

Women's ordination: Why is this issue important and what's at stake?

Pastor Stephen van der Hoek, 30 August 2018

*The one who hears you hears me,
and the one who rejects you rejects me,
and the one who rejects me rejects him who sent me.*
(Luke 10:16)

The question of whether women should be ordained into the office of the holy ministry is a question that seems to be plaguing churches throughout the world. Where women have been ordained, churches have been split over the matter, not to mention a certain change in the whole character of those church bodies as a result. Why is this? Why is this an issue, and what's at stake?

I. Pastors, apostles and Jesus Christ

Before discussing this issue, it may be helpful to paint some of the background to the pastoral ministry as a whole, especially as it is connected to the ministry of the apostles, who in turn receive their authority from Jesus himself. The first thing that needs to be established is whether such things as “ordination” and “the ministry” actually exist. In 1 Peter 2:9 we read where the apostle writes: *But you are a chosen race, a **royal priesthood**, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvellous light.* We know, for example, that there was a priesthood appointed in the Old Testament from the tribe of Levi, beginning with Aaron and his descendants at the time of Moses. At the time of the Reformation, the ministry of the church had most commonly come to be known as the “priesthood”, particularly because the Roman Catholic Church viewed the Lord's Supper as celebrated in the Mass primarily as a sacrificial act, similar to the Old Testament daily sacrifices. Just as in the Old Testament, where a priest performed the animal sacrifices in the temple, so also in the New Testament, it was believed, a priest would offer the unbloody sacrifice of the Mass as a propitiatory sacrifice (that is, a sacrifice which accomplishes *atonement*) on behalf of both the living and the dead.

At the time of the Reformation, there was a rejection on the part of Lutherans (as well as other Protestants) of the Lord's Supper as a propitiatory sacrifice, and so there was a certain element in which the ministry of sacrifice, the priesthood, was also rejected. We might say that the *royal priesthood* (or the “priesthood of all believers”, or the “priesthood of the baptised”) was one of the great discoveries of the Reformation. And there is a certain sense in which that is correct, properly understood. However, does this imply that the church of the Reformation properly should have no ministry? Is it true that every Christian is a minister?

In 1 Peter, although the church as a whole is referred to as a royal priesthood, in the same letter, they are later referred to as a flock which has shepherds. 1 Peter 5:1–4: So I exhort the **elders** among you, as a **fellow elder** and as a witness of the sufferings of Christ, as well as a partaker in the glory that is going to be revealed: **shepherd** the flock of God that is among you, **exercising oversight**, not under compulsion, but willingly, as God would have you; not for shameful gain, but eagerly; not domineering over those in your charge, but being examples to the flock. And when the **chief Shepherd** appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory. This royal priesthood is not without elders or shepherds, who carry out a particular ministry of *shepherding* (the word “pastor” is Latin for shepherd) and *exercising oversight* (the word “bishop” comes from this word). We also see in this text an intimate connection between (1) the *elders* and the apostle as a *fellow-elder*, and then a similar connection between (2) *the elders together with the apostles* and their *chief Shepherd*, who is Jesus Christ. (Please see the diagram below.)

Shepherds for the royal priesthood in 1 Peter

Connection 1: pastors → apostles
 Connection 2: pastors & apostles → Jesus

These two connections—between *pastors* and the *apostles*, and then between the *pastors together with the apostles* and *Jesus*—are very important. We also see a similar structure in Ephesians, where St Paul writes in 4:8–11: Therefore it says, “When he ascended on high he led a host of captives, and he gave gifts to men.” (In saying, “He ascended,” what does it mean but that he had also descended into the lower parts of the earth? He who descended is the one who also ascended far above all the heavens, that he might fill all things.) And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, **the pastors and teachers** ... Here St Paul is speaking of the event where Jesus ascended into heaven, and then poured out gifts upon the church. Particularly, St Paul here speaks of gifts that we might not expect! He speaks not about the spiritual gifts, like wisdom, or knowledge (see 1 Corinthians 12:8), but about the gift of certain *people*: *he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers*. A good case can be made for seeing the “pastors and teachers” as the same people, rather than two separate categories¹: they are shepherds who do their shepherding by teaching; they are also teachers who when they teach thereby shepherd the flock. We also see in this passage, the same connection between the pastors and the apostles and Jesus: *the pastors together with the apostles* are gifts that the ascended Lord Jesus has given to his church.

