

The Ministry of Women

Today, I would like to take the opportunity to preach on the Biblical topic of Women, especially women in ministry and women in the church.

Somehow, in modern American culture, sociologists and others have come to the conclusion that CHRISTIANITY holds women back and “keeps them in their place”.

Nothing could be further from the truth.

I believe with all my heart that Christianity FREES WOMEN from the tyranny that both unbiblical male dominance and modern feminism thrusts upon them.

Christianity, whenever it comes into a culture, elevates the status of women, and frees them from the bondage that is so prevalent in cultures that are not influenced by the Scriptures.

We’ll be going to a number of Scriptures, but turn first to Genesis 2.

I. The Differences Between Men and Women -- Genesis 2:4-8, 18-25

1. The differences between man and woman predate the fall.

The differences already existed, and not just the physical, obvious differences. The role distinctions also pre-date the fall.

The COMPLEMENTARY nature of man and woman predate the fall.

The differences that exist between man and woman were corrupted by the fall – they were not created by the fall.

2. The differences are physical – obviously.

The first thing you notice about a person is their gender.

And, admit it, when you can’t tell a person’s gender quickly, it is a little troubling, no matter how “open minded” you are.

Are you troubled by the thought of homosexual marriage?

Does it bother you, that in all likelihood, in the next few years, we will probably see legislation passed that will recognize full marriage, or something very much like it for gays and lesbians?

If you don't believe the Scriptures, you will have a hard time refuting how "unfair" it is that people of the same sex cannot marry.

It's not good enough to say you're "uncomfortable" with it. That can simply be prejudice, and prejudice should never be codified by law.

God created man and woman to be together and to complement one another.

This is something that is naturally ingrained in us, true.

It is also something that is plainly taught in Scripture,

3. The differences are also emotional.

This is built in by God.

There are female characteristics and male characteristics.

There are also characteristics that do not know gender boundaries.

EXAMPLE:

I was talking with another pastor who is going through an extreme physical difficulty. He was scheduled for some tests and he was admitting his mind was racing toward the worst possible outcome. He said too often he found this was exactly his nature, looking at the worst thing that could happen and making contingency plans. But, his wife is just the opposite. She said she would refuse to believe there was anything wrong until test results confirmed it.

That's a classic case of OPPOSITES complementing one another.

One was too cautious and taking too many precautions.

The weakness is obvious. Catastrophizing and negativity. The strength is planning ahead and being pro-active in your health.

The other refuses to believe there could be a problem until it is proven. The strength is being positive and upbeat. The negative is, if there is something really wrong, it might be overlooked.

Together, they make a good pair IF they build on each other's strengths and minimize one another's weaknesses.

That's part of being A TEAM.
That's part of being ONE FLESH.

4. How and Why women were created

a) Adam was formed first v. 7.

This isn't just a coincidental fact, it is important in the whole issue of male and female roles as we will see in 1 Timothy 2.

- Adam was made by the direct hand of God.
- He is the only creature in whom God BREATHED in a soul.
- Man was immediately set apart from the animal kingdom (something that is often denied by Dawinian Evolutionists, who see man as simply the most evolved of the animals).

b) Adam was perfect in himself, but still lacking something outside himself.

What was he lacking?

A creature that was COMPARABLE to him. **v. 18.**

Adam was created as a creature who needs fellowship.

He had fellowship with God – but not 24/7.

Who did he have he could talk to?

Who did he have to share his life with?

Which animal was there that could understand him, because the was just like him?

None was to be found.

That's because humans are unique.

And men and women are EQUALLY human.

That's an amazing thought.

We have said that men and women are different.

☺ The world says Women are from Venus and Men are from Mars.

In reality – men and women DO understand one another – and CAN understand one another -- if they will listen to God and follow the directives of His Word.

The roles of men and women are not some great unsolvable mystery.
It only becomes that way when we abandon what God has said.

Are women inferior to men?

