

I am conservative by nature and generally have an attitude that if it's not broken, don't fix it. Change is often hard for me. But, my overarching goal in life is to do what God desires, what is right. When I was interviewed to be an elder candidate, I inquired what issues might be on the agenda for the upcoming elder board. I learned that re evaluation of women as elders /deacons was a central item. I expressed that my belief at the time based on experience at previous churches and Monte Vista was that males only should lead, but that I had not prayerfully studied it and welcomed the opportunity to do so.

From the time I joined the board, we have together and individually prayerfully considered scripture and articles on this subject to determine God's heart on the matter. My views have changed to believe women should be included as church leaders in all areas of leadership. I would describe my position as inclusive(egalitarian) as opposed to traditional (complementarian). But why? How could I come to that conclusion?

GENESIS

The Genesis passages (1,2) are not completely clear to me in regards to when "ul adam" refers to human and when it refers to the man Adam, but Gen 2;20 says that for "adam" God found no helper (ezer) suitable(kngdu). The vast majority of the times this word for helper is used in the old testament it refers to God (eg., Psa 54:4 the psalmist states " God is my helper"). Before the fall it seems that no hierarchy is clear in Genesis and consistent with this, there does not appear to me to be inferiority or hierarchy implied in Eve having a helper relationship with Adam. As part of the curse (Gen 3:16), after the fall Eve was told that Adam would rule over her.

JESUS' DEALING WITH WOMEN

We know from the gospels that Jesus had women among His followers, among those who financially supported Him, who followed Him to His crucifixion, who were the first to encounter the risen Christ after His resurrection. He spoke to the Samaritan woman at the well who would customarily be ignored by Jewish men. He healed an unclean Jewish woman (having a prolonged menstrual flow) and spoke to her, again something a Jewish man would not do. He included a woman as an image of God in the parable of the lost coin (Luke15:8-10). He forgave the woman caught in adultery when the Jewish custom was to stone her and challenged the sinless men to throw the first stone.

When Jesus was at Mary and Martha's home and Mary sat at Jesus' feet listening to his teaching- the position I understand only a Rabbi's students would take who were studying to become a rabbi and which women were always prohibited from assuming- He not only failed to rebuke her, but told her sister Martha she had chosen the " better part" and encouraged her participation. We have to agree that the way Jesus treated women was not just different from the cultural norms, but revolutionary.

BUT, Jesus never spoke about women as leaders- pro or con- or slavery, whether it was right or wrong.....He did, however, speak to the fact that "rulers "and "great ones" who "exercise authority" should not lord it over others, but amongst His followers should be "servants" and "slaves" of all (Mk10:42-5).

PAUL – SPIRITUAL GIFTS

There are many things that Paul discusses that touch on our topic. First, the issue of gifts of the Spirit (1Cor12, Rom 12:3-8). He mentions all believers are baptized into one body and made to drink of one Spirit(1Cor12:13)-Jew and Greek, slave and free (and presumably male and female). We do see (1 Cor 11:5) that definitely women are able to pray and are given the gift of prophesy – proclaiming God's truth. Women are part of the body of Christ and therefore given the gifts of the Spirit. Nowhere does it say that Jew or Greek, slave or free, male or female are given different gifts. The list of gifts include apostle, teacher, and prophesy.

PAUL – CULTURE

Paul writes instructions to churches in most of his letters about various aspects of spiritual life. Conduct in worship and use of spiritual gifts are addressed at various times in 1Cor 11-14. He addresses head coverings in 1Cor11. A wife/woman was directed to have a covering over her head when she prays or prophesies and a man was told long hair is a disgrace for him. Elsewhere he directs believers to greet one another with a holy kiss. The old testament law directs Jews to stone those who don't ob-

serve the sabbath (Ex 31:14), who are rebellious sons (Deut. 21:18-21), and who commit adultery. Jesus commanded His disciples to wash one another's feet. Polygamy was practiced by David and Solomon and was a common practice. Slavery was practiced until the late 1800's, but today we would agree that it is obviously a sinful practice. Where would we- where would I - align on the slavery debate if I had lived in the 1840's and 50's? Some cultural practices of yesterday are clearly not God's plan for today. And some practices that seemed to be God's plan for one time are clearly not His plan for other generations.

