

## **Gender Confusion**

John Witcombe

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“Male headship is fine for the home but when it comes to the New Testament Church, Christ has assumed that position of headship; He is now the head of the church and all positions of church leadership under Him can be filled by any qualified person, be they men or women.” This is the current thinking of many within our church. Take a moment and consider whether or not this assumption is biblical.

Wasn't Jesus the head of His church before the cross? If there was an exclusive male headship in both the home and in the church before the cross, why would the cross remove this headship only from the church and not from the home? Is there not a close relationship between home leadership and church leadership? Indeed there is:

This is a true saying, If a man desire the office of a bishop, he desireth a good work. A bishop then must be blameless, the husband of one wife, vigilant, sober, of good behaviour, given to hospitality, apt to teach; Not given to wine, no striker, not greedy of filthy lucre; but patient, not a brawler, not covetous; One that ruleth well his own house, having his children in subjection with all gravity; (For if a man know not how to rule his own house, how shall he take care of the church of God?) (1 Timothy 3:1-5).

He who is engaged in the work of the gospel ministry must be faithful in his family life. It is as essential that as a father he should improve the talents God has given him for the purpose of making the home a symbol of the heavenly family, as that in the work of the ministry, he should make use of his God given powers to win souls for the church. *As the priest in the home, and as the ambassador of Christ in the church*, he should exemplify in his life the character of Christ. He must be faithful in watching for souls as one that must give an account. In his service there must be seen no carelessness and inattentive work. God will not serve with the sins of men who have not a clear sense of the sacred responsibility involved in accepting a position as pastor of a church. *He who fails to be a faithful, discerning shepherd in the home, will surely fail of being a faithful shepherd of the flock of God in the church* (*Reflecting Christ*, p. 179, emphasis added unless otherwise indicated).

The church can be defined as several families meeting together, serving the Lord. Each one of these several families is to individually function as a little church. If there is to be male headship in the little church, then is it not reasonable to believe that there would also be male headship in the larger church.

*Every family is a church*, over which the parents preside. The first consideration of the parents should be to work for the salvation of their children. When the *father and mother as priest and teacher* of the family take their position fully on the side of Christ, a good influence will be exerted in the home (*Child Guidance*, p. 549).

The *father is the priest and the house-band* of the home. The *mother is the teacher* of the little ones from their babyhood, *and the queen of the household*. Never is she to be slighted. Never are careless, indifferent words to be spoken to her before the children. She is their teacher (*Reflecting Christ*, p. 178).

Some *households have a little church in their home*. Mutual love binds heart to heart, and the unity that exists among the members of the family preaches the most effectual sermon that could be preached on practical godliness. As parents faithfully do their

duty in the family, *restraining, correcting, advising, counseling, guiding, the father as a priest of the household, the mother as a home missionary*, they are filling the sphere God would have them fill (*Sons and Daughters of God*, p. 223).

Notice the gender roles italicized in the statements above. Both father and mother preside over the little church in their home but serve in different roles. The father is the priest and house-band and the mother is teacher, home missionary and queen of the household.

When several little family churches gather together on the Sabbath, do the gender roles that were operative during the week disappear on the Sabbath? What would be the purpose for eliminating these roles in the larger church that God has established in the little home church?

Imagine a situation in which a church meets in the home of a certain family. If the wife of this family was the ordained elder or pastor of this church that meets weekly in their home, the husband, would now be under her spiritual headship: "Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves: for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account, that they may do it with joy, and not with grief: for that is unprofitable for you" (Hebrews 13:17). Can you see the confusion this might cause?

We must maintain distinct gender roles in the home and in the church. If we blur these role distinctions, we will create gender confusion and this would be an "abomination unto the Lord our God" (Deuteronomy 22:5).

Just as Christ is the head of the church, so is He also the head of the family. "But I would have you know, that the head of every man is Christ; and the head of the woman is the man; and the head of Christ is God" (1 Corinthians 11:3). Christ is the head of the family because He is the head of man who in turn is the head of his wife.

In the home, is a wife permitted to have headship authority over her husband? The Bible answers: "Likewise, ye wives, be in subjection to your own husbands . . ." (1 Peter 3:1).

In the church, are women permitted to have headship authority over a congregation? Are they permitted to speak and act with ecclesiastical authority over men? Again, what does the Bible say?

Let the woman learn in silence with all subjection. But I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man, but to be in silence (1 Timothy 2:11, 12).

For God is not the author of confusion, but of peace, as *in all churches* of the saints. Let your women keep silence in the churches: for it is not permitted unto them to speak; but they are commanded to be under obedience, as also saith the law. And if they will learn any thing, let them ask their husbands at home: for it is a shame for women to speak in the church (1 Corinthians 14:33-35).

All women, in all the churches, are commanded to be under obedience according to the law. In other words, women are not permitted to speak or act with ecclesiastical authority over men. The restriction on speaking, teaching and the silence that is imposed upon women in the verses above has nothing to do with their duty to testify, pray, teach or preach in the congregation. Paul is talking about the law that commands the wife to be under the authority of her husband: ". . . he shall rule over thee" (Genesis 3:16). We see in Paul's instruction that this principle of headship that was commanded in the home also finds its application in the church.

In the following passage Paul is restating this command showing the dishonor that is brought to both the man and the woman if the order of authority that God has established by law is reversed in the church. The concept of head covering connotes being under authority.

Every man praying or prophesying, having his head covered, dishonoureth his head. But every woman that prayeth or prophesieth with her head uncovered dishonoureth her head: for that is even all one as if she were shaven. For if the woman be not covered, let her also be shorn: but if it be a shame for a woman to be shorn or shaven, let her be covered. For a man indeed ought not to cover his head, forasmuch as he is the image and glory of God: but the woman is the glory of the man. For the man is not of the woman; but the woman of the man. Neither was the man created for the woman; but the woman for the man. For this cause ought the woman to have power on her head because of the angels (1 Corinthians 11:4-10).

We can see in this passage that a woman may pray and prophesy (preach, teach, exhort) in the church as long as she does this with power on her head. In other words, she may do these things as long as she is not in a position of ecclesiastical authority over men. If she prays or prophesies as an ordained pastor or elder, she dishonors and brings shame upon herself. If a man prays and prophesies while under the usurped authority of an ordained woman, he brings shame upon himself.

Man is the image and glory of God the Father who has no head over Himself (1 Corinthians 11:3); because of this, man was not to wear a symbol of subjection. On the other hand, the woman is the glory of the man and was created for the man and for this reason she was to have a symbol of subjection to the man. Male headship is what the law commands and for the church to reverse this order brings shame and dishonor to both men and women.

This view is so politically incorrect in this egalitarian age that it is difficult to even write these things. But do we want our views and actions formed by the Word of God or by political correctness (PC)? This is an issue that will soon test the entire earth. How? PC will dictate that we cooperate with the authorities, give up the seventh-day Sabbath and unite with the entire world in honoring Sunday as the day of rest. Those who have learned to ignore PC and cling to the Word of God on every issue will endure the trial of this final test.

In the current issue of women's ordination, we are being tested. Our response may very well determine our own personal outcome on the final test soon to come.

*BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE: John and Sharon Witcombe have ministered in churches in Washington and Oregon. John began to serve as a pastor in 1994. Presently they serve in Southern Oregon. Their daughter has recently blessed them with a grandchild.*