

I SUFFER NOT A WOMAN

Conclusion

Tonight I'm going to bring this series to a close. There is so much more I could share about how corrupted our views of women are, but if what I have shared so far hasn't affected any change in the way people view this whole issue, then probably nothing I say will *ever* change their minds.

*Divers weights, and divers measures, both of them are alike **abomination** to the LORD.*

Proverbs 20:10

In the economy of the Old Testament, trade was often done by measuring scales, and the weights, usually some type of stone, was used to measure goods for buying and selling. These weights were to be *the same* for both buying and selling, so that equity and justice were practiced in every day life. But greedy and wicked merchants would use *two different kinds* of weights—one for buying and one for selling—without the person knowing what was going on. In so doing, they would increase their own profits at the expense of the buyer. God said He hated this kind of thing because He is a God of justice.

Double standards come in all shapes and sizes, not just in economic trade. One of Jesus' strongest denunciations was against the double standards or hypocrisy of the religious leaders of Israel. "*Woe to you scribes and Pharisees; hypocrite!...*" He said, in Luke 11:44. Then He told them how they appeared righteous externally, but inwardly they were like unclean graves.

God is no less disgusted with double standards when it comes to the doctrines of Scripture. Those who wrongly divide the word of truth in order to support some error they are promoting are just as much an abomination to God as those who rip people off in the economic realm. So tonight, I am going to end this series by looking at some of the *double standards* that are being applied to the Scripture with regards to the proper place of the women in the gatherings, and in the home.

But first, I want to repeat something I said in our last chat session. There is a *vast difference* between the Patriarchal system which has prevailed since the original fall, and the system Jesus established during His ministry. I mentioned last time how Jesus turned that whole system on it's head when he told His disciples that they were not to live and act the same way the rulers and leaders of the nations did. The rulers of the nations *take dominion* and *exercise authority* over the ones they are ruling. In the Kingdom of God, the opposite must be true. Those who lead must do so from a position of humility. They are to lead *by example*. People must be granted the liberty to follow or not follow that example. The ones who are mature in the faith are not to take dominion over the immature, or exercise authority over them.

This is *the way* of the kingdom. This is how we are to walk, both in public gatherings and in private homes. Unfortunately, what you see today in *both* the home and the churches is just the opposite. The ones who lead demand submission; they take dominion; they exercise authority. The *doctrine* and the *deeds* of the Nicolaitans prevails in the church system, where the clergy rules over, and demands submission from, the laity. And the *spirit* of the Nicolaitans prevails in the homes, where the husbands rule over, and demand, submission from their wives.

I also tried to paint a picture of just how *oppressed* women were in the days of Rome, and as a result, just how radical Paul's statements on marriage and relationships would have sounded to the people he wrote to. But Paul was not the only "radical" with regards to the treatment of women. The way Jesus treated women was also considered radical. Let me to take a few minutes and show you just how radical your Lord was in this whole area.

There is no way to adequately explain how radical Jesus was in His emancipation of women. Everything about the Lord's visit to earth is contrary to all the ways of men. He was born and grew up in a man's world. Long before Bethlehem, however, He pre-existed. That pre-existence was in another realm, not ours. In realms unseen He was driven to have a counterpart. The Hebrews, it seems, outdid the Greeks. In the Talmud and in Jewish proverbs, you can find the following Jewish views of women:

Let the words of the Law be burned rather than women be allowed to learn it.

If a man teaches his daughter the Law it is as though he taught her lewdness.

The woman is in all things inferior to man. Let her therefore be submissive.

Let a curse come upon the man who must have his wife or children say grace for him.

It is good for that man whose children are male. It is ill for that man whose children are female.

At the birth of a boy everyone is joyful, but at the birth of a girl everyone is sad.

When a boy-child comes into the world, peace comes into the world. When a girl-child comes into the world, nothing comes!

Even the most virtuous of women is a witch.

In the Jerusalem Temple, built by Herod and Jewish religious leaders, women were confined to an area called *the Court of the Women*, which was fifteen steps lower than the court designated for Jewish men. No such courts to divided men and women in either the Tabernacle in the Wilderness, or in Solomon's Temple. What you see is the steady degrading of women over time.

Then Jesus came on the scene. He walked into that religious, Patriarchal world and turned it upside down. He brought the *good news*, which was aimed at loving the oppressed and setting them free—especially women. Read through the Gospels, and you will see that Jesus never uttered a negative word about women. In stark contrast to the attitude the rest of the men of Israel displayed at that time, Jesus taught women; He allowed women to travel with Him; He treated women as equals. In effect, He *ignored* the social conventions concerning women—things which had stood since the original fall.

