

“A woman shall not wear anything that pertains to a man, nor shall a man put on a woman’s garment, for all who do so are an abomination to the Lord your God” (Deut 22:5)

✠ Lecture IV: The Question of Women’s Ordination ✠

✠ In The Beginning:

In the creation account it is written, “God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him; **male and female He created them**” (**Gen 1:27**) both Adam and Eve were equally created in the image of God. Neither received more of the image of God than the other. So Holy Scriptures begins with the equality of the sexes. As persons, as human beings, as spiritual beings, standing before God, men and women are absolutely equal. Despite this equality, there is in the second chapter of the Holy Book of Genesis a more detailed account of the creation of the two humans, which shows some differences in their God-given responsibilities. God did not create the man and woman spontaneously at the same time, but rather He created Adam first and Eve later for a specific purpose. God established and designed patriarchy as His ideal form of government by creating Adam first (**Gen 2:20**). Had He intended democracy, He could just as easily have formed Eve and Adam at the same time and have said, “it is not good that man or woman should be alone, I will make them to be helpers comparable to each other.” Had He intended a matriarchy, He would have created Eve first then Adam as a suitable helper to her, but this did not happen and God created a patriarchy in which the male has authority. God also prepared the man for leadership before giving him the woman by having Adam name the living creatures (**Gen 2:19-20**). Naming is a form of leadership, for example, when the Israelites conquered Trans-Jordan, they asserted their authority by renaming the rebuilt cities (**Num 32:38**), Pharaoh Necho asserted his rule over Eliakim by renaming him Jehoiakim (**2 Kgs 23:34**), and the chief of the eunuchs renamed Daniel and his three friends (**Dan 1:7**). Notice that after the Lord gave Adam his bride, Adam gave her the generic name “woman” (**Gen 2:23**). Even the source of the woman’s creation symbolizes this leadership-follower creational principle. Woman was created from a rib taken from man’s side, which suggests a dependent relationship. Man’s creation involved the endowment of leadership; the woman’s creation involved the endowment of support to that leadership. Accordingly, the original creation, **prior to the fall**, provides the basis for the patriarchal system of government, which God deemed “**very good.**”

✠ The Fall of Humanity:

When craftily tempted and deceived in the Garden of Eden, Eve, rather than seeking Adam’s counsel and leadership, took the lead herself, eating of the forbidden fruit and then leading her husband into sin (**Gen 3:6**). The whole creation, through Eve’s lead, became corrupt, though the structure and inherent principles of the creation remained intact. Yet, the man (Adam), as the natural head, was held ultimately responsible. It was only when he ate of the forbidden fruit that “the eyes of both of them were opened” (**Gen 3: 7**). Both the man and the woman received Divine judgment for their rebellion. In addition to death, they were destined to live out their lives in suffering and pain. Part of the Divine pronouncement of judgment for Eve (and thus for all women) was a tension in the authority-submission relationship with man, “Your **desire** shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you” (**Gen 3:16**). The same word “desire” is used by God to mean “excessive control over” → “sin lies at the door and its **desire** is for you, but you should rule over it” (**Gen 4:7**). Thus, the words of God to Eve refer to a new desire on the part of woman to exercise control over man, but he will in fact rule or exert authority over her. The result down through history has been an ongoing struggle between the sexes with women seeking control and men ruling instead, often harshly. Before the fall, there was true harmony in the man-woman relationship, but through sin a new element of tension and dissention entered in this relationship, they lost a relationship both with God, symbolized by hiding among the trees, and with one another, symbolized by putting a barrier of clothing between them. Through the cross, women’s submission is not erased but rather harmony is restored to her relationship with man.

✚ Was Patriarchy a Cultural Accommodation of the Old Testament?

