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### A Biblical Perspective on the Role of Women in the Church

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## A Biblical Perspective on the Role of Women in the Church

Our society is obviously male-oriented. This year four new Congresswomen were elected. However, if four more women were to be successful in every successive election, it would take 123 years to equalize the numbers of women and men in the U.S. Congress. Similar proportions probably characterize the male-female ratio in the church.

In creation, the original equality of emphasis was on status, dignity, and worth. See Gen. 1:26 and 2:7. In fact, there seemed to be good balance between the "male and female created He Them," achieved by greater refinement and sensitivity in the woman to match the greater brawn and strength of the man.

Then the fall, with Eve making the first choice and offering it to Adam, resulted in a functional shift. This had to do with responsibility and authority, as determined by God in His word to the woman, "-- and thy desire shall be to thy husband, and he shall rule over thee." Gen. 3:16

However, in the process of redemption, the meaning of this "curse" was moderated and modified in harmony with the unfolding revelation of God's love in and through Jesus Christ. Jesus made no difference between men and women in His ministry, and was often served better by women than by men. What seemed to emerge was not so much distinctions between the sexes but inter-dependence. St. Paul struggles to interpret this and to apply it to the mutually inter-related roles of men and women in the church. He related his applications appropriately to different cultures and situations, e.g., Corinth and Philippi. In the Corinthian setting he commanded the women to keep silent in the church; in the Philippian situation he highly commended the women who shared with him in the "labors of the gospel." Phil. 4:3.

It is this original "equality in balance," the shift of status resulting from the fall, and the redeeming impact of Christ's plan of redemption that provide the basis for our interpretation and our position with respect to the current role of women in the church. The Genesis 3:16 status is shown to be descriptive of the sinful state after the fall, but is not normative for the redeemed state made possible by the death and resurrection of Jesus. It is interesting to note also the strong pro-women content and attitude of the gospels and their writers. They seemed to understand this as the spirit of Jesus' teaching and ministry.

(Here I would add the concluding paragraph of the statement which was presented at the September meeting of the Board of Elders. I would only substitute the words "men and women" for "husband and wife" in the 5th line.)

Milo A. Rediger  
November 11, 1980