NOT AT ALL. They are comparable to men.

We are made of the same stuff – literally – as the woman was TAKEN OUT OF MAN – and every man that has come since, has been taken out of a woman.

This includes the Lord Jesus Christ who was MADE OF A WOMAN.

Supernaturally, and miraculously, he didn't have an earthly father.
All his HUMANNESS – and he was 100% human -- as best as we can tell in our imperfect knowledge, he got from Mary, his mother.

c) The joy Adam had when Eve was brought to him. v. 23

Adam was overjoyed.

This is a poem – the first recorded words from man are a poem – celebrating what God had given to him as a great gift.

He knew among the animal kingdom, there was no one like himself.

He also immediately knew, SHE was just like himself.
SHE WAS COMPARABLE TO HIM – he recognized it immediately.

While the Scriptures do not tell us Eve's reaction, we can only imagine, in the Innocence of the Garden of Eden, untainted by sin, her reaction to Adam was the same as his to her.

Moses then gives his foundational commentary – which is the foundation of marriage -- repeated by our Lord and the Apostle Paul. **v. 24**

This “one flesh” idea is not just physical.
It is THE ONE LIFE they live TOGETHER.

II. The Dignity of Being a Woman – Genesis 1:26-28

Single people are not inferior to married people.

But single people have their own unique trials and temptations, just like married people share unique challenges.

Your dignity is not based upon “getting married”.

A married woman is not MORE of a woman than a single woman.

Marriage does not make you a woman, you already ARE a woman.

1. Both men and women are made in the Image of God

Men and women are equal in the sense that they bear God’s image equally.

They were created by different methods, but, essentially of the same STUFF, and by the direct hand of God Himself.

2. Both men and women are absolutely equal in Christ.

We are misunderstood by many to say men are better than women.

We DO NOT believe that and anyone who DOES believe that is sadly mistaken.

Difference in roles does not mean difference in worth.

We will deal with differences in roles on Father’s Day when we preach this same outline to the men.

In Christ, there is neither male nor female.

There is no Gender in the Eternal State – only for this time.

Islam doesn’t see it that way.

Mormonism doesn’t see it that way – they marry for time and eternity.

In both those systems – Gender is eternal and gender roles are eternal.

Christ tells us that in the eternal state – we do not marry, nor are we given in marriage. (Matt. 22:30).

That’s why we say, “Until death do us part”. For the Christian -- at death, the surviving spouse is absolutely free to re-marry – as the Bible says – *only in the Lord* **I Cor. 7:39**.

There are obvious and necessary gender distinctions in this world.

There is NO GENDER DISTINCTION in the eternal state.

In the eternal state, we all take on the role of the BRIDE, and Christ is the BRIDEGROOM for all eternity.

We find our full realization in Him, and all our needs eternally met in him, as HE functions as the head of the Church, eternally, just as the Husband is the head of the Home in this present age.

For procreation
For completeness of humanity

In the eternal state there is no need for male or female.
On earth it is for companionship and procreation.

III. Distinctive Roles for Women in Ministry

The New Testament CLEARLY shows there is a great need for the ministry of women.

1. Is it Biblical for a woman to be a pastor?

One of the questions I get asked most, from those outside of our conservative theological circles is: “Why can’t women become pastors?”

1 Timothy 2:11-15

I do not believe this is meant to be a total ban on women speaking in any way at all.

What is being limited is AUTHORITATIVE speaking.

What is being limited is the type of public speaking that would put HER in a position of leadership over men.

Obviously, preaching would do that.

I think public praying can also do that – as the one praying publicly is not praying only for themselves, but is speaking on behalf of the entire congregation.

That is also why we limit our Communion meditations to the men. Women are certainly capable of giving good thoughts concerning Christ, but MEN are to be the leaders in the church.

The injunction IS NOT CULTURAL.

Paul does not appeal to culture.

