

WOMEN IN THE CHURCH

Background

This issue of Women in the Church was the subject of prolonged discussion over 17 years ago culminating in 1988 with a statement presented by the elders and accepted by the church. A copy of the existing statement is attached as an appendix to this report. Teaching and discussion continued on the issue of women deacons and in March 1990 the church decided that women could be nominated as deacons. The first women deacons were elected in November 1990.

This discussion paper is presented in the context of a commitment following the Development Team Report to review our position papers. Members are invited to study it, to contribute to further discussions that will be arranged in connection with it and to be involved in the adoption of a finally agreed position paper, possibly at a Church Meeting in the autumn/winter.

Additional reasons for re-visiting this issue are that:

- it is an issue which has a direct impact on at least half of the congregation as far as their role in the church is concerned and is significant for the whole church in terms of the use of gifts;
- since 1988, practice within the church has varied with differing interpretations of terms such as 'leading' and 'sharing' and this has led to some confusion and uncertainty over church practice which needs clarification; and
- most of the present congregation were not around when this matter was last discussed.

It was against this background that the elders drew up a discussion paper in November 2005 for discussion and consideration by the church. An open discussion meeting was held on Wednesday, 15th February 2006 which led to the expression of various views and questions. In addition oral and written comments were received and on consideration of these the elders decided to invite further oral and written comments by Sunday, 28th May 2006 before finalisation of this revised discussion paper.

In the November 2005 discussion paper the elders recognised, as they did in 1988, that the issue of women in the church is important but difficult, given the strongly held and potentially divisive conflicting Biblical interpretations which Christians hold. We noted that this was highlighted by the current debate in the Church of England over women bishops. The discussions (formal and informal) that have taken place to date have confirmed this analysis and have demonstrated that members hold a spectrum of views ranging from women not being permitted to be elders or to teach men (although they may teach children and other women) to women being elders and teaching in mixed-sex contexts in the church. While it is not clear how many members hold the views at either end of the spectrum or somewhere in between, it is clear that sufficient numbers hold these different views and that the 1988 position statement does not fully reflect where we stand as a church today.

In re-considering this issue the elders recognise that in setting out our position we must acknowledge the range of views within the church based on differing understandings of the scriptures and seek to reach an accommodation to which the church can subscribe as a whole. It is evident, therefore that the principles and practice we set out will not go as far as some would wish and will go beyond what others may prefer. This will require sensitivity and respect for views of others which do not accord with those we hold. In approaching scripture, therefore, we need humility and like Peter accept that in the Bible "some things that are hard to understand" and heed his warning that nonetheless we must be careful that we do not "distort" scripture.

In areas like this, where Christians disagree, we need to accept that within the church we are all seeking to be ruled by scripture and, as far as the particular issue on women in the church is concerned, not by the influence on the one hand of secular feminism or on the other, male chauvinism.

It is within this overall context that we have drawn up this revised discussion paper on the basis of the following format:

- General Biblical Principles
- Principles and Practice of the Church
- Scriptural Teaching

The section on scriptural teaching provides a summary of the main views and for more detailed consideration of key texts reference should be made to the Frequently Asked Questions section of the November 2005 discussion paper. There is a section at the end of this paper setting out the elders' brief responses to the main issues and questions raised in discussions and submissions to date.

WOMEN IN THE CHURCH

General Biblical Principles

The Bible provides a framework for considering subjects on which there is no clear consensus among Christians regarding its teaching. The Biblical approach to women in the church, which is one such issue, requires acceptance and application of the following key principles.

Authority of Scripture – our church belief and practice is based on scripture which takes precedence over tradition or customs or the writings of the church fathers or claimed interpretations of history. The written word of God is the source of authority and we must seek, therefore, to be ruled by scripture and endeavour to understand what it says, even when the meaning is difficult. Our knowledge is imperfect as Paul points out to Christians in Corinth and, when the Bible is not clear on an issue and there are different interpretations, the governing principle must be love not discord.