Indeed, no man in all of human history was ever *as radical* in his treatment of women as was Jesus. As we look at the things He did and said regarding women, remember that His heart toward women was but a reflection of *the Father's heart* attitude towards them.

Let's start with the beginning of His natural life. Two of the four Gospels recount the virgin birth of Jesus. This was a disgrace beyond words. Even today, if anyone wrote a biography of a man and started it with the story of the man's *virgin* birth, everyone would think him mad. How much more do you suppose this would have been the case back then?

Calling Mary a virgin, and at the same time saying that she bore a child, was the equivalent of saying that she was a fornicator. Yet, Matthew and Luke recorded the truth, knowing that first-century readers would be shocked at what they read. That story would certainly be perceived by the Hebrew mind as an admission that she had sex *before* she was married.

Let's look at His ministry for a few minutes. Probably the most *infamous* story in the Gospels is the story of Jesus and the woman at the well. Here is a Jewish man who goes out of His way to travel through the despised area known as Samaria. This is something a devout Jew would never even consider doing. The racial prejudice between Jews and Samaritans was very strong.

Jesus sat *alone*, waiting for His disciples to return with food. He waited, deliberately, for a certain woman to come to the well. When she arrives, she ignores Him and begins to draw water from Jacob's well. This woman was defamed in reputation. She was a social outcast, even among the Samaritan half-breeds, so she must have been very shocked when Jesus started speaking to her because this was unthinkable. A man, talking to a woman in public, alone; things like this just did not happen.

It was even more unthinkable that a *Jewish* man would talk with a Samaritan woman—alone. What is more, *this* woman was a divorcee. Even today, there is hardly a divorced woman alive who does not feel like she is a second-class citizen. Antagonism toward divorcees—male and female alike—is still very much a part of our religious mentality, so you can imagine how much worse it was back then. Yet the Lord went out of His way to speak to a person who was despised because she was a Samaritan, despised because she was a woman, and despised because she was a divorcee—and a *five* times divorcee at that!

But there's more. Jesus was not only talking to a despised Samaritan woman who was five times divorced, He was talking to a woman who was currently living in adultery. In other words, the woman at the well was the *least likely candidate* for conversion. A much-hated, no longer young, hard-to-get-along-with (she was divorced five times!), adulteress, and a Samaritan. It's pretty clear from her part of the conversation that she was also shallow—but not too shallow to show contempt for a Jew who needed a drink of water. This woman was so far down the social ladder there was no steps left.

But there's more. For a man to speak to a woman publicly—to engage in even the briefest of conversations with any woman in public—was seen as an indication that you had slept, or were intending to sleep, with her. The only possible reason any man would speak to a woman alone, in public, was to arrange a sexual encounter with her.

It takes a while for the reality of the situation to sink into our brains because most of us do not relate to this poor woman the way Jewish men, and even Samaritan men, did. But when it finally dawns on us that the Father *purposely* sent Jesus into Samaria to offer *that* woman the good news, you can begin to get a sense of how radical Jesus' ministry really was. To this despised woman, Jesus revealed the truth that God is Spirit, and that the day is coming when all will worship Him in spirit instead of at a certain place.

Consider the story of the woman who was dragged into the Lord's presence (*John 8:3*) because she was caught in the act of adultery. All the Lord did was tell her not to do it again! But to the men who wanted to stone her He said, let him that has no sin be the first one to begin the stoning process.

Most of us have missed completely the importance of what Jesus did in this account. You see, these men were using *different* weights and measures when it came to punishing those caught in the act of adultery. Maybe you haven't noticed, but they didn't drag *the man* out and seek to stone him. They only dragged the woman out. It was *the woman* they wanted to kill, not the man.

Was the man less guilty? No. But the fact is, in a man's world, the woman doesn't get away with anything. On the other hand, the man gets away with murder. Jesus wasn't going to have any part of this kind of a double standard. So he extended the same level of mercy to the woman, as those male religious rulers had extended to the man.

Then He confronted them about their own sin. Again, I think most people miss what Jesus was really saying there. He wasn't just talking about sin in general. He wasn't saying, you who are sinless, cast the first stone. He was talking about the *same kind of sin* this woman was caught in. He was getting to the root of their Patriarchal hypocrisy. What Jesus was saying to them was this: "*Let the one who has never committed adultery, the one who has never had sex with a woman other than his wife, or the one who has never lusted after a woman, be the one who casts the first stone*".

This brings us to the Lord's view of divorce. In that day, women could not divorce their husbands; only a man could divorce his wife. In addition, he could divorce her on a whim. She had no legal rights, and the man always got custody of the children. Many divorced women had to resort to prostitution for survival. When Jesus addressed the issue of marriage and divorce (*Mk. 10:2-12*), He *rejected* this inequality and lifted marriage to the point of mutuality. In other words, He leveled the playing field.

