

# **The Women's Role & Current Practice**

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*Note: In **December 1990** the first edition of this paper was written and sent to a group of 50 brothers and sisters around the world for their consideration. This group included a number of disciples of recognized biblical scholarship, as well as the world sector leader couples and several others whose responses were also highly valued. I have received tremendous encouragement to pursue the topic of the Women's Role, especially from Pat Gempel and Doug Arthur. My position three years later hasn't fundamentally changed; the paper has only been re-written for a broader distribution.*

*This isn't a "position paper" for the brotherhood. We aren't in the business of legislating new doctrines! No authoritative pronouncement is being made on the Women's Issue -- serious discussion has been ongoing for three years, and my paper only attempts to speak clearly on the subject for the benefit of us all.*

## **INTRODUCTION**

### **SPEAK WHERE THE BIBLE SPEAKS?**

One of the slogans of the *early* Restoration Movement was "Speak where the Bible speaks, be silent where the Bible is silent." This meant we shouldn't make rules where God hasn't legislated. If the Bible doesn't condemn it, it's permissible, in principle. ("In principle" because the Bible does warn of actions causing others to "stumble" -- violate conscience and fall away -- and strongly advises us to take local culture into account.)

By the end of the 19th century our slogan had taken on quite a different meaning. No longer did it mean *freedom* in areas not covered by the Bible, but rather *restriction*.

Unless "authority" could be found in the Bible, book, chapter and verse, it was prohibited.

"Authority" was construed as direct command, scriptural example or necessary inference. This was a far cry from our original Restoration plea:

In essentials, unity;  
in non-essentials, liberty;  
in all things, charity." - Rupertus Meldenius

The Christian Church held to the original, more flexible interpretation of the slogan. Unfortunately, they became so "flexible" that they got into serious doctrinal trouble. The mainline Churches of Christ, on the other hand, favored the stricter view, abandoning the Restoration plea for unity. This explains why Churches of Christ have so long been an issues-oriented group.

The maxim of Meldenius also warns of the dangers of liberalism. We have to remember to actually "speak" where the Bible speaks. And we have to clearly define "essentials".

The 1906 split wasn't really over the issue of instrumental music, missionary societies, church government or any other issue. It was over this basic presupposition in Bible interpretation. "Speak where the Bible speaks" had lost its original *positive* meaning and taken on a *negative*, ugly one.

While this perspective applies to many subjects, in this article it is be turned to the women's role. Up to this point in the movement we haven't struck the right balance: we've "spoken" where the Bible said nothing, and been "silent" where we should have given guidelines.

We in our generation must choose which way we will go! The trick is to avoid arrogance on the one side ("We have totally restored the New Testament Church!") and liberalism on the other ("Anything goes, let's just be friends").

Here then are some biblical principles, as well as some guidelines which allow us to flexibly implement those principles.

I believe we'll come to appreciate that there is considerably more liberty than we've been taught.

## **I. AUTHORITY**

Since most of the questions about the women's role center round the concept of right and wrong kinds of authority or leadership, we need to take stock of our presuppositions in this area.

### A. TWO PROBLEMATIC PASSAGES

Traditionally Churches of Christ have held to a fairly narrow interpretation of 1 Tim 2.11-12 and 1 Cor 14.33b-35. The passage in 1 Timothy covers women teaching men in general:

A woman should learn in quietness and full submission. I do not permit a woman to teach or have authority over a man; she must be silent.

It was exceedingly common in Greco-Roman and Egyptian religion for women to take the lead and dominate the men. There is evidence that the false teachers in Ephesus, to whom 1 Tim was addressed, were under the influence of some matriarchal system which considered Eve the heroine who brought true knowledge to the human race, and from whom Adam was created! They also employed priestesses more often than priests. The Christian religion, as the Jewish one before it, stood in stark contrast to these pagan systems.

The word twice translated "silence" in 1 Timothy 2, Greek *ἡσυχία*, means primarily "quietness, rest", as opposed to total audio silence. It addresses the spirit of the woman (see 1 Pet 3.1-6) more than the sounds of the woman!

The Corinthian passage is more specific, and covers discussion of prophecies and their interpretation:

As in all the congregation of the saints, women should remain silent in the churches. They are not allowed to speak, but must be in submission, as the Law says. If they want to inquire about something, they should ask their own husbands at home; for it is disgraceful for a woman to speak in the church.

