



Chapter 10

Male vs. Female Leadership Authority

Women will have a role, to one degree or another, in the leadership and ministry of a given local Church. This may come as a surprise, to those who have understood Paul to say they wouldn't, but we'll take a careful look at what he was actually saying.

The questions we need to explore, are not whether they will, but what level of authority will they function in and how should male leadership relate to them?

Because the biblical rationale is far too complex to explain in detail in this study, I would like to include a summary of the role of women in the teaching and leading ministry of the Church, as I see it. I am well aware that this is still a hotly debated issue and one full of controversy, but because it is my studied conclusion that God does intend for women to function in various dimensions of Church ministry and leadership, I believe to leave this topic out of a study on the authority of leadership in the local Church, would be to fail to address some serious and potentially volatile issues of authority.

What's your Culture?

To begin with, it appears that Paul's concern with female teaching ministry and leadership has more to do with issues relating to his current culture, than to principles that relate to all of time. I am convinced that Paul would instruct us in our day to drop the culture of his day and maintain the eternal truths. The eternal truths that most concern Paul, in this area, are that wives should submit to husbands & local leadership, as regards vocal Word ministries and leadership.

In Paul's day, the worship of Diana and Aphrodite, in Greece and Asia Minor, were of such a pervasive and disrupting nature that Paul found it necessary to uphold the current Jewish norms of silent non-leadership roles for women. Add to this that the Jewish culture was extremely negative to women leadership and vocal expression, and you have an apostle who knows that while Jesus was slowly changing the role of women in godly culture, He didn't try to overthrow the entire culture within the span of His earthly ministry and wasn't leading the apostles to do so within the span of their ministry. It would take centuries before such changes could culminate.

Submission is the Eternal Principle

Submission is the eternal issue with Paul and ultimately the Holy Spirit. And, submission is not a statement of inferiority as compared to superiority. It has nothing to do with giftedness, intelligence, or spirituality. It has to do with divine order and the principle of headship. While no one likes the idea of abusive control in the headship, yet the divine wisdom of one being ultimately responsible only makes sense. Because Adam was created first he took the primary role of leadership, and Eve was called to submit to his authority and leadership. As long as male headship is maintained then there are no clear limitations to the level of leadership that a woman can function in within the local Church. Because the role of Elder/Overseer is primarily referred to as being the

domain of male leadership, some have felt that this was God's way of indicating that women ought not to aspire to the role of elder. However, when it is recognized that Paul was addressing cultural issues of his day, that for all intents and purposes eliminated women from both teaching and leading, it would have been inconsistent for him to refer to women as aspiring to the work of an elder anyway. Therefore, if we drop the cultural issues and recognize they related essentially to the first century and not all of Church history, then perhaps the roles of Shepherd and Elder are open to women. These decisions are really beyond the scope of this study to address. Suffice it to say, that whatever decision is settled upon must not fail to address Genesis chapter three and the dynamics that are taking place there. And, whatever decision a given gathering makes in this area, should be done so with the highest degree of sensitivity and elimination of all aspects of male chauvinism as a motivation in the decision making process.

What seems abundantly clear to me is that women may teach, as they do so in submission to their headship coverings, since the cultural hindrances of the 1st century do not apply to the 20th century.

Before a woman moves out in these areas she must have a clear conscience about it, according to Romans 14. If a woman's husband or shepherd opposes this she is in violation to move out in vocal Word ministries in the presence of men. Much prayer and study should precede moving out in these areas. For the woman called to a teaching ministry she must be extremely careful to handle herself and her ministry sensitively and with extreme humility, yet not without boldness, when speaking with men in the audience who are still coming to grips with these difficult issues.

The Harvest Cries out for Laborers

All around the world women's ministries are beginning to explode, and I want to go on record as saying that when it does so in a humble spirit it is exciting. If we are living in the last of the last days, then we need every gifted ministry in their place, functioning to their greatest capacity. God has clearly gifted women for ministry, and male leadership would be wise to stand aside and let God have His way in our day, because it appears as though He is calling for women to take the front lines of ministry.

