



Male Leadership in Church

How should it work?

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1: Embracing male leadership as Scriptural

The NT makes it clear that Christian women, like men, have been given many spiritual gifts by God.

Since Pentecost the Spirit is poured out upon both men and women, Acts 2.18, so that Peter could say that both ‘your sons and your daughters will prophesy,’ Acts 2.17.¹ And like any other members of the body of Christ, it is vital that women use their God-given abilities for the health and growth of the church. When God gives gifts to the body of Christ, he expects them to be used.

The question

The contemporary church, then, needs to honour women and encourage them to use their talents. But does that mean that the NT does away with all distinctions between men and women? Should all offices in a church be open to both men and women? Should the church become a kind of unisex / androgynous community, where male and female are completely interchangeable? With changes in Western culture, these are very live issues now.

Paul directly addresses this question in 1 Timothy 2.8-15. This passage is central and primary to the debate concerning gender roles in the church. Paul writes:

I want men everywhere to lift up holy hands in prayer, without anger or disputing. I also want women to dress modestly, with decency and propriety, not with braided hair or gold or pearls or expensive clothes, but with good deeds, appropriate for women who profess to worship God.

A woman should learn in quietness and full submission. I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man; she must be silent. For Adam was formed first, then Eve. And Adam was not the one deceived; it was the woman who was deceived and became a sinner. But women will be saved through childbearing – if they continue in faith, love and holiness with propriety.

We should remind ourselves of the background to this passage. There had been massive problems in the church in Ephesus – probably involving its leaders going

¹ See also for example, 1 Corinthians 11.2-16

off the rails.² Paul is writing to Timothy who has the difficult task of setting things straight in the church there. Certain people in the church had become false teachers. They were promoting wrong ideas based on fanciful interpretations of the OT. Paul doesn't give much detail concerning the exact nature of the heresy, but three things seem clear.

1. The false teachers stirred argument, 1.4. This is in the background as the apostle says that he wants men to pray without there being angry disputes, 2.8.
2. The false teachers stressed asceticism – that is treating yourself harshly and denying yourself good things as a way (it was said) of getting closer to God. For example, Paul writes, that they teach the doctrine of demons, and says 'they forbid people to marry and order them to abstain from certain foods, which God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and know the truth,' 4.3.
3. We know from 2 Timothy, that a number of women had been caught up in the false teaching. And Paul speaks in this letter of 1 Timothy of some women who had 'already turned away to follow Satan', 5.15.

If it is true that the previous leaders of the church in Ephesus had led people astray, then new leaders would need to be appointed and Paul goes on to give the qualifications required for ascertaining who would be suitable for being elders and deacons in chapter 3 of the epistle, immediately following the section on which we are focusing. With that context the apostle has some things to say about men and women in church v8-10. But it is v11-15 where it gets controversial as he writes, 'A woman should learn in quietness and full submission. I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man; she must be silent. For Adam was formed first, then Eve. And Adam was not the one deceived; it was the woman who was deceived and became a sinner. But women will be saved through childbearing – if they continue in faith, love and holiness with propriety', v11, 12.

Paul's instructions?

There are basically two points here.

² See Paul's warning to the Ephesian elders in Acts 20.30

First, he instructs that women should be silent, v12. What does he mean by that? Does that mean that women are never to make any verbal contribution in the gathered church? The answer must be 'No' – because that doesn't harmonize with what Paul writes elsewhere in NT. It would contradict, for example, what Paul says in 1 Corinthians 11.5, where he speaks of godly women praying and prophesying in church while having a submissive attitude. Rather, what Paul talks about in v12 is women learning in quietness, v11, and in that context being silent. In other words, he does not allow women to interrupt the teaching of God's word. That's the silence he is talking about. (Interestingly it implies that Paul is not averse to a man in the congregation asking a question etc.)

Secondly, v12, women are not to teach or have authority over men. Does that mean that women are never to teach anyone and that it is impossible for God to give a gift of teaching to any woman? No. In fact there is a desperate need for mature, humble women to teach other women. To Titus Paul writes, 'Teach the older women to be reverent in the way they live...to teach what is good. Then they can train the younger women to love their husbands and children, ...'.³ So, given the right context, women are to teach. But what Paul does not allow is women teaching the whole church, to have authority over men. It is worth noting that those two aspects, teaching and authority, are what distinguish elders from deacons in the church.⁴ Paul does not allow women in the eldership (leadership) role over the church. He is making that clear before he gets to explaining the qualifications for elders in chapter 3. That position of authoritative teaching over a congregation is reserved for suitable men. Hence in chapter 3, as Paul sketches out the requirements for eldership, his language assumes male elders, 3.2.