To argue that in Old Testament times woman could not be admitted in the priesthood because their cultures would not have allowed it fails to recognize that most of Israel's neighbors had both men and women serving as priests in their religion, and to argue that the reason why Israelite women were prohibited from serving as priests was that God did not want them to engage in the kind of immorality that the pagan priestesses engaged in is lacking any biblical basis in addition to implying that women are more prone to sexual immorality than men, which is a sexist argument that is yet to be proven. Thus the culture of Old Testament times would have welcomed women priests in Israel. The reason women in Israel were not ordained as priests was not because of their culture, but rather because of the pre-fall headship principle that permitted only men to be spiritual leaders within the worshiping community. Deborah, however, who was married, is one clear exception to patriarchy (**Judges 4:4**), but it is the exception that proves the rule. In addition to being a prophetess, Deborah was "judging" (i.e. ruling) Israel. The narrator, however, makes his intention clear by carefully shaming the Israelite men at that time for their fear so that none dared to assume leadership. Note, for example, how Deborah shames Barak, the military commander of Israel's army, for his failure to assume leadership. After she had mediated God's command to him to join battle with Sisera, commander of the Canaanite army, Barak replies, "If you will go with me, then I will go; but if you will not go with me, I will not go!" (**Judges 4:8**) To which Deborah responds, "I will surely go with you; nevertheless there will be no glory for you in the journey you are taking, for the Lord will sell Sisera into the hand of a woman." (**Judges 4:9**) Apparently, the Lord raised up this exceptional woman, who was full of faith, to disgrace the men of Israel for their lack of faith, which is essential to leadership in the holy nation. Therefore, the story aims to reprove unfaithful men for not taking leadership, not to present an alternative norm to male authority. Holy Scripture interprets the rule of women as God's judgment against the sinful nation, God ridicules it saying, "As for My people, Children are their oppressors, and **women rule over them**. O My people! Those who lead you cause you to err, and destroy the way of your paths" (**Is 3:12**)

✚ Was Patriarchy a Cultural Accommodation of the New Testament?

Some argue that Lord Jesus Christ could not ordain women as apostles because the culture of His time would not have permitted Him to do so without prematurely jeopardizing His ministry. Are they, in effect, charging our Lord with insensitivity or accommodation to the injustice women suffered in His days? How could this be, when our Lord clearly said, "Which of you convicts Me of sin?" (**Jn 8:46**) "Sin" surely includes the sin of gender injustice. To suggest, as proponents of women's ordination do, that Lord Jesus Christ's choice of male apostles was a mere concession to the "male-dominated" social structure of His time is completely flawed. The Holy Gospels reveal that Lord Jesus Christ was not afraid to break social customs when they conflicted with the Truth and Holy Scriptures. Against custom, he ministered to Gentiles, spoke to a Samaritan women, worked good on the Sabbath, and ate with tax collectors and sinners. He condemned the social injustices of His time when He spoke against divorce and remarriage, when He drove from the temple those who were profaning it and exploiting others, and when He criticized religious leaders to their faces for their hypocrisy. While the Jewish Talmud said it was better to burn the Torah than teach it to a woman, Lord Jesus Christ taught women freely not only by including them in His audiences but by using illustrations and images in His blessed teaching, which would be familiar to them (**Mt 13:33; Lk 15:8-10**). Though men in our Lord's day normally would not allow women to count change into their hands for fear of physical contact, Lord Jesus Christ touched women to heal them and allowed women to touch Him (**Lk 7:38**). He even allowed a small group of women to travel with Him and His disciples (**Lk 8:1-3**). Lord Jesus Christ's own life as well as the thrust of His teaching reveal that He would not bow to any cultural pressure when moral issues were at stake. He denounced the scribes and Pharisees and all those who accommodated Scriptural principle to their cultural norms calling them "hypocrites" (**Mt 15:7**). The "cultural argument" is a futile attempt to explain the lack of Scriptural precedent for ordaining women to headship roles in both the Old and New Testament worshiping communities.

In our Lord's treatment of women, we see how He raised their station in life and how He showed them compassion and respect in a way that they had never known before, but Lord Jesus Christ still did not exalt women to a place of leadership over men. None of the twelve He selected were women. Lord Jesus Christ could easily have chosen and ordained six men and their wives as apostles, since the wives of the Apostles frequently accompanied them (**1 Cor 9:5**). But He did not. Lord Jesus Christ could have chosen and ordained at least one of the women who were actively involved in His ministry, traveling to places with Him and supporting Him and His disciples with their own money (**Lk 8:1-3**). But He did not. He could have ordained His own blessed mother since she already had the divine certification as being "blessed among women" (**Lk 1: 28**). But He did not. He could have chosen and ordained Mary Magdalene, just as He commissioned her to bear witness to His Resurrection (**Jn 20: 1-18**). But He did not. Lord Jesus Christ could have ordained the Samaritan woman as an apostle, since she defied several "cultural" stigmas (a woman five times divorced, living unlawfully with a man, and a Samaritan) to become a powerful and successful evangelist. But He did not. Lord Jesus Christ implicitly confirmed the Old Testament patriarchy by not appointing a woman as an apostle though He made a radical break with His culture in so many ways that surely He would have done it in this manner also if it had been beneficial. It is nonsense to argue that the counter-cultural Lord Jesus Christ appointed only male apostles because He was culturally conditioned.

