

Women Leaders in the Church

written by Tim Jennings, M.D. | January 30, 2011



I belong to a church in Brisbane Australia and we are currently going through a bit of upheaval over the issue of appointing women in the church as elders

, I am still a babe when it comes to such matters and the only scripture I can find in relation to this topic is found in 1Tim 3, The evidence is overwhelmingly in favour of the blokes .. I have read your book and what you say just makes sense, are you able to shed some light on this topic for further study, so I can make a decision based on Gods' Word.

Your Bro In Christ, S

Usually I don't answer a question with a question, but in this case, let me ask, why is this a question at all? Why is it some oppose women teachers, preachers and elders? What motivates the heart of those who would say, that strictly based on gender, a person is disqualified from being a leader in God's cause?

Is such a position not the height of bigotry and closed mindedness? To globally assert that all persons of

female gender are, by genetic predetermination, excluded from being a teacher, elder or preacher is no different than asserting that spiritual fitness is determined by skin colour.

The Bible demonstrates that excluding persons from leadership based on gender is contrary to God and His methods. Females have held leadership positions in God's cause throughout Biblical history, from Miriam, Deborah, and the prophetesses of the New Testament to Joan of Arc, Mother Teresa, Ellen White and other modern female leaders.

In God's kingdom what matters is character, whether God's law has been written upon the heart, whether a person has been renewed in mind and motives to live in harmony with God and His methods, whether one is willing to stand for right and not compromise, even if the heavens fall, not whether one is male or female. And interestingly, according to scripture it takes both male and female to make the image of God (Genesis 1:27). When we move to an exclusively male or female dominated society (or church) we distort the divine image and impair the spread of the gospel.

God's kingdom is the kingdom of self-sacrificing love. "Greater love has no man than he give his life for a friend." (John 15:13). "This is how we know what love is that Christ gave his life for us and we ought to give our lives for our brothers." (1 John 3:16). "For God so loved the world that he gave his only son..." (John 3:16). What methods are practiced by those who insist that, based on gender and gender alone, a person is disqualified from leading in God's cause? What motivates the heart of those who oppose women in leadership? Is it love or is it some primitive male insecurity couched in religious dogma? The Pharisees in Christ's day were very good at making bigotry appear pious and holy - are we as a Christian community falling into the same trap?

When we read scripture and texts like 1 Tim 3 we must remember the context, to whom it was written. Paul was not writing to you and me. He was writing to one of his students in the first century AD. The same Paul also told slaves to obey their earthly masters (Eph 6:5). Do we take this advice literally and apply it today and conclude that slavery is acceptable? Or do we recognize Paul was writing in the context of a social fabric understanding the nuance of his society and seeking a course which would promote the spread of the gospel most effectively in HIS day?

When modern society finally stood up and fought to abolish slavery there were religious leaders who turned to scripture and the writings of Paul to support the "legitimacy" of slavery. Are we, as a church, not making the exact same error when we use Paul's writings to a first century audience and try to apply it to women's role in leadership today?

One of the founders of my church, who was a woman, made it clear that the issue of women leadership is not determined by men but by God and has been settled by the evidence of God's blessing upon women leaders in the form of souls saved to the kingdom. She so strongly believed that women should be in Christian leadership that she states she was directed by God to use her tithe money to give to women who were doing the gospel work because the church would not pay them. (EV 493, DG 105, 106). (This should give pause to those church leaders who believe that tithe money should blindly be given to an organization rather than realizing the tithe is God's, to be used to spread the gospel as He directs in its use).

Here in America, Martin Luther King Jr. powerfully called our attention to the injustice of racism and the foolishness of judging a person by the colour of their skin. His words ring down the corridors of time:

Let us not wallow in the valley of despair, I say to you today, my friends.

And so even though we face the difficulties of today and tomorrow, I still have a dream. It is a dream deeply rooted in the American dream.

I have a dream that one day this nation will rise up and live out the true meaning of its creed: "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal." I have a dream that one day even the state of Mississippi, a state sweltering with the heat of injustice, sweltering with the heat of oppression, will be transformed into an oasis of freedom and justice.

I have a dream that my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character.

I have a dream today!

Should we not as Christians take these same lessons and apply them to male and female roles in the church?

Let us not wallow in the valley of despair, I say to you today, my friends.

And so even though we face the difficulties of today and tomorrow, I still have a dream. It is a dream deeply rooted in the [Christian] dream.

I have a dream that one day this [church] will rise up and live out the true meaning of its creed: "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all [humans] are created equal...."

I have a dream that my [wife, mother and sister] will one day live in a [church] where they will not be judged by the [gender of their being] but by the content of their character.

I have a dream today!

Do you share the dream?