

Second, although we have been talking about equality, it is true to say that the Bible generally does not actually speak much about equality. Rather, it speaks about *unity*. Jesus prayed not that we might be equal, but that we might be *one*. And equality and unity are not the same thing. Nor does equality lead to unity. The difference between the two has been put like this:

The miracle of Christian unity is that God brings together people who are naturally unequal, and welds them together in harmony with a love, which because it comes from God, transcends all natural inequalities.

The Gospel and Law

Finally, it is often said that any rules or regulations, such as those prohibiting women to be pastors, is a return to the old way of the law. The gospel of Christ is not a matter of dos and donts - God accepts us no strings attached. We are not saved by rules and regulations, but by God's free gift.

That is true. The law is not a way of salvation. Because of our sin we cannot keep the law even one little bit. We can only be saved by grace, through faith in what Christ has done on our behalf. But to suggest that the 'regulations' concerning the male pastorate are 'legalistic', or a return to the old way of the law is misleading. No-one is saying that the Lord's directions for male only pastors are some kind of 'law' or 'condition' that we must keep in order to be saved.

Rather, they are what Luther calls 'evangelical commandments' - commands the Lord gave his disciples in order to *promote* the gospel. Jesus' command to 'go and make disciples of all nations' is another evangelical command. With it, the Lord explicitly tells us to teach 'all that I have commanded you' (Mt 28:19-20). The church makes disciples by Jesus' command, it baptises by his command, it celebrates Holy Communion by his command to 'do this in remembrance of me.' These commands do not diminish the gospel. Rather, they promote it.

St Paul knew the gospel. He preached the gospel. He staked his life on the gospel because the gospel was his life. He did not suddenly have a change of mind and revert to a legalistic mindset when it came to women. But the gospel he preached did not allow him to water

down or disregard 'the command of the Lord', or any other aspect of revealed doctrine for that matter. He rightly saw that there is no contradiction between the gospel of free forgiveness and evangelical commandments for the well being of the church of God.

The gospel is absolutely central to our faith. It is the power of God to save all people, male and female. It cuts through all the distinctions and inequalities of our own making, while transforming all God-ordained patterns of relationship. Embraced and empowered by this gospel, men and women equally serve Christ in their various callings.

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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*
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For the Sake of the Gospel



For the Sake of the Gospel

To those seeking assurance that allowing only men to serve as pastors is not against the gospel but rather for the sake of it.

If there's one thing that people on both sides of the women's ordination debate agree on, it's that the gospel is absolutely central to our faith. Everything we believe, do, think and say springs from the joyful announcement, 'Christ died and rose for you! Your sins are forgiven - go in peace!'

The Gospel!

What is the gospel? The gospel is pure gift - it is God's unexpected and undeserved declaration that he considers us completely innocent, holy and right with him. The gospel is also powerful - it is the power that motivates and drives our new life in Christ. And the gospel makes no demands - it doesn't tell us what we should or shouldn't do, nor is the gospel the basis for some new law. The only 'demand' the gospel makes is this: 'God has forgiven you in Christ - believe it and you have it!'

One of the most wonderful New Testament expressions of this Good News is found in St Paul's letter to the Galatians:

'You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus, for all of you who were baptised into Christ have been clothed with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus' (3:26-28).

This really is good news for us! By faith in Christ, we are *sons of God*, just like Jesus himself. Through baptism into Christ, we are *clothed with Christ*. We have Jesus, and all his goodness and holiness, wrapped around us like a new set of clothes. God sees us dressed up like his own Son! And what's more, this Good News beckons to and embraces all people equally, regardless of race, colour, sex

or social standing. It is totally inclusive. *We are all one in Christ Jesus*, because we are all dressed in Jesus. There are no shabbily dressed, second class Christians. That's the gospel.

The Gospel and Ordination

But the question we want to address here is this: *Does this gospel mean that women, as well as men, should be pastors?* Supporters of the ordination of women say yes. Since men and women enjoy equal status before God, they say, this should be translated into equal opportunities and privileges in the life of the church. Just as the gospel is as much for women as for men, so the privilege of publicly preaching the gospel should be equally open to women.



Those who uphold the church's tradition of ordaining only men, disagree. Gal 3:26-28, as the prime example of the gospel, does not address the topic of who may or may not become pastors. It talks about how we are saved through faith and baptism into Christ. It tells us how all believers are one in Christ and equal in God's sight. It proclaims the free gospel that makes no demands. *But whether women (or even men) can be pastors is not addressed here.* If you want to know what the Lord's will is about who may be a pastor, you need to consult Scripture passages that actually address that topic. Just as we don't consult an oven manual to find out how to change our car tyres, so we don't look to Gal 3:26-28 to discover whether or not women should be pastors.

The response, however, will often be that while Gal 3:26-28 doesn't talk *directly* about the ordination of women, passages like this do have *serious implications* for ministry. Surely we can draw practical, social conclusions from the gospel. After all, inspired by the gospel, the church overcame every barrier between *Jew and Greek* (Eph 2). Led by the Spirit, the Church in later centuries abolished the distinction between *slave and free* (Philemon 16; 1 Tim 1:10). Surely the time has come to dismantle this last frontier of inequality between *male and female*, as is already being done outside the church.

Such conclusions might be in order were the rest of the New Testament silent on this issue. But it isn't. There are *clear and direct passages* which specifically address the issue of men and women in the church. As a result, we don't need to draw our own conclusions from passages like Gal 3:26-28. Nor should we. Passages such as 1 Cor 14 and 1 Tim 2 answer the question for us: women are not to take the role of pastoral leadership in the Christian congregation. Furthermore, Eph 5 and 1 Cor 11 spell out the distinctive roles Christian men and women are to exercise as they relate to each other in marriage. For the husband this involves leadership (headship) exercised with Christ-like love. For the wife it means voluntary and loving submission to her husband.

The Gospel and Equality

But don't such instructions completely contradict the equality and inclusiveness mentioned in Galatians 3? Doesn't the command for women to be subordinate in the matter of pastoral leadership undo any real equality gained under the gospel? Not at all, and for several reasons.

First, it is God who defines the true nature of equality and corrects our misunderstanding of equality. His Word shows that we men and women are *equally* created and loved by God, *equally* sinful and in need of God's grace and forgiveness, and most of all, *equally* having that forgiveness in Christ.

But his Word also shows that the roles and responsibilities we have as men and women are *different*. In the congregation, some men have been given the responsibility of speaking God's Word publicly and authoritatively, while women, and most other men, have not. But such differing roles do not make a person superior or inferior. Any act of service in the name of Christ is fully recognised and valued by God - be it leading a congregation through preaching and administering the sacraments, be it visiting, counseling and listening to people, or be it simply giving a cup of cold water. According to God's definition of equality, men and women are equal no matter how they serve him.

Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures. (1 Corinthians 15:3)