

is to *feel* good in order to deaden the pain of a meaningless existence.

The most essential right for a postmodernist, then, is the unrestricted pursuit of pleasure. The highest virtue is tolerance of other people's opinions and behaviours, so as not to cramp each other's style. Right and wrong is whatever people *feel* is right or wrong for them, rather than an external standard. This is very dangerous because it removes the common foundations society needs to function. Only raw power is left - those who shout the loudest win. So 'empowerment' has become a major theme of our times.

Like all false belief, postmodernism cannot be sustained either. But this has not stopped its ideas becoming very influential, infecting much of our culture and way of life. Television, for instance, presents a huge range of viewpoints and lifestyles with little or no factual or moral assessment, treating everything as acceptable regardless of truth or goodness. In fact people in the postmodern world can hold quite contradictory views and not feel at all uncomfortable.

Arguments that women should be ordained because it is what the majority of people want, or because it's wrong to say 'no' to anyone who feels the call to ministry, or because it is necessary for women's empowerment - these come from postmodernism rather than from God's Word.

Scepticism About the Scriptures

It is clear that both modernism and postmodernism reject divine authority. People ruled by these beliefs approach God's Word critically, rather than submitting to it in faith and obedience. They are inclined to dismiss the clear meaning of the text and search instead for something more in tune with their own beliefs. Or they explain away sections of the Bible as the product of their times and not relevant today.

Some proponents of women's ordination, for example, paint St Paul as a misogynist (a woman-hater) whose writings can't be trusted. Some argue that disagreement among theologians shows that the true meaning of the Bible cannot be found, and the important thing instead is that people interpret the Scriptures their own way.

But all this is simply giving way to the false beliefs of our culture. Just because people reject the truth does not mean the truth is not there. Instead we have the Lord's assurance that it is clearly available: 'All scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that everyone who belongs to God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work' (2 Tim 3:16-17).

Bold Faith

These are testing times. Exposing the darkness of our world, and allowing Christ to extract us from it, is a challenging and threatening venture. Yet this is what our Lord calls us to do, by the light of his goodness, righteousness and truth (Eph 5:8-11). The pain involved is our share in his cross, as he warns. But he also gives us strength to bear it by his own comprehensive victory: 'In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world' (John 16:33).

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Brochures in this 'Ordained by God' series:

1. *Introducing the Issue*
2. *Let's Be Clear About Pastors*
3. *By Christ's Command*
4. *Church History Teaches*
5. *The Spirit of the World*
6. *For the Sake of the Gospel*
7. *Honouring God's Good Creation*
8. *Keeping Mission Integrity*
9. *Women Speak*
10. *Speaking the Truth in Love*

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The Spirit of the World



The Spirit of the World

To those looking for a clear word of Christian teaching about the influence of today's Western culture on the push for the ordination of women.

To believe that our Lord permits only *men* to be pastors comes into conflict with the common assertion that all roles should be open to both men and women equally. The so-called 'liberation' of women has seen many restrictions lifted. This has happened in the church too, under the impetus of Jesus' elevation and encouragement of women.

And so the question arises, 'Why can't women be pastors also?' Saying 'no' to the ordination of women seems harsh and sexist. This position and, those who hold it, are vigorously attacked.

Lutherans agree that the ordination question needs to be decided from God's Word. But this doesn't mean all the arguments used in the debate are consistent with this principle. In fact, a close examination shows that many arguments for the ordination of women draw as much from the thinking of the *world* as they do from the Scriptures.

This pamphlet sets out aspects of modern thinking which are influencing the case for the ordination of women, and encourages us not to be taken in by them. St Paul says in 1 Cor 2:12: 'We have not received the spirit of the world but the Spirit who is from God, that we may understand what God has graciously given us.'

Western Culture's Beliefs

Massive changes in basic Western beliefs over the last century took popular hold in the 1960s, leading to behavioural changes such as rejection of authority,

declining church attendance, approval of sex outside marriage, and rampant consumerism.

Chief among these changed beliefs is the replacement of trust in God by trust in *ourselves* - either in human reason and ability ('modernism') or in human experience and feelings ('postmodernism'). Christians feel the pull of these attractive but false beliefs, both in arguments for the ordination of women and in other matters.

Modernism

One of the basic characteristics of modernism is a boundless optimism about human ability. 'Civilisation has come so far,' the argument goes, 'there's every reason to trust our ability to deal with the future. We can get it right, and given enough time we *will* get it right.'

Unfortunately this view takes no account of human sin, nor of the goodness of God in preserving and abundantly blessing his creation despite that sin. In fact the modernist world view has written God out of the equation altogether.

With this confidence in human ability comes the assumption that whatever is *new* is best. New is good and old is bad. But history shows that human 'progress' has been matched by even greater human sin.



Confidence in human progress is not the Lord's way. In fact he works in ways we often do not understand, using things which seem foolish to us - the cross, divine grace, the sacraments and, yes, the male-only ministry (1 Cor 1:18-25; 14:33-38). Arguments that women should be ordained because it is 'inevitable', or because women make better pastors, or because this is necessary to be credible in the modern world, or even because other churches do - these come from trust in human ability rather than from listening to God's Word.

'Rights' Movements

One powerful expression of modernism is the movement for individual 'rights'. This goes in a direction different to God-pleasing concern for others. It divides society and

families into 'victims' and 'oppressors', implying that some are wholly innocent and others are irredeemably evil.

The rights movement is inspired by liberation ideology and the belief that humanity evolves by struggle against those holding it back. Its method is to attack social institutions which it believes entrench and perpetuate oppressive power. Some, for example, undermine marriage and denigrate motherhood because they believe these oppress women. Public discussion is often saturated with these ideas, so that what was once thought normal becomes 'old fashioned', and what was once unacceptable becomes regular practice. The push for the 'right' of women to be ordained needs to be seen in the light of this influence.

Our Lord's way, by contrast, is quite different. His way is not the assertion of individual rights, but rather 'submission' - submission first by Christ to the will of the Father (Phil 2:5-11), and then submission by men and women who follow Christ, as in Eph 5:21ff which begins, 'Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ.' Christians do not live by asserting themselves and demanding their rights, but rather by repentance and self-giving service. Thus the gospel collides head-on with the world's deepest beliefs.

Postmodernism

Modernist optimism cannot be sustained, that should be clear. This has struck not only Christians loyal to the Word of God; it has also occurred to recent generations of Western young people. They have seen the failure of their parents' world and have rejected it. They've said 'no' to trust in human reason and ability, and 'yes' to trust in emotions and experiences instead.

While criticism of modernism is justified, sadly postmodernists also reject the only proper authority there is - the triune God and his Word. In fact many postmodernists reject authority altogether. For them, there is no ultimate purpose to life, no abiding truth. Their primary attitude is *pessimism*, and their main goal

We have not received the spirit of the world but the Spirit who is from God. 1 Corinthians 2:12