

Women Leading Today: Leaders Study Guide

Introduction: *This series of studies is designed for church groups who wish to explore the issues of women in leadership. It comes out of work done by the Women in Leadership Taskforce, a group set up by the Executive Council of the Baptist Union of Victoria, to mark the 30 year anniversary of the first woman ordained in Victoria in 1978, Marita Munro. The brief of the Taskforce was to audit the progress of the past 30 years and to bring recommendations for ways to enhance the opportunities for women leaders in the future.*

These studies draw largely upon the 1977 BUV Report on the Ordination of Women in the light of scripture teaching and the practice of Baptist Churches. The scholarship of this original report is to be commended as it has stood well the test of time. We are indebted too to Cheryl Williams who designed the Gender Equity Tool.

The Taskforce membership has varied and a number of people have been involved at different stages: Mark Bailey, Val Billingham, Sue Bluett, Darren Cronshaw, Carolyn Francis, Ann Harding, Colin Hunter, Joanne Jarlett, Ann Lock, Alan Marr, Gwyn Milne, Jillian Stewart, Nicholas Tuohy, Anne Wilkinson-Hayes, with Roslyn Wright chairing the team. A final report by the Taskforce was presented to Executive Council in April 2009.

The final form of these studies was put together by Mark Bailey, Nicholas Tuohy and Roslyn Wright. We hope that you find here a useful set of resources to guide your explorations of Women in Leadership.

May 2009

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WOMEN LEADING TODAY - WEEK ONE

SETTING THE QUESTIONS WOMEN IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

Leader's Notes	<p><i>Before the meeting:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ <i>Make copies of the material to be read aloud (pp 34-40).</i>▪ <i>Prepare an A3 sized copy of the Audit Tool "Gender Equity in Churches"(pp 36-37) for the group to complete together.</i> <p><i>Begin the meeting together with prayer, opening yourselves to a greater awareness of God's spirit and God's life at work in our world.</i></p> <p><i>Have 2 people read aloud to the group "Setting the Questions" as you all listen. Encourage one another in reading to do so with depth and soberness as well as in an unhurried manner. Moreover, talk to each other and listen intently and prayerfully to the different voices. It is preferable to have both women and men sharing the reading.</i></p> <p><i>Let the group know that after the reading there will be some silence for people to notice their own reactions. What thoughts or feelings does it bring?</i></p>
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SETTING THE QUESTIONS: A personal response by Rev Roslyn H Wright

READER 1

The Ministry Review Task Force in 2000 suggested that the next ten years will bring an increased need for diversity in church leadership. This diversity will need to include leaders who are specialists, full time and part time leaders, bi-vocational leaders, and leaders who are able to equip and work with an increasing number of lay leaders.¹ The time continues now at the end of this decade to be ripe for an expansion of the range of pastoral leaders.

READER 2

I believe that the beginning point from which to look at the issues of gender and leadership is not the 'equal opportunity' push that is present in society at large. Our discussion on gender issues must begin from our understanding of God's own nature, what this reveals about the nature of the church, and how we are invited to be the body of Christ.

¹ "Ministry Review Task Force." Melbourne: Baptist Union of Victoria, 2000, p. 9.

READER 1

As Baptists we affirm the God we profess is triune. God's own nature is a relationship, one of mutuality and reciprocity, but not for God's own sake. Everything comes from God, and everything returns to God, through Christ in the Spirit.¹ This is seen most clearly in Jesus' prayer for his disciples (John 17:20-21). For the church to be a true expression of God's own nature we must all be free to use the gifts we have been given. Otherwise, 'the end result is half a loaf.'²

READER 2

Excellent work has been done exploring the biblical basis of the equality of all peoples.³ The evidence used against women taking leadership is not based on good scriptural scholarship, and must be judged in the light of the larger picture of God's own dealing with humankind, in the Old Testament, in the New Testament writings of the early church and in the record of Jesus' own life.

READER 1

Changes are needed too in the models of church, looking for new ways of being the church together. The old ways will not take us forward. For the health and well being of our denomination we need to be encouraging the use of all people's giftedness. A great deal of uncertainty and ambiguity is ahead for all those in leadership as well as for those whom they serve. We have not yet engaged fully in God's own trinitarian life. We have ignored Christ's own statement of call (Luke 4:18-21) and the example of his ministry of welcome and inclusiveness. Jesus engaged and dialogued with women, affirmed their faith, did not shun their bodily functions, encouraged them in discussion and debate, and allowed women to challenge him and stretch his understanding of his own mission. He was not bound by rules or traditions, and sought to bring others into freedom and the fullness of life. Is this not then our call too?

READER 2

Although we have had women in pastoral leadership in the BUV for more than thirty years, most of us have not had women as role models. We need to explore other models of leadership, as exercised by women and men, inside and outside the institution of the church. We need to become more self-aware about how we are leading. We need to be freed in our choices for

¹ LaCugna, Catherine Mowrey. *God for Us: The Trinity and Christian Life*. San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1973, p. 274.

² C. Anne Davis, "Liberation, Not Separation," *Review and Expositor* 72 (1975): p. 67.

³ See Gretchen Gaebelien Hull, *Equal To Serve: Women and Men in the Church and Home* (Old Tappan, New Jersey: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1987). Also Val Webb, *Why We're Equal: Introducing Feminist Theology* (St Louis, Missouri: Chalice Press, 1999).

exercising leadership that will be a better fit both ourselves and the situations into which we are called. There is no 'one size fits all'.

READER 1

It has been a difficult task for me to address these issues. Despair has walked with me as I have focussed on the limited opportunities for women at present. But I have to believe that God's Spirit is still at work in the Church, drawing us all towards the fullness of life that is God's own self. The choice I make is to continue to move with God's own longing for our full participation in the life of God, and the body of Christ.

READER 2

Let us affirm that as Baptists we hold dearly the reality of God's ongoing revelation through scripture. 'The Lord has yet more light and truth to break forth from his word.'¹ To limit our current understanding of God's word in scripture as the total truth is to have lost something vital from our Baptist heritage. Writing as he did in a much earlier age, we can find new meaning in the words of W. T. Whitley: 'In ecclesiastical history ministers are not the men who count... Baptists beyond others, are especially pledged to recognise and to utilise the priesthood of all believers.'²

Leader's Notes

After 3 minutes of silence invite the group to share their initial impressions and responses to the reading.

After a few minutes of sharing, ask the group to fill out the Equity in Churches – Audit Tool which explores the ways women share in the life and ministry of this church.

This data collection should only take a few minutes. If the group becomes stuck on particular sections, assign someone to get the information needed for further discussion on week 4.

¹ George Rawson, "We limit not the truth of God," in *Baptist Praise and Worship*, ed. The Psalms and Hymns Trust (London: Oxford University Press, 1991), p. 73.

² Karen E. Smith, "Beyond Public and Private Spheres: Another Look at Women in Baptist History and Historiography," *The Baptist Quarterly* 34, no. 2 (1991): p.80.

Gender Equity in Churches - Audit Tool ¹

This tool is designed to help you think about the place women occupy in the life of your local church.

Local Church - Ministry Roles

List the numbers of men and women who have leadership roles in the following ministries.

Ministry Role	# Men	# Women
<i>Attendees</i>		
<i>Pastors</i>		
<i>Deacons</i>		
<i>Secretary</i>		
<i>Treasurer</i>		
<i>Youth Leaders</i>		
<i>Bible Study Leaders</i>		
<i>Early Childhood Ministry</i>		
<i>Sunday School</i>		
<i>Playgroup</i>		
<i>Girls Brigade</i>		
<i>Boys Brigade</i>		
<i>Mission</i>		
<i>Outreach</i>		
<i>Other</i>		

¹ Designed by Rev Cheryl Williams for the *Baptists Today* Conference August 2008.

Ministry Tasks

In our worship times we usually have many people participating in a variety of tasks.

Fill in the following table listing how often women take on these tasks in your church.

Ministry Task	Always	Regularly	Often	Seldom	Never
<i>Preaching</i>					
<i>Worship Leading</i>					
<i>Music</i>					
<i>Leading Prayers</i>					
<i>Reading Bible</i>					
<i>Children's Talk</i>					
<i>Leading Communion</i>					
<i>Preparing Communion</i>					
<i>Flowers</i>					
<i>Collecting Offering</i>					
<i>Welcoming</i>					
<i>Morning Tea</i>					
<i>Other</i>					

Leader's Notes

This data will be revisited in week 4, so keep the chart until then. At this stage the intention is to raise the questions of where and how women are participating in the life and ministry of the church.

Choose 3 readers for this next section.

For the aid of time and flow, unless considered important, there is no need to read any text in brackets, eg: (See Paul's discussion in Phil 2:4)

Rather than holding the discussion at the end of the study, two sections have been established to pause and discuss together. Allow 8-10 minutes for each discussion section.

READER 1

As we read through the following material together, note that there are two different opinions in this discussion indicated by change in print font.

THE OLD TESTAMENT BACKGROUND¹

It is difficult for the present day reader in Western countries to appreciate the low estimate of women prevailing throughout the Middle East during the whole of the Biblical period. The woman was her husband's property, together with his children, slaves and cattle. Therefore she had no legal rights of her own; her husband was responsible for her in every phase of life, religious as well as civil. Typical is the attitude of Ben Sirach in Ecclesiasticus (42: 9-14 in the period between the Testaments): he considered that daughters are a continual source of worry from the day they are born!

In practice, of course, a woman might be greatly loved (e.g., Rachel and Hannah), and be influential in her home (e.g., Sarah, Ruth) and even in the life of the community (e.g., Jael, Esther). There are attempts in the Old Testament to afford the woman protection against the unscrupulous, e.g., in safeguarding the inheritance of the daughters of Zeiophehad (Numbers 27: 1-11); in prescribing that a man divorcing his wife should give her a bill setting out the reasons why he had put her away (Deuteronomy 24: 1-4). Of course, without legal rights of her own, she could not initiate divorce proceedings.

Genesis 1-3 is of primary significance for understanding woman's place in Scripture.

READER 2

1. Genesis 1: 27 makes three important statements: that man is God's creation; that man is created in God's image; and that man is created as male and female. The word "man" encompasses both male and female. Together they are in the image of God; the woman is not distinguished from the man in this respect. The emphasis here is on equality.

2. In Genesis 2, Adam was created first, and then a helper, the woman, was made for him.

It is at this point that a difference of opinion arises. On the one hand, it is suggested that the narrative lays stress on the priority of man, for he was created before the woman. Therefore man's lordship over woman belongs to the original purpose of God, and continues to this present time.

¹ A Report on the Ordination of Women: The Baptist Union of Victoria. 1977

READER 1

BUT, on the other hand, it is pointed out that this passage does not state or even imply that because man was created before woman, lordship was given to him. The purpose of the passage explicitly underlines the interdependence of man and woman, who in marriage become "one flesh", i.e., personality requires both sexes for true fulfilment, rather than laying stress on man's priority.

READER 2

3. Genesis 3: 16-19 records the divine judgment after the Fall. For woman it meant aggravated pain in childbirth, yet a desire for her husband who "shall rule over you."

READER 1

Therefore the difference of opinion mentioned above concerns man's lordship over woman; was it God's original intention, or has it arisen as God's judgment on sin at the Fall? The interpretation of Genesis 2: 18-25 is determinative in this issue.

READER 3

Genesis 2: 18-25

18 Then the Lord God said, 'It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper as his partner.' 19 So out of the ground the Lord God formed every animal of the field and every bird of the air, and brought them to the man to see what he would call them; and whatever the man called each living creature, that was its name. 20 The man gave names to all cattle, and to the birds of the air, and to every animal of the field; but for the man there was not found a helper as his partner. 21 So the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and he slept; then he took one of his ribs and closed up its place with flesh. 22 And the rib that the Lord God had taken from the man he made into a woman and brought her to the man. 23 Then the man said,

'This at last is bone of my bones
and flesh of my flesh;
this one shall be called Woman,
for out of Man this one was taken.'