Inadequate explanations?

This teaching does not go down well today. It does not fit with secular views of male and female and is not popular – even in some churches which call themselves 'evangelical'. It is too 'out of step' with our current world. With that in mind, various 'explanations' have been brought forward to try to explain this teaching away and insist that Paul does not mean what he appears to say. Here are the four main contenders.

³ Titus 2.3,4

⁴ See 1 Timothy 3.2 and note deacons serve 3.10; elders 'direct the affairs of the church' 5.17.

- *The Galatians über verse explanation*

Some say that because Galatians 3.26-29 say that we are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus and that in him there is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for we are all one in Christ Jesus – that whatever Paul seems to be saying in 1 Timothy 2 it cannot mean that there are different roles for men and women in the church because in Christ there is no difference between male and female. But using Galatians 3.28 that way, as a master verse which trumps everything else, is to rip that verse out of context entirely and to misuse it. In Galatians Paul is not talking about church polity at all. He is talking about salvation – justification by faith and the Christian’s status before God. Our acceptance with God is the same for everyone. But to force this verse to make Paul effectively contradict himself concerning gender roles in the church is a travesty of exegesis.

- *The stop-gap explanation*

This picks up on the present tense of the word ‘permit’ in v12. The idea is that this should be read ‘I am not permitting’ – as if ‘I am not permitting women to teach for the moment, but when I get to Ephesus, I will sort things out and say something different.’ But that is stretching the present tense a very long way. And secondly, 3.14, 15 makes it clear that Paul is telling Timothy precisely what he would say if he was there – in case he can’t get there. So, this explanation falls.

- *The wife only explanation*

This ‘explanation’ is that these instructions do not apply to women generally but only to married women who might embarrass their husbands by speaking out. But the fact that Paul uses the expression ‘full submission’ in v11, suggests that Paul has a wider issue in view and that makes sense when we realize that those women taken in by the false teaching and who were causing trouble were mainly young widows, 5.11-15. It was these unmarried women who had swallowed the heresy and had turned away to follow Satan (remember Paul speaks of the heresy as being ‘things taught be demons’, 4.1). Single women needed to take heed of the apostle’s teaching too. So, this explanation falls as well.

- *The prevailing culture explanation*

Some say that these instructions only apply to the prevailing situation in Ephesus – at the particular time in the first century Roman world when Paul wrote – and

are not relevant generally or to us today. The idea is that this is just a cultural matter which changes with times and places. It is true, some things are like that in NT – washing feet, or greeting each other with a holy kiss. They seem part of the times rather than being universal. But this is different. *First*, notice that the context here is what Paul teaches ‘everywhere’, v8, for all churches. But *second*, what Paul is touching on here can’t be tied to any culture. Authority and teaching happen in all cultures. And that leads to Paul reasoning: ‘For Adam was formed first, then Eve. And Adam was not the one deceived; it was the woman who was deceived and became a sinner’, v13, 14. Here he gives the basis for his instructions – and he does not refer to the prevailing culture, but to Genesis and the record there of Creation and of the Fall. These things predate all cultures – and affect all cultures – all human beings. So, what he says doesn’t change with culture. His instructions apply in the 21st century just as much as it applied in the 1st century; they apply in New York, London or Glasgow just as much as they do in Ouagadougou.

In v13 we are told that Adam was made first then Eve, Genesis 2.7, 22. As Christ’s headship is indicated by the term ‘firstborn over all **creation**’⁵ so the male is the Christ-like head – not a bully but a caring loving leader – like Christ. But he is to have leadership.

In v14 we move on to the Fall in Genesis 3. We read v14, ‘And Adam was not the one deceived; it was the women who was deceived and became a sinner’. That is not saying that women are more open to deception than men and therefore shouldn’t teach. That cannot be true. If that were the case Paul would not allow women to teach at all – not even other women. What he is saying is that in the garden of Eden Eve was deceived into taking the leadership role – she taught and encouraged Adam to eat the fruit and it led to disaster. The implication is that seeking to take the male’s role in the church, women would be making the same mistake that Eve made – so don’t do it. (We could also add here that the Fall came about by Adam failing to exercise leadership and having been given God’s command, failing to protect his wife by opposing Satan’s lies).

