt for God's order, pattern and propriety. It is a rejection of God's word.

The placement of the woman in a Christian view is historic and carries the weight of centuries of practical and natural order. The feminist idea is relatively new as far as history is concerned and fits the pattern of rebellion predicted for these last days by Scripture. :

2 Timothy 3

1. This know also, that in the last days perilous times shall come.
2. For men shall be lovers of their own selves, covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy,
3. Without natural affection, trucebreakers, false accusers, incontinent, fierce, despisers of those that are good,
4. Traitors, heady, highminded, lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God;
5. Having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof: from such turn away.
6. For of this sort are they which creep into houses, and lead captive silly women laden with sins, led away with divers lusts,
7. Ever learning, and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth.

The Truth of Scripture: God's Pattern

No one is advocating a secondary role of women. There is no difference to God. In the Spirit, which is God's view, there is no favoritism. In His Kingdom there will be no more male or female. In the spirit there is no race, no slavery, no marriage, or difference of any kind as far as the distinctions of flesh or worldly position.

Galatians 3: 27. For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ.

28. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus.

29. 29. And if ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.

Matthew 22: 24. Saying, Master, Moses said, If a man die, having no children, his brother shall marry his wife, and raise up seed unto his brother.

25. Now there were with us seven brethren: and the first, when he had married a wife, deceased, and, having no issue, left his wife unto his brother:

26. Likewise the second also, and the third, unto the seventh.

27. 27. And last of all the woman died also

28. Therefore in the resurrection whose wife shall she be of the seven? for they all had her.

29. Jesus answered and said unto them, Ye do err, not knowing the scriptures, nor the power of God.

30. 30. For in the resurrection they neither marry, nor are given in marriage, but are as the angels of God in heaven.

Now as that is the truth of scripture notice it is a reference to the spiritual and what comes after the resurrection. As of now we still have earthly roles to play. How it is we are to walk in these earthly roles is described by scripture. They have great spiritual meaning and are living figures; witnesses even to God's plan, God's order, and God's propriety. Never were these meant to put women in bondage. (It is a sad truth the corruption of man has contributed to the abuse of women and these truths have been utilized to enslave them. It was never meant to be so). This submission of the woman to the man was meant to be a spiritual picture. In it we see Christ and the Church.

Ephesians 5:22. Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord.

23. For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church: and he is the saviour of the body.

24. 24. Therefore as the church is subject unto Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in every thing.

25. 25. Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it;

26. That he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word,

27. That he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish.

28. So ought men to love their wives as their own bodies. He that loveth his wife loveth himself.

29. For no man ever yet hated his own flesh; but nourisheth and cherisheth it, even as the Lord the church:

30. For we are members of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones.

31. For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall be joined unto his wife, and they two shall be one flesh.

31. 31. This is a great mystery: but I speak concerning Christ and the church.

32. 32. Nevertheless let every one of you in particular so love his wife even as himself; and the wife see that she reverence her husband.

So we see that the relationship between man and woman is meant to symbolize the relationship between Christ and his bride the church. A symbol is a mystery. It is a living allegory of something spiritual. It is a physical witness that the world can see of a spiritual thing that they cannot see. It is a parable in itself. It is the physical testifying to the spiritual. In these days when men are spiritually blind it is our keeping of these figures that testify to God and his order. We live in a time when the Devil has done much to destroy the image of God in his own creation. Homosexuality, divorce, feminism, these are all perversions of God's order and creation. This is the purpose of the physical creation. It witnesses to the Spiritual truth of all of God's creation.

Romans 1: 17. For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith: as it is written, The just shall live by faith

18. 18. For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness;
19. 19. Because that which may be known of God is manifest in them; for God hath shewed it unto them.
20. 20. For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse:
21. 21. Because that, when they knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened.
22. Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools,

Think of it. Even the invisible qualities of God are represented in the things he created. It is the devil that wants to destroy this natural order and pervert it so that God cannot be seen in it. A muddying of the waters if you will. It is the Church's job and holy convocation to witness back to the world this order. It is not just in what we proclaim, but also what we do and the sacraments and figures that we keep. Women and their submission to this pattern are a part of our worship and witness as to God's order. We should at this juncture go to the earliest scriptures of the woman and find her meaning so that this order finds a place in our hearts.