Pastors as gifts of the ascended Lord Jesus in Ephesians

There are countless other passages that could be used to defend the actual existence of the ministry, or the *pastoral office* (in German, *Predigtamt*), in the church. There are many Christians today who simply “don’t see” the pastoral office in the New Testament, and it would be time well spent to lay out a much more thorough foundation for the ministry in the New Testament. However, the missing link is often the *apostles*, and their connection with the pastoral ministry, both because the apostles are actually *pastors themselves*, and

¹ The grammatical reason for this is that there is only one mention of the article “the”. Often in the New Testament, if one article is used before two nouns, they often refer to the same thing, as in Ephesians 1:3, “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ”. “God” and “Father” are the same person. If they were intended to be separate, it would say, “the God” and “the Father”. The same applies to “the pastors and teachers.”

because the apostles also teach *about* the pastoral ministry. The connection between the pastoral office and the apostles, and then the *pastoral office together with the apostles* and Jesus Christ is very important in understanding what is at stake in the whole question about women's ordination.

When we read the Gospels, we read that Jesus had a number of disciples. However, sometimes the word "disciple" is used in two different ways: sometimes to speak of his larger company of disciples, and sometimes to speak of his twelve apostles. For example, St John in his gospel doesn't use the word "apostle" at all, and so only uses the word "disciple". Often, they are spoken of simply as the "Twelve". In Matthew 10:1–4, Mark 3:13–19, and Luke 6:12–16, we read not only the *names* of the twelve apostles, but also Jesus' specific call and appointment of each of them. Jesus also promises them to *sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel* (Matthew 19:28). We also read in the Gospels about the death of Judas in Matthew 27:3–10 and Acts 1:18–19, and his replacement by Matthias in Acts 1:26. Paul, then, is also spoken of as an "extra" apostle to these twelve, and following his conversion, recorded in Acts 9, he then seems to be the apostle most spoken about.

Jesus sends and
chooses his twelve
apostles

At the election of Matthias, the prerequisite is given for choosing an apostle, where Peter says: *So one of the men who have accompanied us during all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, beginning from the baptism of John until the day when he was taken up from us—one of these men must become with us a witness to his resurrection* (Acts 1:21–22). This gives a particular insight into Jesus' appearance for Thomas's benefit after his resurrection. We read that Jesus appeared to the apostles on Easter evening, with the exception of Thomas who happened to be absent. When the apostles share the good news of the resurrection with absent Thomas, he doesn't believe them. However, Jesus, having chosen Thomas as part of the Twelve and desiring him to be an apostle, appears to him, such that Thomas sees him with his own eyes, not needing to take his fellow-apostles' word for it. Jesus then says: *Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed* (John 20:29). Although Thomas did not believe, every Christian for the rest of history will not have the same luxury of seeing Jesus as he did, but will have to take the apostles' word for it. It is no surprise that on the day of Pentecost, after the first 3000 Christians were baptised, we read that they *devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching* (Acts 2:42).

The unique character
of the apostles and
their ministry

Today we often read many passages in the Gospels quite generally, as applying to all Christians. But often they refer to the apostles firstly, and only to other Christians secondarily, insofar as we stand together with them, believing their eyewitness and their doctrine. Matthew 10, for example, is a lengthy sermon of encouragement to the apostles, on the occasion when Jesus sent them out on a mission trip, and these words firstly apply to them. (See also John 14–16). We also see in the epistles that sometimes the apostles use the pronoun "we" referring to the whole church, but also sometimes in referring to *themselves* as a group. For example, St Paul writes: **We** are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through **us**. **We** implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God (2 Corinthians 5:20). This passage firstly refers to the apostles, and only secondarily to others, insofar as they are standing together with the apostles in making the same appeal. St John also writes of his own authority together with the other apostles, when he writes: **We** are from God. Whoever knows God listens to **us**; whoever is not from God does not listen to **us**. By this we know

the Spirit of truth and the spirit of error (1 John 4:6). And so, it is not insignificant that it is the Twelve that share his Last Supper with him (Matthew 26:20) and then receive its institution (v. 26—29). Similarly, it is the Twelve (minus Judas) that receive the Great Commission to make disciples of all nations, baptising and teaching (Matthew 28:16—20), and also the command to forgive and retain sins (John 20:21—23). It is for this reason that Paul speaks about the church as being *built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets* with *Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone* (Ephesians 2:20).