What about v15? ‘But women will be saved through childbearing – if they continue in faith, love and holiness with propriety’. How are we to understand that? *First*, Paul is emphasizing that just as the role of authoritative teaching in the church is reserved for men, so the tremendous privilege of bearing children is the woman’s domain alone – and of course, it was Mary who gave birth to the

⁵ Colossians 1.15

Saviour of the world. We are equal before God but we each have our distinctive roles. Women are not second-class citizens. But *secondly*, once you realize that the false teachers were ascetic, forbidding marriage – then we can see that it is not far from that for them to be saying childbirth is a bad idea. They would imply that it messes women up spiritually, their children take all their time and it is much more spiritual to be a virgin. They would have an ascetic view that sex is defiling. But Paul is saying ‘No!’ to that idea. Family and childbearing are a good gift of God. It is faith and love and godly living that are the way to heaven – whether you are a virgin or a mother. There is nothing unspiritual about family life.

More questions

We have begun this booklet by looking at this particular passage which is crucial to what Paul says about male and female roles in the church. It is clear that Paul is insisting on male leadership and we should embrace what the apostle says. However, you may well have more questions. A single passage can’t deal with everything. So, bear with me. There are more things to say from the Bible about this issue which we will deal with in future chapters. But here are three things to bear in mind as we proceed.

A). We will see how this passage fits with what Genesis teaches about the relative characteristics of male and female in Genesis. Male and female are equal but not the same. They are made slightly different in order to serve God’s purposes. Men and women are not meant to be rivals but to be a team.

B). Paul teaches that men and women, though equal before God, have different roles in family life. Paul speaks about the husband being the Christ-like head of his wife in Ephesians 5.22-33. Notice how what Paul teaches about male and female roles in the church in 1 Timothy fits with family life. The same structure applies in both church life and family life. In fact, the church is meant to be God’s family, 1 Timothy 3.4, 5, 15.

C). Although the NT says that leadership in church is male – it also indicates that men need female help. And so, we will find that the role of deacon – which is that both of a servant of the church and a helper to the leadership is open to women. We see this, for example, with Phoebe, Romans 16.1.

Having made the initial case for leadership in the church being male, we will now go on to delve into the background of this a little more and to look at the kind of male leadership which God requires.

2: The character of good male leadership

Scientifically females are characterised by having XX chromosomes and males by having XY chromosomes in every cell of their bodies. Functionally this means, among other things, that while females give essential and enormous help as the nurturers of life, males are the providers of life. Maleness is about initiating and being the overall protector of life and fruitfulness. This simple fact actually gives us the main idea to hold on to with regard to the true character of male leadership.

True male leadership is, under God, about bringing and preserving life and fruitfulness in the church. We may say that leadership is to be 'parental' even 'fatherly' in character, 1 Thessalonians 2.11; 1 Timothy 3.4,5; 2 Timothy 2.1 etc. Many males in Christian leadership, have lost their bearings and seem to have forgotten this – and this has caused much difficulty in many churches. They see leadership as about control and decision making rather than growing people.

But let us fill in the background from Genesis for what I am suggesting. There are two things here. The first has to do with the word and related to that the second has to do with life.

The word

God is the first speaker. He creates the world through his word, Genesis 1.3, and his word is prior to all we perceive as reality. His word is all powerful and authoritative. He speaks and it is done. And he creates a world which is 'very good', Genesis 1.31. His is a commanding word but a benign word. In that sense it is father-like.

Having created man, the LORD speaks directly to the man as to his work, his freedom and its limits, Genesis 2.16, 17. According to the text of Genesis, Adam, the 'firstborn', then speaks authoritatively to the rest of creation. The LORD brought all the land animals and birds to the man 'to see what he would name them; and whatever the man called each living creature, that was its name', Genesis 2.19. What he said counted. Those names stuck and, in a sense 'defined' those creatures. Before the Fall, Adam names his partner 'woman', Genesis 2.23. Later, post the Fall, Adam names his wife Eve, Genesis 3.20, the mother of all living.

Here the pattern is being set for the male being the authoritative speaker. It is

part of Adam's headship over creation, under God.

Life

The scenario in Genesis 1 and 2 is of God, having created the heavens and the earth, planting the garden of Eden, Genesis 2.8. The man, Adam, is made and then set to the work of tending this garden, Genesis 2.15. However, this is not meant to be a static situation. This is with a view to extending Eden into the whole earth, Genesis 1.28. Adam is to break new ground and sow the seeds of Eden.