(Ps. 119:89-120; Mk. 7:1-13; Jn. 17:17; Matt. 4:1-11; 1 Cor. 13: 8-13; 2 Tim. 3:16-17; & 2 Pet. 3:14-16)

Freedom of Conscience – scripture sets out core beliefs and patterns of behaviour which are absolute and to which the church must adhere. However, beyond these it allows different positions to be held on a range of doctrinal matters and freedom in personal behaviour. The constitution of Windsor Baptist Church, while extending the fullest and freest liberty of conscience, requires members to accept 14 doctrines. Jesus taught his disciples a lesson in tolerance when he said that those who were not against them were for them. Paul warns against a judgemental attitude over what food may be eaten and keeping holy days and he challenged Galatian Christians to stand fast in the freedom they had in Christ by resisting pressure to be circumcised. Subject to the authority of scripture, there is freedom to differ on matters which are not essential and it is the responsibility of all to follow the example of the Bereans who, on hearing Paul's preaching, searched the scriptures to see if it was true and the instruction to the Thessalonian believers to test everything.

(Mark 9:38-41; Rom. 14; 1 Cor. 8; Acts 17, Gal. 5:1-6; Col. 3:16 & 1Thess. 5:21)

Unity – David says in the Psalms that it is good to live together in unity and Jesus expressed that unity in terms of his followers being in him. Paul takes up this unity when he tells the Galatian believers that we are one in Christ Jesus. He emphasises the importance of this unity by exhorting Christians in Ephesus to make every effort to maintain unity in the body of Christ. While the Bible stresses our freedom in Christ, it also calls on us to restrict our freedom for the greater good of the community of believers and warns us to watch out for, and avoid, those who cause division. The underlying Biblical principle governing the exercise of Christian freedom is not to please ourselves but to serve others in love

(Ps. 133; Jn. 8:32; Rom. 14; Rom. 16:17-18; 1 Cor. 8; Gal. 3:28; Gal. 5:13-15 & Eph. 4:3-5)

Principles and Practice of the Church

Creation Principles

1. Man and woman are created in God's image – neither one nor the other reflects more of the image of God but together they, in distinction from all other living creatures, are invested with his image.
2. Man and woman are distinctive and complement each other in making the creation of mankind complete by having the ability to fulfil God's commands.
3. Man and woman jointly exercise stewardship over the rest of creation – some believe on the basis of male leadership and others on the basis of equality.

Fall Principles

1. The fall distorted the creation model of male/ female relationships. Some believe this resulted in unacceptably harsh male rule within man's leadership role. Others believe it introduced sinful male dominance contrary to the creation principles of equality and mutuality.
2. Tensions and conflicts in male/female relationships are an inevitable result of the fall.

Redemption Principles

1. Christ's redemptive work on the cross restores the broken relationship between men and women brought about by the fall. Some believe this should be reflected now as far as gender roles within the church are concerned and others take the view that that this awaits final fulfilment in future glory.
2. Men and women have equal status in Christ – some believe that this does not confer equality of function as there is male headship in the church and others believe that there is no gender distinction in role, including eldership.
3. Spiritual gifts are given by God to men and women without any gender distinction.

Practice

The following practice reflects:

- the Biblical principles of the authority of scripture, freedom of conscience and maintenance of unity;
 - the views of those who believe that leadership in the church should be by male elders; and
 - the views of those who believe that women should not be excluded from teaching in a mixed- sex context.
1. The church shall, as at present, appoint only men as elders.
 2. Under the direction of the elders, having demonstrated gift and spiritual maturity, all other leadership roles and spiritual/practical activities, including teaching, shall be open to women on the same basis as men.
 3. The elders shall encourage, and provide opportunity for, women to develop and use their gifts for the benefit of the church.