24 Therefore a man leaves his father and his mother and clings to his wife, and they become one flesh. 25 And the man and his wife were both naked, and were not ashamed.¹

¹ The New Revised Standard Version (Anglicized Edition), copyright 1989, 1995 by the Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Leader's Notes | *Take 10 minutes to consider this material using these questions¹:*

- *Where is God in this situation?*
- *What is God like/what does God look like in this situation?*
- *What is God doing in this situation?*
- *Therefore what does God require of us in this situation? What is God inviting us to become?*

Continue with the same readers.

READER 1

THE MINISTRY OF WOMEN IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

(1) A study of the Old Testament reveals that there were no women priests in Israel. This is surprising when we consider that women held the office among Israel's neighbours. However, the religions they served included fertility cults, and these cults involved sacred prostitution. God's people were warned again and again against such falsehood and the immoral rites accompanying it. It is generally conceded that this is at least one of the basic reasons why God did not permit women to serve in the priestly office. To be sure, Israel did not always keep itself from such evil practices (see, e.g., Deuteronomy 23: 18).

Perhaps the nearest approach to women priests are "the ministering women" mentioned in Exodus (38: 8) and 1 Samuel (2: 22). Their functions are unknown. However, the term which describes them is that used of the Levites in Numbers (4: 23 and 8: 24). Moreover, both women and Levites are associated with "the tent of meeting." Probably, like the Levites, the women were assistants to the priests in their official duties.

Apparently this office did not continue in later Israel. There is possibly some significance in that the final reference to them is in connection with immorality (1 Samuel 2: 22).

READER 2

(2) Alongside Old Testament references to prophets, men who bring God's word to his people, is also mention of prophetesses. The following are specified: Miriam (Exodus 15: 20); Deborah (Judges 4: 4); Huldah (2 Kings 22: 14; 2 Chronicles 34: 22); and a false prophetess, Noadiah, who perverted God's word (Nehemiah 6: 14). Apparently Isaiah's wife also experienced the call to the prophetic office as well as her husband, for she is designated "prophetess" (Isaiah 8: 3).

¹ proposed as an aid for Biblical exploration by Rev Dr Frank Rees, Principal, Whitley College.

READER 3

(3) The Old Testament also mentions wise women in 2 Samuel (14 and 20). Perhaps also Jeremiah (9: 17) should be included. Their function may only be understood when set beside their male counterparts. These women exercised a ministry of exhortation and instruction.

It should be noted that in Jeremiah 18: 18 the three functions are set alongside each other: "the law shall not perish from the priest, nor counsel from the wise, nor the word from the prophet." Here are three parallel functions, and it is significant that the woman was excluded from only the first of these. Considering the place of women in the Old Testament world, this is quite remarkable.

Discussion And Reflection

What surprises did you have in this material?

What questions does this overview raise for you?

What possibilities does this discussion raise that you would like to explore further?

Leader's Notes

At the end of the discussion, invite the group to silence. Ask them to prayerfully consider what are the key questions for their church at this time?

Invite them to simply offer their questions, without further discussion. Record these questions on a flip chart for use in week 4.

Close with prayer and a blessing of each other.

WOMEN LEADING TODAY - WEEK TWO

REFLECTION ON MINISTRY JESUS and WOMEN

Leaders Notes

Before the meeting

- photocopy the study materials (pp 41-47)
- ensure pens and paper are available

Begin the meeting together with prayer, opening yourselves to a greater awareness of God's spirit and God's life at work within your church community.

Briefly recap on what was covered in Week One, specifically highlighting the important aspects of the Discussion component to the final part of the Study.

*Have two people read aloud to the group "**Reflections on ministry over the past thirty years**" as you all listen. Let the group know that after the reading there will be some silence for people to notice their own reactions. What thoughts or feelings does it bring?*

REFLECTIONS ON MINISTRY OVER THE PAST THIRTY YEARS REV MARITA MUNRO

READER 1

I was 23 when I was ordained to the Victorian Baptist Union of Churches at Collins Street on 1 October 1978. I had been accepted for ordination training at the end of 1975 when Norman Pell was the General Superintendent. He was personally very encouraging. I still keep the official letter of acceptance that he sent me.

I have never felt really comfortable about being recognized as the first woman to be ordained in Australia. I always thought that that kind of a person needed to be someone who really enjoyed public life and was prepared to mount (in a natural way) something of a campaign to getting the cause of women higher on the church's agenda - that's not really been my style and I am uncomfortable with that kind of a role. (It's horses for courses, I guess. I've left that to others).

READER 2

So what has ordination meant to me?: The wider authority and recognition of church and community of my calling and gifts to work in the church. I have never seen ordination as giving me something special that those who are not ordained do not have. The path to ordination provided me with training, experience,

opportunity and privilege in pastoral care, worship, education, preaching and mission which prepared me in a way that others may not have had. I found I had gifts in leadership, and as I used these I felt confirmed in what I was doing: preaching, visiting, leading worship, taking bible studies, chairing meetings, tutoring Greek at the College, all these were gifts I had and the call was to use them.

Ordination opened some doors for me - opportunities to speak in a number of contexts - to conduct special services which might not have happened otherwise and made people in the wider community aware that perhaps the church is not as prejudiced or outdated as some thought. I have done funerals and dedications and baptisms and weddings, conducting worship services in elderly citizens homes - rituals in situations in which the church encounters people who might not normally feel at home in a worship service.

READER 1

On a number of occasions when I have been conducting business with banks or other places, the "Rev Munro" on documentation has been queried - Is this for someone else? No, it's for me. That's me. There follows embarrassment or quiet curiosity and genuine interest. I still get duplicates of mail from various Christian organizations. One addressed to Marita Munro, the other to the Revd M. Munro – couldn't be the same person!

My struggles have included not being tall enough to see over the pulpit or the lectern. And discovering a style of leadership and a niche for myself where I think my gifts can best be used. Self-doubt was one of the initial obstacles for me. I actually was quite shy. I saw other women in leadership roles, as teachers, missionaries, leading Girls' Brigade, and as minister's wives, but the big question was 'What did it mean to be a woman and a minister?' There were not many models to help me.

READER 2

I also experienced some organised opposition from a conservative group within Victorian Baptists (The Baptist Revival Fellowship) in those days. Some have since died or changed their tune, as I discovered in an interview for my PhD thesis.

When people say to me that the greatest opponents to women's ordination or women in leadership in the church are other women - I have to say: that has not been my experience. But my PhD research revealed that it is often encouragement from fathers or other significant males that provides the impetus towards ordination.

READER 1

Galatians 3: 28 was a key text in the whole debate. "In Christ there is no Jew nor Greek; no slave nor free; no male and female." Athol Gill used to say that Paul had the first one pretty well-worked out; the second was a bit more of a struggle but the book of Philemon could be seen as an encouragement for slave masters to recognize their slaves as brothers. As for the women issue; it wasn't an idea on his agenda. A bit later I discovered Romans 16 with the names of all those women being greeted by Paul and a more careful exegesis based on better translations showed that Phoebe was a minister, Junia an apostle, and Priscilla, a teacher of theology; to say nothing of Phillip's 4 daughters who were prophetesses in the Book of Acts.

The person of Jesus as he is presented to us in the Gospels is a great inspiration. I can't ever really get past him. I had the privilege of leading a bible study in 2008 at the School of Ministry on Matt 14. It was the story of Peter getting out of the boat and sinking as he walked towards Jesus. In contrast to Peter's faltering faith was the response of the Canaanite woman who persisted in her requests for healing for her daughter for Jesus despite opposition. She eventually wins a concession from him.

READER 2

I see in Jesus a person who affirmed women in his ministry and teaching. He had followers, disciples, who were women. And the first witnesses to the resurrection, the first apostles if you like, were women.

The leaders of our denominations have not always regarded women as being trustworthy enough to handle the transmission of the faith tradition. Odd isn't it? How many of us can thank God for Godly women who have faithfully passed on to us a living faith. I can - my mother and my grandmother.

I thank God for faithful women Sunday School teachers, ISCF and Scripture Union leaders; ministers' wives from my childhood and teenage years.

READER 1

While it is still a very 'blokey' culture in pastoral circles, there are pockets within that that are much more open to the ministry of women. I think that women now have better support networks and a bigger range of models to follow. We have women who have been national denominational leaders, women on significant committees, a woman who is a regional minister. There is greater acceptance of women in ministry teams. We see couples in ministry together. And some of the newer church plants are being led by women. There are more women

teaching and learning, women who are working in supervision, and in spiritual direction, both exercising ministry and receiving support.

My Advice? Go for it. Recognise that men play a crucial role in this, as they can bring influence to bear that we as women can't. Don't assume people are against you. You don't need to bang the drum too loud, but let your life speak, in your words, and your actions. Women must be present, functioning, competent, assertive (where necessary) and gracious wherever possible. Live out the gifts you have and use them. And be prepared that sometimes you might be the first women to lead in some way in your area. Take the risk, look for support, and be true to your call.

Leaders Notes

After 3 minutes of silence invite the group to share their initial impressions and responses to the reading.

This can be done by getting everyone to share a few short words that come to mind – it is not intended that this be a discussion, but rather a set of personal responses to the material.

*Again appoint another two readers and read through the following material together ¹.
- Jesus and Women*

JESUS AND WOMEN

READER 1

The four Gospels show that the ministry of Jesus was set in Israel. The Old Testament conceptions of womanhood were determinative for that nation, and so form the background for his life and work.

For the evangelists, "ministry" is the ministry of Jesus. Any ministry by his followers is participation in that of their Master. Even when Jesus sends out the Twelve (Matthew 10; Luke 9) or the Seventy (Luke 10), it is that his followers might do what he is doing. For the disciple, there is never a ministry independent of his Lord's. This, of course, becomes the principle of all ministry in the New Testament (see, e.g. Mark 16: 19, 20; when the apostles go out and preach everywhere, the ascended Lord "works with them" Matthew 28: 18-20; John 20: 21-23).

¹ A Report on the Ordination of Women: The Baptist Union of Victoria. 1977

READER 2

The inner core of Jesus' followers, the Twelve, was exclusively male Jews, but a group of women "ministered" to them, and at least on occasion travelled with them (Luke 8; 1-3), something completely unheard of among the rabbis, who held aloof from women and would not admit them as disciples. Women were among the crowds that gathered to hear him teach (Matthew 14: 21; 15: 38). Indeed, on occasions women were included in his teaching of the inner group (Luke 10: 38-42), or taught as individuals (John 4; 11: 17-27). Women, including his own mother, were prominent amongst those of his followers who did not abandon him on Calvary (Matthew 27: 55,56; Mark 15: 40,41; Luke 23: 49,55; John 19; 25), some of whom were first to witness the resurrection.

READER 1

Both in his teaching (Matthew 5: 27-32) and in his practice (John 8: 3--11), Jesus refused to countenance the contemporary legal double standard of morality arising from woman's inferior status in his age. But more, in his teaching on divorce (e.g., Matthew 5: 32; 19: 9; Mark 10: 11, 12; Luke 16: 18), Jesus challenged the legal deprivation of women by insisting upon their rights, an attitude which ultimately was influential in leading to the freedom accorded women in later ages. He explicitly recognised women's faith on many occasions (Matthew 9: 22; 15: 2B; 26: 10-13; Mark 5: 34; 14: 6-9; Luke 7: 47-50), and compared the faith and practice of the pharisees unfavourably with that of women (Luke 7: 36-50; Matthew 21: 31, 32). The need of a woman could cause him to turn aside from satisfying the request of a man (Mark 5: 21-34). Luke 11: 27, 28 possibly points towards a fulfilment for women beyond that of motherhood. The Samaritan woman undertook a ministry of proclamation which brought many to believe in Jesus (John 4: 39-42). The resurrection testimony was first entrusted to women (Matthew 28: 5 -7), i.e., to those who had no legal right to bear such testimony.