It's true that 1 Corinthians 14 is referring to church meetings, and so apparently is 1 Timothy 2.8-10. Once again, and for the record, the N.T. teaches *against* women having authority over men. Yet the way Paul discusses the issue leads me to reject the artificial distinction between "worship services" and "other meetings."

Notice that Paul gives his directive as a universal, absolute principle. Both 1 Tim 2 and 1 Cor 14 refer to the O.T. (to the Fall and to the Law, respectively). Furthermore, if 1 Cor 11 is talking only about small groups, where prayer by women is allowed, why is the *veil* an issue? The veil is an issue in a *public* context. To postulate that Paul moves from small groups in the beginning of 1 Cor 11 to large groups later in the chapter is unwarranted.

What this underscores is that the silence of 1 Cor 14 isn't total silence, but silence in the (quite possibly) heated discussion of the interpretation of prophetic messages. This passage as well as 1 Thess 5.19-22 show that prophetic oracles were *weighed*, not just accepted unthinkingly. When a woman's opinion conflicted with her husband's, or with other leaders', then rather than making an ugly scene it was advisable to take the matter up once she was at home. Then, presumably, the discussion or disagreement could proceed without public disgrace.

Women are not to have authority over men, nor to come into conflict with their authority. The veil issue can quite easily be argued on cultural grounds, but not this one. It doesn't read that way. It's a *universal* principle. No, 1 Cor 14 and 1 Tim 2 aren't that hard to understand. But applying them takes patient study.

So what does it mean for a woman to have authority over a man? *What is* authority? Distributing bread and wine? Leading a song? Baptizing? I suggest that our idea of "authority" comes from the traditional Church of Christ, not from the Bible itself. We've been conditioned by Church of Christ thinking -- more than by the Bible.

### **B. LEADERSHIP = AUTHORITY?**

Now comes the question of whether a woman "being the leader" means she has authority over men in a wrong way. Is *all* "leadership" authoritative, and thus prohibited for all women whenever men are in the group? Or is it possible to be the "leader" without exercising authority over men in a manner contrary to scripture?

Consider the following cases and ask the question: "Does she wrongly have authority over men?"

#### WRONG AUTHORITY OVER MEN?

- \* Leading a church: *Absolutely yes!*
- \* Leading Sunday School toddlers' class: *Absolutely not!* If that's the case, only fathers would be allowed to bring up their children!
- \* Leading a song: *Not really.* If there were no male to lead the song at worst we'd have the provisional sort of leadership shown in the case of Deborah and Balak. At best there is no true exercise of "leadership."
- \* "Leading" a guest or church member to an empty seat (ushering): *Not at all.* (Ask a visitor if he or she feels "under the authority of" the usher. I think the answer would be "sort of" -- in a limited kind of way.)
- \* Leading a prayer: *No "authority" as such.*
- \* Helping to study the Bible with a male non-Christian: *No.* (There's no hint of a rebuke for Priscilla in Acts 18.24ff.)
- \* Giving a testimony: *No,* unless it turns into preaching or teaching. (As a matter of fact, *any* talking, or singing -- see Col 3.16 -- is a *kind* of teaching. So let's not reduce Paul's point to an absurdity. There most certainly is a way to speak without "teaching" or "preaching".)

## **II. SILENCE**

How are we to understand the New Testament teaching that women are to remain "silent" in church? The verse in question is 1 Corinthians 14.34.

### **A. INTERPRETATION OF PROPHETIC MESSAGES**

Though we've already touched on this (page 3), it may be helpful to take it up again, since we are normally used to reading this passage as an excerpt, quite out of context. We have to examine the context of a passage before drawing firm conclusions. The context of 1 Cor 14.34 is the interpretation of prophetic messages and possible disagreements arising in the discussion. Paul is talking about women

disgracing their husbands publicly (through contentious behavior) instead of waiting to get home before bringing up their reservations.

"Women should remain silent in the churches" *cannot* mean absolute silence, since in 1 Cor 11 Paul allows women to pray and prophesy in the assembly. Thus the view occasionally met that women should be "seen, not heard" is completely groundless!

## **B. PROPHECY**

It seems to me that one wrong assumption we've made is that prophesying = preaching. I believe this is primarily a reaction against the charismatic movement. Some prophecy is preaching, just as some preaching is prophetic, but it's impossible to equate the two.

In Acts 2 Joel's prophecy is fulfilled:

...I will pour out my Spirit on all people.  
Your sons and daughters will prophesy...  
Even on my servants, *both men and women*,  
I will pour out my Spirit in those days,  
and they will prophesy.