As the book of Acts unfolds, we start to see the apostles bring in others to help them in their work, such as in chapter 6, where seven others are appointed (v. 5—6). These particular

<p>The ordination of pastors in the New Testament</p>

men are different from the apostles, in that, although they are appointed to do the same work and go out preaching the gospel, they have not necessarily seen the Lord Jesus face to face and been witnesses of his resurrection. These men are suitably chosen and *set before the apostles, and they prayed and laid their hands on them* (Acts 6:6). We also read about others, such as Silas (sometimes called Silvanus), Barnabas, Timothy and Sosthenes. These men were not chosen by the Lord Jesus directly (or *immediately*, without human means), but indirectly (or *mediately*, through means) through testing and appointment and approval by the church. Paul makes special note in Galatians 1:1 that he is *an apostle—not from men nor through man, but through Jesus Christ*. He means here that his apostleship was not a human authority (*from men*), or even by human agency (*through man*) such as Timothy or Silas, but by a personal physical encounter with Jesus on the road to Damascus.

This second category of workers in the church, such as Timothy and Silas, who are not apostles, is what we would call *pastors* in the church. They are neither eyewitnesses nor have received an immediate, direct call from Jesus, but have been proven faithful to the apostles' doctrine and have been approved and appointed to preach it. The particular custom in Acts 6:6 of praying and laying on of hands, after having been approved for this particular service, is what we today would call the custom and practice of "ordination". The New Testament also gives other names to this pastoral office, such as *elder*, *bishop* (sometimes translated as *overseer*), or *minister* or *deacon* (particularly when referring to an assistant). Even some of Paul's epistles, although their apostolic authority comes from him, were not all written by him in *isolation*, but come to us as letters written together with other pastors². Paul recognises himself in sharing the authorship with these others as a *pastor* together with them (or a *fellow-elder*, as Peter says in 1 Peter 5:1), and yet at the same time, these pastors share with Paul in his apostolic authority in speaking with one voice together with him. Although these others are not apostles, the letters nevertheless come not simply from the *apostolate*, but also from the *pastorate* of the church, such that the letters are *pastoral* letters—letters from pastors to congregations.

In sending out the apostles, Jesus says: *Whoever receives you receives me, and whoever receives me receive him who sent me* (Matthew 10:40), and likewise, *The one who hears you hears me, and the one who rejects you rejects me, and the one who sent me* (Luke 10:16). These passages also refer to the pastors of the church, not insofar as they speak and say whatever they like, but insofar as they speak the same message and words and gospel as the apostles. This authority is not simply arbitrary totalitarianism, but must be exactly according to the words and testimony of the apostles. The alternative to speaking with one voice together with the apostles is to

² 1 Corinthians is addressed from Paul and Sosthenes, 2 Corinthians, Philippians and Colossians from Paul and Timothy, and 1 & 2 Thessalonians from Paul, Silvanus and Timothy.

speak against and contrary to them, which both Jesus and the apostles themselves describe, in calling them “false prophets”.

II. The ordination of women in particular

In 1 Timothy 2, St Paul addresses the question as to whether women should serve as pastors. *Let a woman learn quietly with all submissiveness. I do not permit a woman to teach or to exercise*

*St Paul's prohibition
of women serving as
pastors in the church*

authority over a man; rather, she is to remain quiet (v. 10—12). We know that what he says in this chapter applies to this issue, because of his use of the word “teach” and “authority”: *I do not permit a woman to teach or to exercise authority over a man* (v.12). A few verses later in

chapter 3, St Paul then gives a list of qualifications for pastors, both as *overseers* (or *bishops*) and *deacons*. In both of these lists, it is stipulated that they must be the *husband of one wife* (v. 2 & v. 12), but particularly in the first list, that they must be *able* (or *apt*, KJV) *to teach*³ (v. 2), exactly what has just been prohibited in the previous chapter for a woman to do. The context of the chapter indicates that Paul is speaking about the public worship of the church: he speaks about *general prayers* (v. 1), and also about the way in which men and women should conduct themselves in prayer and attire (v. 8—10). We see from this that what follows about women teaching and having authority does not apply to the general speaking of women in other situations.