Discussion and Reflection

What surprises did you have in this material?

What questions does this overview raise for you?

What possibilities does this discussion raise that you would like to explore further?

Leaders Notes

For this section you will need to make sure that each person in the group has a piece of paper and a pen.

The Christian Scriptures clearly highlights the ways in which Jesus understood the implication of the Good News as it impacted upon the treatment, place and status of women. In a religious and cultural context, His treatment of women was nothing short of radical for his day.

Go around the group taking it in turns to read each of the following passages together.

Take a short period of silence at the conclusion of each.

You do not need to enter into discussion on each passage (discussion occurs after the readings), rather simply allow the passages to speak for themselves ¹.

THE WITNESS OF THE GOSPELS

Jesus taught female students.

Luke 10:38-42

Now as they went on their way, he entered a certain village, where a woman named Martha welcomed him into her home. She had a sister named Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet and listened to what he was saying. But Martha was distracted by her many tasks; so she came to him and asked, 'Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to do all the work by myself? Tell her then to help me.' But the Lord answered her, 'Martha, Martha, you are worried and distracted by many things; there is need of only one thing. Mary has chosen the better part, which will not be taken away from her.'

Jesus called a woman a daughter of Abraham as equal to men.

Luke 13:16-17

And ought not this woman, a daughter of Abraham whom Satan bound for eighteen long years, be set free from this bondage on the sabbath day? When he said this, all his opponents were put to shame; and the entire crowd was rejoicing at all the wonderful things that he was doing.

Jesus accepted women in his inner circle.

Luke 8:1-3

Soon afterwards he went on through cities and villages, proclaiming and bringing the good news of the kingdom of God.

¹ All readings are from the NRSV.

The twelve were with him, as well as some women who had been cured of evil spirits and infirmities: Mary, called Magdalene, from whom seven demons had gone out, and Joanna, the wife of Herod's steward Chuza, and Susanna, and many others, who provided for them out of their resources.

Jesus appeared first to a woman after his resurrection.

Matthew 28:1, 9

After the sabbath, as the first day of the week was dawning, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to see the tomb. Suddenly Jesus met them and said, 'Greetings!' And they came to him, took hold of his feet, and worshipped him.

Women were present at Jesus' death.

Matthew 27:55-56

Many women were also there, looking on from a distance; they had followed Jesus from Galilee and had provided for him. Among them were Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James and Joseph, and the mother of the sons of Zebedee.

Mark 15:40-41

There were also women looking on from a distance; among them were Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James the younger and of Joses, and Salome. These used to follow him and provided for him when he was in Galilee; and there were many other women who had come up with him to Jerusalem.

John 19:25

When the soldiers had crucified Jesus, they took his clothes and divided them into four parts, one for each soldier. They also took his tunic; now the tunic was seamless, woven in one piece from the top. So they said to one another, 'Let us not tear it, but cast lots for it to see who will get it.' This was to fulfil what the scripture says, 'They divided my clothes among themselves, and for my clothing they cast lots.' And that is what the soldiers did. Meanwhile, standing near the cross of Jesus were his mother, and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple whom he loved standing beside her, he said to his mother, 'Woman, here is your son.' Then he said to the disciple, 'Here is your mother.' And from that hour the disciple took her into his own home.

Jesus repeatedly expressed concern for widows.

Luke 20:46-47

'Beware of the scribes, who like to walk around in long robes, and love to be greeted with respect in the market-places, and to

have the best seats in the synagogues and places of honour at banquets. They devour widows' houses and for the sake of appearance say long prayers. They will receive the greater condemnation.'

Jesus challenged ritual impurity laws.

Mark 5:25-34

Now there was a woman who had been suffering from haemorrhages for twelve years. She had endured much under many physicians, and had spent all that she had; and she was no better, but rather grew worse. She had heard about Jesus, and came up behind him in the crowd and touched his cloak, for she said, 'If I but touch his clothes, I will be made well.' Immediately her haemorrhage stopped; and she felt in her body that she was healed of her disease. Immediately aware that power had gone forth from him, Jesus turned about in the crowd and said, 'Who touched my clothes?' And his disciples said to him, 'You see the crowd pressing in on you; how can you say, "Who touched me?"' He looked all round to see who had done it. But the woman, knowing what had happened to her, came in fear and trembling, fell down before him, and told him the whole truth. He said to her, 'Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace, and be healed of your disease.'

Jesus challenged cultural and religious divisions and spoke to foreign women.

John 4:7-10

A Samaritan woman came to draw water, and Jesus said to her, 'Give me a drink'. (His disciples had gone to the city to buy food.) The Samaritan woman said to him, 'How is it that you, a Jew, ask a drink of me, a woman of Samaria?' (Jews do not share things in common with Samaritans.) Jesus answered her, 'If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that is saying to you, "Give me a drink", you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water.'

A woman receives the first post resurrection apostolic commission in the Gospels.

Matthew 28:5-7.

But the angel said to the women, 'Do not be afraid; I know that you are looking for Jesus who was crucified. He is not here; for he has been raised, as he said. Come, see the place where he lay. Then go quickly and tell his disciples, "He has been raised from the dead, and indeed he is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see him." This is my message for you.'

Leaders Notes

Take a short period of silence and then ask the group to respond to the following discussion questions.

Discussion
and Reflection

What words, phrases or images stood out for you?

What strikes, or moves or challenges you from these passages?

What implications does the response of Jesus to women have for you and your church community?

Leader's Notes

Take a further short time of silence after the period of discussion.

Get each person in the group to write a short sentence or question to Jesus that arises out of their personal responses to the passages.

At the end of this process go around the group and have everyone read out their sentence or question to Jesus.

Ask the group to hold these responses prayerfully over the coming week.

Close with a short time of prayer and a blessing.

WOMEN LEADING TODAY - WEEK THREE

WOMEN IN THE EARLY CHURCH WOMEN IN THE LETTERS OF PAUL

Leader's Notes

Before the meeting - photocopy the study materials (pp 48-57)

Begin the meeting together with prayer, opening yourselves to a greater awareness of God's Spirit and God's life at work in our world.

The following Section of text is lengthy as it deals with the major texts regarding women and ministry in the New Testament. The text is apportioned into 6 voices and to be read in a conversational manner. It is suggested that copies of this study and 6 readers be selected the week before this meeting. Those readers will then have time to highlight their sections, and prayerfully and thoughtfully read them before the meeting to aid in flow and intelligibility when gathered.

In reading, encourage one another to do so with depth and soberness as well as in an unhurried manner. Moreover, talk to each other, listen intently and prayerfully to the different voices. It is preferable to have both women and men sharing the six reading places.

For the aid of time and flow, unless considered important, there is no need to read any text in brackets, eg: (See Paul's discussion in Phil 2:4)

Rather than holding the discussion at the end of the study, several sections have been established to pause and discuss together. Allow 8-10 minutes for each discussion section.

Note that different opinions are expressed by an alternative type face.

WOMEN IN THE EARLY CHURCH¹

READER 1

This new attitude of Jesus to womanhood is reflected in the life and ministry of the church after the first Easter, as it is recorded in the Acts of the Apostles. Women join in prayer with men (Acts

¹ A Report on the Ordination of Women: The Baptist Union of Victoria. 1977

1; 14) ; women join the church (5: 14; 8: 12; 17: 4, 12); women are among those Christians who are persecuted (8; 3; 9: 2; 22: 4); women form an audience for the preaching of Paul and his companions (16: 13), and are converted and baptised as a result - Peter's Pentecostal sermon makes it evident that women, as well as men, were the recipients of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2: 17-21). Since the Spirit of prophecy came upon them, all believers - both men and women - received the gift of prophecy, and were able to proclaim "the mighty works of God" (2: 11). That is why the church in Acts is a witnessing community.

READER 2

But further in Acts, as in the Old Testament, there is a specific prophetic office in which women are included (21: 9) as well as men (13: 1; 23: 10). This reflects the Old Testament counterpart (Luke 2: 36-38; note the public character of the office in the reference to the Temple).

READER 3

Thus, while according to Acts, men clearly had the major part in the church's public ministry, women were involved in a way that was revolutionary for Jewish society. It is necessary to consider whether the men's greater activity in public leadership was merely a reflection of contemporary cultural expectations, and accordingly something that may be changed as a result of the new place given to women by our Lord.

READER 4

It should be noted that in certain areas of the pagan world in the New Testament period, women enjoyed considerable freedom, e.g. a woman could apparently be in charge of the Philippian branch of a Thyatirian dyeing business (Acts 16: 14, 15 note the reference to her "household"); and women served as priestesses and as magical functionaries (16: 16). Nevertheless women's status was not far removed from that within Judaism. They generally suffered the same legal and moral disabilities, which our Lord's attitude was ultimately to change completely.

WOMEN IN THE LETTERS OF PAUL¹

READER 1

This new attitude is also seen in the writings of Paul for the names of faithful Christian women are frequent enough to show that women played an important role in the life of churches with which the apostle was associated and that they assisted greatly in the expansion of the gospel. The apostle held such women in great respect and honour.

¹ A Report on the Ordination of Women: The Baptist Union of Victoria. 1977

READER 2

The closing greetings of his letter to the Romans are instructive in this regard. Note the mention of:

READER 3

PHOEBE (Romans 16: 1, 2), is designated "a deacon (not "deaconess") of the church at Cenchreae". Of all the words which may have been used to describe her service, the apostle selects that which in the New Testament comes to have the technical meaning of "deacon". It is, of course, wrong for us to read our category of "deacon" back in the New Testament. However, whatever the term denoted in the New Testament, that is applied to Phoebe. She was a deacon!

It is said that "she has been a helper of many". The word "helper" is from the very same root as that which designates the "rule" of the elder in 1 Timothy 5: 17. Leadership is the idea at the heart of both words. The specific area of Phoebe's leadership is not indicated.

READER 4

PRISCILLA (also called Prisca, Romans 16: 3, 4; see also Acts 18: 2, 3, 18, 26; I Corinthians 16: 19; 2 Timothy 4: 1) The home of this woman and her husband was a house-church. Both were actively involved in God's work. It is interesting that Paul mentions her before her husband, and that this is true in most of the New Testament references. She was probably more prominent in the life of the church.

READER 5

JUNIA (Romans 16: 7, or Junias, a male name). It is generally conceded that a woman is mentioned, for this is how the early Greek readers of the New Testament understood the name. They also considered that she was an apostle. Andronicus and she were "of note among the apostles", they had won renown for their apostolic labours. Of course, apostleship in the New Testament was wider than the Twelve. Paul and Barnabas are both designated "apostles" (Acts 14: 4, 14). The possibility of a woman apostle is significant.

READER 6

Of MARY (Romans 16: 6) it is said that she worked hard. Tryphaena, Tryphosa, Persis, the mother of Rufus, Julia, sister of Nereus are mentioned without any attribution.

The following passages require consideration:

READER 1

(a) Galatians 3: 28. Paul points out that, as the result at God has done for mankind through the death and resurrection of his

Son, natural differences - like that between Jew and Gentile - mean nothing with regard to one's spiritual standing and status before God. All believers are "Abraham's offspring" and sons of God, regardless of racial, social or sexual differences. What is stated is all are now "one man" in Christ Jesus. This should be as a reversal of the curse in Genesis 3.

Paul is talking about the new state of affairs "in Christ Jesus", over against what applies "under the law". In Christ, we are taken back to creation, or rather forward to the new creation (2 Corinthians 5: 17; Ephesians 2; 10; ; Colossians 3: 10; Galatians 6: 15), in which notions due to sin are obliterated. In particular, religious disadvantages which women have known, no longer in Christ.

Some find in these words an indication that woman is no longer disqualified from any ministry in the church. Her subjection to man, the result of the Fall, has been done away with in Christ.

