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Women in the Church

Part 1

The role of women in the Church is one of the controversies of our time. Many focus on Paul's statement "Let women keep silence in the church" (1 Corinthians 14:34) and wonder why men even allow women to sing hymns during services or perform special music. Others believe Paul was out of touch with reality or certainly with what our society has come to. Some look at Paul's writing that says that in baptism "there is neither male nor female" (Galatians 3:28) and declare we should have women preachers and anything else women would want to be or do.

by Darryll Watson

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Perhaps we could better understand this subject if we first study and come to understand the roles women have played in the Bible.

Creation of Woman

To begin with, we may ponder some common questions: Why and how did God create woman? Is she inferior or superior to man? Do women have a place in religion, or are they simply to be mindless robots following a man around? No doubt you have a few questions of your own on this subject and no doubt some have posed such questions to you.

What can we surmise or deduce from the Scriptures on this issue? Let's go back to the beginning. In Genesis 1:26-31, we find the creation of man: "And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness; let them have dominion ... in the image of God created he him, male and female created he them. And God blessed them, and ... said to them Be fruitful and multiply ... replenish ... subdue... And it was very good."

Now notice that::

1. God created mankind in His own image and likeness.
2. God created mankind as male and female

3. God gave mankind dominion over all living things and power to increase and multiply.

What does this tell us about man and woman?

If you think about it, it tells us that they were equal in being and different in function (sex). There is nothing here that would indicate that the male could rule by himself, multiply by himself; or subdue by himself. This passage plainly indicates a partnership. And it reveals that sexual differentiation is part of the order established at creation. Just as God (Hebrew: Elohim) is uni-plural ("let us"), man is uni-plural ("them/them"). And the two (male and female) though they become one, can multiply, creating more mankind in their own image, as did God.

This important concept is further revealed in Genesis 2:18-24 in the "creation" of the marriage institution. Here we find the account of God's taking a rib from the sleeping Adam and creating woman. What does God's taking a rib to create Eve suggest? It seems to suggest sameness of creation (all other creatures were created from the dust of the ground). It suggests the role, the function of the woman: she wasn't taken from his head to indicate rulership or headship over him: she wasn't taken from his foot to indicate being

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trodden under his feet; but from his side to indicate that he was to love her, protect her - and she was to support him. A “help” from him and for him. [It also suggests that without woman, man is missing something vital].

Biblical Headship

Does this suggest functional subordination? It's neither subordination nor domination of a superior over an inferior. This account rather indicates:

1. Helper status of the woman
2. Order of creation
3. Naming of humanity (man/woman) or in Hebrew ish/isha.

In 1 Corinthians 11:3-12 Paul addresses the “headship” of man to woman. He clearly understands the created functionality of man/woman “For man is not of the woman; but the woman of the man. Neither was the man created for the woman: but the woman for the man... Nevertheless neither is the man without the woman, neither the woman without the man in the Lord. For as the woman is of the man, even so is the man also by the woman; but all things of God.” (verses 8-12). And again, in Ephesians 5:21-28: “Submitting yourselves one to another in the fear of God. Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife even as Christ is the head of the church:... So ought men to love their wives as their own bodies.” This was not a fabrication of Paul, but an application of what we have seen from creation. Colossians 1:13-18 shows Christ's headship “he is the head of the body, the church, .. and, having made peace through the blood of his cross, by him to reconcile all things unto [the Father]”. In 1 Timothy 2:13, Paul again shows that man was formed first, and, though Eve was deceived, Adam was the first to sin. Note how Paul always appeals to order of creation and not to any other reason, such as a supposed “curse of Eve” as a result of the first sin.

In a body, does a rib rebel against or envy the head? The rib is in a supporting role to the body. This does not make the rib inferior to the head. Without the ribs, the body could not stand. On the other hand, does the head despise or mistreat a rib? No, the head makes great efforts to insure that the ribs are as comfortable as possible!

So, the first lesson we get from the Bible on this issue is that male/female does not mean superior/inferior. We should clearly see that God created male and female as functions to complement each other to make a better one than either could be apart.

Representation

Now let's consider some other aspects. In the Old Testament, men represented their tribe, their nation. Men received the sign of the covenant in their flesh (circumcision). Women could not. But women shared with men in the blessings and responsibilities of the covenant and were vital to the fulfillment of its blessings which included long life, prosperity, children and land. In particular, women were blessed in child-bearing, which men could not (1 Tim. 2:15). Women shared equally with men in the blessings of worship by resting on the Sabbath (Exodus 20:10), listening to the reading of the law (Deut. 31:9-13), and rejoicing before the Lord.

