

Women in Leadership !

Judges 4

Intro

Women in Leadership has widely been discussed and debated among Christians and Churches for centuries. It is a matter that has split Churches, friends and families and still does. In preparation for today's message I watched many hours of sermons given by people on both sides of the debate. Both sides really arguing their points well, and I came to the conclusion that there will be people who have really wrestled with Scripture and have the position they have, based on what they understand the Bible is saying. It would be very easy for us to judge the opposition and to characterise them with unhelpful labels. We should approach this subject with humility, respect, with an open mind and understanding.

At Moorlands College there were many Ladies who were studying with me that believed that God was calling them into ministry and they were sometimes rubbing shoulders with Men who were really against this. The college was inter denominational so drew people from many traditions. There were many stories of hurt and upset from people that felt rejected who felt called but couldn't minister in their own home Church. I only say this to highlight that this debate is not always some dry theological one but it's one that really affects lives in a deep way and has affected many people's futures. One person said to me the reason there are so many women on the Mission field is because it's the only place they can go to use their gifts that they believe God has given them. I believe it's fair to say that God has used these Sisters in Christ in such amazing ways and Maybe more men should consider leaving these shores for the Mission field too.

Our Approach

We must never run away from Scripture

The Bible was written over a span of **1500 years**, by 40 writers. Unlike other religious writings, the Bible reads as a factual news account of real events, places, people, and dialogue. Historians and archaeologists have repeatedly confirmed its authenticity.

There will be parts of the Bible that will make you feel uncomfortable and they are normally the parts that atheists and critics will bring up. There are parts that are descriptive and parts that are prescriptive.

As we approach Scripture we need to look at everything through the lens of the whole of scripture, the whole story, the bigger picture. Sometimes 1 verse can sum up the bigger picture like John 3:16. This verse goes hand in hand with so many other parts of scripture. It all fits with the heart of God for people and his creation. Other times a verse can leave us scratching our heads like baptising the dead in 1 Corinthians 15. But the Mormons have built a whole theology around this 1 verse. So as we look at Women in Leadership we need

to look at the whole picture not just a text here or a text there. When we do look at a text we need to understand who it was for, why it was written? When? The context.

Our Attitude

When we read scripture what is our attitude. What if God / Scripture is saying something we don't agree with? What if the Bible says something that society today opposes? Would we be willing to listen, to change, to question the advice and wisdom that others give? For those who have held deep rooted beliefs what if God shone new light on familiar texts? What if we've missed something in scripture that has always been there that would shed new light on a particular topic?

Our approach & Attitude is really important and we need a teachable spirit.

1 Peter 5:5

Likewise, you who are younger, be subject to the elders. Clothe yourselves, all of you, with humility toward one another, for "God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble."

Before I go into more details there are a couple of verses I just want to highlight:

**God is the same yesterday, today & Forever more .
Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today and forever. Hebrews 13:8,
I the Lord do not change. Malachi 3:6**

2 Timothy 3:16 tells us that ALL Scripture is inspired by God and useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting, and training in righteousness. The Bible is a work of God that was written by human men that were inspired by God. What better source of inspiration than our Creator!

I believe these 2 verses are important throughout this message as God never changes nor does his love or forgiveness. We can have confidence in him as God nor his words will never change.

As I mentioned earlier let's not run away from Scripture, let's not cherry pick the verses we like and don't like. There is Scripture that is challenging but hiding it, pretending it doesn't exist won't make it go away. People who are searching will want to know what you think. Have you experienced this? People coming to you and asking what you think about this piece of Scripture or that piece of Scripture?

THE BEGINNING

We'll start at the very beginning of Scripture from Genesis. What was God's original plan for Man & Woman.

Gen 1:26 God makes man in his image and his job was to look after creation
Gen 1:27 In the image of God he created him; male & female he created them.