Women prophesied in the early church. Consider the evangelist Philip: "*He had four unmarried daughters who prophesied.*" (Acts 21.9)

1 Corinthians 11 also mentions women prophesying. Prophesying in general, or New Testament prophecy (as opposed to O.T. prophecy) by women was clearly not considered to be the exercise of authority over men.

## **C. PRAYER**

In Acts 1.14 the women are in the prayer meeting:

They [the apostles] all joined together constantly in prayer, along with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and his brothers.

To maintain, as some do, that the women merely listened while the men prayed is really stretching it! (Then we'd have to assume that Jesus' brothers, mentioned in this passage *after* the women, were also silent!)

Then there's 1 Cor 11.5 again, where women pray in church:

And every women who prays or prophesies with her head uncovered dishonors her head...

So what scripture is there *against* women praying in church? To argue that in the first century church some women prayed publicly, but we have the right to forbid it today (without a clear scripture) is dangerous.

## **SUMMARY**

In the early church female prophecy was not the exercise of authority over men. While public prayer was allowed, preaching and teaching was not. The N.T. never mentions female evangelists -- evangelettes? Moreover, the "silence" of 1 Corinthians 14 is not total or absolute.

### III. COMMUNION

Let's give a moment or two to the issue of Communion, or the Lord's Supper.

#### A. DISTRIBUTION

Traditionally (traditionally in our movement) only the men have been allowed to pass out the golden plates. Here is the accepted sequence:

- \* The women prepare the bread and fill up each individual cup.
- \* The men, in some degree of pomp and ceremony, distribute the tokens.
- \* Afterwards the women clean up.

Why not let the men do more of the "dirty work" and let a few women share in the distribution? It is tortuous, in my view, to hold that a woman handing out communion plates is "usurping" authority from the men and wielding it against them.

But weren't *only men* selected to distribute the bread in the early church? Isn't this the teaching of Acts 6.1-3?

...The Grecian Jews among them complained... because their widows were being overlooked in the daily distribution of food. So the Twelve gathered all the disciples together and said, "It would not be right for us to neglect the word of God in order to wait on tables. Brothers, choose seven men from among you who are known to be full of the Spirit and wisdom. We will turn this responsibility over to them..."

Acts 6 *can't* be used to show it's wrong for women to distribute the sacred emblems! The size of the church by that time, plus the caliber of the people selected, show that this was something much bigger scale than the Lord's Supper. (Which of us allows only evangelists to serve communion?) This is more a "meals on wheels" distribution. In fact, if we're going to exclude women from distributing the bread and wine, we might as well be consistent and insist that the men be miraculously endowed! (Acts 6.6, 6.8, 8.6)

#### B. TESTIMONIES

A related issue is this: Should women be encouraged to give testimonies during the communion? (It may be of interest that even our standard "communion talk" lacks direct scriptural example, whether by men or by women, so this is really a matter of applying the scriptural principles to a practical situation.)

I see no harm in women giving a testimony, *if and only if* it's just that: a testimony, without preaching. So where's the dividing line?

All I can do in this paper is give a few suggestions:

- \* While variation of both volume and tone are important in any kind of communication, I would consider it inappropriate for a woman to shout in a mixed audience, slam her fist on the pulpit, or otherwise attempt to command and control attention through a show of power.
- \* Watch the use of the imperative: "You've got to, We really need to, Repent!, Come forward, Do It!"... These are commands and will be perceived as such by men and

women alike. In the same way, avoid the use of expressions like "I want to challenge you to..."

- \* Avoid imitating the preaching style of the evangelist(s) the church are familiar with.
- \* Don't structure the talk with "points" that need to be obeyed, even if "it's what the Bible says."
- \* Neither insist that the audience take notes.

These suggestions are meant to be taken as no more than just that. I recognize their subjective and somewhat arbitrary nature, and obviously any guidelines will have to be shaped by local custom and common sense. The hope would be that our members wouldn't be shocked by what they see when travelling from one congregation to another.

#### **IV. BAPTIZING**

What about baptism? Are we right in having only brothers "do the honors"? This needs to be discussed.

##### **A. ARGUMENTUM EX SILENTIO**

At the outset we must acknowledge there are no examples in the New Testament of women baptizing anyone. Some conclude this means it's unlawful. Yet the *argument from silence* is logically weak and often erroneous. Using this sort of argument we could preach against many of our practices -- for example, owning a building or office, publishing *Upside Down*, preaching on radio or TV, and even having a "baptistry"!