St Paul also gives a reason for this prohibition: *For Adam was formed first, then Eve; and Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and became a transgressor* (v. 13—14). The reference

*St Paul's reasoning
for the prohibition
from Adam and Eve*

to Adam and Eve implies that this rule applies to all people and for all times. It cannot simply apply to a Jewish context, since only a few verses earlier in verse 7, Paul refers to himself specifically as *a teacher of the Gentiles*. What Paul is not saying here is that women have to be

silent, because men are better than women! Rather, St Paul refers us back to Genesis 2 to the creation of the first man and woman: *Adam was formed first, then Eve*. We read: *And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, “You may surely eat of every tree of the garden, but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die* (Genesis 2:16—17). This command, which was broken in the fall, was spoken to the man before the creation of Eve, implying that if Eve was to know about it, Adam needed to tell her. Because of the consequences of breaking this command, it would have been for Adam a natural act of love towards her to make sure that she knew this command very clearly. When we read about the fall, we can see that Eve knew this command about the tree well. However, when she did fall, it says: *she took of its fruit and ate, and she also gave some to her husband who was with her, and he ate* (Genesis 3:6). Just as it was Adam’s duty and task to pass the word of God on to his wife, it was also his sin to keep silent when she was tempted.

This is the exact picture that Paul uses in his argument against the preaching of women in the church, in that he wants the example of Adam and Eve to be reflected in the relationship between a pastor and the congregation. Both the relationship between a husband and wife, and the relationship between pastor and people points to the mystic union of Christ and the church as bridegroom and bride, as St Paul says: *No one ever hated his own flesh, but*

³ The phrase “able, or apt, to teach” is one word in Greek, *διδασκτικον* (*didactikon*), which means, *able to teach*, not simply in the sense that they are “able to do the job”, but that they are qualified and suitable.

nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ does the church, because we are members of his body. “Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh”. This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church.

By way of conclusion to his argument, Paul says: *Yet she will be saved through childbearing—if they continue in faith and love and holiness, with self-control* (v. 15). This is not to say that

St Paul’s reference to
the vocation of
motherhood

women are of no worth if they do not bear children, but refers back to the relationship of Adam and Eve. The struggle between the sexes is entrenched in us by virtue of the fall, when God says to Eve: *I will surely multiply your pain in childbearing; in pain you shall bring forth children. Your desire shall be for (or against)⁴ your husband, and he will rule over you* (v. 16). Just as it was Adam’s calling to pass on this first word of God to his wife, and not Eve’s, it is also not Adam’s calling to bear children, but Eve’s. Conversely, it is as if St Paul says that the office of pastor is off-limits for women, just as child-bearing is off-limits for men. He points to child-bearing as a noble task (even if particular women are not called to it personally), rather than women seeking to usurp the pastoral office without the apostles’ authority and approval. Women are not saved through childbearing, as opposed to faith. Paul does not teach that only *men* are saved by faith alone! Rather, St Paul refers to the vocation of motherhood in contradistinction to the teaching office in the church, and that women should *continue in faith and love and holiness, with self-control*—in other words, a normal Christian life that both women and men would be happy to pursue in their respective vocations.

One last remark about 1 Timothy 2 – in verse 11, we read: *Let a woman learn quietly with all submissiveness*. This last word “submissiveness” links this whole issue concerning women’s

The nature and
character of
subordination

ordination to a larger theme of “submission”—or better, willing “subordination”—within the New Testament, particularly with respect to the relationship between men and women in the context of marriage. There are a number of passages in the New Testament, which speak particularly about husbands and wives, each of which call upon women to be *submissive* (or *subordinate*) to their husbands—an idea which does not sit well with today’s thinking. There have been many instances of misuse of such passages in situations of domestic violence, where women have been told to “submit”, meaning, “do what I say, shut up, or else.” People who have been victims of such situations will most probably hear these passages in a way which does not fit with their original intent—as though women are second-class citizens in the church and should serve as unthinking “doormats”. Nothing could be further from the truth.

The passages about husbands and wives in marriage are found in Ephesians 5:22–33, Colossians 3:18–19 and 1 Peter 3:1–7. This later passage from 1 Peter also has some similarities with the passage about women in 1 Timothy 2, particularly in verses 9–10. The commands to wives in these passages to “submit to your husbands” are often heard in our context in light of modern feminism, so that people think these passages favour the oppression or subjection of women. However, a respect for women is not shared in every religion; in the Qur’an, by contrast, we read: “Men have authority over women because has made one superior to the other, and because they spend their wealth to maintain them. Good women are obedient. They guard their unseen parts because God has guarded them.