God told them to have Children, rule creation, look after it. Man & Woman together working as a team and together carrying the image of God. God looked at creation and it was good! Chapter 2 goes into more detail; God makes man originally but says it's not good for man to be alone, (a verse for us at this time of pandemic – we need people no person should be an island). God creates and gives Adam a helper and this helper came from Adam Gen 2:23 "This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; She shall be called woman, for she was taken out of man. For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh".

Man needs woman and woman needs man. We are different but together we are one. if we were all the same it wouldn't matter if leadership was all male or female but men and women are different and we need both not just on a romantic level but on a social & Communal level too. The organisation and governance of the earth was down to Adam & Eve, both responsible. Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 11:11 & 12 "In the Lord, however, woman is not independent of man, nor is man independent of woman. For as woman came from man, so also man is born of woman. But everything comes from God

I want to come to the word helper as this I believe is really important to understand. God gave Adam a helper and sometimes this conjures up images perhaps a magician assistant who is a side act or subservient to the Man, maybe someone just making up the numbers.

This view would be wrong !

The word helper in Hebrew is עֵזֶר – Ezer pronounced Ay-zer

Eve, the first lady was Adam's EZER (Ay-zer). The root of this word is to rescue and save, to be strong. Eve wasn't there to hold Adam's coat she was there to rescue, save and be strong.

She is meant to be pro-active not a supporter from the sides. God describes himself as humanity's Ezer, God is our Ezer and he chooses this word for Eve in her relationship with Adam. In a prophetic sense the Messiah will come through her line Jesus would come to rescue and save.

And so we come to our text that was read from Judges about Deborah who led her people out of oppression from the Canaanite king Jabin. Deborah was a leader, a judge, a tactician and a Prophetess (other Prophetesses mentioned in the Bible include Miriam (exodus 15:20), Huldah (2 Kings 22:14), Noadiah (Ne 6:14) and Anna (Luke 2:36). Like the meaning of the Hebrew word Ezer she rescued and saved her people and supported Barak. In our story it was a woman that led and won the battle and it was a woman named Jael that eventually killed the Canaanite king. Through the Bible we see this role of Helper / Ezer in other women like Rahab, Esther & Ruth, 3 ladies of courage and support.

Back to Adam & Eve: We've looked at what God intended but then Adam & Eve decided to disobey God and sinned. Death came into the world (Genesis 3)! God's creation was corrupted by sin and death. Eve was deceived by the serpent and gave her fruit to Adam who was there at the time when all this happened. And we live under the curse but our curses were different For Eve it was an increase in pain in childbearing. Her desire will be for her husband and he will rule over her – a consequence for sin. For man, the ground was cursed and it would be hard labour when farming the land.

But God had a plan to redeem us, to free us to break the curse and to give us new life! This was the Messiah Jesus Christ who came for you and me to redeem us. His Spirit would fill his people at Pentecost.

Joel 2: 28 – 29 & Acts 2

I will pour out my Spirit on all people.
Your sons and daughters will prophesy,
your old men will dream dreams,
your young men will see visions.
Even on my servants, both men and women,
I will pour out my Spirit in those days.

Women have a voice! They will Prophesy and they will dream dreams through the working of the Holy Spirit. They are not meant to be silent. God's plan and work involved men and women. Galatians 3:26 – 29 in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith, for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.

What does this mean for the Church today?

When we look at us the Church in the UK today people will hold various positions regarding Women in Leadership.

- Some will say that Women shouldn't be in leadership at all.
- Some may argue that yes it's ok for women to be in leadership but the headship should be male.
- Some like our Church believe that it's ok for both men & women to be in leadership.
 - There maybe a few other positions too.

There are passages in the New Testament written by Paul that people struggle with regarding women. We could be here hours analysing each bit

Let's look at one of those main passages which comes from 1 Corinthians 14: 34 – 35

Let your women keep silent in the churches, for they are not permitted to speak; but *they* are to be submissive, as the law also says. And if they want to learn something, let them ask their own husbands at home; for it is shameful for women to speak in church.