GOSPEL WITNESS

Reaching the world - Jew/Gentile, slave/free, male/female (Gal3:28) - was clearly Paul's passion. In doing so, he tried to reach them where they were. He modified his approach to Jews and Gentiles. In 1Cor 9:19-23 he states he became all things to all men that he might win some. He writes in several letters about order in worship. He appears to have a concern about how that might affect someone coming to a house church to learn of this new faith in Jesus (1Cor 14:26-40). Some of this involves women. In v.34-35 he states "the women should keep silent in the churches. They are not permitted to speak, but should be in submission." "If there is anything they desire to learn, let them ask their husbands at home. For it is shameful for a woman to speak in church." That seems contradictory to other passages on giftedness, prophesy and prayer (1Cor11). My understanding of this passage gained clarity when I visited a replica of a synagogue of Jesus' day in Nazareth touring Israel a couple of years ago. Men and women sat on opposite sides of the synagogue. In all likelihood, a similar seating arrangement occurred in Christian house churches. Women were not taught- secular or religious- in those days. They were not allowed to ask questions of other men, but had to ask their husbands. In their new participation in churches of believers and eagerness to learn where they had previously been prevented, if they were to call across the room to their husbands, this could create disorder in the church. This could have turned off visitors to their gatherings and discouraged some from hearing the gospel. It would have been shameful to disrupt church gatherings, drawing attention to themselves instead of Christ. They were encouraged to learn from their husbands at home. In 1 Tim 2:8-11, we see that Paul addresses men that are angry and quarreling, and women flaunting their wealth by their dress thereby drawing attention to themselves and not Christ and His transformative work in their lives. In v.11, a woman is advised to learn quietly with all submissiveness. Does that refer to God and His Word? Is that to men at that time in history or always? Men, of course, should also learn in submission to Christ. "I do not permit a woman to teach or to exercise authority over a man; rather she is to remain quiet." (v.12). The word for exercising authority "authentein" is used nowhere else in the Bible and it's meaning was: 1. To commit an act of violence 2. To take matters into one's own hands 3. To exercise mastery over 4. To hold sway over someone or something. Some historians of the day used it in the context of violent acts implying more than authority - domination. If Paul had meant the usual definition of authority he could have used other words he uses elsewhere. Paul, it would appear, is advising against a woman teaching in such a way as to dominate a man. (We would assume he would also advise against a man teaching a woman in such a way as to dominate her.) Many believe the word translated quiet or silent refers to quiet receptive humility towards God and scripture since elsewhere women must speak to pray or prophesy. This seems to be a more reasonable explanation for this passage than a single verse discounting other passages on spiritual gifts and Jesus' actions and words.

Why doesn't Jesus include female disciples among the 12? I don't know. Why doesn't Paul use the term person instead of man/husband in listing the attributes of elder or overseer (1Tim 3, Titus 1)? (Paul uses the term wives in 1Tim3 describing deacons leading many to believe he supports women deacons.) Why doesn't Jesus or Paul condemn slavery? Perhaps for the same reason - even among egalitarians - that many would avoid the discussion of female leaders in middle eastern cultures today. It would be challenging to obtain an audience for the gospel, even as it would have been to discuss women leaders and abolition of slavery in a paternalistic first century Israel where owning slaves was common place. But, there was a transition in our country and world - albeit painful - when slavery was abolished. What would Jesus do - or have us at Monte Vista Chapel do - regarding women and leadership today? Considering the information I have presented leads me to believe that God would have us include women as leaders even though that change may be uncomfortable or painful.