

Women's Ordination

written by Tim Jennings, M.D. | September 17, 2012



Recently I was asked to read an article that addressed the issue of ordination of women. The article, while advocating for female pastors, opposed ordination for women as ordination included “church authority” to baptize and establish churches. The author appealed to the example of Lucifer in heaven being jealous of Christ and Korah being jealous of Aaron and neither being content with their position as evidence that God has selected men to be ordained and women should not be jealous of ordination but content with their position.

The following is my response to the article:

The issue of achieving equality in a world of sin, where human hearts are filled with selfishness, is difficult. And I appreciate any open-minded attempt to move toward a unity of love. But the appeal to Lucifer’s jealousy of Christ is misapplied to the question of ordination of women. Why? Lucifer’s inequality to Christ is inherent, i.e. God is God, created beings are created beings, and thus Lucifer’s rebellion was against his inherent inequality attempting to create a lie that a created being was God. Such is not the case with men and women, both are human.

The case of Korah is also misapplied, as the author failed to understand the unique nature of the Israelites and their “acting roles” in the “theater” of the sanctuary. Just as in any theatrical production

the actors all have specified roles to play, so too in the Jewish economy God gave specified roles for the various actors to play. The production would never succeed if all the actors wanted to play the same role. But, in actual practice (i.e. in the actual experience of salvation) all the Israelites were called to be a "kingdom of priests" not just the descendants of Aaron. (Exodus 19:6) It was only within the confines of the sanctuary "theater" that the descendants of Aaron were the priests, as they represented the converted, while the rest of the tribes acted out the role of the unconverted persons, so that the "annual recurring play" could enact the plan of salvation. It was simply a teaching tool, not reality. In the New Testament we are told that all the believers (both men and women) are the "priesthood."

Many people who appeal to Biblical examples regarding the role of women in the church fail to account for the historical context in which God meets people where they are. He tolerates deviations from his ideal, in which sinful minds are entrenched, in order to connect with us and lead us out of our bigotry and selfishness and back to his ultimate restoration. Sadly, we often love our bigotry more than God's ideal!

God didn't condemn polygamy in the OT, but had Paul address it in the NT. Polygamy didn't suddenly become wrong in the NT. And pointing to examples like Korah to address issues of women's ordination, or even to Paul, would be like pointing to OT polygamy to address issues of marriage. It would be wrong to point to the practice in the OT as historical evidence of how God would like things. Regarding how women were treated during the time the Bible was written, is an artifact of the bigotry of humanity, not a revelation of God's plan. God merely tolerated male dominance, as he did polygamy in order to connect with humanity and lead them back to true unity and equality. God's pronouncement in Genesis that Adam would rule over Eve, was not God's ideal, but God's foreknowledge proclaiming how sin would distort the divinely established equality.

If you disagree with my assertion, then perhaps, since Korah was cited as a case example for determining who is qualified to serve as a priest of God, we might benefit from utilizing other instructions from that same era.

A person was disqualified from the priesthood if he had any physical defect, including poor vision. (Lev 21:20) Should we void the credentials of all serving pastors who wear glasses or suffer other ailments? Is this Biblical instruction any less inspired than the example of Korah?

Lev 19:19 prohibits wearing clothes made of two types of material, should we disqualify from the pastorate those who wear a wool/poly blend? Is this direction less inspired than the injunction regarding women?

When we operate on an imposed law construct, with God the imposer of law, then we struggle with such issues because God has said it, therefore the rule must be followed. Many fail to realize that God's government is based on principles and those principles can be applied differently in different settings, so in one place God can say "use the tithe and buy fermented wine and rejoice before the Lord" (Dt 14:26) but another place say that such drink is a mocker. (Prov 20:1)

As we move closer to God, his methods of love become more and more our methods until we are one day like him in character. We come back into complete unity with God and the only "inequality" that remains is the inherent differences built into our being by God, such as women bearing children and men being physically stronger. But there are no inherent differences in moral worth, intelligence, spiritual insight, compassion, love, ability to lead people to Christ, or serve as priests in God's church.

As long as selfishness reigns in the hearts of men inequality, discrimination, domination, subordination and self-exaltation will continue to manifest itself in our relationships, including within the church. But as love casts out our fear, as selfishness is replaced with selflessness, and as we are restored more fully to God's image, then inequality will evaporate and true oneness with God and each other will be experienced. Then perhaps we will return to the Biblical model of ordination being the affirmation by the church of the gifts the Holy Spirit has already imparted, regardless of gender.