Scriptural Teaching

There are, broadly speaking, two views on this issue within Christian thinking - one is 'complementarian' and the other 'egalitarian'. Those holding these respective views adopt essentially different approaches in their use of the Old Testament creation account. Others hold views somewhere along a continuum between the complementarian and egalitarian views either by attaching more weight to some aspects of the respective views or on the basis of a different overall approach to the scriptures.

The Biblical basis of the two main views is summarised below under the headings creation, the fall and redemption. There is also brief comment on other views.

Complementarian View

Creation – man and woman were created in the image of God to have a relationship with him. Both reflect God's character in their lives but they are distinctive and have different roles rooted in creation based on:

- Adam being created first and Eve being created as a helper for Adam;
- God's naming of the human race 'man' and Adam's naming of Eve;
- Adam's position as representing the human race in terms of our sinfulness.

The God-given differences in role and function under which man exercises leadership do not diminish or create a second-class citizenship within the kingdom of God as both men and women are equal in personhood, value and importance in his sight.

The leadership role of men is reflected in the Old Testament by the male priests, prophets and political leaders. While some women were prophets and leaders (Miriam, Deborah and Huldah), they did not teach as this was the role of the priests or lead in military terms (as did male judges and later kings). It is also significant that they prophesied to other women or to men in private.

(Gen. 1:27-28; Gen.2:18-25; Gen. 5:2; Ex. 15:20-21; Lev. 10:8-11; Judges 4:6-14; 2 Kings 22:14; Rom. 5:15; 1 Cor. 15:15:22)

The Fall – God's curses did not introduce new roles or functions for Adam and Eve but rather distorted the created order of the man and woman. Adam would misuse his authority by ruling harshly and Eve would desire to usurp his authority.

(Gen. 3:16)

Egalitarian View

Creation – God created man and woman in his image distinctive from all other living creatures and both reflect the divine image. Femaleness reflects the image of God as fully as maleness and this is demonstrated by the female images of the eagle and hen. God's mandate regarding man's stewardship over creation refers to both male and female. This delegated rule over creation does not distinguish between the sexes and there is no division of responsibility or suggestion of hierarchy or rank in carrying out this role. There is full equality in role and function from creation.

While man was created first, God proclaimed that it was not good for him to be alone as he needed a suitable 'helper' to make him complete. The word 'helper' does not necessarily suggest subordination as it is also used of God and it is only at the end of the sixth day when God had completed his creative work, including creating man and woman, that he declared all of his creation 'very good'. Adam in giving the name 'woman' and proclaiming 'flesh of my flesh' was not asserting ownership or his authority but rather unity.

In the Old Testament world, apart from the Aaronic priesthood, all other Israelites, male and female, could not be part of the priesthood. Women held every other major office in Hebrew political and spiritual life except that of priest – judge (Deborah), queen (Athaliah) and prophetesses (Miriam, Deborah and Huldah). Women did not teach, but then neither did men who were not priests.

(Gen.1:26&28; Gen1:31; Gen.2:18-24; Exodus 15:20; Deut.32:9-11;Judges 4&5; 1 Sam. 25; 2 Kings 11:1-6; 2 Kings 22:14-20; Neh.6:14; Ezk. 13:17-23 Matt. 23:37)

The Fall - the man and woman acted independently in their decision to eat the fruit and their sin was one of disobedience. There is no suggestion of Eve having been reproved for usurping a leadership role which belonged to Adam. The fall distorted the relationship between man and woman from one of harmony to one of conflict. From then she would be subject to man's rule but as a command from God as a consequence of sin and not as God created her. The extent of the distortion of the male/female relationship was soon reflected in polygamy when Lamech married two women thereby breaching the 'one flesh' union and diminishing the dignity and worth of women.