The river in Eden separates into four rivers which flow out of Eden, Genesis 2.10 pointing the way and providing water to enlarge the garden and make the whole earth fruitful. In order to extend this life-giving rule human beings must multiply, Genesis 1.28 and fill the earth with God's image. And there is treasure, gold and pearls to be found out there, Genesis 2.12. The earth is to be subdued, conquered, brought to fruition for God, with Adam leading the way and Eve helping him, Genesis 2.18. Adam is to initiate life 'out there'.

We note here also, that through sacrificing part of himself, under God, Adam is also the source of life for Eve, Genesis 2.21,22 and they are one flesh, Genesis 2.24. In sowing his seed in Eve, Adam fathers children, bringing life, Genesis 4.1; 5.3.

So, putting these two things together, we can see that Adam's leadership was very much about life. And that should be the main first concern for church leaders. Male leadership is about bringing life and good fruit in people's lives through the word of God. We are immediately reminded of Jesus who, as the Good Shepherd, said, 'I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full,' John 10.10.

Provision and protection

God's first recorded words to Adam are as follows: 'You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat of it you will surely die,' Genesis 2.17. This is juxtaposed with God's decision to make Eve, v18.

The first part of what God says is about provision for Adam's ongoing life. He is free to eat from the garden. And, of course, once Eve is created, as one with

Adam, she is to do the same. Her life is provided for by her husband, the gardener.

The second part of God's initial words to Adam set a limitation and bring a warning. The tree of the knowledge of good and evil is out of bounds. To eat of it will not bring life but death. Adam, as the one who has been given God's word has responsibility for protecting Eve. We must say that not only was Eve deceived by Satan, but Adam failed to oppose Satan's lie, 'You will not surely die', Genesis 3.4. Not only should Adam have not eaten the fruit himself when offered it by Eve, but he ought to have opposed the false teaching of the serpent. However, calamitously he neglected this responsibility.

This reminds us that there is certainly a need for male church leadership to exercise authoritative oversight and discipline in churches in order to protect and preserve spiritual life. This must happen as and when necessary. However, this more negative side of what is required of leaders should not dominate the atmosphere of a congregation. A pessimism and air of suspicion should not characterise a church. Yes, we have a great enemy, but our God is greater, 1 John 4.4. We must protect people in order to grow them. But our main aim is to grow them.

All this is best seen in terms of a church leader being like a father who provides for and protects the children he loves, Galatians 4.19-20.

3: Looking after people

Leadership is not first of all about being ‘masterful’ or a being a strategist, but about growing human beings. So, let’s remind ourselves briefly of a biblical view of what people actually are. We use three ‘S’s to help us get a rounded perspective. Human beings are similar to God, servants of God, stewards for God.

Similar to God

Human beings are a revelation of the glory of God. ‘Let us make man in our image, in our likeness...male and female he made them’, Genesis 1.26,27. Mankind’s nearest ancestor is not an ape – it is God himself.

There is a glory about human beings. We are ‘made a little lower than the angels...crowned with glory and honour’, Psalm 8.5. This should govern the behaviour of leaders and the way they view the people under their care.

There is something lyrical about us. The first poetry from God in Scripture is to do with human beings, Genesis 1.27.

*So, God created man
in his own image,
in the image of God
he created him;
male and female
he created them.*

Poetry is repeated, this time from the mouth of Adam, with the creation of woman, Genesis 2.23.

*This is now bone of my bones
and flesh of my flesh;
she shall be called woman
for she was taken out of man.*

The glory of God is not just seen in the cosmos, but in us. At least in part, God’s name is to be ‘majestic in all the earth’, Psalm 8, because of us. That bestows immense dignity on all human beings – including women.

And that God makes us male and female is not to imply that somehow that God himself is Transgender (a bit of both - as I have heard said on one podcast) but to convey that God is a relational being, of unity in diversity. The one God is Trinitarian, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, not an isolated monad. Leader, your people are the image of God. Your loving aim in ministry, given our fallen condition, is that people might be renewed in the image of God in all righteousness and holiness (like Jesus), Ephesians 4.24 – to glow afresh with the life of God. Does that attitude set the ethos of your pastoral dealings?