Furthermore, to suggest that St. Paul's statements prohibiting women from having authority over men were concessions he had to make to accommodate the anti-women cultural practices of his times is to ignore St. Paul's own clear explanation of his reasons and to charge him with theological inconsistency and hypocrisy. St. Paul said: "I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man, but to be in silence." (**1 Tim 2:12**) → **Why??** ← "For Adam was formed first, then Eve, and Adam was not deceived but the woman being deceived, fell into transgression." (**1 Tim 2:13-14**)

The Apostle Paul, in forbidding women to rule and teach, provides the rationale for such prohibition. He did not give cultural or sociological factors in Ephesus (St. Timothy was the Bishop of Ephesus) or in the New Testament times as the reason he prohibited women from exercising the role of authoritative teaching. Whatever the cultural or sociological situation may have been in Ephesus – Gnosticism, witchcraft, worship of mother-goddess Diana, mysticism, feminism, etc. – St. Paul employed a **theological** reason to address the specific problem that occasioned his statement. His stated reason was that Adam was created first and that he was not deceived but the woman was. St. Paul points back to the pre-fall creation ordinance of headship, reiterated after the fall. By appealing to the Divine arrangement from creation as the reason why the woman is not to have authority over the man, the apostle dispelled any suggestion that his instruction was culturally conditioned or time-bound. Those who attempt to explain St. Paul's statement on the basis of cultural accommodation are in effect saying that he misconstrued or misapplied the Old Testament in order to justify his lack of moral courage to stand against unjust cultural norms. How can St. Paul who said, "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither **male nor female**; for you are all one in Christ Jesus" (**Gal 3:28**), be so characterized by proponents of women's ordination? Only a few verses before the one in question St. Paul affirms, "I am speaking the truth in Christ and not lying" (**1 Tim 2:7**) Additionally, St. Paul said, "Let your women keep silent in the Churches, for they are not permitted to speak; but they are to be submissive, **as the law also says**" (**1 Cor 14:34**)

→ Thus St. Paul's reason for prohibiting headship authority to women was not cultural but rather he understood clearly the permanent validity of the creation principle of man headship. St. Paul employed the same reasoning when he addressed the issue of head covering, he said, "For a man indeed ought not to cover his head, since he is the image and glory of God; but woman is the glory of man. For man is not from woman, but woman from man. Nor was man created for the woman, but woman for the man. **For this reason** the woman ought to have a symbol of authority on her head, because of the angels. Nevertheless, neither is man independent of woman, nor woman independent of man, in the Lord." (**1 Cor 11:7-11**)

This prohibition is neither undermined nor contradicted when St. Paul suggests that women do prophecy (**1 Cor 11:5**). In response, Holy Scripture distinguishes between the office of pastors and the office of a prophet(ess), “He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers” (**Eph 4:11**). The gift of teaching and the gift of prophecy are essentially different (**Rom 12:6-7**). Prophesying was the direct communication of Divine revelation (**1 Cor 14:30-31**). Therefore, the actual content of communication was predetermined. The prophet or prophetess never spoke independently, but was directly “moved by the Holy Spirit” (**2 Pet 1:21**). Personal freedom in actual communication of the truth was precluded. The analytical and reflective powers of the mind became virtually obsolete. So, for instance, the injunction for the early Church was “Let two or three prophets speak, and let the other judge. But if anything is revealed to another who sits by, let the first keep silent” (**1 Cor 14:29-30**). The elder or priest, on the other hand, has a degree of personal freedom in actual communication, though the essential content must remain unalterable. He must harness and direct his analytical and reflective powers of mind. Furthermore, in accordance with the progressive revelation of God, this gift of prophecy was initially an extraordinary and temporary spiritual gift associated with the inauguration of the dispensation of the Holy Spirit and the universal thrust of the Holy Gospel. Both men and women were to participate in the initiation of the new era in fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecy (**Joel 2:28-32; Acts 2:17-21**)

The appearance of extraordinary spiritual gifts was a unique phenomenon, which marked the commencement of the new spiritual age; such gifts are not now a part of normative Church practice and ministry. The charge that St. Paul is contradicting himself when he states, on the one hand, that women do prophecy (**1 Cor 11:5**) and, on the other hand, that women are to keep silent in Church (**1 Cor 14: 34-35**) is virtually unfounded. There is no clear evidence to suggest that women prophesied inside the Church itself. St. Paul directive is that prophets (not prophetesses) are to speak in the Church (**1 Cor 14:29-33**). Having issued this specific directive, St. Paul immediately commands that women are to keep silent in the Churches (**1 Cor 14: 34-35**). It seems highly unthinkable that a man of St. Paul’s stature would glaringly contradict himself within the space of three to five sentences of the text.