⁴ The sense of the ambiguity here is that the woman’s desire is **for** the man’s position or authority, in such a way that she is **against** him.

As for those from whom you fear disobedience, admonish them, forsake them in beds apart, and beat them.” (Surah 4:34, tr N J Dawood). This passage should be *completely abhorrent* to every Christian. We see here a number of things which are not taught in the bible, particularly that men are “superior to women” and also the advice to “beat them”. By way of contrast, the apostles teach husbands to *love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, so that he might present the church to himself in splendour, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish. In the same way husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ does the church, because we are members of his body* (Ephesians 5:25—30). Also, *husbands love your wives, and **do not be harsh with them*** (Colossians 3:19). And also from St Peter, *Likewise, live with your wives **in an understanding way, showing honour** to the woman as the weaker vessel, since they are heirs with you of the grace of life, so that your prayers may not be hindered* (1 Peter 3:7).

How can one infer anything less than a total self-sacrificing love, affection and respect from husbands towards their wives? How could anyone justify the subjection and domination of women from these passages? St Peter’s words are particularly useful in our discussion, especially his reference to women as *the weaker vessel*. Once again, we often hear these words today with feminist knee-jerks. However, “it is a truth universally acknowledged” (to quote a famous novel!) that in most marriages the man is the physically stronger partner—he should therefore not use his muscle-power against his wife. Also, St Peter commands husbands to “show honour” to their wives, because of their equal standing before God: *they are heirs with you of the grace of life*. Any subjection and oppression of women is even said to interfere with a man’s spiritual life and connection with God (*so that your prayers may not be hindered*). Such passages are part of the reason why in Christian missionary work, the status of women is universally elevated—and rightly so.

The passages directed to wives are as follows: *Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife even as Christ is the head of the church, his body, and is himself its Saviour. Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit in everything to their husbands* (Ephesians 5:22—24). *Wives, submit to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord* (Colossians 3:18). *Likewise, wives, be subject to your own husbands, so that even if some do not obey the word, they may be won without a word by the conduct of their wives—when they see your respectful and pure conduct. Do not let your adorning be external—the braiding of hair, the wearing of gold, or the putting on of clothing—but let your adorning be the hidden person of the heart with the imperishable beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which in God’s sight is very precious. For this is how the holy women who hoped in God used to adorn themselves, by submitting to their husbands, as Sarah obeyed Abraham, calling him lord. And you are her children, if you do good and not fear anything that is frightening* (1 Peter 3:1—6). Much could be said about these passages, but I would single out three things: (1) the headship of the husband in marriage, (2) the winning over of a husband by a wife’s good conduct, and (3) the imperishable beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit.

The headship of a husband in a marriage is once again not a thing of oppression but is a “taking leadership” in love. Jesus himself teaches this kind of servant leadership, when he says: *The Son of Man came not to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many* (Matthew 20:28). Also, we see this attitude in the foot-washing: *If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another’s feet* (John 13:14). St Paul also speaks

The headship of a husband in the context of marriage

of this headship in marriage in 1 Corinthians 11, where he says: *I want you to understand that the head of every man is Christ, the head of a wife is her husband, and the head of Christ is God* (v. 3). The way in which a husband treats his wife is akin to the way in which Christ relates to his own church, and the way in which God relates to his own Son. These relationships are not ones of force and dominance, but of love and respect. In fact, we see an equality in these passages: an equality with Christ and all men since Christ became a man, an equality of men with women by virtue of their common creation, and an equality of Christ with his Father by virtue of their common divinity. The distinctions imply a certain order, and do not imply a lack of dignity and respect.

St Peter speaks of the good conduct of a wife in a marriage as a testimony within the marriage, such that an unbelieving man could even be won over to the faith *without a word by the good conduct of their wives* (1 Peter 3:1). This particular willing subordination of a woman towards her husband is therefore a powerful and serious thing.