As you read the Gospels, you see how the gives honor to women in His parables. In the parable about the woman and her lost coin, Jesus used the imagery of a woman to give us a clearer portrait of *God as Savior* (*Lk. 15:8-10*). In another place, Jesus expressed His feelings toward Jerusalem using the imagery of a female. He spoke of a *mother hen* spreading her wings over her tiny chicks (*Matt. 23:37; Lk. 13:34*). Here is a female (a hen) being used to illustrate the love of God. On another occasion someone told the Lord His mother and His brothers had come to see Him. Jesus replied, My mother and my brothers are those who hear God's word and practice it. He made clear that both males and females who believe on Him become His own kin (*Lk. 8:19-21*). In salvation, the Son of God *equaled* women with men.

The story of Mary and Martha also shows just how radical the Lord's views were. First of all, Mary was allowed to sit at the feet of Jesus—something that was *unthinkable* at that time. Sitting at the feet of a teacher was a sign that you were one of his disciples. The followers of a religious teacher or rabbi in those

days always sat at his feet when he was teaching them. Jesus taught a woman. No man with any character or integrity would ever engage in such a thing at that time. Yet Jesus let Mary sit at His feet, just like the Twelve sat at them. In allowing her to do this, Jesus was numbering Mary among His disciples.

Think of it! A *woman* in the midst of men; a woman learning the law; a woman acting like a disciple, rather than fulfilling her so-called, “God-ordained”, womanly duties. All of this was forbidden; it was totally counter-culture. Even worse—for those who think Patriarchy is God’s divine order—Jesus Himself said Mary had chosen the *better* part. He commended her for it and said that it *would not* be taken from her.

Secondly, Martha *complained* to a man about what her sister was doing—again, something that was unthinkable. Women did not complain to men about anything. They were the virtual slaves of men. They were the property of men. Women were to keep silent and give men *blind* obedience. Not only did Martha complain to a man, she complained to a man *in public*, which was a double disgrace.

I want to say it again, so the reality of what happened that day gets down into your spirits. In allowing Mary to sit at His feet while Martha was tending to kitchen duties, Jesus was *setting women free* from being *limited* to the drudgeries confined to their gender. He allowed Mary to leave the kitchen and be placed in the position of a disciple. Moreover, even in allowing Martha to complain to Him about what Mary was doing, Jesus was setting women free. Oh that every man and every woman would let the Holy Spirit give them a revelation of what transpired in that house that day. Jesus tore that whole Patriarchal system to shreds!

We see it again in the account of the woman who anointed Jesus' feet. The men who were present in that room that evening were no doubt mortified at what they saw. For a woman to touch a man, let alone to anoint His feet with oil was beyond unthinkable. Add to this the fact that she had just recently been demon possessed.

In a time when the common view of women was that they were little more than slaves, and their chief purpose was to give men sex and children, Jesus raised women to a level of both dignity and worth. He related to women as human beings, not as cattle, not as property. He spoke to women in public; He taught women; He allowed Himself to be touched by women; He chose as His closest friends *three women*: Mary, Martha, and Mary Magdalene; and perhaps one of the most overlooked aspects of His ministry is that He was financed by women. Women always traveled with Jesus, and they were His main financial supporters (*Lk. 8:1-3; Matt. 27:55,56; Mk. 15:40,41*).

The honor Jesus bestowed gave women was unprecedented, and the greatest one of all was that He chose to appear *first* to women, not to men, after His resurrection. In so doing, He was making it obvious to His disciples, and to all of us, that He was bringing forth a *new order*—an order that is *not* of this planet. To see how Jesus treated women is to understand what *God* thinks of women.

The life the Lord lived, with regards to women, transformed the apostles. That transformation is revealed in different ways; but the most obvious one can be seen by the fact that they were so open about what He said and did concerning women when they wrote the Gospel accounts. If these men had *retained* the common Patriarchal Hebrew attitude of their day towards women, much of the Gospel account would never have been written down.

The (Christian) Patriarchal view of women is that they should get married, be a homemaker, bear children, manage the house, and basically serve the man. This is what she was created for. While Jesus never denied that this is a proper role for a woman, He made it clear by what He did and said to Mary that this is not the woman's *only* choice.

Men who promote the Patriarchal system tend to overlook the way Jesus treated and interacted with women, and they are quick to quote certain key passages to prove Patriarchy is the one and only order available for women to walk in. The problem is, they are slow to quote other verses—which in some cases are in the very same passage—which might not support their interpretation. Again, this is *the same* as using different weights in the area of buying and selling. For example: in First Timothy 5:14, Paul says:

I will therefore that the younger women marry, bear children, guide the house, give none occasion to the adversary to speak reproachfully. For some are already turned aside after Satan.

