

BIBLICAL LEADERSHIP

AN URGENT CALL
TO RESTORE BIBLICAL
CHURCH LEADERSHIP

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REVISED
AND EXPANDED

Testament correctly only when we allow the Scriptures on male-female equality as well as on male-female role differences to speak with full authority.

The Bible is not ambiguous about this critically important doctrine. In the most straightforward, clear manner, the Bible repeatedly states that male-female role differences exist in relationship to headship and submission. Not only do the apostles Paul and Peter expressly state the headship-submission doctrine, they argue cogently and passionately for it and support the universal application of their teaching from theology and original creation. In the final analysis, Christ's choice of a male apostolate serves as the basis for their teaching.

CHAPTER 4

Qualified Leadership

"An overseer, then, must be above reproach."

1 Timothy 3:2a

In a letter to a young presbyter named Nepotian, dated A.D. 394, Jerome (A.D. 345-419) rebuked the churches of his day for their hypocrisy in showing more concern for the appearance of their church buildings than the careful selection of their church leaders: "Many build churches nowadays; their walls and pillars of glowing marble, their ceilings glittering with gold, their altars studded with jewels. Yet to the choice of Christ's ministers no heed is paid."¹

A similar error is repeated by multitudes of churches today. Many churches seem oblivious to the biblical requirements for their spiritual leaders as well as to the need for the congregation to properly examine all candidates for leadership in light of biblical standards (1 Tim. 3:10). This failure was dramatically highlighted when a leading evangelical journal in America brought together five divorced pastors and asked them to share their feelings, experiences, and views on divorce and the ministry. The journal's staff published the forum because they believed the growing problem of divorce among ministers needed to be faced openly and honestly. In fact, the article claimed that a recent survey of divorce rates in the United States showed that pastors had the third highest divorce rate—exceeded only by that of medical doctors and policemen!²

The pastors' thoughts on divorce were presented in the journal through an open forum format. Along with the forum, the journal published the responses of seven well-known evangelical leaders to the divorced pastors' comments. What is astounding about the article is

that not one of the seven leaders even mentioned the biblical qualifications for leadership outlined in 1 Timothy or Titus! This article reveals a widespread ignorance within the Christian community concerning Scripture's vigorous insistence on God's qualifications for local church leaders. It also demonstrates that churches and denominations have substituted their own standards for the biblical ones.

THE NEED FOR QUALIFIED SHEPHERD ELDERS

The most common mistake made by churches that are eager to implement eldership is to appoint biblically unqualified men. Because there is always a need for more shepherds, it is tempting to allow unqualified, unprepared men to assume leadership in the church. This is, however, a time-proven formula for failure. A biblical eldership requires biblically qualified elders.

The overriding concern of the New Testament in relation to church leadership is for the right kind of men to serve as elders and deacons. The offices of God's Church are not honorary positions bestowed on individuals who have attended church faithfully or who are senior in years. Nor are they board positions to be filled by good friends, rich donors, or charismatic personalities. Nor are they positions that only graduate seminary students can fill. The church offices, both eldership and deaconship, are open to all who meet the apostolic, biblical requirements. The New Testament is unequivocally emphatic on this point:

- To the troubled church in Ephesus, Paul insists that a properly constituted Christian church (1 Tim. 3:14,15) must have qualified, approved elders:

It is a trustworthy statement; if any man aspires to the office of overseer, it is a fine work he desires to do. *An overseer, then, must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, temperate, prudent, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, not addicted to wine or pugnacious, but gentle, uncontentious, free from the love of money. He must be one who manages his own household well, keeping his children under control with all dignity (but if*

a man does not know how to manage his own household, how will he take care of the church of God?); and not a new convert, lest he become conceited and fall into the condemnation incurred by the devil. And *he must have a good reputation with those outside the church, so that he may not fall into reproach and the snare of the devil* (1 Tim. 3:1-7; italics added).

- Paul also insists that prospective elders and deacons be publicly examined in light of the stated list of qualifications. He writes, "And let these [deacons] also [like the elders] first be tested [examined]; then let them serve as deacons if they are beyond reproach" (1 Tim 3:10; cf. 5:24,25).

- When directing Titus in how to organize churches on the island of Crete, Paul reminds Titus to appoint only morally and spiritually qualified men to be elders. By stating elder qualifications in a letter, Paul establishes a public list to guide the local church in its choice of elders and to empower it to hold its elders accountable:

For this reason I left you in Crete, that you might set in order what remains, and appoint elders in every city *as I directed you, namely, if any man be above reproach, the husband of one wife, having children who believe, not accused of dissipation or rebellion. For the overseer must be above reproach as God's steward, not self-willed, not quick-tempered, not addicted to wine, not pugnacious, not fond of sordid gain, but hospitable, loving what is good, sensible, just, devout, self-controlled, holding fast the faithful word which is in accordance with the teaching, that he may be able both to exhort in sound doctrine and to refute those who contradict* (Titus 1:5-9; italics added).

- When writing to churches scattered throughout northwestern Asia Minor, Peter speaks of the kind of men who should be elders. He exhorts the elders to shepherd the flock "not under compulsion, but voluntarily, according to the will of God; and not for sordid gain, but with eagerness; nor yet as lording it over those allotted to your charge, but proving to be examples to the flock" (1 Peter 5:2,3).

- If the elders have a contentious spirit, the people will inevitably become contentious (1 Tim. 3:3; Titus 1:7).
- If the elders are inhospitable, the people will be unfriendly and cold (1 Tim. 3:2; Titus 1:8).
- If the elders love money, the people will become lovers of money (1 Tim. 3:3).
- If the elders are not sensible, balanced, and self-controlled, their judgment will be characterized by ugly extremes, which will cause the people to be extreme and unbalanced (1 Tim. 3:1,2; Titus 1:8).
- If the elders are not faithful, one-woman husbands, they will subtly encourage others to be unfaithful (1 Tim. 3:2; Titus 1:6).
- If the elders do not faithfully hold to the authority of the Word, the people will not hold to it (Titus 1:9).

Much of the weakness and waywardness of our churches today is due directly to our failure to require that church shepherds meet God's standards for office. If we want our local churches to be spiritually fit, then we must require our shepherds to be spiritually fit.

Third, the biblical qualifications protect the church from incompetent or morally unfit leaders. Some people push themselves into positions of church leadership to satisfy their unholy egos. Others are sadly deceived about their own ability and character. And some are evildoers who are motivated by Satan to infiltrate and ruin churches. The public, objective, God-given qualifications for church leadership protect the congregation from such unfit people.

These observable, objective standards for elders are especially important when churches must deal with dominating, stubborn church leaders who are incapable of truly seeing their sins or heresies and yet must be discharged from office. The elder qualifications empower each congregation and its leaders with the right and the objective means to hold back or remove unfit men from leadership. To refuse to remove a sinful or doctrinally unsound elder, however, is willful disobedience to God's Word that will eventually undermine the moral and spiritual

It is highly noteworthy that the New Testament provides more instruction on the qualifications for eldership than on any other aspect of eldership. Such qualifications are not required of all teachers or evangelists. One may be gifted as an evangelist and be used of God in that capacity, yet be unqualified to be an elder. An individual may be an evangelist immediately after conversion, but Scripture says that a new convert cannot be an elder (1 Tim. 3:6). There are three critically important reasons why God demands these qualifications of church elders.

First, the Bible says that an elder must be of irreproachable moral character and capable in the use of Scripture because he is "God's steward," that is, God's household manager (Titus 1:7). An elder is entrusted with God's dearest and most costly possessions, His children. He thus holds a position of solemn authority and trust. He acts on behalf of God's interests. No earthly monarch would dare think of hiring an immoral or incapable person to manage his estate. Nor would parents think of entrusting their children or family finances to an untrustworthy or incompetent person. So, too, the High and Holy One will not have an unfit, unqualified steward caring for His precious children.