However, St Peter also explains what this submissiveness looks like: *Do not let your adorning be external—the braiding of hair, the wearing of gold, or the putting on of clothing—let your adornment be the hidden person of the heart with the imperishable beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which in God’s sight is very precious* (v. 4). We see similar words in 1 Timothy just before the passage about women speaking in the ministry. *Women should adorn themselves in respectable apparel, with modesty and self-control, not with braided hair and gold or pearls or costly attire, but with what is proper for women who profess godliness—with good works* (v. 9–10). Here we see that this humble attitude is very precious in God’s sight—it is a great source of good works. In fact, the women in the church *take the lead* in modelling this attitude for the men, who together with the women, should have the same sort of attitude towards the teaching of the apostles, and to Christ himself. After all, Christ is the bridegroom of the whole church, and both men and women together as his members are his bride.

It is also obvious that there in these two passages above, the particular external adornments that Peter and Paul mention are cultural. The wearing of a gold ring, for example, is today a sign that a woman is married. What St Paul also says about women wearing head coverings in 1 Corinthians 11 can also be seen in this light. External dress does not mean the same thing in each culture in each time and place. There are indeed certain things in the epistles that are only for a certain time, although the general principles still apply of being *respectable* and *modest* (1 Timothy 2:9).

The other passage which refers to women’s ordination comes from 1 Corinthians 14, where St Paul writes: *As in all the churches of the saints, the women should keep silent in the churches.*

<p>The ordination of women in 1 Corinthians 14</p>
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For they are not permitted to speak, but should be in submission, as the Law also says. If there is anything they desire to learn, let them ask their husbands at home. For it is shameful for a woman to speak in church. Or was it from you that the word of God came? Or are you the only ones it has reached? If anyone thinks that he is a prophet, or spiritual, he should acknowledge that the things I am writing to you are a command of the Lord. If anyone does not recognise this, he is not recognised (1 Corinthians 14:33b–38). As in 1 Timothy 2, this passage also speaks with common language in terms of *submission*, the character of which has already been explained. However, just as in 1 Timothy Paul cites the example of Adam and Eve, here he emphasises explicitly the universality of this passage’s application: *As in all the churches of the saints* (v. 33). He also mentions the “Law” in general, meaning the “Law of Moses”, rather than a specific passage.

We could assume that he means the kinds of things he says about Adam and Eve, or the example of Abraham and Sarah that St Peter cites (1 Peter 3:6).

Perhaps the most striking feature of this passage is the final section, where St Paul almost appears to lose his temper somewhat, accusing the Corinthians, and drawing upon the fulness of his apostolic authority to make his point. *Was it from you that the word of God came? Or are you the only ones it has reached? If anyone thinks he is a prophet, or spiritual, he should acknowledge that the things I am writing to you are a command of the Lord.* Even he goes so far as to say: *If anyone does not recognise this, he is not recognised.* We cannot help but call to mind other similar passages of St Paul, such as where he says: *If anyone is preaching to you a gospel contrary to the one you received, let him be accursed* (Galatians 1:9). It almost seems unreasonable to our modern ears that Paul should be so “heavy-handed” in this matter, such that some exegetes want to deflect these words to refer to good order in the church generally.

The things I am writing to you are a command of the Lord. Here Paul calls not simply upon his own authority as an apostle, but upon the authority of Jesus himself. We are reminded of

The prohibition of women pastors as the command of the Lord

the Great Commission with these words: *teaching them to observe everything I have **commanded** you* (Matthew 28:20). We know from history that Jesus sent out his twelve apostles, who were all men. We also know from history that when Judas was replaced as an apostle that the eleven remaining knew full well that it was a prerequisite that his replacement be *one of the men⁵ who have accompanied us* (Acts 1:21), even though from a human perspective, we might think that Mary Magdalene, the first witness of the resurrected Jesus, might have been the most obvious candidate. Instead, Judas’ replacement is a man generally unknown to us, who is never mentioned in the New Testament again.

III. Conclusions

If we compile all these things together, we see first of all that having women serve as pastors is a rejection of St Paul’s words, and particular words which he claims are not culturally bound, but are universally binding for all time and a *command of the Lord*. We would fall into the trap of seeing Paul as a misogynist, although in his words directed to husbands, we see the great love and affection that he would have them show their wives. St Peter also

General conclusions about the reception of the ministry

speaks in the same way. Then we would have to ask the question as to whether Jesus himself is a misogynist for choosing only twelve apostles who were men. The shape and form of the office of the ministry (or the *pastoral office*) is given by the apostles, and also the ministry continues the work of the apostles, although not as eyewitnesses. It is Jesus himself who sent his apostles, as we read: *As the Father has sent me, so I am sending you* (John 20:21), and the pastors are sent in the same way, although indirectly, *mediately*, through human means, through approval by the church. Jesus teaches that his apostles should be received just as they would receive himself, and as a consequence, those preachers who speak the same message as the apostles should also be received in this way. Pastors should