To illustrate, the Bible doesn't say only an elder can lead communion. (This sadly became the view in the 2nd century church.) In fact, the Bible gives no clue as to who should be allowed to lead communion. (Jesus apparently qualified.) Neither does the Bible say only evangelists can baptize. This *could* be our position, but what scripture would we use to support it? We have been right to allow any man, evangelist or not, the privilege of baptizing. Following the same reasoning, the Bible doesn't say that only a man can baptize, so why shouldn't women be allowed the same right as men?

We're forced back to the central question in the whole discussion: does the silence of the scriptures mean *permission* ("Christian Church view") or *prohibition* ("Church of Christ view")? I believe that, while not abandoning our wise conservatism, it is time to reject the narrowness of the "Church of Christ" approach. We certainly do have *permission*, unless higher principles override it.

##### **B. BAPTISMAL "AUTHORITY"?**

Having stressed this, let's move on to consider the connection of women baptizing to authority. Three questions must be answered:

- \* Is baptizing an exercise of authority?
- \* Can women have authority over women?
- \* Can women baptize?

Here is our current position, or, more accurately, the consensus we have reinforced through our teaching or lack of teaching: baptism is somehow an exercise of authority; and women do have authority over women.

Women's authority over women is supported from Titus 2:

Likewise, teach the older women...  
Then they can train the younger women... (Titus 2.4-5)

In other words, based on our present thinking:

- \*Yes, baptism *is* an exercise of authority (somehow).
- \* Women *do* have authority over women, and so
- \* Women *can* baptize women (not men).

Thus it shouldn't be at all surprising that in some quarters women have (innocently enough) baptized women. They're simply following the logic we've taught them. But what about our reasoning? Are our assumptions correct?

To begin with, is baptism really an exercise of authority? The authority in 1 Tim 2 is *teaching* authority, specifically in the context of disagreement. In the same way, the context of 1 Cor 14 is that of disagreement: how do we proceed when Christians disagree over the meaning of a prophecy?

The reason these passages don't relate to baptizing is that at a baptism there's no disagreement: all Christians agree on its meaning, no one is challenging anyone else, and there's zero possibility that men or women will be led astray through the action of baptism.

Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you..." (Matt 28.18-20)

Baptism was instituted and is upheld by the authority of Jesus, as we baptize "in the name of Jesus" or "in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit." But the same is true of evangelism: "All authority... has been given to me. Therefore go..." The commission is for all Christians, without sexual distinction.

The natural reading of Matt 28 is that, just as women make disciples and teach them to obey, they also baptize these disciples. Jesus says he got the authority from God and is commissioning us to baptize disciples in the authority ["name"] of the trinity [for want of a better term]. In other words, the "authority" in baptism is no different to the "authority" which is given all Christians by virtue of the Great Commission. Thus baptism is *not* an exercise of authority as such.

As for the question of whether women may have true "authority" over women, in practice we all respond with a hearty "yes". And if we think the New Testament way, in terms of *relationship*, we will speak more in terms of friendship and influence than in terms of position and obedience. (The brief letter of Philemon provides a superb



view of Paul's own reluctance to resort to authority when love and reason can prevail.)

When all is said and done, women *do* lead and influence other women, so if you accept that description of "authority" you have already conceded the point that women may baptize women.

Maybe you aren't convinced baptism isn't an exercise of authority. (Hopefully not because you get a feeling of power from baptizing someone!) But remember, if it *is* an exercise of authority, that still doesn't militate against a woman baptizing a woman, that is *unless* you can prove that women have no authority over women, which you cannot do. In other words, the *least* we should be able to agree on is that women have the right, in principle, to baptize women.

This may *feel* strange, but we must attempt to settle the question not on the basis of feelings, but on the basis of what the scriptures say. I propose the reason it feels strange is our conditioning in traditional Church of Christ teaching.

### **C. CAN A WOMAN BAPTIZE A MAN?**

What would it mean if a woman baptized a man? If it's wrong, the "wrong" would lie on the side of the baptizer, not the baptized.

Some of us were baptized by someone who wasn't technically a true Christian at the time he baptized us (i.e., he was "re-baptized"), but that doesn't invalidate the baptism. In the same way, a woman could preach a sermon to a mixed audience: it would be wrong of her to do it, but that wouldn't "invalidate" the sermon. (Truth could still be conveyed, conviction could incite listeners to action.) In the case of a questionable baptism, the sin, if any, would lie with baptizer, not with "baptizee".