✦ **Biblical Obstacles to Women’s Ordination:**

Holy Scripture unquestionably teaches that women are not to be ordained elders (priests). At least three reasons support this contention. The first reason concerns the matter of the specific qualifications outlined for entering the office of a priest or bishop; the second reason concerns the replacement of Judas; and the third reason concerns the direct prohibition against women becoming pastors.

1. Eldership Qualifications :

The specific qualifications outlined for those aspiring to the pastorate or eldership strongly imply that such candidates are to be men (**1 Tim 3:1-7; Titus 1:5-9**). The bishop is required to be the “husband of one wife” (**1 Tim 3:2; Titus 1:6**). Furthermore, he must be a person who “rules his own household well” which is a prerequisite for taking care of the Church, “For if a man does not know how to rule his own house, how will he take care of the Church of God?” (**1 Tim 3:4-5**)

The management of the household, according to Holy Scripture, is primarily the man’s rather than the woman’s responsibility. The man is considered the head under Lord Jesus Christ “the head of woman is man” (**1 Cor 11:3**). This fact that the man is to manage the household is further substantiated when the statement of similar qualification for deacons is examined, “Let deacons be the husbands of one wife, ruling their children and their own houses well” (**1 Tim 3:12**)

This statement leaves no doubt as to who is to manage the household. Consistency, therefore, demands that the similar qualification for those aspiring to be pastors must also refer to men and not women.

2. The Replacement of Judas:

The Holy Book of Acts records that the 120 male and female disciples who were gathered in the upper room sought guidance to find a replacement for Judas. Significantly, they sought Scriptural guidance on whether to fill the vacancy. They appealed to the Holy Book of Psalms where it is written, “Let another take his office (Gr. *Episkopen*; position of overseer)” (**Acts 1:20; Ps 109:8**)

Now notice the qualification of the candidates, “Therefore, of these **men** who have accompanied us all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, beginning from the baptism of John to that day when He was taken up from us, one of these must become a witness with us of His resurrection” (**Acts 1:21-22**). Why did the 120 men and women in the upper room appoint two men and no women as candidates? Were there no qualified women? Was there no woman with a heart (**Acts 1: 24**) acceptable enough to God to take over this apostolic ministry? Certainly not. Obviously there were capable women among the 120 disciples, since all of them – male and female – were filled with the Holy Spirit on Pentecost. The absence of a woman candidate (including Virgin Mary) is no coincidence, the reason why women were excluded as candidates for the apostleship, even though some of them undoubtedly met the requirements set forth in verse 21-22, is clearly the gender. The disciples in the upper room were “with one accord” (**Acts 1:14**) in their choice of a male replacement.

3. Women Prohibited:

The third reason why women are not to be priests or bishops is because Holy Scripture specifically prohibits such action. St. Paul, in communicating to St. Timothy the policies, practices, and principles that are to govern how one ought to conduct himself “in the house of God, which is the Church of the living God” (**1Tim 3:15**) said:

- “I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man, but to be in silence.” (**1 Tim 2:12**)
- “Let your women keep silent in the churches, for they are not permitted to speak; but they are to be submissive, as the law also says... for it is shameful for women to speak in church.” (**1 Cor 14:34-35**)

✠ Deaconesses in The Church:

In the early Church, there were deaconesses helping the Apostles and later the bishops and priests with some service matters. Deaconesses were selected from among elderly women and most probably widows who were married once. St. Paul said, “Do not let a widow under sixty years old be taken into the number, and not unless she has been the wife of one man, well reported for good works; if she has brought up children, if she has washed the saint’s feet, if she has relieved the afflicted, if she has diligently followed every good work” (**1 Tim 5:9**). An example of a successful deaconess is Phoebe about whom St. Paul wrote to the Romans saying, “I commend to you Phoebe our sister, who is a servant of the church in Cenchrea, that you may receive her in the Lord in a manner worthy of the saints, and assist her in whatever business she has need of you; for indeed she has been a helper of many and of myself also” (**Rom 16:1-2**). Since the 13th century, the service of the consecrated deaconesses has been neglected in our Coptic Church, but due to the urgent need for the service of women in the church, H.H. Pope Shenouda III revived this rite by consecrating a large number of deaconesses for the service of Cairo Churches on the Pentecost Feast of 1981. This consecration **does not** include laying of hands or ordination.