As stewards of God's household, elders have access to people's homes and the most intimate details of their lives. They have access to the people who are most vulnerable to deception or abuse. They also have the greatest influence over the doctrinal direction of the church. Therefore, church elders must be men who are well-known by the community, have proven integrity, and are doctrinally sound.

Second, local church elders are to be living examples for the people to follow (1 Peter 5:3). They are to model the character and conduct that God desires for all His children. Since God calls His people to "be blameless and innocent, children of God above reproach in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation" (Phil. 2:15), it is necessary that those who lead His people be morally above reproach and model godly living.

John MacArthur, well-known radio preacher and author, echoes this point when he writes: "Whatever the leaders are, the people become. As Hosea said, 'Like people, like priest' (4:9). Jesus said, 'Everyone, after he has been fully trained, will be like his teacher' (Luke 6:40). Biblical history demonstrates that people will seldom rise above the spiritual level of their leadership."³ Because people are like sheep, shepherd elders have an extraordinarily powerful impact on the behavior, attitudes, and thinking of the people:

of the church. Roland Allen (1868-1947), well-known Anglican missionary to China and influential missionary author, decried this problem in his day:

We are so enamored of those qualifications which we have added to the apostolic that we deny the qualifications of anyone who possesses only the apostolic, whilst we think a man fully qualified who possesses only ours. A young student fresh from a theological college lacks many of those qualifications which the apostle deemed necessary for a leader in the house of God, the age, the experience, the established position and reputation, even if he possesses all the others. Him we do not think unqualified. The man who possesses all the apostolic qualifications is said to be unqualified, because he cannot go back to school and pass an examination.⁵

To be faithful to Holy Scripture and God's plan for the local church, we must open the pastoral leadership of the church to all in the church who are called by the Holy Spirit (Acts 20:28) and meet the apostolic qualifications. Although such a plan may be abhorrent to the clerical mind-set, it represents an authentic, apostolic mind-set. According to the New Testament, the elders of the church are all the men of the local church who desire to lead the flock and are scripturally qualified to do so.

The scriptural qualifications can be divided into three broad categories relating to moral and spiritual character, abilities, and Spirit-given motivation. Let us now examine each of these categories.

Comparison of Elder Qualifications

1 Timothy 3:2-7	Titus 1:6-9	1 Peter 5:1-3
1. Above reproach	1. Above reproach	1. Not under compulsion, but voluntary
2. The husband of one wife	2. The husband of one wife	2. Not for sordid gain, but with eagerness
3. Temperate	3. Having children who believe	3. Nor yet as lording it over...but proving to be examples
4. Prudent	4. Not self-willed	
5. Respectable	5. Not quick-tempered	

vitality of the whole church as well as the integrity of the leadership council (see chapter 9, page 217). The refusal to remove an erring elder will also damage the church's credibility and gospel witness before an unbelieving community, which is a matter of utmost concern to Paul (1 Tim. 3:7). Thus the God-given standards for elders are essential for protecting the local church's spiritual welfare and evangelistic witness.

Today churches most need men of Christlike character to be in spiritual leadership. The best laws and constitutions are impotent without men who are "just," "devout," "sensible," "self-controlled," "forbearing," "uncontentious," and faithful to sound doctrine. These are precisely the qualities that God requires of those who lead His people. Let us, then, heed the warning of the late author and Christian apologist Francis Schaeffer (1912-1984) who writes, "The church has no right to diminish these standards for the officers of the Church, nor does it have any right to elevate any other as though they are then equal to these which are commanded by God himself. These and only these stand as absolute."⁴

THE QUALIFICATIONS FOR SHEPHERD ELDERS

When we speak of the elders' qualifications, most people think these qualifications are something different from those of the clergy. The New Testament, however, has no separate standards for professional clergy and lay elders. The reason is simple. There aren't three separate offices—pastor, elders, and deacons—in the New Testament local church. There are only two offices—elders and deacons. From the New Testament perspective, any man in the congregation who desires to shepherd the Lord's people and who meets God's requirements for the office can be a pastor elder.

As the three lists below show, God does not require wealth, social status, senior age, advanced academic degrees, or even great spiritual gift of those who desire to shepherd His people. We do the congregation and the work of God a great disservice when we add our arbitrary requirements to God's qualifications. Man-made requirements inevitably exclude needed, qualified men from the pastoral leadership

1 Timothy 3:2-7

- 6. Hospitable
- 7. Able to teach
- 8. Not addicted to wine
- 9. Not pugnacious
- 10. Gentle
- 11. Uncontentious
- 12. Free from the love of money
- 13. Manages his household well
- 14. Not a new convert
- 15. A good reputation with those outside the church

1 Peter 5:1-3

Titus 1:6-9

- 6. Not addicted to wine
- 7. Not pugnacious
- 8. Not fond of sordid gain
- 9. Hospitable
- 10. Lover of what is good
- 11. Sensible
- 12. Just
- 13. Devout
- 14. Self-controlled
- 15. Holds fast the faithful Word—both to exhort and to refute

MORAL AND SPIRITUAL CHARACTER

Most of the biblical qualifications relate to the candidate's moral and spiritual qualities. The first and overarching qualification is that of being "above reproach." What is meant by "above reproach" is defined by the character qualities that follow the term. In both of Paul's lists of elder qualifications, the first specific character virtue itemized is, "the husband of one wife." This means that an elder must be above reproach in his marital and sexual life (see chapter 9, page 192). Pointing out the Bible's emphasis on marital faithfulness and sexual purity, Robertson McQuilkin, author of the excellent book *An Introduction to Biblical Ethics*, writes:

God's standards on human sexuality are treated in Scripture as the most important of all rules for relations among people. In the Old Testament, teaching against adultery is emphasized second only to teaching against idolatry. In the New Testament, both Christ and the apostles emphasized marital fidelity. Paul includes sexual sins in every one of his many lists of sins, and in most cases they head the list and receive the greatest emphasis.⁶

From the beginning, God sternly warned His people against the corrupt sexual practices of the heathen nations. He commanded His people to be holy and separate from the nations, to be faithful to the marriage covenant, and to be sexually pure. In the eighteenth chapter

of Leviticus, Moses details all the sexual sins of the godless nations that would soon surround Israel. God warns His people against the practice of such sins: "Do not defile yourselves by any of these things [depraved sexual practices]; for by all these the nations which I am casting out before you have become defiled.... Thus you are to keep My charge, that you do not practice any of the abominable customs which have been practiced before you, so as not to defile yourselves with them; I am the Lord your God" (Lev. 18:24,30). The need for purity was taught in the new covenant community as well. Paul writes, "But do not let immorality or any impurity or greed even be named among you, as is proper among saints" (Eph. 5:3; italics added).

One of Satan's oldest, most effective strategies for destroying the people of God is to adulterate the marriages of those who lead God's people (Num. 25:1-5; 1 Kings 11:1-13; Ezra 9:1,2). Satan knows that if he can defile the shepherds' marriages, the sheep will follow. The specific marital and family qualifications God requires for elders are meant to protect the whole church. So the church must insist that its leaders meet these qualifications before serving and while serving. If the local church does not insist on these requirements, the people will sink into the toxic wasteland of today's sexual and marital practices.

Tragically, many major Christian denominations have learned nothing from the Old Testament about the certain results of accommodating secular standards of sexual behavior. In nearly every major Christian denomination, God's laws regarding marriage, divorce, sexuality, and gender differences are being discarded and replaced with an acceptance of the most corrupt human practices. Among Christian leaders, adultery and other sexual sins are at epidemic levels.⁷ Among the major denominations, clergy divorce and remarriage is hardly an issue. As *Time* magazine aptly describes today's religious landscape, "Denominations that once would not tolerate divorced ministers now find themselves debating whether to accept avowed lesbian ones."⁸

The other character qualities stress the elders' integrity, self-control, and spiritual maturity. Since elders govern the church body, they must be self-controlled in the use of money, alcohol, and in the exercise of their pastoral authority. Since they are to be models of Christian living, they must be spiritually devout, righteous, lovers of good, hospitable, and morally above reproach before the non-Christian community. In pastoral work, relationship skills are preeminent. Thus shepherd elders must be gentle, stable, sound-minded, and uncontentious.

them were unprepared in my own view—doctrinally and/or personally. Several times we recommended that the church not ordain the man.