I. Timothy 5:14-15

When you read this verse, it sure sounds like Paul is espousing the Patriarchal view that *all* women should marry and bear children because that is what the woman was created to do. But let's read what Paul said just prior to verses 14-15.

Let not a widow be taken into the number under threescore years old, [sixty years old] having been the wife of one man, Well reported of for good works; if she have brought up children, if she have lodged strangers, if she have washed the saints' feet, if she have relieved the afflicted, if she have diligently followed every good work. **But the younger widows refuse: for when they have begun to wax wanton against Christ, they will marry; Having damnation, because they have cast off their first faith.** And withal they learn to be idle, wandering about from house to house; and not only idle, but tattlers also and busybodies, speaking things which they ought not.

I. Timothy 5:9-13

What is the subject of this passage? The subject is “widows” being taken into the care of the fellowship. Paul tells the church not to accept the responsibility for caring for a widow unless she is, first of all, sixty years old (or older). He lists a bunch of other qualifications she must have in order to be eligible to receive permanent financial support from the church. Then he tells them *not* to accept “younger widows” because he knows they *will not* remain widows but will eventually get remarried. Then, he says: “*I will therefore that the younger women [ie: widows] marry, bear children, guide the house...*”

Get the picture? Paul is not giving a blanket command to *all* women everywhere to get married and have children because this is what God created them for. He is not saying that if the woman wants to be pleasing to God, if she wants to fulfill the function for which she was created, then she must get married, have lots of babies, be a housewife, and serve the man. He is talking about younger “widows” whom he is assuming

(for whatever reason) will eventually get re-married. He was telling the churches how *not* to end up becoming mini-welfare states, supporting whole families after a widow gets re-married. Like Jesus, the apostle Paul does not confine women to what most male leaders say is her “God-ordained”, womanly role of cooking, cleaning, having children and serving the man. That’s why he wrote what he did to the believers at Corinth. When’s the last time you heard a preacher give a sermon on I. Corinthians seven.

*Now concerning the things whereof ye wrote unto me: **It is good for a man not to touch a woman.** Nevertheless, to avoid fornication, let every man have his own wife, and let every woman have her own husband.*

I. Corinthians 7:1-2

*But I speak this by permission, and not of commandment. **For I would that all men were even as I myself.** But every man hath his proper gift of God, one after this manner, and another after that.*

I. Corinthians 7:6-7

*I say therefore **to the unmarried and widows, It is good for them if they abide even as I.** But if they cannot contain, let them marry: for it is better to marry than to burn. And unto the married I command, yet not I, but the Lord, Let not the wife depart from her husband: **But and if she depart, let her remain unmarried, or be reconciled to her husband: and let not the husband put away his wife.***

I. Corinthians 7:8-11

Paul says very clearly that it is “good” for a man not to touch a woman. He also says very clearly that he wished all men were as he was—unmarried. He also says to the unmarried (and the widows), that it would be best if they abide as he is, again, unmarried. Now think! If God’s “divine order” for woman is that they fulfill their “God-ordained” role being a housewife, mother and a servant to men, then what is Paul doing encouraging women to *disregard* the divine order? If it’s God’s *perfect will* that women get married, have children and be housewives, why is Paul admonishing women to ignore God’s perfect will by remaining single? And why is he telling widows it’s best to remain unmarried, when over in First Timothy he told them it’s best they get re-married?

Please notice that Paul sets the married women at liberty to “**depart**” from her husband if she must. He is talking about **separation**, not divorce. He says that if for some reason the wife feels she must separate from the husband, she can do so. But she is not free to remarry. Let her remain separated, or let her be reconciled to her husband. Neither Jesus or Paul requires the woman to stay in an abusive marriage, or in a marriage that is **taking her away** from Christ.

My point is not to say that the traditional role of the women is wrong. It's *not*. My point is that women have been *set free* to follow the Lord *the same way* a man has follows Him. This can be done in a married state or in a single state. However, it cannot be done in under the Patriarchal system, for in that system, the woman's *first* allegiance must be to the man (not to God). In that system, the woman must obey the voice of the man, even if what the man says *contradicts* the voice of God. In that system the women serves Jesus Christ *through* the man. She does not serve Him directly. In that system, the woman follows the man, not God. She obeys the man, not God.