He doesn't say "*We have to face the facts that 1st century men just won't like a woman being a preacher, but by the time we get to the 20th century, things will be different.*"

Paul goes back to the Biblical account of creation and the fall.

Verses 13-14 must be taken together to understand Paul's argument.

Sometimes, people look only at v. 14 and come to the conclusion that Paul is saying women are more easily deceived than men.

That's really not the point.

The point is a matter of LEADERSHIP.

Leadership was broken.

Eve stepped out of the bounds of her place and usurped Adam's God-given authority. That's what v. 12 is all about.

As she did that – she was deceived, and she decided to eat and give it to her husband to eat – and he did – even though he wasn't deceived.

To quote Wayne Grudem – "*In this case, the main point is not that the man is undeceivable, or that the woman is more deceivable; the point is that when God's order of leadership is repudiated, it brings damage and ruin. Men and women are both more vulnerable to error and sin when they forsake the order God has intended.*"

1 Corinthians 11 is a passage similar to this one, and the issues there are both Biblical and cultural.

We don't have time to go into that today, but I hope to do a Sunday School lesson in June on the first 16 verses of 1 Corinthians 11.

2. Is there a Biblical office of Deaconess?

The name "Deacon" carries with it two connotations.

Usually, in our day, when we say "Deacon" we mean the office of Deacon.

This is Biblical.

In 1 Timothy 3:10 – Paul talks about the office of Deacon after giving the necessary qualifications for a man to be a deacon.

In Paul's epistle to the Phillippians, he addresses it to the church, with the bishops and deacons.

The meaning of the term "*diakonos*" δι-~~ακ~~-οῦ-ος is "*servant*".

In its various noun and verb forms it is used over 100 times, but only a handful of times in the OFFICIAL OFFICE of deacon.

Angels came and **MINISTERED** to Jesus after the temptation (Matt. 4:11). Jesus came not **TO BE MINISTERED UNTO** but **TO MINISTER** (Matt 20:28).

Christ referred to himself as a minister in this sense MANY times.

John 12 – there was a supper and Martha **SERVED**.

Women often ministered to Jesus or to the church as a whole.

There were the women who **provided** from their financial resources to support Jesus and his disciples Ministry during their preaching tour -- **Luke 8:2-3**

PROVIDED is the verb form of the word Deacon.

We do not see any indication, in Scripture that there was a BIBLICAL OFFICE of deaconess, but we do find many many instances of women MINISTERING.

3. A Glimpse of Women in Ministry from Romans 16

This chapter features 33 names.

24 were in Rome (17 men & 7 women)

In addition he mentions two households and the mother of Rufus and the sister of Nereus.

9 of the people mentioned were with Paul in Corinth. (8 men & 1 woman).

1) Phoebe v. 1-2

For those who believe in the official office of Deaconess – (and let me state clearly, that we, at SGBC don't recognize "Deaconess" as a legitimate NT office in the same way we recognize "Deacons") this is invariably the passage they will use.

What do we learn from this passage?

1. This is a commendation from Paul, to the Church in Rome, of a woman, that they probably have never met, who has come from Cenchræe, which is a Seaport near Corinth.

2. Because of the nature of this commendation from Paul, it is likely that Phoebe was the one who DELIVERED this letter to the Roman Church, by sailing from Corinth to Rome.
3. She is a worthy woman who has been a HELPER to many, including Paul himself. She was a SERVANT with a SERVANT'S HEART.
4. In a nutshell, we see that women can be valuable and trusted helpers in the work of the gospel, but the text says nothing, and does not even intimate anything about Phoebe holding a special "office" in the Corinthian church.

Something else should be mentioned about Phoebe, and it applies to many others on this list.

Many were first generation Christians.

How can you tell?

She is named after a goddess.

It is doubtful Christian parents would have done that.

AND -- Also note, she didn't NEED to change her name.

Her name was no longer a testimony to the goddess Phoebe.

Her name and life was a testimony to the saving grace of Christ.