Eve: the First Woman

Genesis 2:18. And the Lord God said, It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him an help meet for him.

19. And out of the ground the Lord God formed every beast of the field, and every fowl of the air; and brought them unto Adam to see what he would call them: and whatsoever Adam called every living creature, that was the name thereof.

20. 20. And Adam gave names to all cattle, and to the fowl of the air, and to every beast of the field; but for Adam there was not found an helpmeet for him.
21. 21. And the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall upon Adam, and he slept: and he took one of his ribs, and closed up the flesh instead thereof;
22. 22. And the rib, which the Lord God had taken from man, made he a woman, and brought her unto the man.
23. 23. And Adam said, This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh: she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man.
24. 24. Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh.
25. 25. And they were both naked, the man and his wife, and were not ashamed.

It is an inescapable fact that woman was made as far as the physical to be a helpmeet for man. This is the clear definition. Not the leader, but the helper. She was to be in submission. In fact God put Adam into a deep sleep and took her out of him to form her.

“This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh: she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man.”

This is a revelation of Jesus and his bride the Church. He was put into a deep sleep through the cross and we were taken out of him. It is through his death that we are saved and “of Him”. He is our head and we are his body. The body is in submission to the head. In these last days however the devil has tried to change this picture.

Colossians 2; 18. Let no man beguile you of your reward in a voluntary humility and worshipping of angels, intruding into those things which he hath not seen, vainly puffed up by his fleshly mind,

19. And not holding the Head, from which all the body by joints and bands having nourishment ministered, and knit together, increaseth with the increase of God. Gods order and propriety is that we all are in submission to our head.

Ephesians 4: 15. But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ:

16. From whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love.

This relationship between Christ and his Body and Adam and his body (Eve) cannot be denied. Her head was Adam. So we are told to honor this order even in the New Testament.

1 Corinthians 11

1. Be ye followers of me, even as I also am of Christ.

2. Now I praise you, brethren, that ye remember me in all things, and **keep the ordinances, as I delivered them to you.**

3. **3. But I would have you know, that the head of every man is Christ; and the head of the woman is the man; and the head of Christ is God.**

These are ordinances of the Church. This is not merely culture, but a source of understanding and discipline, which is rich in meaning for us all. In this Pattern we understand how sin came in to play.

Adam and Eve

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When we examine Adam and Eve together again we see the pattern. We see two parts coming together to make one whole. Genesis tells us that the two cleaved together and became one flesh (Genesis 2:24). Just like Body and Spirit! Eve is a figure for the body. She is the weaker vessel and she was taken out of Adam as he was in a deep sleep. We already saw where the Church was figuratively taken out of Christ as he was in a deep sleep. Adam's deep sleep is figurative of Christ's death on the cross. We as the church are his body as Adam and Eve were pictures of body and spirit. As Adam and Eve became one so we become one with Christ who is the last Adam according to the spirit. Adam is a picture of the spirit. He has head ship. Eve like the body was meant to be in submission. Notice that the serpent (Satan) did not go to Adam. Adam was intimate with Eve not a serpent. So it is with man period. Our spirits are intimate with our flesh not any outside influence. We see that the serpent went to Eve and he beguiled her. It is our flesh that is susceptible to outside stimuli.

Genesis3:4 And the serpent said unto the woman, Ye shall not surely die:

5 For God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil.

6 And when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree to be desired to make one wise, she took of the fruit thereof, and did eat, and gave also unto her husband with her; and he did eat.

7 And the eyes of them both were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together, and made themselves aprons.

In Eve we see all of the components of sin. The lust of the eyes, (*that it was pleasant to the eyes,*) the lust of the flesh, (*saw that the tree was good for food*) and the pride of life (*and a tree to be desired to make one wise*) (1 John 2:16).

Satan never comes to the Spirit. He comes through the flesh. He went through Eve to get to Adam. Satan goes through your fleshly desires to enslave your spirit. Adam's desire was for his wife. A man's desire is to please his own flesh.

Eph 2:3 Among whom also we all had our conversation in times past in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind; and were by nature the children of wrath, even as others.

James 1:14 But every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed.

Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin: and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death.