Woman must be free to hear God's voice, and follow the leading of His Spirit, and obey what He directs her to do. This does not equal anarchy or matriarchy (ie: woman running the home). It's God's order under the New Covenant. God doesn't give women gifts just so they can be exercised at church. These gifts are to be utilized at home. The man should be spiritual enough to recognize the gift his wife has been given and give her the liberty to move in it, instead of acting like a spoiled brat and demanding that she lay everything down at his feet and serve him. The fact that women were able to move in *ministry gifts* in the Early Church says *a lot* about the men in those assemblies.

At the end of the last chat session I said that if you know what to look for in the Scripture, and if your mind isn't already pre-disposed to reject the possibility of women having the liberty to function and minister in the gatherings, you will find that there are statements all through the New Testament which show that women were full participants in the life of the church. I also shared some examples of what I believe were New Testament women who actually led fellowships in their homes.

I want to look *again* at one of the woman I mentioned. The reason I want to look at her again is because we have so thoroughly brainwashed by the Patriarchal system, it takes quite a bit of effort to break through these lies. Even when one describes the truth the New Testament reveals, it doesn't "sink in" right away. It has to be repeated, over and over again, until finally the mind is able to (once and for all) *reject* the garbage we have been taught. The woman we are going to revisit is *Lydia*.

*And on the sabbath we went out of the city by a river side, where prayer was wont to be made; and we sat down, and spake unto the women which resorted thither. And a certain woman named Lydia, a seller of purple, of the city of Thyatira, which worshipped God, heard us: whose heart the Lord opened, that she attended unto the things which were spoken of Paul. And when she was baptized, **and her household**, she besought us, saying, If ye have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come into my house, and abide there. And she constrained us.*

Acts 16:13-15

As I said last week, Lydia was a business woman who traded in valuable, dyed garments. She was Paul's first European convert and her home became the first meeting place for European Christians. Once again, I would like you to notice what the Scripture says of her. It says that: "...when she was baptized, **and her household**, she besought..." Paul and his companions to lodge at her house. We don't know if she was divorced, or if she was a widow, or if she was just a single woman. But what is clear is that she was the *head* of a Roman household—and when she became a Christian, the same thing that happened in every

other Roman household (where a man was the head) happened to her household. The entire household followed the head and were baptized as Christians. I also said that when we see the term “house” or “household” in the New Testament, we do not understand what it meant to the people in Paul’s day. We view these terms in the context of our own culture. This is a big mistake. For us, a house is our own private haven, away from the other people and the business of the culture. On Sunday mornings, we leave our private house and we travel to a *public building* which we call “church”. The house and the church are two completely separate entities, which serve two completely different purposes.

But it was not that way in Paul’s day. The house was not a private haven. It was a semi-public dwelling. Moreover, that house *became* the church almost instantly, as soon as *the head* of the house got saved. People didn’t leave their home and *travel to* a church. They lived in the church.

Also, please notice what the Scripture says about Lydia and her *female* friends. Paul is on his second missionary trip (AD. 49-52). Silas and Luke are with him. They come to the city of Philippi. Because of an edict of Emperor Claudius, there were no Jews in the city of Philippi. So instead of going to the local synagogue, Paul and Silas go outside the city, to a place where women are already meeting together to worship. When he arrives, the Scripture says he: “...spoke unto **the women** which resorted thither...”. When he shares the gospel with them, Lydia responds. What do you suppose happened to the *other* women in that group, when Lydia accepted the gospel? I’ll tell you what happened. The first *all woman* congregation was born!

Now, how many of you think Paul told all these women they had to put a covering over their head and remain “silent” in the gatherings? That would be some meeting! Nobody talking; nobody sharing; nobody praying; nobody worshipping. It would have been the first “Quaker” meeting in history!

How many think Paul told these women they could teach *each other*, as long as there were no *men* in the congregation? How many of you think that Paul told these women that the *first* man that becomes part of that fellowship will have to immediately be made the leader because it’s against God’s divine order for women to teach a man or be in authority over a man? Soon after the conversion of Lydia, Paul and Silas are put in prison. When they are released, before they leave Philippi, they go back to Lydia’s house. Notice what the Scripture says.