READER 2

An alternative view is that those for whom Genesis 2 teaches that woman's subjection to man is God's original purpose and so not related to the Fall, this Galatian passage will indicate woman's freedom within this God given role.

READER 1

It is important to note that neither are suggesting woman is no longer woman in Christ. The physical differences remain!

Discussion and Reflection

Spend a minute in silence thinking and praying about what you have just heard.

Invite the group to share their initial impressions and responses to the reading.

Are there new perspectives or insights that have been raised for people?

Encourage participants to write down questions and issues this section has raised for discussion in week 4.

READER 3

(b) Some passages suggesting woman's submission to man:

1 Corinthians 11: 3. Some here find a hierarchy of God - Christ - man - woman. "Head" implies that one stands over another in the sense of being the ground of his being. Here is an order of

priority. In particular, God the Father exercises authoritative leadership over the Son with respect to their roles. This demonstrates that equality does not rule out different roles. The apostle thus provides a theological basis for the subordinate place of woman. This clearly shows that the issue cannot be dismissed as something that is due to cultural differences between the sexes in New Testament times which no longer applies today. The respective roles and responsibilities which God originally ordained continue to be valid in the church.

READER 4

Others, however, point out that God's headship over Christ is certainly not to be understood in terms of superiority - subordination. In the New Testament, the head is not regarded as that which controls the body; the heart does (see e.g., 1 Corinthians 7: 37). The head is at the top of the body, it is the chief member- "Head" is also used metaphorically to denote source (the head of a river is its source), which seems to be the meaning here. Paul never states that every man is subordinate to Christ, for not all submit themselves to him. However, he is their "source"; they were created by him (Colossians 1: 16). Therefore it cannot be argued that the passage defines the relation of man to woman as that of a superior to a subordinate. He means that Christ points back to God, whose revealer he is; man points back to Christ, his creator; woman points back to man for whom she was made, whose "glory" she is. Paul immediately proceeds to a discussion of what men and women should wear when praying or prophesying. Each sex has its appropriate style. It is not possible to deduce from this that one sex is subordinate to the other.

READER 5

Ephesians 5: 21-33. The passage deals with relationships between husband and wife. Some note that, since the husband is the head of the wife (verse 23), the wife is to submit herself to her husband. This is not to be understood as her subjugation to him, but a voluntary self-submission on her part. The passage does not say that the husband is superior to his wife, but she is subject to him "in everything", for there is no area of life where this does not apply. Colossians 3: 18 makes the same point, stating that her submissiveness "is fitting in the Lord." While the passage speaks only about the marriage relationship, it implies the overall priority or leadership responsibility which God has given to man. The marriage state was normal. Even those women who remained single were under the authority of the senior male in the family. From the general principle of Christian submissiveness, Paul applies this to particular cases, wives to husbands, children to parents, servants to masters, recognising the normal order. It is not stated that husbands should submit to wives, parents to children, masters to servants. Their respective Christian responsibility is spelt out in different terms. It is explicitly stated that the husband is the head.

READER 6

Others affirm that the passage clearly points to the place of woman in marriage. To broaden the scope of the words is to go beyond what Scripture teaches. Further, it is interesting that the verb "be subject" is not found in the Greek text of Ephesians 5: 22. It must be supplied from verse 21, where however subjection is required of one believer to another, i.e., of the husband to his wife, as well as of the wife to her husband. What the apostle is speaking about is the mutual love and respect that the one ought to have of the other, something different from the leadership responsibility given to one partner alone.

READER 1

1 Peter 3: 1-7, although not written by Paul, may well be considered here. The passage is set within a similar context of relationships within the Christian family as in the Ephesian and Colossian passages just considered. Wives are to be subject to their husbands (verse 1), just as godly women in Old Testament times were submissive to their husbands (verses 5 and 6), where the woman respected her husband in his role of leader-protector. The woman, although the weaker partner, is equally heir of grace as her husband (verse 7), who should be understanding of her needs.

Again, some suggest that here the principles of leadership and submission are clear, and that inspired principles are not negotiable.

READER 2

However, others point out that the passage is in a section, beginning at 1 Peter 2: 15, where Christians are exhorted to "be subject for the Lord's sake to every human creature" ("institution" is an impossible translation). So, like Ephesians 5: 21-33, it is concerned with the mutual submission of believers to one another. "Be subject" is literally "stand under." The word does not necessarily carry any implications of obedience. Under the influence of our Lord's teaching about true precedence (Matthew 20: 26, 27; 23: 11; Mark 9: 35; 10: 42- Luke 9: 48; 22; 26; see also Philippians 2: 3-11), the word was used to describe the believer's humility, his readiness to renounce his own will for the sake of others.

READER 3

The early Christians accepted the social structures of which they were part. But they filled these relationships with new content through their voluntary submission to one another. For example, they accepted slavery; they were in no position to change it. But when the relationship of owner and slave was characterised by mutual submission, although the legal position of both remained the same, the new attitude led ultimately to the place where the degrading social institution became intolerable and was

ultimately abolished. This has a bearing on the relationships of husband and wife. In those areas where the gospel has been truly received, mutual submission has removed the stigma of inferiority under which women suffered.

It is fair to state that those who emphasise the permanence of women's subjection to man are not speaking about the male domination of women. But they suggest that woman's role is the junior member of a partnership. That role, however, requires that she may not aspire to the leadership of men in any ministry.

READER 4

The contrary view stresses the mutual relationship into which Christians have been brought, both male and female. There is now no hindrance to the woman's leadership. In 1 Peter 5: 5, younger people are to be subject to the elders. This has never been considered as a barrier for the ordination of young men. Similarly, the subjection of women ought not to be regarded as a barrier to theirs.

Discussion and Reflection

Spend a minute in silence thinking and praying about what you have just heard.

Invite the group to share their initial impressions and responses to the reading.

Are there new perspectives or insights that have been raised for people?

Encourage participants to write down questions and issues this section has raised for discussion in week 4.

READER 5

(c) Passages referring to woman's ministry:

1 Corinthians 11: 2-16. It is important to note at the outset that Paul is explaining why women should dress in a certain way when praying and prophesying, and not why they should desist from such a practice. If he had objected to their praying and prophesying, it is difficult to understand why he should devote so much space to a discussion about proper clothing. The apostle does not say one thing when he means something entirely different. That women did so minister is not dependent on this passage alone (e.g., prophesying; Acts 21: 9). Neither can prophecy be restricted to a private ministry. Prophecy is proclamation, preaching, and is mentioned in relation to services in Acts 13: 1, 2 and 1 Corinthians 14.

Whereas in both Jewish and Greek society women wore a head covering in public, apparently some Corinthian women discarded it in their public ministry (i.e., in the house- churches). Paul's argument is not easy to understand. He states that a man should minister with head uncovered, because "he is the image and glory of God" (verse 7; see Genesis 1; 26, 27). He exists to give glory to God. However, if the woman were to minister with uncovered head, since she is "the glory of man" (verse 7), she would not glorify God, but would reflect the glory of man (her husband?) Perhaps Paul means to infer that men would be distracted from worship by her uncovered locks!

READER 6

Verse 10 lies at the heart of his argument: "a woman ought to have authority on her head ..." (not, as RSV, "a veil"; indeed no veil is mentioned at all in the original Greek of this whole passage). The apostle appears to say that her head covering, which effaces man's glory in the presence of God, is at the same time a sign of her authority to pray and preach in this new dispensation. Some such explanation is required, for "authority" means "the right to do something," Woman needs such authority "because of the angels," that is to say, it is not merely a matter of earthly importance. The suggestion that "woman is the glory of man" is, to judge from verses 8 and 9, an inference drawn from the fact that woman was created after and for man, i.e., to be his helper (Genesis 2: 18, 21-23).

READER 1

Some suggest that this must be pressed to signify that woman may minister only when bearing the tokens of her subjection to man. That is to say, she may minister only in so far as man's priority is observed, i.e., under his leadership.

READER 2

However, others note that man's leadership is not at issue here, but the dress appropriate to men and women, a propriety that recognises differences due to creation. In fact, the apostle continues, in verses 11 and 12, to demonstrate that, although woman was created for man. their relationship is a mutual one (as, of course. Genesis 1: 27 teaches). Both are "from God," and dependent upon him.

READER 3

1 Timothy 5: 3-16 speaks of an order of widows, in which only those aged 60 years and older could be "enrolled" (ver 9), indicating an official list. The apostle is more concerned about their personal character and qualifications than any definition of their duties, which may only be inferred (say from verse 10). Young widows are to remarry and to care for their families (verses 11 - 15).

READER 4

1 Timothy 3: 11 occurs in a passage about deacons. The verse begins "Women ... " As in the case of deacons in verse 8, the noun has no article. So it is scarcely: "their wives", which many have too hastily assumed. If deacons' wives are meant, why do we find only deacons' wives in the Pastorals, and not bishops' or elders' wives mentioned as well? They would be even more important in the church's life. Further, why the mention of wives before the deacon's marriage (verse 12)? The order is manifestly wrong.

The directions in this verse virtually repeat what has been said about deacons, and appear to refer to women who are engaged in the same work. An increasing number of scholars accept this. If this is the case and women deacons are in mind, this is in line with what is stated about Phoebe in Romans 16: 1, 2.

READER 5

Titus 2: 3 - 5. The apostle points to the significance of experienced Christian women's example and teaching in the church. No public ministry is in view.

READER 6

To summarise what we have discovered thus far about women ministering, we have found in the New Testament prophetesses, possibly a woman apostle, women deacons, and widows. There are women who pray and prophesy. There are, however, no deaconesses nor do we find a woman elder.

Discussion and Reflection

Spend a minute in silence thinking and praying about what you have just heard.

Invite the group to share their initial impressions and responses to the reading.

Are there new perspectives or insights that have been raised for people?

Encourage participants to write down questions and issues this section has raised for discussion in week 4.

READER 1

(d) Passages counselling women's silence:

1 Corinthians 14: 34-36. The early church found these verses a problem, because it did not know where they belonged. It is

difficult to discover the proper order, for one important group of manuscripts places them after verse 40. They do not appear to be related to the subject under discussion in the chapter, viz., speaking in tongues. So their true meaning is far from clear.

Whatever the immediate context, the passage may not be separated from what was said in 1 Corinthians 11: 2-16, where it is plain that women may pray and prophesy in church. Any interpretation which silences women absolutely is not valid, because this is inconsistent with what Paul said in the earlier chapter and makes nonsense of his appeal to what takes place "in all the churches of the saints" (verse 33), for Luke informs us that there were prophetesses at Caesarea, a church well known to the apostle (Acts 21: 9).

READER 2

The prohibition is associated with women asking questions in church (verse 35). The woman may not disturb worship by her questioning and, no doubt, the ensuing animated discussions. Rather, she is to question her husband at home. As verse 33 shows, there must be no disorder in worship. It is interesting that Paul uses language in verse 34 that is earlier used of speakers who have nothing meaningful to say -- the uninterpreted speaker in tongues (verse 2S), a prophet who has given place to a second speaker (verse 30).

Instead of obtruding themselves in this fashion, the women are to "be subordinate, as even the law says." The statement is very general. The woman is to show the attitude of voluntary submission which, as we have seen, is required of all Christians. "As even the law says," is a most unusual way of speaking for Paul. He possibly has in mind the example of godly women in the Old Testament era, much as 1 Peter 3: 5, 6 suggests.

READER 3

Some consider that just as one prophet is to submit himself meekly to another prophet who has a revelation (verses 30 - 32), so the women are to submit themselves to the men. Further, the reference to the law is to the early chapters of Genesis, and this shows that the issue is not merely local and temporary, but a divine principle is operative that applies for all time.

READER 4

However, others will insist that the details are too general for such conclusions to be drawn, and involve reading a great deal more into the words than is warranted, a practice that Scripture itself warns against. Moreover the issue is set within the context of marriage. What is stated here must not be pressed to cover what applies to women in general.