Often the local church ignored our counsel and proceeded without our approval, finally ordaining the man at a later date. *What was particularly troubling was how infrequently the man or his local church bothered to inquire as to our reasons (italics added).*¹⁰

ABILITIES

In the catalogs of elder qualifications, three requirements address the elder's abilities to perform the task. He must be able to manage his household well, provide a model of Christian living for others to follow, and be able to teach and defend the faith.

Able to Manage the Family Household Well

An elder must be able to manage his household well. The Scripture states: "He must be one who manages his own household well, keeping his children under control with all dignity (but if a man does not know how to manage his own household, how will he take care of the church of God?)" (1 Tim. 3:4,5). The Puritans referred to the family household as the "little church." This perspective is in keeping with the scriptural reasoning that if a man cannot shepherd his family, he can't shepherd the extended family of the church.

Managing the local church is more like managing a family than managing a business or state. A man may be a successful businessman, a capable public official, a brilliant office manager, or a top military leader but be a terrible church elder or father. Thus a man's ability to oversee his household well is a prerequisite for overseeing God's household.

But what about single men or married men who have no children? Can these men be elders? Most definitely (1 Cor. 7:8-35)! As we will discover in the exposition portion of this book, the qualifications regarding marriage and children should not be construed as commands to marry and have children (see chapter 9, page 190). Rather, because most men are married and have children, the Scripture sets forth God's standard for church leaders who are husbands and fathers. Setting stan-

Angry, hot-headed men hurt people. So an elder must not have a dictatorial spirit or be quick-tempered, pugnacious, or self-willed. Finally, an elder must not be a new Christian. He must be a spiritually mature, humble, time-proven disciple of Jesus Christ.

When examining candidates for eldership, most churches address these personal moral qualities only superficially if at all. John H. Armstrong, editor of *Reformation and Revival Journal* and author of *Can Fallen Pastors Be Restored?*, expresses his frustration with the lack of concern churches demonstrate when questioning candidates' personal moral qualities. He writes:

In all my years of service on councils and committees I have rarely heard a candidate asked: "What about your life morally?" We might discuss a man's marriage, and that often in a rather shallow manner. Almost never did I hear the candidate asked, "Are you sexually pure, at this time, before God?"... We simply do not probe the issue of proven character and personal purity very deeply.

In an age where sexual misconduct is common, both in the culture and in the church at large, I am compelled to ask, "Why do we never ask these kinds of questions before we ordain a man?" We live in a time where the statistics suggest that habits in the church are not that different from those in the general population....

In these professional examination procedures we may ask a dozen doctrinally oriented questions, for every one ethical and moral question. I am not demeaning doctrinal questions, for far too many pastors are fuzzy and unclear in this area as well, but why do we almost totally ignore the areas of sex, money, and power? Is it not in these areas that most of the ethical and moral failures will surface?⁹

Armstrong further comments:

Some years ago I was asked to chair a committee for my evangelical denomination where the duties included pre-examining men for ordination before the council was convened.... Our job was to test, to question, and then to recommend. We examined a good number of men each year. More than half of

dards for married men who have children is quite a different issue from commanding marriage and fatherhood, which is not always a matter of choice. Single men and childless, married men can certainly be pastor elders. Where they lack experience because of their unmarried or childless status, their fellow elders who are married and have children can fill in the gap. Single and childless men have a unique contribution to make to the flock and the eldership team. Of course the sexual conduct and home management of single and childless men must be above reproach, just as it must be above reproach for married men who have children.

Able to Provide a Model for Others to Follow

An elder must be an example of Christian living that others will want to follow. Peter reminds the Asian elders “to be examples to the flock” (1 Peter 5:3b). If a man is not a godly model for others to follow, he cannot be an elder even if he is a good teacher and manager. Like Peter, Paul also recognized the importance of modeling Christ. He did his utmost to model Christ and expected the people to follow:

- Brethren, join in following my example, and observe those who walk according to the pattern you have in us (Phil. 3:17).
- Be imitators of me, just as I also am of Christ (1 Cor. 11:1).
- For you yourselves know how you ought to follow our example, because we did not act in an undisciplined manner among you...but in order to offer ourselves as a model for you, that you might follow our example (2 Thess. 3:7,9b).
- I exhort you, therefore, be imitators of me (1 Cor. 4:16; cf. Gal. 4:12; 1 Thess. 1:5,6; 1 Tim. 4:12; Titus 2:7).

The greatest way to inspire and influence people for God is through personal example. Character and deeds, not official position or title, is what really influences people for eternity. A quotation by Samuel Brengle concerning the power of personal example, that is quoted by J. Oswald Sanders in his classic work *Spiritual Leadership*, bears repeating: “One of the outstanding ironies of history is the

utter disregard of ranks and titles in the final judgment men pass on each other.... The final estimate of men shows that history cares not an iota for the rank or title a man has borne, or the office he has held, but only the quality of his deeds and the character of his mind and heart.”¹¹ Today men and women crave authentic examples of true Christianity in action. Who can better provide the week-by-week, long-term examples of family life, business life, and church life than local church elders? This is why it is so important that elders, as living imitators of Christ, shepherd God’s flock in God’s way.

Able to Teach and Defend the Faith

An elder must be able to teach and defend the faith. It doesn’t matter how successful a man is in his business, how eloquently he speaks, or how intelligent he is. If he isn’t firmly committed to historic, apostolic doctrine and able to instruct people in biblical doctrine, he does not qualify as a biblical elder (Acts 20:28ff; 1 Tim. 3:2; Titus 1:9).

The New Testament requires that a pastor elder “[hold] fast the faithful word which is in accordance with the teaching” (Titus 1:9a). This means that an elder must firmly adhere to orthodox, historic, biblical teaching. “Elders must not,” as one commentator says, “be chosen from among those who have been toying with new doctrines.”¹² Since the local church is “the pillar and support of the truth” (1 Tim. 3: 15b), its leaders must be rock-solid pillars of biblical doctrine or the house will crumble. Since the local church is also a small flock traveling over treacherous terrain that is infested with “savage wolves,” only those shepherds who know the way and see the wolves can lead the flock to its safe destination. An elder, then, must be characterized by doctrinal integrity.

It is essential for an elder to be firmly committed to apostolic, biblical doctrine so “that he may be able to exhort in sound doctrine and to refute those who contradict” (Titus 1:9b). This requires that a prospective elder has applied himself for some years to the reading and study of Scripture, that he can reason intelligently and logically discuss biblical issues, that he has formulated doctrinal beliefs, and that he has the verbal ability and willingness to teach others. There should be no confusion, then, about what a New Testament elder is called to do: he is to teach and exhort the congregation in sound doctrine and to defend the truth from false teachers. This is the big difference between

board elders and pastor elders. New Testament elders are both guardians and teachers of sound doctrine.