*And they came and besought them, and brought them out, and desired them to depart out of the city. And they went out of the prison, **and entered into the house of Lydia: and when they had seen the brethren**, they comforted them, and departed.*

Acts 16:39-40

By now some *men* had been converted and had become part of this formerly all woman fellowship. Notice that having men in the fellowship didn’t change anything. They were still meeting in *Lydia’s* home. Lydia was *still* the overseer of that fellowship. Lydia was a *spiritual* leader. Thirteen years later (AD. 63), Paul would write a letter to this *same* church in Philippi. What do you find in that letter? You find there are two very strong *women* present in that assembly, and Paul refers to them (in the King James) as “*fellowlabourers*”. He said these two women—Euodias and Syntyche—“laboured with” him “in the

gospel”. Laboring with Paul in the gospel does *not* mean that they cooked for him and washed his clothes! It means they *preached* the gospel right along side of Paul. The NIV says:

*Therefore, my brothers, you whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, that is how you should stand firm in the Lord, dear friends! I plead with **Euodia and I plead with Syntyche to agree with each other in the Lord.** Yes, and I ask you, loyal yokefellow, **help these women who have contended at my side in the cause of the gospel**, along with Clement and **the rest of my fellow workers**, whose names are in the book of life.*

Philippians 4:1-3 (NIV)

The NIV says these women “*contended*” at Paul’s side because this is the thought that’s being expressed by the Greek term, “*sunathleo*” (soon-ath-leh'-o). *Sunathleo* (Strong’s #4866) literally means “to wrestle in company with”, or “to labor with” or “to strive together for”. It’s only used twice in the New Testament, and both times are in the book of Philippians. The other occasion is where Paul said:

*Only let your conversation be as it becometh the gospel of Christ: that whether I come and see you, or else be absent, I may hear of your affairs, that ye stand fast in one spirit, with one mind **striving together for the faith** of the gospel;*

Philippians 1:27

Euodias and Syntyche were at Paul’s side, contending with unbelievers in the cause of the gospel, in the same way that Paul contended with them. This is why he call them his “fellowlaborers” (KJV) or “fellowworkers” (NIV). The Greek word there is “*sunergos*” (soon-er-gos’), and it means “a co-laborer”, or a “companion in labor”.

Throughout the New Testament it is used to describe people who operated in a *ministry* capacity. It refers to those who were both preached the gospel to the unsaved, and those who ministered to the saved. This is important because Patriarchal male religious leaders are loath to admit that these two women worked right along side of Paul, preaching the gospel, contending for the faith, and doing things that they say only men should do. So let’s have a look at how this word is translated elsewhere.

Romans 16:3 Greet Priscilla and Aquila **my helpers** in Christ Jesus:

Romans 16:9 Salute Urbane, **our helper** in Christ, and Stachys my beloved.

Romans 16:21 Timotheus **my workfellow**, and Lucius, and Jason, and Sosipater, my kinsmen, salute you.

I. Corinthians 3:9 For we [apostles] are **labourers** together with God: ye are God's husbandry, ye are God's building.

*II. Corinthians 1:24 Not for that we [apostles] have dominion over your faith, but **are helpers** of your joy: for by faith ye stand.*

*II. Corinthians 8:23 Whether any do inquire of Titus, he is my partner and **fellowhelper** concerning you: or our brethren be inquired of, they are the messengers of the churches, and the glory of Christ.*

*Philippians 2:25 Yet I supposed it necessary to send to you Epaphroditus, my brother, and **companion in labour**, and fellowsoldier, but your messenger, and he that ministered to my wants.*

*Philippians 4:3 And I intreat thee also, true yokefellow, help those women which laboured with me in the gospel, with Clement also, and with other **my fellowlabourers**, whose names are in the book of life.*

*Colossians 4:11 And Jesus, which is called Justus, who are of the circumcision. These only are my **fellowworkers** unto the kingdom of God, which have been a comfort unto me.*

*I. Thessalonians 3:2 And sent Timotheus, our brother, and minister of God, and our **fellowlabourer** in the gospel of Christ, to establish you, and to comfort you concerning your faith:*

*Philemon 1:1 Paul, a prisoner of Jesus Christ, and Timothy our brother, unto Philemon our dearly beloved, and **fellowlabourer**...*

*Philemon 1:24 Marcus, Aristarchus, Demas, Lucas, my **fellowlabourers**.*

Nobody ever denies that *male* “sunergos” like Timothy, Paul, and the rest are operating in a ministry capacity. Yet they will deny up and down that *female* “sunergos” like Euodias, Syntyche and Priscilla are operating in a ministry capacity because they are biased and dishonest.

There are several reasons why it was possible for a woman to function in a ministry capacity in the Early Church. I want to wind this study down by looking at what is probably the *main* one. It was because, during the first 15 or 20 years of the New Testament Church, there was no religious structure; there was no religious hierarchy. Everything was *fluid*; the social life of the kingdom was just forming.

People read the book of Acts and they interpret it like they do everything else, in our present day cultural and religious context. They think the apostles did what modern missionaries and pastors do—they start a congregation; stay for a couple of years and indoctrinate everyone into their particular theology; and then appoint some leaders who will carry on the program after they leave. In order to prove that this is the way the original apostles operated, they point us to the following passage in the book of Acts, which *seems* to say this is exactly what the apostles did.