READER 5

1 Timothy 2: 11-15 might at first sight appear to prohibit the teaching role of women in worship services of the church. However, as in the passage just discussed, the situation is again one in which the woman is learning (verse 11), presumably from her husband, although this is not stated.

She is not to teach. The statement is unqualified, nothing is said about her doing so "in church", although this is undoubtedly implied. The words are in a passage dealing with public worship (verse 8). The problem at stake is about the woman having "authority (the word is "domineer", found only here in the New Testament) over men" (verse 12. To be precise, Paul uses the singular: "man", i.e., "husband"). Instead of seeking to domineer, she is to learn in the only way instruction may properly be received, i.e., "with all submissiveness" (verse 11).

READER 6

In a letter so much concerned about "sound doctrine" (1: 10), it is difficult to separate this passage from apostle's concern about what was being taught in the churches under Timothy's care. Error was abroad, teaching was prevalent, that is characterised as "old wives' fables" (1 Timothy 4; 7), which was capturing "weak women, burdened with sins and swayed by various impulses" (2 Timothy 3 "upsetting whole households" (Titus 1; 11). The vulnerable are to be silenced. This interpretation finds support from the reference to Eve who "was deceived and became a transgressor" (verse 14).

READER 1

That the wife is in question, and not women in general, is clear from verse 15: "woman will be saved through bearing children". The two latter words are too narrow in scope for Paul's term, which denotes what is stated in 1 Tim 5: 14; 2 Timothy 1: 5; 3: 14, 15; Titus 2: 4; viz., the care of household and family. She finds salvation, surely through faith in Christ when it finds expression in a family's upbringing through the example of a pious and pure life. Not through domineering over her husband, but her ministry is to be found "in modesty".

Paul illustrates from the Genesis story. Would she domineer over her husband? Remember, woman was created second, not first! Would she domineer? Let her consider what happened when a woman did. It was not Adam who fell to Satan's wiles; Eve was deceived, and she led him astray!

READER 2

Note that the apostle says: "I permit no woman ..." He talks like this when he cannot appeal to a "word of Lord" (i.e., to a saying

of Jesus; see, e.g., 1 Corinthians 7: 12, 25). He does not quote Old Testament scripture only illustrates from it.

Perhaps few today would want to silence woman completely in church, for such an interpretation would set this passage in contradiction to what the apostle states elsewhere.

READER 3

However, some consider that a woman must not teach in church in such a way as to exercise authority over a man. Her function is to learn in silence and submission. The reference to Adam's priority over Eve in verse 13 (see Genesis 2: 18-25) is a reminder that the direction was based not on cultural grounds but upon abiding theological principles.

READER 4

Others suggest that this is to misinterpret what stated about her domineering, and to read too much into the Scriptural illustration used. One should not press that illustration beyond what it immediately implies. The apostle is dealing with specific problems in young missionary churches. He is not enunciating a universal principle. His advice is relevant when similar conditions occur today.

Discussion and Reflection

Spend a minute in silence thinking and praying about what you have just heard.

Invite the group to share their initial impressions and responses to the reading.

Are there new perspectives or insights that have been raised for people?

Encourage participants to write down questions and issues this section has raised for discussion in week 4.

Leader's Notes

At the end of this discussion, invite the group to silence. Ask them to prayerfully consider what are the key questions for their church at this time?

Spend some time establishing and recording the key questions to discuss together in Week 4. These questions and issues are also the focus for prayer for people until they meet again.

At the end of the discussion, invite the group to silence again. Spend some time praying as a group with the facilitator closing at a time deemed appropriate.

WOMEN LEADING TODAY - WEEK FOUR

FINDING OUR WAY FORWARD

Leader's Notes	<p><i>Before the meeting:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ <i>Copy the questions recorded at the end of each week onto large sheets of paper and display where everyone can see them.</i>▪ <i>Also display the completed A3 sized copy of the Audit Tool "Gender Equity in Churches".</i> <p><i>Begin the meeting together with prayer, opening yourselves to a greater awareness of God's spirit and God's life at work in our world and our church.</i></p>
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Leader's Notes	<p><i>Invite the group to take 5- 10 minutes of silent reflection attending to the sheets of questions and the Audit Tool.</i></p>
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Discussion And Reflection	<p>What stands out to you about the information gathered by the Gender Equity Audit Tool?</p> <p>Which of the questions raised continue to have energy and interest for you?</p> <p>What are the invitations or challenges that are being made to you through this material?</p> <p>What obstacles or resistances do you see? What supports and strengths can you identify?</p> <p>What action do you want to take to meet the invitations or challenges that you have identified?</p> <p>What does this group need to do to help this action take place?</p>
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Leader's Notes	<p><i>At the end of the discussion close with prayer and a blessing of each other, giving thanks for the time you have spent in this exploration and the things you have learnt along the way.</i></p>
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MATERIAL TO BE PHOTOCOPIED FOR WEEK ONE

SETTING THE QUESTIONS: A personal response by Rev Roslyn Wright H Wright

READER 1

The Ministry Review Task Force in 2000 suggested that the next ten years will bring an increased need for diversity in church leadership. This diversity will need to include leaders who are specialists, full time and part time leaders, bi-vocational leaders, and leaders who are able to equip and work with an increasing number of lay leaders.¹ The time continues now at the end of this decade to be ripe for an expansion of the range of pastoral leaders.

READER 2

I believe that the beginning point from which to look at the issues of gender and leadership is not the 'equal opportunity' push that is present in society at large. Our discussion on gender issues must begin from our understanding of God's own nature, what this reveals about the nature of the church, and how we are invited to be the body of Christ.

READER 1

As Baptists we affirm the God we profess is triune. God's own nature is a relationship, one of mutuality and reciprocity, but not for God's own sake. Everything comes from God, and everything returns to God, through Christ in the Spirit.² This is seen most clearly in Jesus' prayer for his disciples (John 17:20-21). For the church to be a true expression of God's own nature we must all be free to use the gifts we have been given. Otherwise, 'the end result is half a loaf.'³

READER 2

Excellent work has been done exploring the biblical basis of the equality of all peoples.⁴ The evidence used against women taking leadership is not based on good scriptural scholarship, and must be judged in the light of the larger picture of God's own dealing with humankind, in the Old Testament, in the New Testament writings of the early church and in the record of Jesus' own life.

READER 1

Changes are needed too in the models of church, looking for new ways of being the church together. The old ways will not

¹ "Ministry Review Task Force." Melbourne: Baptist Union of Victoria, 2000, p. 9.

² LaCugna, Catherine Mowrey. *God for Us: The Trinity and Christian Life*. San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1973, p. 274.

³ C. Anne Davis, "Liberation, Not Separation," *Review and Expositor* 72 (1975): p. 67.

⁴ See Gretchen Gaebelin Hull, *Equal To Serve: Women and Men in the Church and Home* (Old Tappan, New Jersey: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1987). Also Val Webb, *Why We're Equal: Introducing Feminist Theology* (St Louis, Missouri: Chalice Press, 1999).

take us forward. For the health and well being of our denomination we need to be encouraging the use of all people's giftedness. A great deal of uncertainty and ambiguity is ahead for all those in leadership as well as for those whom they serve. We have not yet engaged fully in God's own trinitarian life. We have ignored Christ's own statement of call (Luke 4:18-21) and the example of his ministry of welcome and inclusiveness. Jesus engaged and dialogued with women, affirmed their faith, did not shun their bodily functions, encouraged them in discussion and debate, and allowed women to challenge him and stretch his understanding of his own mission. He was not bound by rules or traditions, and sought to bring others into freedom and the fullness of life. Is this not then our call too?

READER 2

Although we have had women in pastoral leadership in the BUV for more than thirty years, most of us have not had women as role models. We need to explore other models of leadership, as exercised by women and men, inside and outside the institution of the church. We need to become more self-aware about how we are leading. We need to be freed in our choices for exercising leadership that will be a better fit both ourselves and the situations into which we are called. There is no 'one size fits all'.

READER 1

It has been a difficult task for me to address these issues. Despair has walked with me as I have focussed on the limited opportunities for women at present. But I have to believe that God's Spirit is still at work in the Church, drawing us all towards the fullness of life that is God's own self. The choice I make is to continue to move with God's own longing for our full participation in the life of God, and the body of Christ.

READER 2

Let us affirm that as Baptists we hold dearly the reality of God's ongoing revelation through scripture. 'The Lord has yet more light and truth to break forth from his word.'¹ To limit our current understanding of God's word in scripture as the total truth is to have lost something vital from our Baptist heritage. Writing as he did in a much earlier age, we can find new meaning in the words of W. T. Whitley: 'In ecclesiastical history ministers are not the men who count... Baptists beyond others, are especially pledged to recognise and to utilise the priesthood of all believers.'²

¹ George Rawson, "We limit not the truth of God," in *Baptist Praise and Worship*, ed. The Psalms and Hymns Trust (London: Oxford University Press, 1991), p. 73.

² Karen E. Smith, "Beyond Public and Private Spheres: Another Look at Women in Baptist History and Historiography," *The Baptist Quarterly* 34, no. 2 (1991): p.80.

Gender Equity in Churches - Audit Tool ¹

This tool is designed to help you think about the place women occupy in the life of your local church.

Local Church - Ministry Roles

List the numbers of men and women who have leadership roles in the following ministries.

Ministry Role	# Men	# Women
<i>Attendees</i>		
<i>Pastors</i>		
<i>Deacons</i>		
<i>Secretary</i>		
<i>Treasurer</i>		
<i>Youth Leaders</i>		
<i>Bible Study Leaders</i>		
<i>Early Childhood Ministry</i>		
<i>Sunday School</i>		
<i>Playgroup</i>		
<i>Girls Brigade</i>		
<i>Boys Brigade</i>		
<i>Mission</i>		
<i>Outreach</i>		
<i>Other</i>		

¹ Designed by Rev Cheryl Williams for the *Baptists Today* Conference August 2008.

Ministry Tasks

In our worship times we usually have many people participating in a variety of tasks.

Fill in the following table listing how often women take on these tasks in your church.

Ministry Task	Always	Regularly	Often	Seldom	Never
<i>Preaching</i>					
<i>Worship Leading</i>					
<i>Music</i>					
<i>Leading Prayers</i>					
<i>Reading Bible</i>					
<i>Children's Talk</i>					
<i>Leading Communion</i>					
<i>Preparing Communion</i>					
<i>Flowers</i>					
<i>Collecting Offering</i>					
<i>Welcoming</i>					
<i>Morning Tea</i>					
<i>Other</i>					

READER 1

As we read through the following material together, note that there are two different opinions in this discussion indicated by change in print font.

THE OLD TESTAMENT BACKGROUND¹

It is difficult for the present day reader in Western countries to appreciate the low estimate of women prevailing throughout the Middle East during the whole of the Biblical period. The woman was her husband's property, together with his children, slaves and cattle. Therefore she had no legal rights of her own; her husband was responsible for her in every phase of life, religious as well as civil. Typical is the attitude of Ben Sirach in Ecclesiasticus (42: 9-14 in the period between the Testaments): he considered that daughters are a continual source of worry from the day they are born!

In practice, of course, a woman might be greatly loved (e.g., Rachel and Hannah), and be influential in her home (e.g., Sarah, Ruth) and even in the life of the community (e.g., Jael, Esther). There are attempts in the Old Testament to afford the woman protection against the unscrupulous, e.g., in safeguarding the inheritance of the daughters of Zeiophehad (Numbers 27: 1-11); in prescribing that a man divorcing his wife should give her a bill setting out the reasons why he had put her away (Deuteronomy 24: 1-4). Of course, without legal rights of her own, she could not initiate divorce proceedings.

Genesis 1-3 is of primary significance for understanding woman's place in Scripture.