2) Priscilla & Aquila v. 3-5

Priscilla and Aquila were a husband and wife both grounded in the gospel. This brings up another point -- that someone in the church mentioned this week.

Is it wrong for women to privately discuss theology with men?

Not talking about women teaching men in the church.

Not talking about women preachers or SS teachers of adult classes.

Privately, in your own home, someone comes over to visit.

Acts 18:24-26

This chapter also tells us something more about them.

Acts 18:1-3

They were one of Paul's favorite couples.

They even worked together making tents together for a time.

3) Mary v. 6 – We really know nothing else about her.

4) Andronicus and Junia -- v. 7

It is very possible they are a husband and wife team.
However, even that is debatable, as Junia appears to be a rare name in the Greek world, but was not exclusively a feminine name, which would mean these are two fellow-laborers.

Just like Phoebe was not a "deaconess", these did not have the official office of "apostle" like Paul did.

They were Jews, that's why they are Paul's kinsmen.
They were Christians before Paul had known the Lord.
They most likely were among those who had seen the Post-resurrection Lord, (that is why they are called apostles) -- eyewitnesses of the resurrection. 1 Cor 15 tells us there were well over 500 of these.

But, that is not the same thing as fulfilling the role of one of the 12 Apostles.
Remember Acts 1 – when Matthias was chosen to fill Judas Iscariots role.
One of the qualifications was that he would have to have been with the Lord from the early days of Christ's ministry.

v. 8-11 we find names of slaves,
names of nobility
names of country folk
names of sophisticates.

5) Tryphena and Tryphosa v. 12

Two women who were sisters and maybe even twins.
Their names mean "delicate" and "tiny".
Paul says their service is tireless. They labor to the point of exhaustion in the Lord.

4. Certain characteristics about all these saints – male and female alike.

1) They worked hard.

They were important cogs in the spread of the gospel.
They are immortalized in Scripture, but we know nothing else than their names for most the most part.

What they did they did not do for glory.
What they did they did for God.

2) **They had backbone.**

They stood strong in a pagan culture.

They all faced persecution.

In a few years, all Christians would be driven from Rome.

Some had already been in prison -- *Andronicus & Junia v. 7*

3) **They were integrated.**

Jews and Gentiles.

Country dwellers and city folk.

Male and Female.

Slaves and free

Wealthy and poor

ALL MEET TOGETHER.

There was no color barrier in the early church.

Prejudice has no place in the body of Christ.

Rufus (v. 13) was the son of Simon of Cyrene who carried Christ's cross and was a black man.

5. **Paul's Christo-centric Heart**

Christ was at the center of all of Paul's thoughts and actions even here in Romans 16 when he is greeting the brethren.

Ten times in this passage we see the words "in Christ", or "in the Lord".

Andronicus & Junia were "in Christ" before Paul.

They were converted before he was.

A Christian is a person who is "in Christ".

Christ is at the very center of his existence.

Christians have a relationship with their Lord.

We belong to Him.

All that we do, WE DO for Him.

We live our lives, with the full realization that we are constantly in His sight, in His heart and in His mind.

Paul also knew how to get a hold of these Christians he had met in various parts of the world.

They would meet at the gathered local church.

They would not live solitary lives apart from other believers.

They were IN CHRIST and all were members one of another.

Sadly, how far we have gone off track in nearly 20 centuries.

Many Christians have no use for the gathered church.

We surely could use a good dose of NT Christianity in our culture and churches today!

ONE MORE WORD.

Lost friend, there were no greetings to you in Romans 16.

That's because you are not part of the body of Christ.

You are not one of the brotherhood.

That is a fearful thing.

But here is a hopeful thing.

Many of these mentioned are first generation Christians.

They lived as lost men and women in a lost culture, until they came to Christ.

You too can come to Christ if you will repent of your sins and believe the gospel.

Will you give up your foolish pride and turn to Christ?

PRAY

HYMN 95

Benediction: Gen. 1:27