*And when **they had ordained them elders in every church**, and had prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord, on whom they believed. And after they had passed throughout Pisidia, they came to Pamphylia.*
Acts 14:23-24

At first glance, it sure looks like Paul raised up a congregation, and then appointed elders before he left. But this is not really how it went. If you back up just a few verses, you will read the following:

And there came thither certain Jews from Antioch and Iconium, who persuaded the people, and, having stoned Paul, drew him out of the city, supposing he had been dead. Howbeit, as the disciples stood round about him, he rose up, and came into the city: and the next day he departed with Barnabas to Derbe.

*And when they had preached the gospel to that city, and had taught many, **they returned again to Lystra, and to Iconium, and Antioch, Confirming the souls of the disciples, and exhorting them to continue in the faith, and that we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God. And when they had ordained them elders in every church**, and had prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord, on whom they believed. And after they had passed throughout Pisidia, they came to Pamphylia.*
Acts 14:19-24

I don't want to get bogged down trying to define the proper function of a New Testament elder at this point. Here I just want to point out *when* it was that Paul ordained elders in "every" church. Notice that it was on *his return* to Lystra, on *his return* to Iconium, on *his return* to Antioch. These churches were the first fellowships that Paul raised up on his first church planting journey. Now, if Paul did not appoint elders *until he returned* to them, what is the clear implication? The implication is that they *had no elders* from the time he left them until the time he returned to them.

Did you ever realize that Paul left his brand new churches *leaderless*? Do you know how long Paul stayed with those congregations before he left them leaderless? Do you know how long it was between the time he left them leaderless and the time he returned to them and ordained elders? Here is the status of those churches at the time of Paul's *return*. The Church at Lystra was 4 months old; the Church at Iconium was 1 year old; the Church of Antioch Pisidia was 1½ years old. Four months, twelve months and eighteen months—without leaders.

Think of it. The believers at Antioch were without *any* leadership for 18 long months. What do you suppose they did during those 18 months? How do you suppose they functioned? What do you think their meetings were like? Want a hint? Those 18 months the *whole congregation* learned how to function together as a *spiritual unit*. They learned how to move under the *direct* Headship of Jesus Christ as a *corporate* people. They learned to rely on the Spirit of God in themselves and in each another. It was *them* against the world—not them and the elders against the world, not them and the pastor against the world, not them and the apostles against the world—just them.

They found out the hard way (sink or swim) that each and every one of them had to carry their own weight. They learned what it was to do their individual part, to supply according to the measure of faith and grace given by the Spirit. Spiritual unity, *unspoiled* by religious rank and authoritarianism, *unspoiled* by pride and arrogance. That's what made the Early Church tick. They walked in a simple, down-to-earth comradeship that was born out of the *corporate functioning* of all the individual members—including women!

There was no Baptist preacher there, telling the woman to be silent, or telling them that they must not function because doing so would be a usurpation of the man's spiritual authority. Both the women and the men flowed together, by the Holy Spirit. They were all working as a spiritual team—men and woman together—all doing whatever part they had been granted by the Holy Spirit.

After 18 months of *that kind* of life, the beloved apostle comes around and sees that some of them have grown much faster than the rest. So he ordains *them* elders. What do you think happened next? Did everything change? Did those newly appointed elders take charge of the meetings and start doing most (or all) of the ministering? Did they start seeing themselves as a separate, special class in the fellowship who were now responsible to lead and feed everyone, every Sunday, now and forever? Did they usurp the corporate leadership of that church? Did they usurp the Headship of Christ? Did they start having elder's meetings? Did they begin to decide the direction of the fellowship? Did they begin to decide who needed to be reproved and who needed to be commended? Did they start to decide who needed this and what should be done about that? And did they put *all the women* who had been functioning up to that point on the sidelines?

Not on your life brother! The minute they would have tried to pull any of that garbage the whole fellowship would have gathered round and booted them out on their ears. Nothing changed—at least not for a few years. The issues of the fellowship remained in the hands of the fellowship—the *whole* fellowship.

Unfortunately, eventually these leaders did take over the fellowships and when they did, they also sidelined the woman who were functioning. They took control of the people, inserted themselves between them and their Head, Jesus Christ, and in doing, they killed the life of the Early Church. From that point on, they were heading into the Dark Ages.

Compared to the life the First Century Church had, we still have no come out of the Dark Ages! And I'll tell you we never will as long as men want to keep propping of the rotting corpse of Patriarchy. Most assemblies are under the curse of God because they are will not set the women free to function and serve God in the capacity He has for them.