READER 2

1. Genesis 1: 27 makes three important statements: that man is God's creation; that man is created in God's image; and that man is created as male and female. The word "man" encompasses both male and female. Together they are in the image of God; the woman is not distinguished from the man in this respect. The emphasis here is on equality.

2. In Genesis 2, Adam was created first, and then a helper, the woman, was made for him.

It is at this point that a difference of opinion arises. On the one hand, it is suggested that the narrative lays stress on the priority of man, for he was created before the woman. Therefore man's lordship over woman belongs to the original purpose of God, and continues to this present time.

¹ A Report on the Ordination of Women: The Baptist Union of Victoria. 1977

READER 1

BUT, on the other hand, it is pointed out that this passage does not state or even imply that because man was created before woman, lordship was given to him. The purpose of the passage explicitly underlines the interdependence of man and woman, who in marriage become "one flesh", i.e., personality requires both sexes for true fulfilment, rather than laying stress on man's priority.

READER 2

3. Genesis 3: 16-19 records the divine judgment after the Fall. For woman it meant aggravated pain in childbirth, yet a desire for her husband who "shall rule over you."

READER 1

Therefore the difference of opinion mentioned above concerns man's lordship over woman; was it God's original intention, or has it arisen as God's judgment on sin at the Fall? The interpretation of Genesis 2: 18-25 is determinative in this issue.

READER 3

Genesis 2: 18-25

18 Then the Lord God said, 'It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper as his partner.' 19 So out of the ground the Lord God formed every animal of the field and every bird of the air, and brought them to the man to see what he would call them; and whatever the man called each living creature, that was its name. 20 The man gave names to all cattle, and to the birds of the air, and to every animal of the field; but for the man there was not found a helper as his partner. 21 So the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and he slept; then he took one of his ribs and closed up its place with flesh. 22 And the rib that the Lord God had taken from the man he made into a woman and brought her to the man. 23 Then the man said,

'This at last is bone of my bones
and flesh of my flesh;
this one shall be called Woman,
for out of Man this one was taken.'

24 Therefore a man leaves his father and his mother and clings to his wife, and they become one flesh. 25 And the man and his wife were both naked, and were not ashamed.¹

¹ The New Revised Standard Version (Anglicized Edition), copyright 1989, 1995 by the Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

READER 1

THE MINISTRY OF WOMEN IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

(1) A study of the Old Testament reveals that there were no women priests in Israel. This is surprising when we consider that women held the office among Israel's neighbours. However, the religions they served included fertility cults, and these cults involved sacred prostitution. God's people were warned again and again against such falsehood and the immoral rites accompanying it. It is generally conceded that this is at least one of the basic reasons why God did not permit women to serve in the priestly office. To be sure, Israel did not always keep itself from such evil practices (see, e.g., Deuteronomy 23: 18).

Perhaps the nearest approach to women priests are "the ministering women" mentioned in Exodus (38: 8) and 1 Samuel (2: 22). Their functions are unknown. However, the term which describes them is that used of the Levites in Numbers (4: 23 and 8: 24). Moreover, both women and Levites are associated with "the tent of meeting." Probably, like the Levites, the women were assistants to the priests in their official duties.

Apparently this office did not continue in later Israel. There is possibly some significance in that the final reference to them is in connection with immorality (1 Samuel 2: 22).

READER 2

(2) Alongside Old Testament references to prophets, men who bring God's word to his people, is also mention of prophetesses. The following are specified: Miriam (Exodus 15: 20); Deborah (Judges 4: 4); Huldah (2 Kings 22: 14; 2 Chronicles 34: 22); and a false prophetess, Noadiah, who perverted God's word (Nehemiah 6: 14). Apparently Isaiah's wife also experienced the call to the prophetic office as well as her husband, for she is designated "prophetess" (Isaiah 8: 3).

READER 3

(3) The Old Testament also mentions wise women in 2 Samuel (14 and 20). Perhaps also Jeremiah (9: 17) should be included. Their function may only be understood when set beside their male counterparts. These women exercised a ministry of exhortation and instruction.

It should be noted that in Jeremiah 18: 18 the three functions are set alongside each other: "the law shall not perish from the priest, nor counsel from the wise, nor the word from the prophet." Here are three parallel functions, and it is significant that the woman was excluded from only the first of these. Considering the place of women in the Old Testament world, this is quite remarkable.

MATERIAL TO BE PHOTOCOPIED FOR WEEK TWO

REFLECTIONS ON MINISTRY OVER THE PAST THIRTY YEARS REV MARITA MUNRO

READER 1

I was 23 when I was ordained to the Victorian Baptist Union of Churches at Collins Street on 1 October 1978. I had been accepted for ordination training at the end of 1975 when Norman Pell was the General Superintendent. He was personally very encouraging. I still keep the official letter of acceptance that he sent me.

I have never felt really comfortable about being recognized as the first woman to be ordained in Australia. I always thought that that kind of a person needed to be someone who really enjoyed public life and was prepared to mount (in a natural way) something of a campaign to getting the cause of women higher on the church's agenda - that's not really been my style and I am uncomfortable with that kind of a role. (It's horses for courses, I guess. I've left that to others).

READER 2

So what has ordination meant to me?: The wider authority and recognition of church and community of my calling and gifts to work in the church. I have never seen ordination as giving me something special that those who are not ordained do not have. The path to ordination provided me with training, experience, opportunity and privilege in pastoral care, worship, education, preaching and mission which prepared me in a way that others may not have had. I found I had gifts in leadership, and as I used these I felt confirmed in what I was doing: preaching, visiting, leading worship, taking bible studies, chairing meetings, tutoring Greek at the College, all these were gifts I had and the call was to use them.

Ordination opened some doors for me - opportunities to speak in a number of contexts - to conduct special services which might not have happened otherwise and made people in the wider community aware that perhaps the church is not as prejudiced or outdated as some thought. I have done funerals and dedications and baptisms and weddings, conducting worship services in elderly citizens homes - rituals in situations in which the church encounters people who might not normally feel at home in a worship service.

READER 1

On a number of occasions when I have been conducting business with banks or other places, the "Rev Munro" on

documentation has been queried - Is this for someone else? No, it's for me. That's me. There follows embarrassment or quiet curiosity and genuine interest. I still get duplicates of mail from various Christian organizations. One addressed to Marita Munro, the other to the Revd M. Munro – couldn't be the same person!

My struggles have included not being tall enough to see over the pulpit or the lectern. And discovering a style of leadership and a niche for myself where I think my gifts can best be used. Self-doubt was one of the initial obstacles for me. I actually was quite shy. I saw other women in leadership roles, as teachers, missionaries, leading Girls' Brigade, and as minister's wives, but the big question was 'What did it mean to be a woman and a minister?' There were not many models to help me.

READER 2

I also experienced some organised opposition from a conservative group within Victorian Baptists (The Baptist Revival Fellowship) in those days. Some have since died or changed their tune, as I discovered in an interview for my PhD thesis.

When people say to me that the greatest opponents to women's ordination or women in leadership in the church are other women - I have to say: that has not been my experience. But my PhD research revealed that it is often encouragement from fathers or other significant males that provides the impetus towards ordination.

READER 1

Galatians 3: 28 was a key text in the whole debate. "In Christ there is no Jew nor Greek; no slave nor free; no male and female." Athol Gill used to say that Paul had the first one pretty well-worked out; the second was a bit more of a struggle but the book of Philemon could be seen as an encouragement for slave masters to recognize their slaves as brothers. As for the women issue; it wasn't an idea on his agenda. A bit later I discovered Romans 16 with the names of all those women being greeted by Paul and a more careful exegesis based on better translations showed that Phoebe was a minister, Junia and apostle, and Priscilla, a teacher of theology; to say nothing of Phillip's 4 daughters who were prophetesses in the Book of Acts.

The person of Jesus as he is presented to us in the Gospels is a great inspiration. I can't ever really get past him. I had the privilege of leading a bible study in 2008 at the School of Ministry on Matt 14. It was the story of Peter getting out of the boat and sinking as he walked towards Jesus. In contrast to Peter's faltering faith was the response of the Canaanite woman who persisted in her requests for healing for her daughter for

Jesus despite opposition. She eventually wins a concession from him.

READER 2

I see in Jesus a person who affirmed women in his ministry and teaching. He had followers, disciples, who were women. And the first witnesses to the resurrection, the first apostles if you like, were women.

The leaders of our denominations have not always regarded women as being trustworthy enough to handle the transmission of the faith tradition. Odd isn't it? How many of us can thank God for Godly women who have faithfully passed on to us a living faith. I can - my mother and my grandmother.

I thank God for faithful women Sunday School teachers, ISCF and Scripture Union leaders; ministers' wives from my childhood and teenage years.

READER 1

While it is still a very 'blokey' culture in pastoral circles, there are pockets within that that are much more open to the ministry of women. I think that women now have better support networks and a bigger range of models to follow. We have women who have been national denominational leaders, women on significant committees, a woman who is a regional minister. There is greater acceptance of women in ministry teams. We see couples in ministry together. And some of the newer church plants are being led by women. There are more women teaching and learning, women who are working in supervision, and in spiritual direction, both exercising ministry and receiving support.

My Advice? Go for it. Recognise that men play a crucial role in this, as they can bring influence to bear that we as women can't. Don't assume people are against you. You don't need to bang the drum too loud, but let your life speak, in your words, and your actions. Women must be present, functioning, competent, assertive (where necessary) and gracious wherever possible. Live out the gifts you have and use them. And be prepared that sometimes you might be the first women to lead in some way in your area. Take the risk, look for support, and be true to your call.

JESUS AND WOMEN¹

READER 1

The four Gospels show that the ministry of Jesus was set in Israel. The Old Testament conceptions of womanhood were determinative for that nation, and so form the background for his life and work.

For the evangelists, "ministry" is the ministry of Jesus. Any ministry by his followers is participation in that of their Master. Even when Jesus sends out the Twelve (Matthew 10; Luke 9) or the Seventy (Luke 10), it is that his followers might do what he is doing. For the disciple, there is never a ministry independent of his Lord's. This, of course, becomes the principle of all ministry in the New Testament (see, e.g. Mark 16: 19, 20; when the apostles go out and preach everywhere, the ascended Lord "works with them" Matthew 28: 18-20; John 20: 21-23).

READER 2

The inner core of Jesus' followers, the Twelve, was exclusively male Jews, but a group of women "ministered" to them, and at least on occasion travelled with them (Luke 8; 1-3), something completely unheard of among the rabbis, who held aloof from women and would not admit them as disciples. Women were among the crowds that gathered to hear him teach (Matthew 14: 21; 15: 38). Indeed, on occasions women were included in his teaching of the inner group (Luke 10: 38-42), or taught as individuals (John 4; 11: 17-27). Women, including his own mother, were prominent amongst those of his followers who did not abandon him on Calvary (Matthew 27: 55,56; Mark 15: 40,41; Luke 23: 49,55; John 19; 25), some of whom were first to witness the resurrection.

READER 1

Both in his teaching (Matthew 5: 27-32) and in his practice (John 8: 3--11), Jesus refused to countenance the contemporary legal double standard of morality arising from woman's inferior status in his age. But more, in his teaching on divorce (e.g., Matthew 5: 32; 19: 9; Mark 10: 11, 12; Luke 16: 18), Jesus challenged the legal deprivation of women by insisting upon their rights, an attitude which ultimately was influential in leading to the freedom accorded women in later ages. He explicitly recognised women's faith on many occasions (Matthew 9: 22; 15: 2B; 26: 10-13; Mark 5: 34; 14: 6-9; Luke 7: 47-50), and compared the faith and practice of the pharisees unfavourably with that of women (Luke 7: 36-50; Matthew 21: 31, 32). The need of a woman could cause him to turn aside from satisfying the request of a man (Mark 5: 21-34). Luke 11: 27, 28 possibly points towards a fulfilment for women beyond that of motherhood. The

¹ A Report on the Ordination of Women: The Baptist Union of Victoria. 1977

Samaritan woman undertook a ministry of proclamation which brought many to believe in Jesus (John 4: 39-42). The resurrection testimony was first entrusted to women (Matthew 28: 5 -7), i.e., to those who had no legal right to bear such testimony.