Adam's desire was to please his wife more than please God. He suffered the consequences for his choice. This is man's predicament. He is caught between fulfilling the flesh's desires or the spirit's. Paul commented on this very problem in his first letter to the Corinthians. Paul tells us that a man is caught between pleasing his wife and God (1Corinthians7:32). While we see the physical concern of a man divided between pleasing the Lord or his wife through this we also see the spiritual concern of a man pleasing God or his flesh. Once again in both creation and in understanding we see that the physical is first then the spiritual is next. For every physical thing there is a spiritual thing. For every natural understanding there is a spiritual understanding. This is the pattern of God. We uphold the understandings to the world when we keep God's pattern and propriety. We are his witnesses.

How the Church Applies These Things

In the understanding that Man is a picture of the Spirit and that woman is a picture of the Body we can better understand the scriptural application of

these figures.

1Corinthians 14:33. For God is not the author of confusion, but of peace, as in all churches of the saints.

34. Let your women keep silence in the churches: for it is not permitted unto them to speak; but they are commanded to be under obedience, as also saith the law.

35. And if they will learn any thing, let them ask their husbands at home: for it is a shame for women to speak in the church.

36. 36. What? came the word of God out from you? or came it unto you only?

37. 37. If any man think himself to be a prophet, or spiritual, let him acknowledge that the things that I write unto you are the commandments of the Lord.

38. 38. But if any man be ignorant, let him be ignorant.
39. 39. Wherefore, brethren, covet to prophesy, and forbid not to speak with tongues.
40. 40. Let all things be done decently and in order.

We understand now that in worship it is the spirit who speaks. A woman being silent in the church is a show that the flesh is in submission. Men speak, women are silent in the church to demonstrate that the spirit speaks here. Not the flesh. It is a submission to God's propriety and pattern and speaks of spiritual order. It is a part of our true worship. To leave this pattern is rebellion, not progress. How can we witness to the world God's order if we do not keep it?

1 Timothy 2: 9. In like manner also, that women adorn themselves in modest apparel, with shamefacedness and sobriety; not with braided hair, or gold, or pearls, or costly array;

10. But (which becometh women professing godliness) with good works.
11. Let the woman learn in silence with all subjection.
12. But I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man, but to be in silence.
13. For Adam was first formed, then Eve.
14. And Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived was in the transgression.
15. 15. Notwithstanding she shall be saved in childbearing, if they continue in faith and charity and holiness with sobriety.

As the Church we do not want to send the message that the flesh speaks here, but rather the Spirit. So women teaching or exercising authority over men is not proper. If she is in silence it represents that the body is in submission to its head.

In the above scriptures we can go deeper into understanding still. Remember that the order of man and woman testifies to the order of Christ and his Church. Let us indulge in a little experiment. In the place of Eve or the woman let us insert the word "church". In the place of Adam and Man let us insert "Christ" and see what happens.

“. In like manner also, that women adorn themselves in modest apparel, with shamefacedness and sobriety; not with braided hair, or gold, or pearls, or costly array;

But (which becometh women professing godliness) with good works.”

Let me ask you. Should a Church be outwardly adorned or rather covered with Good works...what is more important. How we look or what we do?

“Let the woman learn in silence with all subjection.

But I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man, but to be in silence.”

Should a church speak out of its own carnality or should we rather learn in silence, our fleshly impulses and ideas restrained in silence to allow the Spirit of Christ to speak in our midst? Should our ministers speak by the influence of the spirit or their own ideas?

“For Adam was first formed, then Eve.

And Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived was in the transgression.

Notwithstanding she shall be saved in childbearing, if they continue in faith and charity and holiness with sobriety.

Was not Christ first and then the Church through him? And it was not our head, Jesus Christ who was ever deceived, but rather us who would become the church who once were deceived and became sinners. And further won't we as the church be saved through bearing children for our Husband? In other words bringing the Gospel to lost souls and teaching them, making disciples of all nations?

So you can see this has nothing to do with forcing women to second-class citizens. Each Christian woman should see herself as a picture of the church in submission to Christ. It is worship and clarity of witness to God.

Women Praying and Prophesying In the Church.

It is allowed. On what principle?

“There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus.”