Servants of God

We are not gods. Not even human leaders are gods – and certainly not leaders in churches. We find our true selves, not in being lords and setting the agenda but in willing obedience to God and loving him with awe. Is that how you see yourself and your role pastor?

People are made to embrace who God has made us and serve his purposes, his laws, his glory. Do you set people the example in that attitude of servanthood Christian leader? God has the right to forbid the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. We are innately moral beings with a morality that is defined by the glory of God and the well-being of his image – other human beings. That's the 10 commandments. The old Puritans would see the first four commandments in terms of setting the way to love God and the last six showing how to love our neighbours, Mark 12.30, 31. And people thrive under Christ-like love.

Tragically, with the Fall there comes a Satanic humanity, marked by seeking its own glory, often with insensitivity and brutality towards other people. Cain kills Abel out of Satanic pride, Genesis 4.8. This kind of masculinity brings death not life. The 'alpha males' who lead pagan empires as bullies who bring slavery and oppression are pictured as beasts not men. Is your leadership Satanic or servant-like?

Jesus is the great servant of God. He sets the pattern of male leadership for us. 'You know that those who are regarded as rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all. For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and give his life as a ransom for many,' Mark 10.42-45. He is the role-model for church leadership.

Stewards for God

Our job as human beings, according to Genesis is to rule creation, Genesis 1.28. We are to do that for God's glory and creation's good. So, human beings are made for challenges and achievements. Adam, in partnership with Eve, is to push out the boundaries of Eden into the rest of the world.

God gives gifts to different people and enables them to be talented in different areas. In Genesis, this can be anything from gardening, like Adam through to building, Genesis 4.17, raising livestock, Genesis 4.20, to music, Genesis 4.21, to forging metal tools, Genesis 4.22. These abilities are meant to be used to serve God and others, bringing out the potential of all that God has invested into this wonderful earth. As the history of the human race has proceeded, of course, the diversity of what can be done and the different talents that people have has vastly increased. Christian leadership is meant to encourage people and urge them to use whatever gifts God has given them as good stewards in the world and for the extension of Christ's kingdom.

Do we as leaders nurture people's gifts or neglect or even suppress them? Are we catalysts for growth?

Do we encourage people as a good father encourages his children?

Men and women

As leaders we look after and help human beings to grow. But, of course, people come in two types – male and female. That diversity in the human race reflects the diversity within the Trinity. Though we are going to think more intensely about leading both men and women today, we will just now point out the relative differences God has made between us.

Looking at the Genesis account, I want to suggest that the male is characterised by leadership, work and sacrifice. These characteristics are relative not absolute. It's not that women can't take the initiative, or work or make sacrifices – of course they can, they are human beings made in the image of God too – but these are to be prominent in the man.

- Adam is the name not only of the man but of the race, and is the first made, first in the garden, takes the initiative in starting a new family, Genesis 2.7,8,24. He is the leader.
- Adam is made from the ground, (The Hebrew word here is 'adamah'), to

work the ground, Genesis 2.5, 7.

- Adam sacrifices of himself for the making of Eve, he gives of himself for the good of another, Genesis 2.21,22.

But, note, 2.18, without the woman the man cannot fully realize his humanity – they are meant not to be rivals but a team.

Again, as we look at the creation account in Genesis, I would suggest that the woman is relatively characterised by helping, sensitivity and nurture.

- Eve is created as God declares, 'It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him,' Genesis 2.18. To help is not to be lesser. God himself is our help, Psalm 46.1.
- Eve is created and named 'woman' after there is no helper found for Adam among the animals, Genesis 2.20. This suggests a sensitivity and understanding in the woman of which brute beasts are incapable. And Adam seems to recognise this as he declares that she is 'bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh,' Genesis 2.23. There is such a thing as female intuition.
- Eve becomes the mother of all living, Genesis 3.20. Together Adam and Eve can 'be fruitful and increase in number', Genesis 1.28, because of the differences in the male and female anatomy. A mother nurtures her children.

Christ-like and loving male leadership in a church will recognise the shared features of men and women and the relative differences and seek to grow both for the glory of God and the good of the individuals. Church leadership will seek to develop initiative, work and sacrificial living in men. It will honour women for their help and intuition and diverse nurturing skills. It will do this recognising that these people are made in God's image and are his servants and stewards in the world.

4: Looking after the men in your congregation

Church leaders, you are meant to grow your men.