THE WITNESS OF THE GOSPELS

Jesus taught female students.

Luke 10:38-42

Now as they went on their way, he entered a certain village, where a woman named Martha welcomed him into her home. She had a sister named Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet and listened to what he was saying. But Martha was distracted by her many tasks; so she came to him and asked, 'Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to do all the work by myself? Tell her then to help me.' But the Lord answered her, 'Martha, Martha, you are worried and distracted by many things; there is need of only one thing. Mary has chosen the better part, which will not be taken away from her.'

Jesus called a woman a daughter of Abraham as equal to men.

Luke 13:16-17

And ought not this woman, a daughter of Abraham whom Satan bound for eighteen long years, be set free from this bondage on the sabbath day? When he said this, all his opponents were put to shame; and the entire crowd was rejoicing at all the wonderful things that he was doing.

Jesus accepted women in his inner circle.

Luke 8:1-3

Soon afterwards he went on through cities and villages, proclaiming and bringing the good news of the kingdom of God. The twelve were with him, as well as some women who had been cured of evil spirits and infirmities: Mary, called Magdalene, from whom seven demons had gone out, and Joanna, the wife of Herod's steward Chuza, and Susanna, and many others, who provided for them out of their resources.

Jesus appeared first to a woman after his resurrection.

Matthew 28:1, 9

After the sabbath, as the first day of the week was dawning, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to see the tomb. Suddenly Jesus met them and said, 'Greetings!' And they came to him, took hold of his feet, and worshipped him.

Women were present at Jesus' death.

Matthew 27:55-56

Many women were also there, looking on from a distance; they had followed Jesus from Galilee and had provided for him. Among them were Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James and Joseph, and the mother of the sons of Zebedee.

Mark 15:40-41

There were also women looking on from a distance; among them were Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James the younger and of Joses, and Salome. These used to follow him and provided for him when he was in Galilee; and there were many other women who had come up with him to Jerusalem.

John 19:25

When the soldiers had crucified Jesus, they took his clothes and divided them into four parts, one for each soldier. They also took his tunic; now the tunic was seamless, woven in one piece from the top. So they said to one another, 'Let us not tear it, but cast lots for it to see who will get it.' This was to fulfil what the scripture says, 'They divided my clothes among themselves, and for my clothing they cast lots.' And that is what the soldiers did. Meanwhile, standing near the cross of Jesus were his mother, and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple whom he loved standing beside her, he said to his mother, 'Woman, here is your son.' Then he said to the disciple, 'Here is your mother.' And from that hour the disciple took her into his own home.

Jesus repeatedly expressed concern for widows.

Luke 20:46-47

'Beware of the scribes, who like to walk around in long robes, and love to be greeted with respect in the market-places, and to have the best seats in the synagogues and places of honour at banquets. They devour widows' houses and for the sake of appearance say long prayers. They will receive the greater condemnation.'

Jesus challenged ritual impurity laws.

Mark 5:25-34

Now there was a woman who had been suffering from haemorrhages for twelve years. She had endured much under many physicians, and had spent all that she had; and she was no better, but rather grew worse. She had heard about Jesus,

and came up behind him in the crowd and touched his cloak, for she said, 'If I but touch his clothes, I will be made well.' Immediately her haemorrhage stopped; and she felt in her body that she was healed of her disease. Immediately aware that power had gone forth from him, Jesus turned about in the crowd and said, 'Who touched my clothes?' And his disciples said to him, 'You see the crowd pressing in on you; how can you say, "Who touched me?"' He looked all round to see who had done it. But the woman, knowing what had happened to her, came in fear and trembling, fell down before him, and told him the whole truth. He said to her, 'Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace, and be healed of your disease.'

Jesus challenged cultural and religious divisions and spoke to foreign women.

John 4:7-10

A Samaritan woman came to draw water, and Jesus said to her, 'Give me a drink'. (His disciples had gone to the city to buy food.) The Samaritan woman said to him, 'How is it that you, a Jew, ask a drink of me, a woman of Samaria?' (Jews do not share things in common with Samaritans.) Jesus answered her, 'If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that is saying to you, "Give me a drink", you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water.'

A woman receives the first post resurrection apostolic commission in the Gospels.

Matthew 28:5-7.

But the angel said to the women, 'Do not be afraid; I know that you are looking for Jesus who was crucified. He is not here; for he has been raised, as he said. Come, see the place where he lay. Then go quickly and tell his disciples, "He has been raised from the dead, and indeed he is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see him." This is my message for you.'

MATERIAL TO BE PHOTOCOPIED FOR WEEK THREE

WOMEN IN THE EARLY CHURCH¹

NOTE – different opinions are expressed by an *alternative type*.

READER 1

This new attitude of Jesus to womanhood is reflected in the life and ministry of the church after the first Easter, as it is recorded in the Acts of the Apostles. Women join in prayer with men (Acts 1; 14) ; women join the church (5: 14; 8: 12; 17: 4, 12); women are among those Christians who are persecuted (8; 3; 9: 2; 22: 4); women form an audience for the preaching of Paul and his companions (16: 13), and are converted and baptised as a result - Peter's Pentecostal sermon makes it evident that women, as well as men, were the recipients of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2: 17-21). Since the Spirit of prophecy came upon them, all believers - both men and women - received the gift of prophecy, and were able to proclaim "the mighty works of God" (2: 11). That is why the church in Acts is a witnessing community.

READER 2

But further in Acts, as in the Old Testament, there is a specific prophetic office in which women are included (21: 9) as well as men (13: 1; 23: 10). This reflects the Old Testament counterpart (Luke 2: 36-38; note the public character of the office in the reference to the Temple).

READER 3

Thus, while according to Acts, men clearly had the major part in the church's public ministry, women were involved in a way that was revolutionary for Jewish society. It is necessary to consider whether the men's greater activity in public leadership was merely a reflection of contemporary cultural expectations, and accordingly something that may be changed as a result of the new place given to women by our Lord.

READER 4

It should be noted that in certain areas of the pagan world in the New Testament period, women enjoyed considerable freedom, e.g. a woman could apparently be in charge of the Philippian branch of a Thyatirian dyeing business (Acts 16: 14, 15 note the reference to her "household"); and women served as priestesses and as magical functionaries (16: 16). Nevertheless women's status was not far removed from that within Judaism. They generally suffered the same legal and moral disabilities, which our Lord's attitude was ultimately to change completely.

¹ A Report on the Ordination of Women: The Baptist Union of Victoria. 1977

WOMEN IN THE LETTERS OF PAUL

READER 1

This new attitude is also seen in the writings of Paul for the names of faithful Christian women are frequent enough to show that women played an important role in the life of churches with which the apostle was associated and that they assisted greatly in the expansion of the gospel. The apostle held such women in great respect and honour.

READER 2

The closing greetings of his letter to the Romans are instructive in this regard. Note the mention of:

READER 3

PHOEBE (Romans 16: 1, 2), is designated "a deacon (not "deaconess") of the church at Cenchreae". Of all the words which may have been used to describe her service, the apostle selects that which in the New Testament comes to have the technical meaning of "deacon". It is, of course, wrong for us to read our category of "deacon" back in the New Testament. However, whatever the term denoted in the New Testament, that is applied to Phoebe. She was a deacon!

It is said that "she has been a helper of many". The word "helper" is from the very same root as that which designates the "rule" of the elder in 1 Timothy 5: 17. Leadership is the idea at the heart of both words. The specific area of Phoebe's leadership is not indicated.

READER 4

PRISCILLA (also called Prisca, Romans 16: 3, 4; see also Acts 18: 2, 3, 18, 26; 1 Corinthians 16: 19; 2 Timothy 4: 1) The home of this woman and her husband was a house-church. Both were actively involved in God's work. It is interesting that Paul mentions her before her husband, and that this is true in most of the New Testament references. She was probably more prominent in the life of the church.

READER 5

JUNIA (Romans 16: 7, or Junias, a male name). It is generally conceded that a woman is mentioned, for this is how the early Greek readers of the New Testament understood the name. They also considered that she was an apostle. Andronicus and she were "of note among the apostles", they had won renown for their apostolic labours. Of course, apostleship in the New Testament was wider than the Twelve. Paul and Barnabas are both designated "apostles" (Acts 14: 4, 14). The possibility of a woman apostle is significant.

READER 6

Of MARY (Romans 16: 6) it is said that she worked hard. Tryphaena, Tryphosa, Persis, the mother of Rufus, Julia, sister of Nereus are mentioned without any attribution.

The following passages require consideration:

READER 1

(a) Galatians 3: 28. Paul points out that, as the result at God has done for mankind through the death and resurrection of his Son, natural differences - like that between Jew and Gentile - mean nothing with regard to one's spiritual standing and status before God. All believers are "Abraham's offspring" and sons of God, regardless of racial, social or sexual differences. What is stated is all are now "one man" in Christ Jesus. This should be as a reversal of the curse in Genesis 3.

Paul is talking about the new state of affairs "in Christ Jesus", over against what applies "under the law". In Christ, we are taken back to creation, or rather forward to the new creation (2 Corinthians 5: 17; Ephesians 2; 10; ; Colossians 3: 10; Galatians 6: 15), in which notions due to sin are obliterated. In particular, religious disadvantages which women have known, no longer in Christ.

Some find in these words an indication that woman is no longer disqualified from any ministry in the church. Her subjection to man, the result of the Fall, has been done away with in Christ.

READER 2

An alternative view is that those for whom Genesis 2 teaches that woman's subjection to man is God's original purpose and so not related to the Fall, this Galatian passage will indicate woman's freedom within this God given role.

READER 1

It is important to note that neither are suggesting woman is no longer woman in Christ. The physical differences remain!

READER 3

(b) Some passages suggesting woman's submission to man:

1 Corinthians 11; 3. Some here find a hierarchy of God - Christ - man - woman. "Head" implies that one stands over another in the sense of being the ground of his being. Here is an order of priority. In particular. God the Father exercises authoritative leadership over the Son with respect to their roles. This demonstrates that equality does not rule out different roles. The apostle thus provides a theological basis for the subordinate place of woman. This clearly shows that the issue cannot be

dismissed as something that is due to cultural differences between the sexes in New Testament times which no longer applies today. The respective roles and responsibilities which God originally ordained continue to be valid in the church.

READER 4

Others, however, point out that God's headship over Christ is certainly not to be understood in terms of superiority - subordination. In the New Testament, the head is not regarded as that which controls the body; the heart does (see e.g., 1 Corinthians 7: 37). The head is at the top of the body, it is the chief member- "Head" is also used metaphorically to denote source (the head of a river is its source), which seems to be the meaning here. Paul never states that every man is subordinate to Christ, for not all submit themselves to him. However, he is their "source"; they were created by him (Colossians 1: 16). Therefore it cannot be argued that the passage defines the relation of man to woman as that of a superior to a subordinate. He means that Christ points back to God, whose revealer he is; man points back to Christ, his creator; woman points back to man for whom she was made, whose "glory" she is. Paul immediately proceeds to a discussion of what men and women should wear when praying or prophesying. Each sex has its appropriate style. It is not possible to deduce from this that one sex is subordinate to the other.