For this reason, God's book, the Bible, is to be the prospective elder's continual course of study. The Bible is God's complete training manual for all spiritual leaders. Paul reminds Timothy that "from childhood you have known the sacred writings which are able to give you the wisdom that leads to salvation through faith in Christ Jesus (2 Tim. 3:15; italics added). Paul further states that "all Scripture is inspired by God [God-breathed], and profitable for teaching, for reproof, correction, for training in righteousness; that *the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work* (2 Tim. 3:16, 17; italics added). Thus a man is unequipped for the shepherding task if he has not been schooled in God-breathed Holy Scripture. An elder who doesn't know the Bible is like a shepherd without legs; he can't lead or protect the flock. The probing comment of P. T. Forsyth (1848-1921), an influential British theologian of the early twentieth century, bears repeating: "The real strength of the Church is not the amount of its work but the quality of its faith. One man who truly knows his Bible is worth more to the Church's real strength than a crowd of workers who do not."¹³

How are prospective elders to be educated in God's book? First, if raised in godly, Christian homes, they will have had years of instruction in doctrine and holy living from the most effective teachers in the world, their mothers and fathers (Deut. 6:7; 11:19; Prov. 1:8; 4:1-5; Eph. 6:4; 1 Thess. 2:11; 1 Cor. 14:35; 2 Tim. 1:5; 3:15). John Gresham Machen (1881-1937) was a renowned Presbyterian scholar and educator who brilliantly defended the orthodox doctrine of Christ and the trustworthiness of Scripture during the famous fundamentalist-modernist controversy of the early twentieth century. His books on the virgin birth of Christ and the theological continuity between Paul and Jesus are still classics. On the significance of the Christian home in teaching the Bible, Machen wrote:

The absence of doctrinal teaching and preaching is certainly one of the causes for the present lamentable ignorance in the church. But a still more influential cause is found in the failure of the most important of all Christian educational institutions. The most important Christian educational institution is not the pulpit or the school, important as these institutions are; but it is

the Christian family. And that institution has to a very large extent ceased to do its work. Where did those of us who have reached middle life really get our knowledge of the Bible? I suppose my experience is the same as that of a good many of us. I did not get my knowledge of the Bible from Sunday School or from any other school, but I got it on Sunday afternoons with my mother at home. And I will venture to say that although my mental ability was certainly of no extraordinary kind I had a better knowledge of the Bible at fourteen years of age than is possessed by many students in the theological Seminaries of the present day. Theological students come for the most part from Christian homes; indeed in very considerable proportion they are children of the manse. Yet when they have finished college and enter the theological Seminary many of them are quite ignorant of the simple contents of the English Bible.¹⁴

Second, if the local church fulfills its role as a school for teaching apostolic doctrine, prospective elders will have been taught God's Word by gifted teachers. The Bible says that the local church is "the pillar and support of the truth" and "the household of God" (1 Tim. 3:15). This is why Paul charges Timothy to "give attention to the public reading of Scripture, to exhortation and teaching" (1 Tim. 4:13). Timothy was also to teach "faithful men, who will be able to teach others" (2 Tim. 2:2b). When Timothy departed from Ephesus, he expected that "faithful men," like the Ephesian elders, would teach future teachers and pastor elders who in turn would teach others.

Furthermore, the local church is not only a place to learn Scripture, it is the very best place to learn the skills required for shepherding people. It is in the local church that leaders learn to apply God's book to real-life situations. Thus the local church is to be God's school for the spiritual development of His children and the learning of Scripture (Acts 2:42; 11:26).

Third, a prospective elder learns the great truths of God through the consistent reading and study of Scripture and the ministry of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 2:12ff; 1 Thess. 4:9; 1 John 2:27). There is no substitute for a disciplined, persistent encounter with God through personal study of and meditation on Holy Scripture. In addition to studying Scripture, a growing Christian should be reading sound doctrinal material written by godly teachers of the Word.

Sadly, however, many churches (and Christian homes) have no vision for serious teaching or training in Scripture and doctrine. Other churches simply do not have the means to train their leaders; they are struggling to survive as a church body. Yet serious-minded believers hunger for in-depth teaching of the Scriptures. That is why Bible schools and seminaries will always be needed. Although there are problems with religious institutions that breed doubt in the authority of Scripture or reinterpret the Bible to agree with the spirit of the age, a good, Bible-believing and teaching school can provide excellent, in-depth training in Scripture.

I must warn, however, against the arbitrary requirement that many denominations impose on their shepherds to earn a master's degree before they are allowed to serve as a church pastor. God does not require advanced academic degrees as a qualification for spiritual leadership. When we set up formal academic standards, we professionalize the government of the church and create, at least in practice, a pastoral office that is separate from the eldership. We do not have God's authorization to establish such standards.

Do not forget that our Lord and Master, Jesus Christ, was not formally trained in a rabbinical school, although such training was available and very much prized in His day. Despite His lack of formal schooling in religion, however, Jesus was eminently educated in Scripture. Indeed, the people were so amazed by Jesus' knowledge and teaching as an untrained layman that they commented: "How has this man become learned, having never been educated?" (John 7:15b). The same observation was made of Jesus' close disciples: "as they observed the confidence of Peter and John, and understood that they were uneducated and untrained men, they were marveling, and began to recognize them as having been with Jesus" (Acts 4:13).

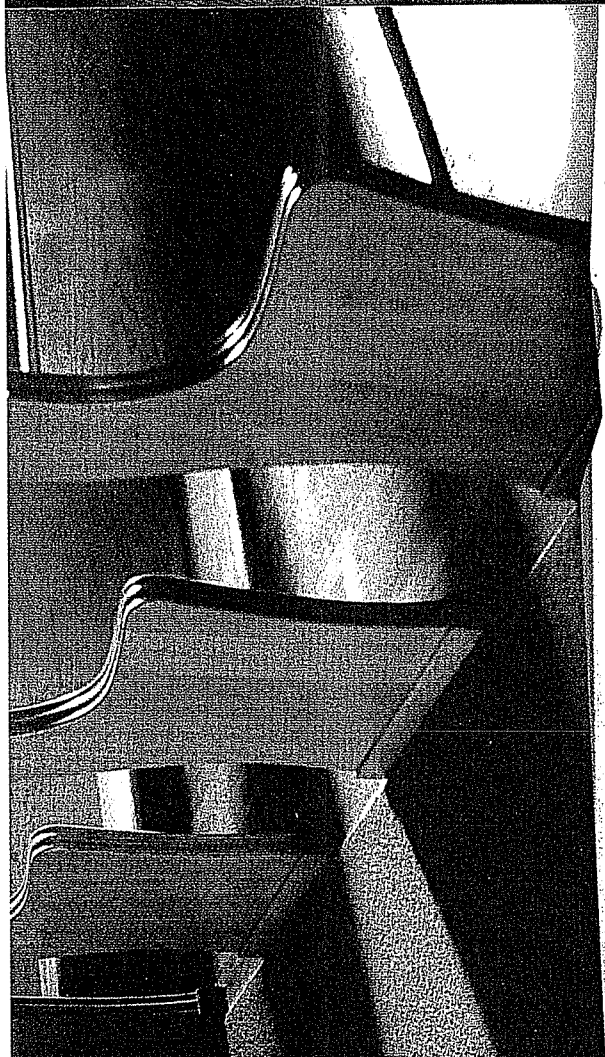
Unfortunately, many Christian people today are so clergy dependent that they can't imagine how men and women without formal, theological training and the degrees that go with it can know the Bible and teach it effectively. We must remember that degrees are required in the world of business and academia but are not required to minister in the household of God. Some people who are not able to go to school are taught by Christ through the Holy Spirit. They are educated in His Word and thus, according to God's standards, are qualified to lead and teach His people.

SPIRIT-GIVEN MOTIVATION FOR THE TASK

An obvious but not insignificant qualification is the shepherd's personal desire to love and care for God's people. Paul and the first Christians applauded such willingness by creating a popular Christian saying: "if any man aspires to the office of overseer, it is a fine work he desires to do" (1 Tim. 3:1). Peter, too, insisted that an elder shepherd the flock willingly and voluntarily (1 Peter 5:2). He knew from years of personal experience that the shepherding task can't be done by someone who views spiritual care as an unwanted obligation. Elders who serve grudgingly or under constraint are incapable of genuine care for people. They will be unhappy, impatient, guilty, fearful, and ineffective shepherds. Shepherding God's people through this sin-weary world is far too difficult a task—fraught with too many problems, dangers, and demands—to be entrusted to someone who lacks the will and desire to do the work.