Let me remind you of my position: that baptism *per se* is not an exercise of authority. Thus in theory I have nothing against women baptizing men. However, I see two practical and related problems that could arise if women baptized men:

- \* Men (especially those baptized by a woman) could quite naturally start looking to women for the lead instead of to male leadership. This would be not only unhealthy, but unscriptural.

- \* Some women, following the lead of these men, could in turn be influenced to disrespect male leadership in the church.

The potential problem is vividly brought to life by 1 Cor 1.13-15:

Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Were you baptized into the name of Paul? I am thankful I did not baptize any of you except Crispus and Gaius, so that no one can say that you were baptized into my name.

The passage highlights the problem of partisanship that results from a baptism. Some people in Corinth were looking to their baptizer for their identity and even their

esteem. If you have difficulty relating to this, consider what happens when a leader is "re-baptized": the repercussions are swift and predictable.

Let me reiterate that it's a *potential* problem, not necessarily a sinful situation as such. As in studying the Bible with someone or discipling him, a bond is formed. Mixed relationships could easily lead to unhelpful romantic entanglement or at the least a questionable example (Luke 17.1-3). There is considerable wisdom in keeping men's and women's ministry separate. Hence my hesitation over baptism of men by women.

For these reasons, my recommendation is to allow women to baptize women, while discouraging them from baptizing men.

## V. WOMEN'S MINISTRY LEADERS

For legal reasons, our old term "Women's Counselor" has been replaced by the new term "Women's Ministry Leader" movement-wide. Several questions have been asked concerning Women's Ministry Leaders:

- \* Is the position justifiable in the absence of biblical warrant?
- \* Is this position a position of authority?
- \* Can a woman appoint another woman to this position, or must the appointment be done by a male leader?
- \* If a woman does the appointment, can she do it in a mixed audience?

### A. THE TERM

The only leadership and teaching positions explicitly and unequivocally mentioned in the New Testament are *elder, evangelist, deacon and teacher* (excluding of course the miraculously endowed positions of *apostle and prophet*.) There is no "official" women's position as such. The term "women's ministry leader" is our own invention. This is not to deny the need for strong women's leadership or the need for a separate women's ministry, only to emphasize the origin of the term our churches employ.

My position is that the term "women's ministry leader" is justifiable, not because it occurs in the Bible, but on practical grounds. It's a helpful term, it isn't confusing, and its absence from the Bible is certainly no cogent argument against its use today. (Remember the weakness of the argument from silence.)

### B. A CHURCH OFFICE?

Is Women's Ministry Leader a position of authority? Yes, though not in the same sense as *evangelist* is a position of authority. Evangelists have authority in the *whole* church, men's as well as women's ministries. Women's Leaders have authority only over women, and thus are not church officers in the same way that evangelists are.

When we appoint (or recognize) Women's Ministry Leaders and Evangelists -- often a husband-wife pair -- the impression may be given that there's some sort of balance, or 50-50 division of the church: while evangelists lead the men, women's leaders lead the women. However, this is far from true! Evangelists lead men *and* women, so there's really no comparison.

There are many examples of leadership pairs whose authority or power is not at all equal: President and First Lady, Football referee and captain, God and Satan! The First Lady isn't the elected head of the women of America; the referee can kick the captain off the field; any power Satan has is only because God has allowed him to have it.

Our confusion isn't due to confusing terminology. I see no need to modify our terminology. "Women's Ministry Leader" has no corresponding term "Men's Ministry Leader." The term WML is specific to women, while Evangelist is specific to the entire church, or region. Nevertheless, we'll avoid confusion if we take care to explain that the positions are on entirely different levels.

### **C. APPOINTMENTS**

Should a woman make the appointment? As far as it's a women's event, no problem! In doing so she would be wise to credit the (male) leadership of the church with the recognition of the new women's leader's ability/potential, as well as with the weight of the decision. Otherwise people could get the idea that the local congregation is really two parallel congregations -- one male, the other female -- tangoing like the double helix of a DNA molecule.

Ultimately the power to appoint resides with elders or evangelists. Remember this: though we may say John and Mary Smith lead the church, what we *really* mean is that John leads the church, while Mary assists him with women's ministry. (That's quite different from a "50-50" split!) This is no demotion for our hard-working sisters, only a description of things within the parameters of the N.T. and our current practice.