READER 5

Ephesians 5: 21-33. The passage deals with relationships between husband and wife. Some note that, since the husband is the head of the wife (verse 23), the wife is to submit herself to her husband. This is not to be understood as her subjugation to him, but a voluntary self-submission on her part. The passage does not say that the husband is superior to his wife, but she is subject to him "in everything", for there is no area of life where this does not apply. Colossians 3: 18 makes the same point, stating that her submissiveness "is fitting in the Lord." While the passage speaks only about the marriage relationship, it implies the overall priority or leadership responsibility which God has given to man. The marriage state was normal. Even those women who remained single were under the authority of the senior male in the family. From the general principle of Christian submissiveness, Paul applies this to particular cases, wives to husbands, children to parents, servants to masters, recognising the normal order. It is not stated that husbands should submit to wives, parents to children, masters to servants. Their respective Christian responsibility is spelt out in different terms. It is explicitly stated that the husband is the head.

READER 6

Others affirm that the passage clearly points to the place of woman in marriage. To broaden the scope of the words is to go beyond what Scripture teaches. Further, it is interesting that the verb "be subject" is

not found in the Greek text of Ephesians 5: 22. It must be supplied from verse 21, where however subjection is required of one believer to another, i.e., of the husband to his wife, as well as of the wife to her husband. What the apostle is speaking about is the mutual love and respect that the one ought to have of the other, something different from the leadership responsibility given to one partner alone.

READER 1

1 Peter 3: 1-7, although not written by Paul, may well be considered here. The passage is set within a similar context of relationships within the Christian family as in the Ephesian and Colossian passages just considered. Wives are to be subject to their husbands (verse 1), just as godly women in Old Testament times were submissive to their husbands (verses 5 and 6), where the woman respected her husband in his role of leader-protector. The woman, although the weaker partner, is equally heir of grace as her husband (verse 7), who should be understanding of her needs.

Again, some suggest that here the principles of leadership and submission are clear, and that inspired principles are not negotiable.

READER 2

However, others point out that the passage is in a section, beginning at 1 Peter 2: 15, where Christians are exhorted to "be subject for the Lord's sake to every human creature" ("institution" is an impossible translation). So, like Ephesians 5: 21-33, it is concerned with the mutual submission of believers to one another. "Be subject" is literally "stand under." The word does not necessarily carry any implications of obedience. Under the influence of our Lord's teaching about true precedence (Matthew 20: 26, 27; 23: 11; Mark 9: 35; 10: 42- Luke 9: 48; 22; 26; see also Philippians 2: 3-11), the word was used to describe the believer's humility, his readiness to renounce his own will for the sake of others.

READER 3

The early Christians accepted the social structures of which they were part. But they filled these relationships with new content through their voluntary submission to one another. For example, they accepted slavery; they were in no position to change it. But when the relationship of owner and slave was characterised by mutual submission, although the legal position of both remained the same, the new attitude led ultimately to the place where the degrading social institution became intolerable and was ultimately abolished. This has a bearing on the relationships of husband and wife. In those areas where the gospel has been truly received, mutual submission has removed the stigma of inferiority under which women suffered.

It is fair to state that those who emphasise the permanence of women's subjection to man are not speaking about the male domination of women. But they suggest that woman's role is the junior member of a partnership. That role, however, requires that she may not aspire to the leadership of men in any ministry.

READER 4

The contrary view stresses the mutual relationship into which Christians have been brought, both male and female. There is now no hindrance to the woman's leadership. In 1 Peter 5; 5, younger people are to be subject to the elders. This has never been considered as a barrier for the ordination of young men. Similarly, the subjection of women ought not to be regarded as a barrier to theirs.

READER 5

(c) Passages referring to woman's ministry:

1 Corinthians 11: 2-16. It is important to note at the outset that Paul is explaining why women should dress in a certain way when praying and prophesying, and not why they should desist from such a practice. If he had objected to their praying and prophesying, it is difficult to understand why he should devote so much space to a discussion about proper clothing. The apostle does not say one thing when he means something entirely different. That women did so minister is not dependent on this passage alone (e.g., prophesying; Acts 21: 9). Neither can prophecy be restricted to a private ministry. Prophecy is proclamation, preaching, and is mentioned in relation to services in Acts 13: 1, 2 and 1 Corinthians 14.

Whereas in both Jewish and Greek society women wore a head covering in public, apparently some Corinthian women discarded it in their public ministry (i.e., in the house-churches). Paul's argument is not easy to understand. He states that a man should minister with head uncovered, because "he is the image and glory of God" (verse 7; see Genesis 1; 26, 27). He exists to give glory to God. However, if the woman were to minister with uncovered head, since she is "the glory of man" (verse 7), she would not glorify God, but would reflect the glory of man (her husband?) Perhaps Paul means to infer that men would be distracted from worship by her uncovered locks!

READER 6

Verse 10 lies at the heart of his argument: "a woman ought to have authority on her head ..." (not, as RSV, "a veil"; indeed no veil is mentioned at all in the original Greek of this whole passage). The apostle appears to say that her head covering, which effaces man's glory in the presence of God, is at the same time a sign of her authority to pray and preach in this new dispensation. Some such explanation is required, for "authority"

means "the right to do something," Woman needs such authority "because of the angels," that is to say, it is not merely a matter of earthly importance. The suggestion that "woman is the glory of man" is, to judge from verses 8 and 9, an inference drawn from the fact that woman was created after and for man, i.e., to be his helper (Genesis 2: 18, 21-23).

READER 1

Some suggest that this must be pressed to signify that woman may minister only when bearing the tokens of her subjection to man. That is to say, she may minister only in so far as man's priority is observed, i.e., under his leadership.

READER 2

However, others note that man's leadership is not at issue here, but the dress appropriate to men and women, a propriety that recognises differences due to creation. In fact, the apostle continues, in verses 11 and 12, to demonstrate that, although woman was created for man. their relationship is a mutual one (as, of course. Genesis 1: 27 teaches). Both are "from God," and dependent upon him.

READER 3

1 Timothy 5: 3-16 speaks of an order of widows, in which only those aged 60 years and older could be "enrolled" (ver 9), indicating an official list. The apostle is more concerned about their personal character and qualifications than any definition of their duties, which may only be inferred (say from verse 10). Young widows are to remarry and to care for their families (verses 11 - 15).

READER 4

1 Timothy 3: 11 occurs in a passage about deacons. The verse begins "Women ... " As in the case of deacons in verse 8, the noun has no article. So it is scarcely: "their wives", which many have too hastily assumed. If deacons' wives are meant, why do we find only deacons' wives in the Pastorals, and not bishops' or elders' wives mentioned as well? They would be even more important in the church's life. Further, why the mention of wives before the deacon's marriage (verse 12)? The order is manifestly wrong.

The directions in this verse virtually repeat what has been said about deacons, and appear to refer to women who are engaged in the same work. An increasing number of scholars accept this. If this is the case and women deacons are in mind, this is in line with what is stated about Phoebe in Romans 16: 1, 2.

READER 5

Titus 2: 3 - 5. The apostle points to the significance of experienced Christian women's example and teaching in the church. No public ministry is in view.

READER 6

To summarise what we have discovered thus far about women ministering, we have found in the New Testament prophetesses, possibly a woman apostle, women deacons, and widows. There are women who pray and prophesy. There are, however, no deaconesses nor do we find a woman elder.

READER 1

(d) Passages counselling women's silence:

1 Corinthians 14: 34-36. The early church found these verses a problem, because it did not know where they belonged. It is difficult to discover the proper order, for one important group of manuscripts places them after verse 40. They do not appear to be related to the subject under discussion in the chapter, viz., speaking in tongues. So their true meaning is far from clear.

Whatever the immediate context, the passage may not be separated from what was said in 1 Corinthians 11: 2-16, where it is plain that women may pray and prophesy in church. Any interpretation which silences women absolutely is not valid, because this is inconsistent with what Paul said in the earlier chapter and makes nonsense of his appeal to what takes place "in all the churches of the saints" (verse 33), for Luke informs us that there were prophetesses at Caesarea, a church well known to the apostle (Acts 21: 9).

READER 2

The prohibition is associated with women asking questions in church (verse 35). The woman may not disturb worship by her questioning and, no doubt, the ensuing animated discussions. Rather, she is to question her husband at home. As verse 33 shows, there must be no disorder in worship. It is interesting that Paul uses language in verse 34 that is earlier used of speakers who have nothing meaningful to say -- the uninterpreted speaker in tongues (verse 2S), a prophet who has given place to a second speaker (verse 30).

Instead of obtruding themselves in this fashion, the women are to "be subordinate, as even the law says." The statement is very general. The woman is to show the attitude of voluntary submission which, as we have seen, is required of all Christians. "As even the law says," is a most unusual way of speaking for Paul. He possibly has in mind the example of godly women in the Old Testament era, much as 1 Peter 3: 5, 6 suggests.

READER 3

Some consider that just as one prophet is to submit himself meekly to another prophet who has a revelation (verses 30 - 32), so the women are to submit themselves to the men. Further, the reference to the law is to the early chapters of Genesis, and this shows that the issue is not merely local and temporary, but a divine principle is operative that applies for all time.

READER 4

However, others will insist that the details are too general for such conclusions to be drawn, and involve reading a great deal more into the words than is warranted, a practice that Scripture itself warns against. Moreover the issue is set within the context of marriage. What is stated here must not be pressed to cover what applies to women in general.

READER 5

1 Timothy 2: 11-15 might at first sight appear to prohibit the teaching role of women in worship services of the church. However, as in the passage just discussed, the situation is again one in which the woman is learning (verse 11), presumably from her husband, although this is not stated.

She is not to teach. The statement is unqualified, nothing is said about her doing so "in church", although this is undoubtedly implied. The words are in a passage dealing with public worship (verse 8). The problem at stake is about the woman having "authority (the word is "domineer", found only here in the New Testament) over men" (verse 12. To be precise, Paul uses the singular: "man", i.e., "husband"). Instead of seeking to domineer, she is to learn in the only way instruction may properly be received, i.e., "with all submissiveness" (verse 11).

READER 6

In a letter so much concerned about "sound doctrine" (1: 10), it is difficult to separate this passage from apostle's concern about what was being taught in the churches under Timothy's care. Error was abroad, teaching was prevalent, that is characterised as "old wives' fables" (1 Timothy 4; 7), which was capturing "weak women, burdened with sins and swayed by various impulses" (2 Timothy 3 "upsetting whole households" (Titus 1; 11). The vulnerable are to be silenced. This interpretation finds support from the reference to Eve who "was deceived and became a transgressor" (verse 14).

READER 1

That the wife is in question, and not women in general, is clear from verse 15: "woman will be saved through bearing children". The two latter words are too narrow in scope for Paul's term, which denotes what is stated in 1 Tim 5: 14; 2 Timothy 1: 5; 3:

14, 15; Titus 2: 4; viz., the care of household and family. She finds salvation, surely through faith in Christ when it finds expression in a family's upbringing through the example of a pious and pure life. Not through domineering over her husband, but her ministry is to be found "in modesty".

Paul illustrates from the Genesis story. Would she domineer over her husband? Remember, woman was created second, not first! Would she domineer? Let her consider what happened when a woman did. It was not Adam who fell to Satan's wiles; Eve was deceived, and she led him astray!

READER 2

Note that the apostle says: "I permit no woman ..." He talks like this when he cannot appeal to a "word of Lord" (i.e., to a saying of Jesus; see, e.g., 1 Corinthians 7: 12, 25). He does not quote Old Testament scripture only illustrates from it.

Perhaps few today would want to silence woman completely in church, for such an interpretation would set this passage in contradiction to what the apostle states elsewhere.

READER 3

However, some consider that a woman must not teach in church in such a way as to exercise authority over a man. Her function is to learn in silence and submission. The reference to Adam's priority over Eve in verse 13 (see Genesis 2: 18-25) is a reminder that the direct based not on cultural grounds but upon abiding theological principles.

READER 4

Others suggest that this is to misinterpret what stated about her domineering, and to read too much into the Scriptural illustration used. One should not press that illustration beyond what it immediately implies. The apostle is dealing with specific problems in young missionary He is not enunciating a universal principle. His advice is relevant when similar conditions occur today.

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