A true desire to lead the family of God is always a Spirit-generated desire. Paul reminded the Ephesian elders that it was the Holy Spirit—not the church or the apostles—who placed them as overseers in the church to shepherd the flock of God (Acts 20:28). It was the Spirit who called them to shepherd the church and who moved them to care for the flock. The Spirit planted the pastoral desire in their hearts. He gave the compulsion and strength to do the work and the wisdom and appropriate gifts to care for the flock. The elders were His wise choice for the task. In the church of God, it is not man's will that matters but God's will and arrangement. So the only men who qualify for eldership are those whom the Holy Spirit gives the motivation and gifts for the task.

A biblical eldership, then, is a biblically qualified team of shepherd leaders. A plurality of unqualified elders is of no benefit to the local church. I agree fully with the counsel of Jon Zens, editor of the journal *Searching Together*. He writes, "Better have no elders than the wrong ones."¹⁵ The local church must in all earnestness insist on biblically qualified elders, even if such men take years to develop.



ELDERS *in*
CONGREGATIONAL
LIFE

REDISCOVERING THE BIBLICAL MODEL
FOR CHURCH LEADERSHIP

PHIL A. NEWTON
FOREWORD BY MARK DEVER

well as for doing business. One of the secrets to a successful eldership is regular, effective meetings that include a major portion of time devoted to laboring together in prayer (Acts 6:4). Board elders don't labor in prayer together, but spiritual shepherds cannot do otherwise. To adapt an old cliché, "elders who pray together stay together." In addition to the elders' work, times of relaxed fellowship are also necessary for building friendship, teamwork, and trust. Summerton comments: "It is important that elders (and, I would recommend, their spouses) should give time, despite the press of other things, to prayer, fellowship and relaxation together, without the impediment of any agenda. The purpose is to build the bonds of love which should be evident to the congregation and which will survive the inevitable strains which responsibility imposes in an imperfect world."¹⁰

- Elders need to be in the business of building up one another's lives. Older, more experienced elders need to mentor younger elders. Elders need to recommend times of sabbatical rest for weary colleagues. Elders need to set up ongoing educational programs for themselves. Elders need to take practical steps toward building an effective, spiritually minded eldership that involves all the elders who share the responsibility of shepherding God's flock.

CHAPTER 3

Male Leadership

"If the foundations are destroyed, what can the righteous do?"

Psalms 11:3

There is much about biblical eldership that offends church-going people today: the concept of elders who provide pastoral care, a plurality of pastors, and the idea of so-called "lay" or nonclerical pastor elders. Yet nothing is more objectionable in the minds of contemporary people than the biblical concept of an all-male eldership. A biblical eldership, however, must be an all-male eldership.

In the minds of most contemporary people, excluding women from church eldership is sexist, discriminatory, and one more example of male dominance. But this need not be the case. No one who truly loves people, who is sensitive to God's Word, and who is aware of the painful dehumanization that women have suffered (and still suffer) worldwide would want to discriminate against women. Women have suffered enough under cruel and irresponsible males, and they have every right to demand justice and change. Discrimination against women is a grievous sin and a dishonor to God in whose image women are created. Yet in our zeal to right the wrongs committed against women, we must not forget that God designed male-female distinctions in order for the sexes to beautifully complement each other and to exercise different functions in society. To deny those distinctions is as destructive and dishonorable as it is to discriminate against women.

We need to be perfectly clear about the biblical teaching regarding women and men as fully equal in personhood, dignity, and value, but distinct in gender roles. These differences are something to be enjoyed, explored more fully, and developed throughout life—not eradicated or

hated. Pastor and author John Piper, who is one of the editors of the landmark work *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*, clearly expresses his wonder over the marvelous, God-created differences of manhood and womanhood. He writes: "Over the years I have come to see from Scripture and from life that manhood and womanhood are the beautiful handiwork of a good and loving God. He designed our differences and they are profound. They are not mere physiological prerequisites for sexual union. They go to the root of our personhood."¹

Yet untold numbers of women today are unaware of these marvelous differences. They have no clue what it means to be a woman as distinct from a man. In the name of justice and fairness for women, goals we all would gladly work together to accomplish, women are being deceived about their female identity and God's holy Word. Women are again being exploited, but this time it is by false, feminist philosophers who demean godly femininity and motherhood and who are anti-child, anti-family, and ultimately anti-woman.

To restrict women from the church eldership would be unjust and discriminatory if it were done arbitrarily by males for their own selfish ends, but if such restriction was part of the Creator's wise plan, then it is not discrimination—it is just and good for the welfare of the family, the local church, and the whole human race. As Christians, we would not accuse Jesus Christ of discrimination. He alone is perfect; we are imperfect. Yet Jesus Christ appointed only males to the foundational office of the Church, the apostolate. Although the feminist spirit of the age recoils at such a thought, Jesus is Founder and Lord of the Church, and we must follow His example and teaching.

THE MODEL OF MALE LEADERSHIP WITHIN THE APOSTOLATE

For the Bible-believing Christian, the primary example of male leadership is found in the person of Jesus Christ. The most obvious point is that Christ came into the world as the Son of God, not the daughter of God. His maleness was not an arbitrary matter. It was a theological necessity, absolutely essential to his person and work. Jesus was and had to be a first-born male, "holy to the Lord" (Luke 2:23). As the "last Adam" and "the second man," He was the antitype of Adam, not

Eve. Therefore, he had to be male (1 Cor. 15:45,47; Rom. 5:14). He had to be a first-born son of David and Abraham, the true son of promise—the King, not the queen, of Israel and the Lord, not the lady, of the universe. According to the creation order, Jesus could not be a woman because in the male-female relationship the male partner alone is invested with the headship-authority role (Gen. 2:20, 22,23; 1 Cor. 11:3; 1 Tim. 2:12), and Jesus Christ alone is Head of the Church and King of kings. He is the model for every male leader.

During His earthly ministry, Jesus personally trained and appointed twelve men whom He called "apostles" (Luke 6:13). Jesus' choice of male leadership was an affirmation of the creation order as presented in Genesis 2:18-25. Before choosing the Twelve, Luke informs us that Jesus spent the entire night in prayer with His Father (Luke 6:12). As the perfect Son, in complete obedience and submission to His Father's will, Jesus chose twelve males to be His apostles. Thus these men were God the Father's choice. Jesus' choice of male apostles was based on divine principles and guidance.

Despite His divinely inspired choice of a male apostolate, some critics claim that Jesus was merely accommodating to His culture. But how could anyone read the life of Christ and think that Jesus accommodated His choices of male apostles to the spirit of His age? He was hated and finally crucified because He consistently, on the basis of divine principle, violated the false rabbinic traditions. Even His fiercest enemies had to admit that Jesus spoke the truth of God, fearing and showing partiality to no one (Matt. 22:16).

Other critics contend that Jesus' work of redemption abolished all male-female role distinctions. Yet if Jesus intended to abolish all male-female role differences through His work of redemption, the choosing of the Twelve was the crucial moment in history to act and appoint women to the apostolate. As the hailed liberator of women, should Jesus not have chosen six women and six men-apostles? At the very least, should He not have chosen *one* woman apostle? If Jesus is the supreme egalitarian that some would like Him to be, He surely failed women at a crucial moment. (I speak foolishly to make an obvious point. Of course Jesus never fails!) Instead, by appointing twelve male apostles, Jesus ratified the Old Testament creation order of male headship, a practice that both Paul and Peter subsequently maintained.

His appointment of a male apostolate does not deny the fact that Jesus honored the dignity of women, ministered to women, traveled

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with them, and encouraged their service for God and Himself in a way that was quite different from the manner of the religious leaders of His day. Despite His deep affection and close relationship with a number of women (such as Mary and Martha), the fact remains that Jesus Christ established an all-male apostolic office as the enduring foundation of His Church (Eph. 2:20; 3:5; Rev. 21:14). Even when a replacement for Judas, one of the Twelve, became necessary, only "men" (Greek, *andrōn*, Acts 1:21) were considered. One man was chosen for that position by the Lord Himself (Acts 1:24). There is no clear example of a woman apostle in the entire New Testament.