Role of Women

What roles, then, were women to play in the family and community?

- 1) Learning and Keeping the Law (Deuteronomy 31:12; 13:6-11; 17:2; 29:18; 2 Chronicles 15:12-13). Women [like men] were always to hear, learn and keep the law.
- 2) Praying: Women [like men] prayed. Read the examples of Hannah, Rebekah and Sarah in Genesis 25:22; 30:6, 22; 21:6-7. And in 2 Kings 4:9-10, 20-23 we see the moving story of the Shunammite woman, her faith and actions that led to the resurrection of her son by Elisha. For an example of how women independently inquired of God, read the account of Hannah in 1 Samuel 1:9-11. The result of her prayer was a prophet named Samuel.
- 3) Teachers: Proverbs 1:8 speaks of the instruction of a mother.
- 4) They were required to fulfill vows: Numbers 30:9 and Numbers 6:2-21.
- 5) Public Worship: Women were expected to be present at Festivals as you can see from Deuteronomy 12:7; 16:11-14; 1 Sam. 1:11. They took part in some sacrifices as in Leviticus 12:6; 15:29 and the example of Hannah in 1 Sam. 1:24-27. followed by her prayer in chapter 2:1-10. The women contributed to the material for the erecting of the tabernacle as recorded in Exodus 35:22, 25-26. Women served at the entrance of the tent of meeting 1 Samuel 2:22. (The

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sons of Eli misused the services of the women, but nonetheless, they were there, probably to sing). Women were singing and making praise in music as in Ezra 2:65; 1 Chronicles 25:5-6; 2 Chronicles 35:25 and Exodus 15:20.

6) Community Office: Huldah was a significant prophetess in Israel contemporary with Jeremiah (2 Kings 22:14). Another prophetess was Noadiah in Nehemiah 6:14. Some would have you believe that God only had prophetesses because the men had lost their hormones. I doubt anyone would want to say that of Jeremiah. Deborah served as a judge as recorded in Judges 4:4-6. And there will be future prophetesses according to Joel 2:28-29, as well as prophets.

Women Priests?

But no priestesses. Though we have examined the many and various roles women played in ancient Israel, we never find that a woman served as a priest (or priestess).

Consider how God established and chose the priesthood. In ancient times, the patriarch was also the family priest: Noah, Abraham, Jacob, Job - men represented the family. Then, with the establishment of the nation of Israel, which was intended to be a "kingdom of priests" (Exodus 19:6), the Levites were chosen by God to serve Him at His Tabernacle. The male descendants of Aaron, a member of the tribe of Levi, were chosen to be the official priests.

In New Testament times, before God, Christians are "neither male nor female" (Galatians 3:28). Jesus "has made us kings and priests unto God" (Revelation 1:6). But the situation in the church is analogous to ancient Israel. Though Israel was a nation of priests, only certain individuals performed official priestly duties. In the New Testament, Christ's twelve apostles were all men. Though women certainly held positions of responsibility in the early church (e.g., Phebe, Romans 16:1), there is no indication that they ever

conducted formal church services. There has been much scholarly speculation as to exactly what were the circumstances that motivated Paul's instructions to the women to keep silence. In the Churches of God, we hold to this commandment (I Corinthians 15:37), though we do exercise the administrative right (Matt. 18:18) to decide how it will be applied to meet the particular needs of local congregations.

In Summary

Men were the representative Heads of Household. Women were never, from creation, intended to be heads of household. Everything we have seen can fit into the created "role function" we saw at creation.

We have studied the creation and noted the intended roles of man and woman. Woman made from man and for man, but as equal in value, yet different in function. Man is to serve woman, and to give himself for her, as Christ serves and gave himself for the church. Men and women are to serve God, in or out of the church. Men and women are to submit to one another, in or out of the church.

In 1 Corinthians 12, in his analogy of the body, Paul showed how we ought to accept our functions and work together. The creational functions are not the result of a curse. The God-ordained relationship between husband and wife helps us understand the relationship between Christ and his bride, the church. As we meditate on this, we come to perceive the nature of God, His relationship to His creatures, and His goal for the future relationship between Himself and all Mankind.

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[Be sure to read the continuation of this article. Ask for the article "**Women in the Bible - Part 2**"]

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