

Exploring the Question of Women in Ministry
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Part 2: Examining the Primary Views¹

I. Extreme Liberal/Progressive Views (“Left”)

A. Radical Feminist

1. Men are the problem. Patriarchy like that seen in the biblical texts is the source of all evils.
2. The solution—women should rule.
 - a. Eliminate from society anything which stems from patriarchy.
 - b. Read all texts through feminist filters to determine what is true or valid for today.
 - c. Replace male authority pattern with female authority patterns.
 - d. Promote the supremacy of being female; adopt goddess worship.
 - e. Ignore, repudiate, and replace Paul’s instructions with other teaching derived from religious or psychological/sociological sources.
3. This position thus considers the question of whether women should be permitted in ministry an insult, stemming from a time that was fundamentally defined by the oppression of women.
 - a. Nothing practiced in that time or culture or resembling it is deserving of continued consideration.
 - b. Positions advocating positive views of patriarchy in any form or to any degree are pointless, without merit, stupid.

B. Moderate/Radical Feminist

1. Patriarchy is evil. It represents a culturally backward and unhealthy, unhelpful view of how men and women ought to function in society.
2. Feminist readings are necessary to correct the errors of patriarchy.
3. Equality is the goal, and the consensus of the group determines what is right.
 - a. Eliminate male authority and replace with democratic structures based on consensus and agreement.
 - b. Seek out more female leaders to bring about a balance of male and female.
 - c. Ignore, repudiate, and/or reinterpret Paul’s teaching so that the contemporary view of the relation of men and women is upheld.
4. This position considers the question of whether women should be permitted in ministry ignorant and in need of correction.
 - a. The right of women to hold places of authority and leadership in Christian ministry is an assumed human and civil right, since all humans are inherently equal.

- b. The need to overturn the errors of patriarchy outweighs any possible positive consequences of continuing to have a majority of male Christian leaders, even if those male leaders espouse feminist values.

C. My Evaluation/Assessment

1. Both of these positions reflect a humanist worldview with the starting point of equal rights as a fundamental presupposition, rather than a biblical worldview with the starting point of being subject to God.
2. Both of these positions object to the role patriarchy has had in the world and wish to see it eliminated entirely.
3. Both positions have some legitimate points to make. However, I dismiss each of them as completely incompatible with genuine Christianity. There is simply no way to reconcile these views with an orthodox understanding of Scripture and its teachings.

II. Extreme Conservative/Fundamentalist Views (“Right”)

A. Tyrannical Male Domination

1. All women are inferior to all men.
2. The natural state of things is for men to rule, women to be subservient.
 - a. In every social context/situation, the male is predominant, and his wishes/decisions control what happens.
 - b. In all relations the male is the unquestioned authority whose position is supreme.
3. Women have no place of ministry in the church except for menial/domestic jobs (cooking and cleaning) and caring for children.
4. This view enshrines the cultural patterns of the first century Mediterranean world as God’s pattern for all cultures, all times.
5. Interpret Paul’s words through the filter of the dominant cultural pattern (patriarchy) as determinative for all social relations.
6. This position dismisses contemporary objections to this way of viewing women as “liberal unbelief,” and therefore unworthy of consideration.

B. Patronizing Male Domination

1. Women are limited by virtue of their nature, and are not suited for positions requiring them to have authority.
2. Male leadership is not only necessary to please God, but for things to work.
3. Women’s roles in church are limited to those which are supporting, or which involve them leading children or other women.
4. This view enshrines the cultural patterns of the first century Mediterranean world as God’s pattern for all cultures, all times.
5. Interpret Paul’s words through the filter of the dominant cultural pattern (patriarchy) as determinative for all social relations, especially in the church.
6. This position dismisses contemporary objections to this way of viewing women as “liberal unbelief,” and therefore unworthy of consideration.

C. My Evaluation/Assessment

1. Both of these views represent an attempt to retain male power and privilege rather than a legitimately held belief that Scripture teaches these things.
2. I dismiss these views as untrue, improper interpretations of Scripture, and completely untenable, without any merit at all.²
3. They represent a perversion of genuine Christianity and perpetuate wrong perceptions of Christian faith which hold us up for ridicule.

III. Moderating Views

A. Moderate Liberalism

1. Reason, experience, and the prevailing norms of contemporary culture must be the determining factors in deciding what is the proper relationship between men and women.
2. Scripture may inform us as one of several sources of insight into God's intentions for men and women. But it is not determinative in and of itself.
3. Since equality of the genders and democratic ideals are the unquestioned values which all intelligent people must espouse, then any passage of Scripture that does not support these ideals must be rejected or reinterpreted to fit with contemporary cultural expectations and understandings.
4. Paul is a product of his culture. His views about this matter and about the relationship between men and women must therefore be rejected or reinterpreted if we are going to determine what God wants for us.
5. The end result is that passages that do not conform to contemporary ideas are simply discarded, ignored, or reinterpreted according to current ideas (which are assumed to be correct, because they are current).
6. Consequently, this position finds no reason to consider what Paul (or any other biblical author) has to say about the question of women in ministry—unless there is a way to reinterpret that author/passage in a way that supports whatever viewpoint is acceptable according to the prevailing ideas in the culture.

B. Pragmatic Pentecostalism

1. Whatever works to bring about people getting saved, healed, filled with the Spirit, etc. must be right, since God obviously is blessing it.
2. Since God poured out his Spirit on both men and women, so that both may prophesy, then there are no other restrictions on who may or may not be used in ministry. Anyone of any gender may be a pastor (or any other office).
3. Any passages of Scripture that do not support this understanding may simply be ignored in the light of the Pentecostal anointing.
4. Those who argue against this are simply legalists, who do not understand the things of the Spirit, and who are themselves spiritually deficient due to their lack of Pentecostal experience.

5. Pentecostals have traditionally relished their position as outsiders to the wider culture, including the wider church.
 - a. So it does not bother them if their beliefs and practices do not line up with what is normal in the rest of the church world.
 - b. Nor are they inclined to listen to critiques of their position or their reasoning.
6. Consequently, they are generally impervious to attempts to refute their position or to challenge their reasoning.

C. My Evaluation/Assessment

1. Each of these two views represents a more moderate position on the issue, though they are quite different, compared to one another.
2. The fact that they also represent different ends of the theological spectrum is a notable curiosity, but doesn't weigh in the evaluation.
3. They share one similarity: both positions tend to ignore the Scriptures that stand against their position.
4. For this reason, I find them unacceptable, for they do not take into account all of the Scriptural teaching on the issue.

Endnotes

1. The views presented here are generalized and simplified, and do not necessarily represent exactly the position of a particular person or group. I admit that more research is needed to more accurately portray these positions. Other positions than these also exist.

2. I say this, even though there may be individual males who are kind and treat women well. Southern gentlemen from the early 18th century in America, or Englishmen of the Victorian Era may have thought that their patronization of women was a way to protect them, but it does not make up for the error of demeaning and de-valuing women as a fundamental assumption.