(Gen. 3:7-13 &17; Gen. 4:19)

Redemption - the distortion of the roles of men and women is addressed as the redemption of Christ is aimed at removing the results of sin in that he appeared to destroy the works of the devil. Accordingly, the order and distinction of roles that were there from the beginning of God's good creation are reaffirmed. Husbands are commanded not to be harsh with their wives but to love them and women are to be subject to their husbands in the Lord. Likewise all service in the church, including leadership, is not to be authoritarian but to follow the servant- model of Jesus and elders are to set an example to be followed. However, servant-leadership does not stand in opposition to authority as Jesus was both servant and Lord and elders are to rule in the church. A pattern of male leadership in the church is, therefore not incompatible with servant-leadership.

When Paul tells the Galatians that there is neither male nor female in Christ and all are one in him, the context is that all are united in Christ. There are to be no factions or divisions among Christians and there is no place in the church for superiority or domination or subjugation or jealousy as all are of equal value and dignity. However, what Paul says about unity has little to say about the relationships between men and women in the church as this equality neither obliterates the differences between the sexes nor abolishes distinction in terms of roles. While scripture is clear that the Holy Spirit, in fulfilment of Old Testament prophecy, gives both men and women spiritual gifts for the common good, this cannot contradict God's word which states that the role of governing and teaching in the church is to be carried out by male pastors and elders.

Paul, when writing to the church at Corinth, uses the word "head" to describe the relationships between man and Christ, woman and man and Christ and God. Studies and lexicons show that the Greek word, "kephale" translated "head" does not mean "source" but rather "authority", thereby reinforcing the male headship order of creation set out in Genesis. Although women may prophesy, Paul, consistent with the principle of male headship, tells those at Corinth that women should be silent in the church and not engage in judging prophecies. He later tells Timothy that the creation principle of Adam's prior creation (male headship) means that women should neither teach nor exercise authority over men in the church. This interpretation reflects the meaning of the Greek word he uses for "authority" and the grammatical structure followed in the text.

Jesus treated women with great respect by talking to them, engaging them in theological conversation, accepting their financial support and letting them accompany the band of disciples travelling with him. He challenged those who treated women as second-class citizens but his

Redemption - Christ's redemptive work restored not only the broken relationship between man and God but also the disrupted and unequal relationship between man and woman arising from the fall. The relationship between men and women is inter-dependent in the Lord and there is neither male nor female in Christ. This equality in status before God must be reflected in the life of the church and roles should not be determined on the basis of gender but rather on gift and spiritual maturity. In Christ male and female share the in-dwelling of the Holy Spirit, have access to God in prayer and join together in worship. They prophesy (as foretold by Joel) which is one of the greater gifts listed by Paul, coming second after apostles and before teaching. There is no longer a male priesthood but, as God's elect, men and women are chosen in Christ to be holy and to serve as priests. This unity, equality of status and value in Christ, while not blotting out the obvious factual differences of race, social position and gender, affects social relationships within the church and participation in the life of the church is not to be based on these differences. Women, like men, receive spiritual gifts from God without gender distinction - they are as much part of the church as men and there is no place for gender division in the church in terms of leadership and teaching roles. Leadership and all service in the church are based on the principle of submission and the servant-model, not hierarchical authority. Both Jesus and Paul taught that authority lay with the church members and Jesus made it very clear that the hierarchical structure of authority prevalent in society as a whole was not acceptable in the church.

Jesus' attitude to women was revolutionary – while Jesus chose twelve male disciples, women were among his followers and he not only taught them, but engaged them in theological conversation. Jesus came to his own people, the Jews, and in this cultural context it is no more surprising that he did not choose women than that he did not choose Gentiles. Women were first to receive the revelation of the incarnation, to witness the resurrection and to be told by Jesus to spread the news of His resurrection. They were also active in the early church - Priscilla, along with her husband Aquila, instructed Apollos, who became one of the foremost leaders of the early church, in doctrine; Phoebe was a deacon in the church at Cenchrea; Junias, was probably a female apostle; and at the end of his letter to the church at Rome, Paul sends greetings to twenty-six people, nine of whom were women. He uses the term 'fellow-workers' to describe both men and women and there is no good reason for concluding that it means something different when applied to women. While there is no reference in scripture to a woman holding the office of elder, texts relating to elders are descriptive rather than prescriptive, and the broad teaching and practice set out in scripture points towards women working alongside men in leadership and ministry roles.