## **VI. CULTURAL SENSITIVITY**

1 Corinthians 8-10 contains three principles essential to our discussion:

- \* Preserve the individual's conscience,
- \* Deal sensitively with culture,
- \* Expedite the gospel.

### **A. CONSCIENCE**

We obviously must not introduce changes that will cause anyone to fall away. "*Be careful... that the exercise of your freedom does not become a stumbling block to the weak (1 Cor 8.9).* They are weak Christians who could easily be influenced to sin against their consciences (v.12), harden their hearts, and eventually fall away.

Paul was a paragon of evangelistic sensitivity -- a cultural chameleon. He was always willing to compromise a cultural principle (never a scriptural one) if it promoted the gospel. Thus he acted more Jewish around Jews and more Greek around Greeks (1 Cor 9.20-22).

### **B. CULTURE**

First century churches had their own culture. Men's and women's roles were sharply defined. Dress was radically different. Slavery was still part of society. There was a common Greek culture, and just about everybody spoke Greek, too.

In the International Churches of Christ we too have a "culture." Our culture has been inherited -- inherited from various conservative religious groups, the Restoration Movement, American culture, and this cumulative culture has been shaped and redefined by a number of influential writers and speakers. For example, few members drink alcohol -- not that the Bible forbids it, but prohibitionists and many other well-meaning people have left a deep mark on our society. We have a certain style of singing and music. Until quite recently, Sunday School and Sunday evening services were unquestioned parts of our religious "culture".

So it is with the women's role. At first our "culture" did not allow women to do much of anything at all. In the '80s we began to overcome that, and the concept of "women's ministry" became more clearly defined. *Women* now taught the Bible to women, counseled the women, and took more of a leading role in advising and decision-making as wives of elders and evangelists. But many other points were left untouched by this reform -- most noticeably (especially to our visitors and young Christians) our public services.

We can move *with* our changing culture, lag *behind*, or run *ahead*. If we advised the sisters in our Middle Eastern churches to adopt western dress, sunbathe in public, dispense with the veil or take on responsibilities traditionally reserved for men, that would be running ahead. It would also be folly, since it would bring unnecessary criticism and slow down the work.

In the West we're hardly running ahead -- rather, we're *lagging behind*. We must ask ourselves how many of the cultural features inherited from the mainline Churches of Christ are worth holding on to. Certainly we must *move with* a changing world, always striving to honestly and accurately apply the unchanging principles of the Bible to life.

### **C. EXPEDITING THE GOSPEL**

As far as expediting the gospel goes, I believe the gospel will spread more quickly when we throw off unnecessary cultural baggage. Not that culture or tradition is bad, but:

- \* Any tradition going against God's word is sin.
- \* Any tradition slowing down the advance of the gospel must be identified and replaced.

We don't want to create laws. The Bible has all the laws we need! Yet we do need to make recommendations. And recommendations on the women's role to American churches are bound to be different to ones for Indian churches. Cultural sensitivity demands they be!

So... whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God. Do not cause anyone to stumble, whether Jews, Greeks or the church of God -- even as I try to please everybody in every way. For I am not seeking my own good but the good of others, so that they may be saved (1 Cor 10.31-33).

## VII. LIBERALISM?

What will happen if we implement the changes in thinking and practice advocated in this paper? I believe our churches will get a tremendous boost, especially our sisters. It will be a legitimate improvement, not just novelty or fun theology. Of course our critics will say we're becoming more liberal.

But will the critics' observation be accurate? Would we really be making a move towards liberalism? Not at all! Consider the following:

- \* Liberals water down the authority of the word of God -- we're seeking to uphold it.
- \* Liberals are lukewarm, and prefer not to challenge people. We're not skirting a sensitive issue; rather we're taking the bull by the horns.
- \* Liberals don't expect every member to be personally involved in spreading the word, that God will use them to evangelize the world in their generation! We do, passionately!

We're not liberal, *but* in the absence of clear guidelines we could step over the line, taking liberties with the word of God. We hear of women preaching, teaching to mixed audiences in evangelistic meetings, doing weddings, preaching communions. That's "liberal", taking liberties, and that goes against the word of God. Clear signals must be given! Someone needs to have the courage to study, discuss, and lay out a few specific, scripturally informed guidelines.

I'm not saying any of us has done anything insincerely or in deliberate disobedience. I think we're all striving to keep our conscience pure and follow God's word purely. But let's be careful! My conviction is that we need not only to undercut the critics, but also, much more importantly, follow the word of God.

# THE WOMEN'S ROLE

# AUGUST 1993