Because of our sin, it is very easy for men to become rivals. We see this in the first two brothers born into the world, Cain and Abel. Though they were brothers, Cain ended up murdering his brother, Genesis 4.8. There was jealousy even between Jesus' disciples, Mark 10.41. Self-centred church leaders can see other men, especially the gifted ones in their congregation, as a threat to them and be less than helpful towards them. Leaders can seek to subdue other men, diminish and boss them rather than grow them. This can lead to a breakdown of relationships and terrible consequences for a church.

Family attitude

As he writes to Timothy, Paul counsels him concerning his attitude as a leader towards other people in the church. Concerning the males, he has two things to say.

First, 'Do not rebuke an older man harshly, but exhort him as if he were your father,' 1 Timothy 5.1. When an older man steps out of line it is tempting for an insecure leader to take the opportunity to deal severely with the senior man in order to establish his own authority. But Paul says that is not the way to go for leaders. Rather they are to entreat him to repent as if he were their father who they love and respect.

Second, Paul says to Timothy, who is himself a younger man, 'Treat younger men as brothers', 1 Timothy 5.1. John Calvin comments, 'So when there is equality of age Paul asks us to display a spirit of brotherliness and to be gentle in our admonitions, so that none can take offence unless he is determined to vent his anger'.⁶

Notice that in all a leader's dealings he is to have the attitude that the people of the church are his family whom he loves. Such love is particularly required in engaging with ordinary men these days, including Christians.

⁶ *Sermons on 1 Timothy*, by John Calvin, translated by Robert White, Banner of Truth, 2018, page 554

Men in the contemporary world

The world has changed for men in recent years. Increasing numbers of males are struggling in one way or another. While elite men are still flourishing, men in general are not – especially poor men and black men.⁷ In the US 3 out of 4 ‘deaths of despair’ are males – alcohol, drugs, suicide. For the UK, 74% of suicides are men.⁸ Christian leader, many of the men you care for are struggling, perhaps without you realising it. Pastor, you are meant, through your preaching and care, to bring life and fruitfulness for God to these men. Do we understand where many men are these days?

Secularism, with its championing of the individual self, has inevitably set men and women against each other. Women have been abused. We should lament this and generally defend women’s rights. We will get to that. But so much has concern for women taken over the agenda that any idea that many men also might be suffering inequality, is met with resistance. The liberals refuse to accept that gender inequality can run in both directions and label any male problems as symptomatic of ‘toxic masculinity’. Those of a more traditional outlook are more sensitive to the troubles that men and boys are facing but think that everything can be put right if we turn the clock back to how society was 60 years ago – which is never going to happen. Neither response is helpful.

So, let’s think about how the world has changed for men – what is driving male distress? Three areas:

Education

Boys don’t do so well as girls at school. Across all subjects, 2019 entries for GCSEs, 72% for girls achieved grade C or above (equivalent grade 4 now) compared to only 63% for boys. And the gap has been the same for basically 20 years. (What happens to that other 37% of boys?) Again, whereas in 1970 just 31% of Bachelor degrees went to women in Britain now it is 58% - outstripping men. What is going on here? Is it that boys have less incentive to work hard to get a good job these days? Is it, especially with the social media / celebrity age, that ‘success’ in life has so little to do with education – so boys don’t bother? Others think science shows that the crucial part of the brain (frontal cortex) for impulse control and planning, matures about 2 years later in boys than in girls – so we have got boys at school too early and they can’t make the most of it. Then they just get discouraged. So, the system simply is better suited to girls.

⁷ See *Of Boys and Men: Why the Modern Male is Struggling*, by Richard V. Reeves, Swift Press, 2022

⁸ *A crisis of masculinity imperils the foundations of the West*, by Nick Timothy, Daily Telegraph, 30th April 2023

Whatever the reason, ordinary boys struggle. Do you care pastor?

Workplace

The Western world has seen a move to deindustrialisation. But at the same time there has been a failure to build an economy which creates enough well-paid jobs. In the workplace the occupations most susceptible to automation are those most likely to employ ordinary men. The statistics from the US are that ordinary men work at 70% of production occupations, 80% transport occupations, 90% construction occupations – very much in line for replacement by machines and AI robots. Muscular strength is no longer required. By contrast women make up most of occupations relatively safe from automation – like health care, personal services, education etc. Salaries have only increased for elite men. In real terms ordinary men have lost 10% of their income since 1983.