If this is the case how should male leadership respond to and release their ministries? May I say at this point that I am well aware that this is such a sensitive and emotionally volatile area. Most men who oppose women's ministries do so more for emotionally insecure reasons and misinformation than they do from true leading of the Spirit, and careful analysis of Scripture.

Submission & Equality are not Opposites

If a local gathering is going to make the decision to release the ministries of women, in their midst, and I sincerely hope they will do so, they are going to have to stand at their sides as equals and not lord it over them, nor treat them in condescending ways. I would suggest to any male leadership team that is beginning to ponder this whole area, that they address this head on, not just begin to insert a few times of female ministry to see how they feel about it. Much has been written and much is being discussed on this theme. It behooves the leadership teams worldwide to make this a very serious study before they begin to change their patterns.

To allow a few women in your Churches to minister occasionally is really nothing more than token approval, which in my estimation is more disrespectful than it is encouraging to them. Their opinions, their roles and their ministries, if they are going to be acknowledged at all, must be acknowledged on the same degree of respect that is accorded to male leadership and ministry.

Women are not inferior just because they are women and called to submit to their husbands. Headship has nothing to do with inferiority. If men aren't careful in this area they will unconsciously treat them as inferior and cause more unrest in their Churches than if they had left this area entirely alone.

Over the years I have discussed this matter with a great many gifted women and become aware of the tension that they wrestle with between wanting to be properly submissive and humble, yet aware that the male leadership that they serve under treat them in a condescending manner as if they should feel lucky to have any part at all in the ministry of the Church. They are expected to remain quietly in the wings waiting to be called forward and given an opportunity to minister.

Male leadership so often fail to ask themselves how they would handle having a tremendous burden to share the Word, but couldn't say anything to anyone lest their motivations be misunderstood, and had to wait until the female Church leadership called them forward and gave them an opportunity to minister the Word. I know there have been times when the Word of the Lord was burning so intensely within me that if I had to sit idly by, waiting for the female leadership of my Church to give me the opportunity to share it, I would have either exploded or withdrawn in frustration and discouragement, and wouldn't even want to hear from God. I know, for a fact, that this is unfortunately the reaction of many gifted women. It's time we honor and release them from this struggle.

Beware of Chauvinism

Gentlemen, think through these issues. Try to imagine how painful it is to hear from God and have little to no outlet. How motivated would you be to dig seriously within the Word of God? How motivated would you be to be a fire burning brightly for God, because you wanted to be available to Him to use your life, when you knew that the likelihood of your being used was slim to none? I have seen the pain that many of these women experience. I believe it is time to encourage them to get into the Word and get into God, we're ready to hear what they have to say, *"Your ministry is just as significant as that of any man!"* What keeps us from saying this to them? Can we honestly say that we have thoroughly studied the Word of God on the legitimacy or illegitimacy of women's ministries? Have we done our historical, cultural, and linguistic analysis to the degree that we are completely confident that the highest degree of biblical scholarship really does indicate the exclusion of women's ministries? My concern is that just as many of our evangelical brethren have rejected the ministry of the Holy Spirit, in signs and wonders, so the same prejudiced, non-biblical approach tends to apply to many of our reasonings why women ought not to be involved in the teaching and leadership ministries of our Churches. I know these are strong words and I know that I may be upsetting some, but who will speak out for women and their callings if it isn't a man? If a woman does so she is attacked as rebellious and unsubmitive. If a woman does solid biblical research, trying to discover the Bible's true teaching in this area, she is labeled as a liberal when she discovers that the Bible really doesn't prohibit her from being involved in teaching and leading. It's often a no-win situation. She's burned without if she believes in her calling and she burns within if she shuts it up.

If all I do in this chapter is stimulate some male leadership teams to think about this issue again, and discuss it on some serious levels, then I will feel like this chapter has served its purpose. I'm personally convinced, that if you will take the time, and the highest degree of utilization of the original languages of the New Testament, you will discover that Paul was not forbidding all leadership to women for all time.

Keep praying women, your men may yet see the light!