The Twelve followed the example of their Lord and Master by appointing seven men, not seven men and women, when they needed to establish an official body of servants to care for the church's widows and funds (Acts 6:1-6). Even thirty years after Christ's ascension into heaven, Peter wrote to the churches of northwestern Asia Minor and exhorted his Christian sisters to submit to their husbands in the same way the "holy women" of the Old Testament age did. He also exhorted husbands to care for their wives and reminded them that their wives were fellow heirs "of the grace of life." Thus Peter continued to follow His Lord's example and taught both role distinctions and male-female equality:

In the same way, you wives, be submissive to your own husbands.... Let not your adornment be merely external...but let it be the hidden person of the heart, with the imperishable quality of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is precious in the sight of God. For in this way in former times the holy women also, who hoped in God, used to adorn themselves, being submissive to their own husbands. Thus Sarah obeyed Abraham, calling him lord, and you have become her children if you do what is right without being frightened by any fear (1 Peter 3:1-6).

You husbands likewise, live with your wives in an understanding way, as with a weaker vessel, since she is a woman; and grant her honor as a fellow heir of the grace of life, so that your prayers may not be hindered (1 Peter 3:7).

Note that Peter supports his teaching on submission with the Old Testament Scriptures and his understanding of God's divine pleasure

and will. Those who try to justify women elders find little help from the examples and teachings of Jesus and the Twelve.

THE MODEL OF MALE LEADERSHIP IN THE NEW TESTAMENT CHURCHES

The biblical tradition of male leadership continued throughout the New Testament era. Even a cursory examination of Scripture reveals this to be true. Nearly 70 percent of the New Testament was written by Paul, the great apostle to the Gentiles and the most dominant New Testament figure outside of Christ, or one of his intimate associates. In fact, all the Old and New Testament writers were males, as were the predominate characters in the Bible. For this reason, secular feminists find the Bible to be hopelessly patriarchal. Describing the patriarchal character of the Bible and the liberal religious feminists' frustration with it, Cullen Murphy, a writer for *The Atlantic Monthly*, writes:

With respect to issues of gender the Bible is also, of course, highly problematic, to use a word that no feminist scholar I've spoken with can help uttering in a tone of ironic politeness.... It is an androcentric [man-centered] document in the extreme. It was written mostly if not entirely by men.... In the Hebrew Bible as a whole, only 111 of the 1,426 people who are given names are women. The proportion of women in the New Testament is about twice as great, which still leaves them a small minority.

...There is no getting around the disturbing character, for women, of much of the Bible, short of an interpretive reading...that may represent, something of a stretch—short of what one biblical scholar has called an act of "hermeneutical ventriloquism."²

So it comes as a mind-jolting shock, after nearly two thousand years of agreeing that Paul (and Jesus) restricted women from eldership, that many Bible-believing Christians and scholars today claim the New Testament and Paul to be egalitarian. This viewpoint is often called Biblical Feminism or Egalitarianism, meaning that men and women are fully equal and that the New Testament does not teach

doctrine.... That they may encourage the young women to love their husbands, to love their children, to be sensible, pure, workers at home, kind, being subject to their own husbands, that the word of God may not be dishonored" (Titus 2:1,4,5).

Paul exhorted Christian wives to submit to their husbands. The basis for his exhortation is given most compellingly in Ephesians 5:23: "For the husband is the head of the wife." If there is any question as to what is intended by the phrase, "the head of the wife," Paul adds the analogy of Christ's headship over the Church, "as Christ also is the head of the church." The word "head" (Greek, *kephalē*) is used figuratively to mean, as is its constant use, "authority over" and "leadership," not "source" or "origin," as biblical feminists assert.³

Colossians 3:18 also states the principle found in Ephesians 5: "Wives, be subject to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord." Commenting on the Ephesians 5 and Colossians 3 passages, George Knight, III, biblical commentator and New Testament professor at Knox Theological Seminary, observes: "this particular exhortation to the wife to submit to her husband is the universal teaching of the New Testament. Every passage that deals with the relationship of the wife to her husband tells her to 'submit to' him, using this same verb (*hypotassō*): Ephesians 5:22; Colossians 3:18; 1 Peter 3:1; Titus 2:4f."⁴

According to Ephesians 5, the manner in which the wife is to submit to her husband is, "as to the Lord," and in Colossians 3, "as is fitting in the Lord." This means that the wife is to submit to her husband as she would submit to the Lord Jesus Christ (cf. 1 Peter 3:6). Using the analogy of Christ and the Church, the wife is to submit to her husband "as the church is subject to Christ." Knight adds: "She should submit to her husband as she submits to the Lord. The comparative 'as to the Lord' conjures up what should and does characterize the godly submission a Christian renders to the Lord Jesus. This one qualification says it all."⁵

Paul teaches that the marriage relationship is a living picture of the relationship between Christ and the Church: "This mystery is great; but I am speaking with reference to Christ and the church" (Eph. 5:32). The husband and wife relationship thus mirrors the relationship between Christ and His Church. Christ, the Bridegroom, is the Head, and the Church, the bride, is subject to Him in everything. Likewise, the husband is the head of the marriage relationship and the wife

traditional male-female role distinctions involving headship and submission. This viewpoint, however, is supported by the Bible only by means of "hermeneutical ventriloquism." If the Bible is allowed to speak for itself, it teaches both the equality of the sexes and gender role distinctions.

It cannot be my purpose in this short chapter to present a full-scale discussion of male and female roles. That has been done by many others and is presented exhaustively in the massive volume, *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood: A Response to Evangelical Feminism*, edited by John Piper and Wayne Grudem. My specific purpose is to show that Scripture excludes women from the church eldership. Let us now turn to Paul's teaching on the subject, which he delivered to the New Testament churches and their leaders.

HEADSHIP AND SUBMISSION ROLES IN THE MARRIAGE RELATIONSHIP

Regarding the marriage relationship, Paul could not have stated more pointedly the divine order or hierarchy of the husband-wife relationship. In complete agreement with Peter's instruction on the wife's marital submission, Paul teaches that the husband is empowered and commanded to lead in the marriage relationship and that the wife is instructed to submit "as to the Lord." The following texts speak for themselves:

- "Wives be subject to your own husbands, as to the Lord" (Eph. 5:22).
- "But as the church is subject to Christ, so also the wives ought to be to their husbands in everything" (Eph. 5:24).
- "For the husband is the head of the wife, as Christ also is the head of the church" (Eph. 5:23).
- "Wives, be subject to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord" (Col. 3:18).
- "But as for you, speak the things which are fitting for sound

submits herself to him in everything.⁶ Thus headship-submission in the marriage relationship is not culturally conditioned. On the contrary, "it is part of the essence of marriage."⁷

HEADSHIP AND SUBMISSION ROLES IN THE LOCAL CHURCH

Paul loves to use the household analogy when speaking of the nature and order of the local church (1 Tim. 3:15). Just as he teaches male headship in the family, he teaches male headship in the household of God (1 Tim. 2:8-3:7). Since the family is the basic social unit and the man is the established family leader, we should not be surprised that men would be the elders or fathers of the larger, local church family. In his mammoth study, *Man and Woman in Christ*, Catholic scholar Stephen B. Clark cogently highlights this principle:

There is a further consideration which points toward the desirability of having the men be the elders of the Christian community...the structure of leadership has to be set up in a way that supports the entire social structure of the community. If the men are supposed to be the heads of the family, they must also be the heads of the community. The community must be structured in a way that supports the pattern of the family, and the family must be structured in a way that supports the pattern of the community. It is in the family that they learn their community roles as well. Conversely, what they see in the community reinforces what they learn in the family. Thus, to adopt different principles on the community level weakens the family, and vice versa.⁸

The principle of male headship, however, does not in any way diminish the significance and necessity of active female involvement in the home or church. First-century Christian women played an indispensable role in the Lord's work, and many passages give evidence of women working diligently in the Lord's service. Some of Paul's co-laborers in the gospel were women (Rom. 16:1-15; Phil. 4:2,3). Yet their active role in advancing the gospel and caring for the Lord's people was accomplished in ways that did not violate male leadership in the

home and church.⁹ Consider the following passages that directly provide instruction on the dual roles of male headship and female subordination in the household of God.