Anyone that picks up a Bible will read this, and it would be no surprise that people will challenge it. Others will use this to run the Church and it has been used. So what is going on in this Church in Corinth in modern day Greece.

Corinth was a huge city with an estimated population of 250,000 plus as many as 400,000 slaves. It had 2 harbours and loads of trading going on. It was Greek and philosophy was

highly valued. But it wasn't a Christian city or Jewish. Religion did play a major part in their city boasting of at least 12 temples and Greeks like Romans worshipped many gods and idols. The biggest if not the most important god of this city was Aphrodite or Diana the goddess of love, whose worshippers practised religious prostitution. Religious worship was conducted by women in this city, and the early established Church being in this city and soaking up this culture was getting itself into a lot of trouble in how they as a church and as individuals behaved. Jesus tells us to not be of this world and Paul I believe in his letter to the Corinthians had a lot of things he needed to sort out and so he wrote many things that were counter to the culture they were in. To counter the religious practices of Corinth he encourages the women to be silent during Church. N.T Wright who understands Greek a lot better than me suggests that this quiet isn't a quiet that we may associate with being shut up but a silent studious quiet rather like when Mary sat at the feet of Jesus wanting to learn.

In the same letter in 1 Corinthians 11:5 Paul talks about women praying and prophesying in so it's quite clear that women were not told to just be quiet as they couldn't if they were praying and prophesying. Paul also writes to the unmarried in chapter 7 encouraging them to stay unmarried. The unmarried women wouldn't be able to follow Paul's advice in Chapter 14 when he says to go home and ask your husband if you want to learn something.

It's important to read scripture in its context.

Women in the New Testament

Lydia was a business woman from Thyatira and a dealer in purple cloth which was expensive.

She may have been well off. Acts 16 describes her as a worshipper of God, similar to Cornelius but Paul gets talking to her and she follows Jesus. She invites them to stay at her house where she and her whole household are baptised. She becomes the 1st known convert in Philippi and it's quite possible that a house Church began in her home. Luke records her name in Acts so she would have been an important person for readers to know about. She may well have been one of the leaders.

What's interesting is that in Philippians 4: 2 – 3 Paul writes and pleads with 2 women, Euodia and Syntyche to agree with each other. They worked alongside Paul in the cause of the Gospel. They are called fellow workers.

Romans 16: 3 names Priscilla also as a fellow worker along with Aquila they were teaching Apollos in Acts 18 about the way of God.

It is likely that Phoebe from Romans 16: 1 – 2 was the carrier of the letter to Rome. She would have been responsible for reading out the letter to the Church.

Romans 16:12 mentions 3 fellow workers in the Lord who are all women. Tryphena and Tryphosa (possibly sisters), Persis which means Persian Woman. 2 Timothy 1: 3 Paul writes about Lois and Eunice – They are Timothy's Grandma and Mother who followed Jesus and had a faith before Timothy. They were very influential on Timothy.

I am absolutely convinced that women played a huge part in the spreading of the Gospel and the growth and running of the New Testament Church.

Conclusion

For a healthy Church it needs to have a well-balanced, Leadership team. If a leadership team were all women where would the wisdom from a man come from. If a Leadership team were all male where would the wisdom of a woman come from. I completely understand that some churches are like this as there are very few men, like the Church I was part of as a boy. How can a man know what a woman goes through, we have no idea what child birth is like! How can a woman fully understand a man. I guess that's why there have been books written like 'Men are from Mars, Women are from Venus'.

In the last days women will prophesy and dream dreams through the Holy Spirit. This means God is speaking to us through women as well as men and that voice needs to be heard.

There is a lot more to this discussion

But I'll finish by reminding us of Eve, the helper – The Ezer (To rescue, to be strong). She is there for Adam as many women who are gifted are ready to serve the Church and to help lead. Let's not turn our backs on these sisters in Christ because we might miss what God is wanting to do through us.