⁵ In English, there is one word “man”, which sometimes refers to a member of the human race (thereby including both sexes) or a member of the male sex. Many languages have two different words: In Hebrew, אָדָם (*‘adam*, man/human) and אִישׁ (*ish*, man/male); in Greek, ἀνθρώπος (*anthropos*, man/human) and ἀνήρ (*aner*, man/male); in Latin, *homo* (man/human) and *vir* (man/male); in German, *der Mensch* and *der Mann*. In Acts 1:21, the Greek word used is the word for a member of the male sex (ἀνήρ).

not be rejected or be seen to be insufficient because they are men, and the doctrine that pastors should only be men should also not be rejected, since it is a part of the apostles' teaching.

The danger is that in rejecting the teaching of the “male-only pastors”, we reject the pastors who already serve as insufficient, simply because they are men. Some men may not be particularly gifted in understanding the troubles of certain women, but this is not a deficiency in men, but in *certain* men which would not necessarily be compensated by women if they served as pastors. After all, Jesus was a man and treated women with the utmost respect and dignity (eg when he speaks to the Samaritan woman at the well, John 4). If women have a problem speaking to a man about their spiritual troubles, they need also to remember that Jesus himself was a man—albeit an extraordinary one!

In rejecting the idea of an attitude of *willing subordination* and submissiveness on the part of women—the *imperishable beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit*—in not putting themselves forward as candidates for the ministry, we also reject the structure of Christian marriages as the apostles teach it, along with the same *attitude* that is required of all Christians towards their pastors, towards the apostolic word, towards Christ, and towards even God the Father. This humble attitude towards the words of Scripture is a fruit of genuine Christian faith and is what enables that same faith to grow in and around that same Word. In fact, this is the same attitude that Jesus himself constantly showed towards his own Father, especially as we see in the Garden of Gethsemane: *Not as I will, but as you will* (Matthew 26:39). St Paul writes, *Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus...* (Philippians 2:5). It is this kind of humility and reverence towards to God and to his Word—the *fear of the LORD* which is the beginning of wisdom (Psalm 111:10)—which is vital to the church's renewal. In speaking about the willing subordination of Christ to his Father, we also confess his true *equality* to the Father, just as we confess the *equality* of women and men, husbands and wives, created in the image of God, in any discussion about subordination.

The attitude of
subordination in the
life of the church

In reference once again to the rejection of a “male-only pastorate”, it is not simply the pastors themselves that are in danger of being rejected, but it is the apostles and their teaching which is also at stake, the very apostolic teaching which the first disciples dedicated themselves to on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:42). We cannot simply pick and choose the parts of the apostolic teaching that we like or don't like without sacrificing something of the whole. In rejecting the apostolic teaching, we are in danger of coming under Jesus' verdict: *the one who rejects you rejects me, and the one who rejects me rejects him who sent me.* (Luke 10:16). We are in danger of rejecting the apostles because they are men, and even Jesus himself, who in his incarnation took on the male sex as the self-revelation of his Father.

Perhaps some will see this as the drawing of a long bow. However, it has always been the case that where people have promoted the ordination of women, there has been a downplay of the significance of the twelve apostles (making all kinds of exceptions and excuses to include various women in their company), to downplay the significance of Jesus' own manhood, and to entertain or even openly to teach that God is our mother. If Jesus hadn't taken human form in one of the two sexes, he would not have taken true human form at all.

When we consider the whole question about *gender* and *sex*, we need to understand that *sex* indicates *difference*. Grammatically speaking, *sexual* intercourse is the intercourse of two

The fatherhood of
God and its
consequences

people *who are different*. However, God is one, and he has no sex or gender, in the sense that he has no female counterpart, and in the sense that there are not two deities, one who is male and one who is female. At the same time, God reveals himself as Father, and is spoken of grammatically in masculine forms. It's in this sense that Paul then says: *I bow my knees before the **Father**, from whom every **family** (or fatherhood) in heaven and on earth is named* (Ephesians 3:14–15). Earthly fatherhood reflects the fatherhood of God himself, as Luther puts it beautifully in his explanation of the Lord's Prayer: "With these words [Our Father in heaven] God tenderly invites us to believe that He is our true Father and that we are His true children, so that with all boldness and confidence we may ask Him as dear children ask their dear Father" (*Small Catechism*, CPH 1986 translation). When people live through the terrible misfortune of being abused by their own fathers, it interferes with their perception of God. The solution to this psychological and emotional problem is not that people should address God as *mother* instead, but that they learn to know their true heavenly Father, despite the poor example of their earthly fathers.