First Timothy 2:9-15

In the same way that every individual family is governed by certain standards of conduct, so too, the local church family is governed by certain principles of conduct and social arrangement. The letter of 1 Timothy addresses specifically the issue of proper order and behavior of men, women, and elders in the local church family. To his representative in Ephesus, Paul writes: "I am writing these things to you, hoping to come to you before long; but in case I am delayed, I write so that you may know how one ought to conduct himself in the household of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and support of the truth" (1 Tim. 3:14,15; italics added).

A major aspect of the church's social arrangement concerns the behavior of women in the congregation. In the church at Ephesus, as a result of false teaching which may have challenged the validity of traditional gender roles, Christian women were acting contrary to acceptable Christian behavior. In order to counter improper female conduct in the church, Paul restates Christian principles of women's conduct:

- Modest dress: "Likewise, I want women to adorn themselves with proper clothing, modestly and discreetly, not with braided hair and gold or pearls or costly garments; but rather by means of good works, as befits women making a claim to godliness" (1 Tim. 2:9,10).
- Submission in the church: "Let a woman quietly receive instruction with entire submissiveness. But I do not allow a woman to teach or exercise authority over a man, but to remain quiet. For it was Adam who was first created and then Eve. And it was not Adam who was deceived, but the woman being quite deceived, fell into transgression" (1 Tim. 2:11-14).

First Timothy 2:11-14 should alone settle the question of women elders. Paul prohibits women from doing two things in reference to the men of the church: (1) teaching and (2) exercising authority over

them.¹⁰ This prohibition is evident in both the positive and negative statements. The positive statement, "Let a woman...receive instruction," is qualified by the manner in which she is to learn: "quietly" and "with entire submissiveness." The woman's learning with full submissiveness must take place under the church's leadership authority, which is the male teacher elders. The negative statement, "But I do not allow a woman to teach or exercise authority over a man," directly forbids women from teaching and leading *men* in the church. Paul is not prohibiting women from teaching absolutely (Titus 2:3; Acts 18:25,26), but specifically from teaching men publicly in the household of God (cf. 1 Cor. 14:34,35). He concludes verse 12 in the same way he began verse 11, insisting on women being silent. "This silence," George Knight insightfully remarks, "is a concrete expression of the principle of submission."¹¹ Since 1 Timothy 5:17 states that elders lead and teach the church and since women are not to teach or lead *men*, it follows, therefore, that women cannot be elders in the church.

Paul's restriction on women teaching and leading men certainly caused heated criticism, just as it does today. So, as in nearly all other passages on male-female role differences, Paul immediately supports his instruction by reminding his readers of the original creation order. He uses the Old Testament creation account to prove his point: "For it was Adam who was first created, and then Eve. And it was not Adam who was deceived, but the woman being quite deceived, fell into transgression. But women shall be preserved through the bearing of children if they continue in faith and love and sanctity with self-restraint" (1 Tim. 2:13-15).

By stating in verse 13 that Adam was created first, Paul means that in the creation design of male and female Adam, the male, was first among equals. God uniquely designed the man, physically, emotionally, and spiritually, to be head of the relationship and the woman to complement his leadership position. It is profoundly significant that God did not create Adam and Eve at the same time. Instead, woman was made after the man, from the man, for the man, brought to the man, and named by the man (Gen. 2:20-23; cf. 1 Cor. 11:8,9).

In verse 14, Paul illustrates from the Fall the necessity of maintaining the creation distinctions between man and woman. He writes, "And it was not Adam who was deceived, but the woman being quite deceived, fell into transgression." Satan shrewdly circumvented Adam—the one God equipped as first among equals to lead

in the relationship—and went directly to Eve, whom he rightly perceived to be weaker in resisting his deceptions (2 Cor. 11:3; 1 Peter 3:7; 1 Tim. 4:7; 2 Tim. 3:6). Hence, a major reason that God insists on an all-male eldership is because godly males are more suited by divine design than godly females for leadership, particularly for identifying and fighting off satanic false teaching and subtle, doctrinal deceptions.

Note that immediately following his instruction prohibiting women from teaching and leading men in 1 Timothy 2:11-15, Paul describes the qualifications for those who oversee the local church (1 Tim. 3:1-7). Significantly, the qualifications assume a male subject; thus the overseer is to be "the husband of one wife" and "one who manages his own household well" (1 Tim. 3:2,4). Paul gives no suggestion of women elders in this passage on the qualifications for elders.

First Corinthians 11:2-16

First Corinthians 11:2-16 is a superb example of how Paul supports his instruction of headship and submission with weighty theological and biblical reasons rather than with cultural-social patterns or adaptation to unique circumstances. Paul begins his instruction on male-female role with an explanation of its source: "But I want you to understand that Christ is the head of every man, and the man is the head of a woman, and God is the head of Christ" (1 Cor. 11:3). Woman's submission is part of a series of subordination and headship relationships: God, Christ, man, woman. God is head, Christ is head, and man is head. Only woman is not referred to as head. These relationships have nothing to do with temporal, local circumstances, but follow a divinely constituted hierarchical order.

By stating that "God is the head of Christ," Paul emphasizes the hierarchical relationship that exists in the Godhead. Although equal in substance, Christ obeys and submits Himself to the Father within the relationship of the persons of the Godhead (1 Cor. 15:28). This submission certainly doesn't imply inferiority on the part of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Before the Fall, God created mankind in His own image as male and female, fully equal in terms of personhood. But in terms of relationship among equals, God established a hierarchy of male leadership and female submission. As is the case within the Godhead, the hierarchy of the relationship does not imply inferiority or superiority. The woman is in no way inferior to the man because she subordinates

himself to him than Christ is inferior to God the Father because He subordinates Himself to the Father. So the headship-subordination relationship of the man and woman is evidenced in the original creation order and in the greater order, the nature of the Godhead.

With remarkable precision, S. Lewis Johnson, Jr., former professor at Dallas Theological Seminary, summarizes this truth: "The ultimate and telling proof that equality and submission may coexist in glorious harmony is found in the mediatorial mission of the Son of God, 'God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God' (Nicaea), who completed it in the true liberation of submission to His Father (cf. John 8:21-47; 1 Corinthians 15: 24-28; cf. 11:3)."¹²

In verses 7-9, Paul reminds his readers of the original order of creation: "For a man ought not to have his head covered, since he is the image and glory of God; but the woman is the glory of man. For man does not originate from woman, but woman from man; for indeed man was not created for the woman's sake, but woman for the man's sake" (1 Cor. 11:7-9). Paul states that the woman is "the glory of man," which means she was created to directly reflect the man's God-created headship authority by submitting to and supporting his leadership; she is the man's vice-regent. Commenting on these verses and especially the phrase "the woman is the glory of man," David Gooding, former professor of Greek at Queen's University, Belfast, Ireland, best summarizes Paul's thinking in this passage:

Chapter 1 of that book [Genesis] makes it clear (1:27-28) that as to essential nature and status man and woman were both made equally in the image of God and were intended, both of them, to share dominion over creation. But chapter 2 of Genesis explains (2:18-25) that when it came to their administrative roles there were significant, God-designed, differences between the sexes. The man was made first and had already begun his God-given tasks before the woman was made. He was, moreover, made direct and not out of the woman. As he stood alone, fresh from the hand of God, he was, says the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 11:7) the image and glory of God, God's viceroy in creation, invested with God's own glory as his official representative. The woman, on the other hand, says the Holy Spirit (11:7-9) is the glory of the man. He is referring to the fact that God made the woman out of the man and designed her role to be that of a partner, help and companion for the man,

to complement the man in his God-given tasks. The woman, then was the man's glory as the man was God's; and the man felt all that joy and delight in the woman and her role that God felt in the man and his role.