Family

The male role in marriage has traditionally been defined in terms of being the provider – based on the economic dependence of the family on the male (We ask our Father in heaven for our daily bread, Matthew 6:11). But the family unit has long been under attack from secularism. That traditional role of father has been largely dismantled as many women gained economic independence – can run a family without a dad. And, of course, egged on by a hedonistic godless society, many foolish men embrace the neglect of family – ‘single and free’. But it leaves them not knowing who they are. Previously men could essentially describe their role as ‘providing for my family’ – it was a position of dignity and respect – but in wider society, that’s going or gone.

Also being the provider for the family socialised men – they knew where they belonged. But once the family goes that sense of home goes too. Divorced men, unless they remarry, are often very lonely. Ordinary young men, perhaps with average or lesser mental ability, become feral. They blame women for their low place in society – and they are wide open to finding their home in a gang. Young men will hear the message from the gang leader, ‘society doesn’t want you, but we do’. So, they find a home in crime and violence. And if boys are not like that, they turn in on themselves and play computer games all day.

I also ought to say that racial discrimination has often made all this worse for black men. Prejudice breeds suspicion. Here is a quote: ‘Effectively the job market in America regards black men who have never been criminals as though

they were.’⁹

Church as a refuge for men

Can men find a home in your church? Can men regain proper confidence and self-respect in your church? They won't regain it under an authoritarian pastors and elders who think their main job is to get their own way and boss people about rather than encouraging and growing people. You will simply be another instrument of crushing these men. True male leadership? We are back to the pattern of the servant-hearted Lord Jesus Christ as our role model, Mark 10.42-45.

Do you seek to grow young men, showing them their worth as made in God's image. Can you excite them and introduce them to the dignity of godliness? Will you help develop initiative and work and sacrifice for the good of others which is true masculinity?

⁹ *Of Boys and Men*, Richard Reeves, Swift Press, 2022, page 55

5: Male leadership which works for women

Pastor, you are meant to grow women spiritually. Male eldership has got to work for women. How is that done?

There is a prevailing cultural current which can make it quite difficult. Many men have proved sinful leaders and much in the climate of our society encourages women to view all men with suspicion – from some Metropolitan policemen who have raped women, to some church leaders who are abusers of various kinds. How can male church leaders regain the trust of women?

It is a conundrum. But it won't be regained by secretive leadership or a leadership which dominates a church – which never listens and basically rules the church through fear.¹⁰ This is not the way of Christ.

Servant leadership

My own experience is that often in conservative evangelical churches there are good women who recognise and do not question the fact that the Bible teaches male leadership. However, these faithful women, because of their acquiescence are taken for granted by leaders and not well served.

The headline with which to start is, of course, Christ-like, servant leadership. 'Whoever wants to be first must be slave of all,' Mark 10.44. Notice that word 'all'. Does the leadership of your church see itself as there to serve all – including, or especially including, the women of the church? Or is the eldership there to serve the organisation and reputation of the church rather than individuals? Elders should think about how the women of their congregations are faring. Are they thriving spiritually?

What does an eldership / male church leadership that is good for women look like?

Let me suggest a few things.

Love

First, there must be total sexual purity – that cannot be emphasized strongly enough. Paul tells Timothy that a leader is to treat 'older women as mothers, and younger women as sisters, with absolute purity,' 1 Timothy 5.2.

¹⁰ I have even known of elders who are afraid to express their views because of other elders.

But mere sexual purity is not enough. Pastor you must love the women of your church as sisters and mothers in the Lord – and let them know that you love them. The NT tells us that the Lord Jesus loved Martha and Mary (and Lazarus), John 11.5. The apostle John loved the chosen lady and her children, 2 John 1. You let the women know that you love them by giving them attention and appreciation and seeking to bring them to radiance as Christians – to an enjoyable walk with Christ. Christian maturity for women is too often equated with being bland and mouse-like. But the NT speaks of people ‘aglow with the Spirit’, Romans 12.11. Priscilla, for example, was obviously a woman who made an impact for Christ. In marriage, a wife is content to be submissive to her husband if she knows that he loves her and will work for the best for her – as Christ loves the church. Just so, for the women of the church to support and be content with male leadership they need to know not only that male leadership / eldership is Scriptural (they know that), but they need to feel that, in the appropriate way, they can thrive – they are loved and appreciated and honoured by the leadership.