At various times in the bible, God is revealed by way of *simile* as being like a mother. *Can a woman forget her nursing child, that she should have no compassion on the son of her womb? Even these may forget, yet I will not forget you* (Isaiah 49:15). Although God has the nurturing characteristics of a loving mother, he still does not reveal himself as mother, or that we should call him "Mother". Jesus says of himself: *How often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing!* (Luke 13:34). Although Jesus compares himself to a mother hen, we do not address him as a mother, and certainly not as a "mother hen"!

By way of contrast, the bible does speak about situations where people worshipped a goddess. In the book of Acts, we read about the Ephesians who worshipped the goddess

The idolatry of
"goddess worship" in
the bible

Artemis (Acts 19:28). Jeremiah also gives a sharp word of rebuke to those who worship a goddess (Jeremiah 44). Such religions and practices often involved the use of priestesses as a representation of and counterpart to the female deity they worshipped. However, this is not Christianity—the pastors of the church represent to their congregations the bridegroom Jesus in his incarnation, standing *on his behalf* (or *in his stead*), who in turn is the revelation of God the Father. To worship God then as a mother ultimately results in a syncretism between Christianity and paganism (and therefore, occult and witchcraft) which does belong to our faith.

At this point, we should acknowledge full well that not everyone who supports the ordination of women necessarily supports the worship of God the Father as a *Mother goddess*! Rather, we should realise that these things are all connected, and it is only a matter of time before the various aspects reveal themselves. It is as if there is a train headed from one city to another—let's say, from Sydney to Melbourne. Many advocates for women's ordination may only seek to take the train a short distance—let's say, from Sydney to Wollongong. What they don't realise is that the track is already laid all the way to Melbourne. When they want to get off at their desired station, they may discover that the driver has changed the route to an express service, such that they can't get off anymore. The train is already headed far past their station, and there's nothing that they can do about

it. The reason is because the very train-line itself was heading away from the source of truth: Jesus Christ and his word. They should never have got on this train in the first place, not knowing where it would stop. They had cut themselves off from the word, and had begun heading in the wrong direction, not realising that all the issues were connected.

At the same time, there are so many opportunities in all kinds of areas for women to serve in the church. We have so many wonderful examples of Christian women in the church

*The great potential
for the service of
women in the church*

who were involved in the church's work in all kinds of ways. The New Testament is full of wonderful women who devoted themselves to Christ and to the Christian faith. As St Peter says, *[the women] are heirs with [the men] of the grace of life*. St Paul says, *There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus* (Galatians 3:28). We read the example that Philip the evangelist had *four unmarried daughters who prophesied* (Acts 21:9), in fulfilment of the prophecy, *Your sons and your daughters shall prophesy* (Joel 2:28, Acts 2:17). We see many examples in the New Testament of Christian women serving whole-heartedly as full and true members of *royal priesthood* of Christ, and it should be our Christian prayer that the Holy Spirit would raise up many more women such as those. This fact is not under dispute. What is under dispute is whether women are permitted to serve in the *pastoral office*, in the *ministry of the word and sacrament*. It is clearly stated in the New Testament that the answer to this question is "no".

Perhaps part of the reason why we have come to discuss this issue so heatedly today is because there are women in the church who genuinely would like to serve in the church in some way, and that a suitable option has not been provided for them. Many women also may not have been treated with the dignity and respect, even by pastors, in many situations. In looking towards the future, we should not simply seek to keep things the way they are, but to enable and encourage women to use their gifts in service of Christ's church and his kingdom.

In Christian love and peace, I quote the words of Jesus to his apostles on the night of his betrayal: *I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing* (John 15:5). There is an old prayer based on these words, with which I conclude: I am nothing, I have nothing, and I can do nothing, but I have a Saviour, who is all, who has all, and can do all.

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