Praying and prophesying are worship too, and expressly in the spiritual realm. It is from a woman's spirit, which is equal in every way to a man's spirit. It is allowed because of this where teaching is not, though it is also spiritual but as we have been over, a woman teaching does smack of holding authority over her male listeners where as praying and prophesy does not. But even in prayer or prophesy a woman should do something that shows she as the body is in submission. This is demonstrated through a veil or scarf over her head as a symbol of the authority she is under.

1 Corinthians 11

1. Be ye followers of me, even as I also am of Christ.
2. Now I praise you, brethren, that ye remember me in all things, and keep the ordinances, as I delivered them to you.
3. But I would have you know, that the head of every man is Christ; and the head of the woman is the man; and the head of Christ is God.
4. Every man praying or prophesying, having his head covered, dishonoureth his head.
5. But every woman that prayeth or prophesieth with her head uncovered dishonoureth her head: for that is even all one as if she were shaven.
6. For if the woman be not covered, let her also be shorn: but if it be a shame for a woman to be shorn or shaven, let her be covered.
7. For a man indeed ought not to cover his head, forasmuch as he is the image and glory of God: but the woman is the glory of the man.
8. For the man is not of the woman; but the woman of the man.
9. Neither was the man created for the woman; but the woman for the man.
10. For this cause ought the woman to have power on her head because of the angels.
11. Nevertheless neither is the man without the woman, neither the woman without the man, in the Lord.
12. For as the woman is of the man, even so is the man also by the woman; but all things of God.
13. Judge in yourselves: is it comely that a woman pray unto God uncovered?
14. Doth not even nature itself teach you, that, if a man have long hair, it is a shame unto him?
15. But if a woman have long hair, it is a glory to her: for her hair is given her for a covering.
16. But if any man seem to be contentious, we have no such custom, neither the churches of God.

We are taught here by the scriptures God's order very clearly. It has not changed for God has not changed. The head of the woman is the man, the head of the man is Christ, and the head of Christ is God (*notice the head of the woman is not just her man, but man. So single or divorced or widowed all women are under authority and should portray this*). A woman should have her head covered when she prays or prophesies. A Man should not. Why?

This is really a simple principle. The head of the woman is man. You can see a man. The woman should wear then a symbol of that authority so it can be seen. A man's head cannot be seen. He is

Christ and in the heavenlies, spiritual. So the man represents this by wearing nothing on his head. Again what we physically practice in these figures testifies to the world God's order, propriety and pattern. Most of all this shows that the Church, which is the body is in submission to her Husband Christ. It is our worship. The woman was made for man: A great mystery.

Can a woman be a Pastor or Elder?

No. As we read in Paul's first letter to Timothy:

1 Timothy 3:

3. Not given to wine, no striker, not greedy of filthy lucre; but patient, not a brawler, not covetous;
4. One that ruleth well his own house, having his children in subjection with all gravity;
5. (For if a man know not how to rule his own house, how shall he take care of the church of God?)
6. Not a novice, lest being lifted up with pride he fall into the condemnation of the devil.
7. Moreover he must have a good report of them, which are without; lest he fall into reproach and the snare of the devil.
8. Likewise must the deacons be grave, not doubletongued, not given to much wine, not greedy of filthy lucre;
9. Holding the mystery of the faith in a pure conscience.
10. And let these also first be proved; then let them use the office of a deacon, being found blameless.
11. Even so must their wives be grave, not slanderers, sober, faithful in all things.
12. Let the deacons be the husbands of one wife, ruling their children and their own houses well.
13. For they that have used the office of a deacon well purchase to themselves a good degree, and great boldness in the faith which is in Christ Jesus.
14. These things write I unto thee, hoping to come unto thee shortly:

Notice the scriptures say "He" in both cases? This coincides and is in the same context with the earlier chapter in First Timothy two:

"Let the woman learn in silence with all subjection.

But I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man, but to be in silence."

It is very clear from scripture. Are women ever referred to as Pastors or deaconesses? Only as the helpmeet of a husband who is a pastor or deacon. It is a place of honor for her, but only as she functions in submission to her head. She still would not hold authority over any man in a congregation. The wives of the Apostles held this honor, but never does the Bible tell us of them having authority over any man. This is not recorded anywhere in scripture.

More to Come.

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