

Women in Ministry & Church Leadership

There appear to be three different hermeneutical approaches to the question of women in ministry and church leadership.

Approach #1

- Focus on NT texts that suggest there is a permanent God-given distinction between men and women that rules out the exercise of teaching/preaching & other leadership roles by women in the church.
 - Ephesians 5:22 = headship principle
 - 1 Corinthians 11:2-16 = headship principle
 - 1 Corinthians 14:34-35 = women be silent and submissive
 - 1 Timothy 2:11-12 = women be silent and submissive

Approach #2

- Set the issue of women in church ministry and leadership within the wider context of the developing place of women in the OT and NT, noting the trajectory of the Bible's view of women toward the Galatians 3:28 principle, which is the apex of a growing number of biblical "voices" that challenge the inherited patriarchal patterns of ancient culture.
 - Galatians 3:28 (Principle/Apex)
 - Women in Paul's Churches (Expansion)
 - Women in the Apostolic Church (Growth)
 - Women in the Ministry of Jesus (Challenge)
 - Women in the OT (Patriarchal society)
- Galatians 3:28 = if the Jew/Gentile and slave/free distinction is considered irrelevant within the church today, then the male/female distinction should also be considered irrelevant for determining ministry roles and functions in the church. In God's community neither race, nor social status nor gender determines ministry roles. Rather, God's call, giftedness and character qualifications determine ministry roles.

Approach #3

- Recognize that the complimentary and egalitarian "voices" are found side by side in Scripture. However, three interrelated principles are important in making sense of the presence of both perspectives in the biblical text.
 - 1st principle = men and women are equal in every way.
 - 2nd principle = some things matter more than others.
 - 3rd principle = we live between the "already" and the "not yet."
- Thus, God seems to be willing to forgo the achievement of some secondary objectives (gender equality) in the interests of furthering his primary objective (bringing salvation to men and women). Hence, the apostles embraced a policy of social conservatism (Get along as best you can with the existing political powers and social structures) in the interest of spreading the gospel. Where society will not tolerate anything but patriarchy, the church accommodates itself to that unhappy reality for the greater good of spreading the gospel message and, indeed, of sometimes simply surviving under the threat of persecution. But where society has open spaces in which women can flourish, liberate them for all forms of Christian ministry in the church or faith community.