Likewise, ye husbands, dwell with them according to knowledge, giving honour unto the wife, as unto the weaker vessel, and as being heirs together of the grace of life; that your prayers be not hindered.

I. Peter 3:7

Lots of men quote the apostle Peter where he tells the wife to submit to her husband. But they ignore what he says immediately after that, which is that the husband is to "honor the wife" as being a fellow "*heir*" of the kingdom of God. Peter goes on to *warn* the husband that if he does not honor his wife and treat her

as a fellow heir of Christ, his prayers will be hindered. That is, God will *not* answer his prayers. I dare say this same principle applies to the churches as well. You treat your women like second-class citizens; you refuse to let them function; you tell them to sit down and shut up; then don't be surprised if the prayers of that church don't get answered.

Don't think God is winking at the fact that half His people (the women) are being kept in religious slavery and bondage by egotistical, selfish, immature men. In the kingdom, when Jesus brings justice to this world, many men are going to find that the show has been put on the other foot; and the women who spent their lives in bondage to that Patriarchal system, will be *rulers over* the men who profited from that system.

It's my hope that those who hear my voice will not wait till it's too late to get into the kingdom order Jesus established when He was here. In closing, let's recap:

First of all, this new order was demonstrated by Jesus in His life and ministry, as he broke with the existing hierarchical structuring of male-female relationships and treated women as equals. See: Luke 8:1-3; 10:38-42; 11:27-28; 13:10-17; 21:1-4; Mark 5:22-42; 16:9 & John 8:3-11; 12:1-8).

Secondly, it was also demonstrated within the Early Church. Women, like men, were converts and the description of first-century church life suggests that women were engaged in significant ministry. See: I. Cor. 11:2-16; Rom. 16:1-16; Col. 4:15; Acts 2:17-21; 5:14; 8:12; 9:1-2, 36-42; 12:12; 16:12-15, 40; 17.4.34; 18:2-3, 24-28; 21:9; Phil. 4:2-3; I. Tim. 3:11; 5:1-16; II. Tim. 1:5 & Tit. 2:3.

Thirdly, the New Testament teaches that *every* Christian—male and female—is to grow into maturity in Christ and to exercise fully the gifts she or he has been given. No sexual distinction is hinted at. See: II. Tim. 1:6-7; Rom. 12:6-8; I. Pet. 4:10; I. Cor. 12:4-31; Matt. 25:14-30.

Special notice should be made here of Paul's teaching in Galatians and Romans, which calls **all** believers (male and female) to be "led by" and "led of" the spirit.

*This I say then, Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh. For the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other: so that ye cannot do the things that ye would. But if ye be **led of** the Spirit, ye are not under the law.*

Galatians 5:16-18

*For if ye live after the flesh, ye shall die: but if ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live. For as many as are **led by** the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God.*

Romans 8:13-14

Women—whether they be they single, married, or divorced—are to follow God and be led by "the Spirit", just as men are to follow God and be led by "the Spirit". **Nothing** can supercede or annul this call upon the woman.

Those passages in Scripture which seem to speak against this the position of equality between men and women, such as I. Cor. 11:2-16; 14:33-35; I. Tim. 2:8-15; Eph. 5:21-33; I. Pet. 3:1-7, must be understood as follows:

1. Our existing translations are often biased against women.
2. Christians shared the cultural attitudes of the first century regarding the position of women in a manner analogous to their attitude toward slavery.
3. Most of Paul's letters are just that—letters. Though the words he spoke were inspired, except for the book of Romans, they were not universal, theological, treatises. They were personal letters, addressed to specific people within the Christian community that were experiencing special problems. These problems called for particular responses which, while correct for that specific situation, may not be applicable in today's current cultural context. Instead of transplanting verbatim, the solutions Paul gave these fellowships 2000 years ago, we should find the underlying general principles which can be applied to our present day situation.
4. Paul's *advice* regarding women in the church must corresponded to, rather than contradict, how the Scripture describes what women *actually did* in the Early Church. In the book of Acts, and other places, we find women doing the work of evangelists, overseeing home fellowships, prophesying and praying, teaching, etc.
5. Those who want to interpret Scripture "literalistically" must be *consistent* in their approach. Yet few, if any, literalists are willing to do this. As just two examples: the same ones who say a woman can't teach (I. Tim. 2:12), don't pay any attention to the admonition that women *shouldn't* braid their hair or wear jewelry (I. Tim. 2:9). Literalists also ignore Jesus' admonition to wash one another's feet. They have no problem applying the words of Paul about man being the "head" of the woman in its most literal and narrow sense (I. Cor. 11:3), but they have no problem *ignoring* the fact that Paul said women who pray or prophesy in a gathering should wear a covering (I. Cor. 11:5).