We know all too well how Satan spoiled it and diminished the glories of both their roles. But Christ, the Seed of the Woman, has come to undo the works of the Devil (1 John 3:8). In the church, angels, we are told (Eph. 3:10; 1 Cor. 11:10), are being taught the manifold wisdom of God, as they see man and woman restored to God and to the roles for which the Creator designed them, as they observe men and women out of love for Christ using the symbols which indicate their acceptance of the order which the Redeemer has laid down for them.¹³

An all-male eldership speaks of agreement with and obedience to God's all-important plan for the sexes in which the man uniquely reflects God's image and glory in headship and the woman uniquely reflects the glory of the man by her submission to the man's God-given task of spiritual headship.

First Corinthians 14:33-38

We must mention one final text, 1 Corinthians 14:33-38, which is very similar to 1 Timothy 2 but is directed to a different congregation: "as in all the churches of the saints. Let the women keep silent in the churches; for they are not permitted to speak, but let them subject themselves, just as the Law also says. And if they desire to learn anything, let them ask their own husbands at home; for it is improper for a woman to speak in church... the things which I write to you are the Lord's commandment." Here, as in 1 Timothy 2, Paul prohibits women from taking the lead publicly by speaking in an open, spontaneous church meeting. He again supports his restriction by appealing to the Old Testament Scriptures and a command from the Lord Himself.

Paul's instructions to churches in Ephesus, Corinth, Colossae, and on the island of Crete regarding women's submission remind us that in a sinful world even Christians struggle with the idea of submission.¹⁴ Furthermore, Paul emphasizes male-female roles because it is very common for males to abdicate their spiritual headship responsibility and obligations in the home and church. Male irresponsibility and passivity is an enormous problem that has frustrated and destroyed

many wives, families, and churches. Ultimately the abdication of male headship is a refusal to submit to Christ's Word and Lordship. Paul, therefore, had to reaffirm God's original creation order as revealed in the Old Testament Scriptures. Christianity did not abolish God's original design for men and women, rather it brought it into better focus.

EGALITARIAN OPPOSITION TO MALE LEADERSHIP

The rallying cry of all religious feminists, including biblical feminists, is, "There is neither male nor female." They take this cry from their banner text, Galatians 3:28: "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus."

Biblical feminists (or Egalitarians) believe that as a result of Christ's redemption, the gospel abolished the old distinctions of male headship and female subordination. They contend that the seven specific passages on women's submission (1 Cor. 11; 14; Eph. 5; Col. 3; 1 Tim. 2; Titus 2; 1 Peter 3) are "problematic," "painfully puzzling," "obscure," "difficult," and "isolated" texts that should be interpreted in light of Galatians 3:28, which they consider to be the clearer, more theologically pertinent text.¹⁵ As a result of their viewpoint, new and creative interpretations have been constructed to explain that the headship-subordination passages do not mean what they appear to say and do not apply to today's churches. Biblical feminists conclude that there are no compelling scriptural reasons for restricting women from serving as elders or as leaders/teachers in any or all church positions.

The methods used by biblical feminists to interpret headship-submission passages, however, are seriously flawed. Galatians 3:28, the feminists' principle text, appears in a context that deals with the fundamental issues of salvation, not the concept of headship and submission. The context addresses the purpose of the law, justification by faith, and the lofty position of every Christian in union with Christ. Paul's point is that *all* Christians, no matter what their race, social status, or gender, share equally by faith the glorious, universal privilege of sonship and heirship apart from the works of the Law (Gal. 3:23-29). So, both men and women are one in Christ Jesus based on

their faith in Him. All Christians have direct access to God as sons and daughters, are indwelt by Christ through the Holy Spirit, and share equally the eternal promises of God.

As to whether the husband-wife role distinctions or gender-based roles in the larger family of God that are present in the Old Testament still exist under the new covenant, Galatians 3:28 simply doesn't comment. However, the author of Galatians 3:28 comments on this question elsewhere. In his letters to the churches in Ephesus, Colossae, Corinth, and Crete, and to his helpers Timothy and Titus, Paul insists that even among men and women who are now "one in Christ Jesus" as a result of the gospel, there exist functional differences and distinct, gender-based roles in marriage and the local church.

Biblical feminists misuse the Galatians 3:28 passage by pressing the text far beyond its intended meaning and declaring the plain, literal interpretation of the headship-submission passages to be simplistic. Following the same methodology of interpretation as the biblical feminists, so-called Christian homosexuals claim the right to same-sex relationships. Because the Bible says "neither male nor female," they claim that all the specific biblical passages prohibiting homosexuality must be understood culturally and in the light of Galatians 3:28. But does Galatians 3:28 truly abolish all sexual distinctions? Can men now marry men, or women marry women? The conclusions that those who hold an egalitarian viewpoint draw from Galatians 3:28 are plainly at odds with numerous portions of Scripture.

Biblical feminists wrongfully pit one group of verses on women's submission against another group of verses on women's equality. The historic Christian position, however, gives equal weight to both truths. Old Testament scholar Bruce Waltke briefly explains the correct approach to handling both sets of biblical claims: "These truths regarding the equality and inequality of the sexes must be held in dialectical tension, by allowing them the same weight at the same time, and by not allowing one to vitiate the other by subordinating one to the other."¹⁶

Peter, for example, holds in "dialectical tension" both husband-wife equality and husband-wife role distinctions. The wife, according to Peter, is "a fellow heir of the grace of life" with her husband and is also the "submissive" partner in the husband-wife relationship (1 Peter 3:1-7). Biblical feminists, on the other hand, promote a half truth—emphasizing the equality side of the male-female relationship without recognizing the subordination side. However, we understand the New

Testament correctly only when we allow the Scriptures on male-female equality as well as on male-female role differences to speak with full authority.

The Bible is not ambiguous about this critically important doctrine. In the most straightforward, clear manner, the Bible repeatedly states that male-female role differences exist in relationship to headship and submission. Not only do the apostles Paul and Peter expressly state the headship-submission doctrine, they argue cogently and passionately for it and support the universal application of their teaching from theology and original creation. In the final analysis, Christ's choice of a male apostolate serves as the basis for their teaching.

CHAPTER 4

Qualified Leadership

"An overseer, then, must be above reproach."

1 Timothy 3:2a

In a letter to a young presbyter named Nepotian, dated A.D. 394, Jerome (A.D. 345-419) rebuked the churches of his day for their hypocrisy in showing more concern for the appearance of their church buildings than the careful selection of their church leaders: "Many build churches nowadays; their walls and pillars of glowing marble, their ceilings glittering with gold, their altars studded with jewels. Yet to the choice of Christ's ministers no heed is paid."¹

A similar error is repeated by multitudes of churches today. Many churches seem oblivious to the biblical requirements for their spiritual leaders as well as to the need for the congregation to properly examine all candidates for leadership in light of biblical standards (1 Tim. 3:10). This failure was dramatically highlighted when a leading evangelical journal in America brought together five divorced pastors and asked them to share their feelings, experiences, and views on divorce and the ministry. The journal's staff published the forum because they believed the growing problem of divorce among ministers needed to be faced openly and honestly. In fact, the article claimed that a recent survey of divorce rates in the United States showed that pastors had the third highest divorce rate—exceeded only by that of medical doctors and policemen!²

The pastors' thoughts on divorce were presented in the journal through an open forum format. Along with the forum, the journal published the responses of seven well-known evangelical leaders to the divorced pastors' comments. What is astounding about the article is