A positive vision of womanhood

Second, we live in a world which for all its denigration of men, is very male oriented. The message out there is, ‘The only worthwhile stuff is male stuff’. So, for example, ‘liberation’ for women is frequently equated with being able to do what men do. For some at least, that goes to the extreme of wanting to knock the living daylight out of each other in the Olympic boxing ring, fight on the front line in the armed forces etc. Are we losing proper femininity?

If we wish to gain or regain the trust of Christian women, we need to articulate a Biblical view of womanhood which says that womanhood is good, positive and exciting. It is part of the ‘very good’ which God declared at the completion of creation, Genesis 1.31. Being a good Christian woman does not mean simply keeping quiet and making the tea. Strong, gifted and intelligent women are brilliant. Men are not to feel threatened by them but to celebrate them. The apostle Paul was unashamed to acknowledge his own debt to various women. Many had supported him and worked hard alongside him, Romans 16.12, Philippians 4.3. He is prepared to speak of the mother of Rufus in Rome saying that ‘she ‘has been a mother to me too,’ Romans 16.13. Women as well as men are disoriented today. We need to let the Bible teach godly womanhood (Proverbs 31 etc.).

Marriage

Third, for male leaders to regain the trust of our married sisters we need to preach and exemplify a Christ-like servant headship for marriage. We need from the pulpit to let them know that we are on their side. We do not endorse the attitudes of Christian husbands who no longer love or cherish their wives and treat them with indifference. 'Husbands love your wives as Christ loved the church' says Ephesians 5.25. Yes, Jesus' great act of love was at the cross, but has his love for the church diminished since then? No. So, what are you doing as a pastor when you fail to challenge Christian marriages where a man neglects his wife for his job or other things or even for the church? Christ presents the church to himself as a radiant church. But I see many married women in churches who are so much less than radiant. I know that every family has troubles to contend with, and every wife feels those troubles. But is there an underlying joy that is saying to the world, 'yes, but I know my husband really loves me and is there for me'?

Listening

Fourth, for male leadership to work for the women of the church, male leaders need to find ways of listening to the women and taking what they say seriously. These women are made in the image of God with just as good a brain as yours if not better. They are part of the body of Christ. Yes, Adam went wrong listening to Eve, but that is not meant to set the pattern of how we view all that women have to say. Abraham is told to listen to Sarah, Genesis 21.12; as Barak listened to Deborah and there was victory, Judges 4.4-9; David listened to Nabal's wife Abigail and was blessed by doing so, 1 Samuel 25.20-35. And in the book of Proverbs Wisdom is personified in female terms, Proverbs 9.1, etc. And yet we may rarely listen to the wisdom of our sisters in the church.

Is there a forum for this in your church whereby women are listened to – especially single women? Or is the atmosphere of the church meeting such that no woman would have the courage to speak up? Indeed, is the church meeting just an exercise in rubber stamping? I'm not saying that male leaders always have to do as the women suggest. However, God made women differently and to think differently from men for a purpose – and we need the help they can give. And don't forget, very often, women, especially the older women of the church, pray for the church even more than the elders do. Aren't they worth listening to?

Recognising gifted women

Fifth, for male leadership to work for women we need to cultivate women's gifts and abilities and use them in the church. From Luke 8.1-3 we know that Jesus and his disciples had a group of women who helped their ministry. Some of these were present at the cross and were witnesses of the resurrection. It seems clear that women like these had a crucial part to play in the early church as deacons / deaconesses in the early church, Romans 16.1, 1 Timothy 3.11. They helped the church and its leadership.

Yes, consistent with the principle of male leadership, eldership in the churches is to be male. But just as it was not good for Adam to be alone, Genesis 2.18, he could not attain all he was meant to be without Eve, so a church leadership which ignores women and their gifts will stunt a church. Engaging with the women of the church will not only keep us from laying ourselves open to the accusation of being patronising – treating women as if they were a nuisance to be tolerated – but will actually enhance the ministry of the church. And when you have a good team spirit between men and women in a church, you are showing the world how things ought to be.

Male leadership which is servant-like and transparent, which is caring and accessible and not manipulative is where we must begin if we want to regain the trust of women and make male leadership work for women.

This might require a revolution in your church. But, let me ask you, is your style of leadership more to do with what makes you feel comfortable and in control than what is actually Biblical? Our truest obedience to Christ is seen where his ways cut directly across our own natural skills and tendencies. Male leadership must grow people and is about leading through love and sacrifice – like Jesus.