Accordingly references in scripture to women being silent in the church or forbidding them to be involved in teaching men cannot, given the overall thrust of the Bible and practice of the early church, be taken as absolute or permanent. When Paul uses the Greek word 'kephale'

approach did not set aside the creation principle of male leadership in the church as he appointed only males as the twelve apostles. Women also played a significant role in witnessing and testifying to the resurrection but this relates to their function as evangelists, not teachers.

Women prophesied in the early church but prophecy is a message brought to the mind by God and does not carry the same authority as teaching. Women who receive the teaching gift may teach men in a private situation outside the context of the assembled congregation in the way Priscilla taught Apollos and also other women and children. Paul had many women co-workers but this does not mean that they had equal authority to him or similar authority to other co-workers or that they held the office of elder or taught in the church.

In summary, therefore, while having greater authority does not mean having greater value in God's sight, the Biblical principle of male headship applies with men holding spiritual leadership and teaching roles in the church assembly.

(Matt. 10:1-4; Matt 19:28; Matt. 21:14; Matt. 28:5-10; Mark 10:42-45; Mark 15:40-41; Luke 8:1-3; Luke 10:28-32, John 4:1-30; John 11:21-29; John 13:13; Acts 2:17-18; Acts 18:26; 1 Cor.11:2-16; 1 Cor.12:7&11; 1Cor.14:29-39; Eph. 5:22-33; Gal. 3:28; Col. 3:18-19; 1 Tim. 2:1-15; 1 Tim 5:17; 2 Tim. 1:5 & 2Tim. 3:14-15; Titus 2:3-5; 1Pet. 3:1-7; 1 Pet. 4:10; 1 Pet.5:1-4; 1John 3:8)

when writing to the Corinthians it does not mean 'headship' but rather 'source'. This is demonstrated by evidence from lexicons/dictionaries and word studies. He is not, therefore, setting out a principle of male authority but demonstrating that the difference between men and women in terms of their origin in the creation allows them to follow different practices in worship. In telling Timothy that women should not teach men or have authority over them, he is not establishing a permanent pattern for the church based on Adam's priority in creation but rather the principle that like Eve women should not teach or lead without knowledge and preparation. The prohibitions are temporary and the permanent principle is that women should not teach or seek leadership roles until they are prepared through learning.

The underlying message of these texts is that everyone participating in church life, whether in prayer, teaching or other service should not unnecessarily flout social customs or promote disorder in worship or assume or usurp roles without appropriate recognition of their gifts and understanding through learning.

(Joel 2:28-29; Matt. 10:38-42; Matt. 15:21-28; Matt. 18:15-20; Matt. 20:20-28; Matt. 23:1-12; Matt. 26:6-13; Matt. 28:10; Mark 7:24-30; Luke 1:32-35; Luke 8:1-3; Luke 10:38-41; John 1:11; John 4:7-42; John 11:23-27; John 13:1-17; John 20:1-18; Acts 2:14-21; Acts 17:10-12; Acts 18:24-26; Acts 21:8-9; Rom. 12:1-10; Rom. 16:1-16; 1 Cor. 5:1-5; Cor.11:2-16; 1 Cor.12:1-31; 1 Cor.14:26-39; Gal. 3:26-27; Eph. 5:18-21 Phil. 4:2-7; Col. 3:16; 1Tim. 2:9-15; 1 Tim. 3:1-7; Titus 1:5-9; Heb.13:17; 1Pet. 2:9-10; 1 Pet. 5:1-6; Rev. 1:6)

Other Views

Other views reflect positions somewhere in between the full complementarian and egalitarian views and are largely based on a different understanding or application of some of the key texts. The main views held are:

Women may teach but not hold the office of elder – some holding this view stress that, while the creation account demonstrates the equality of men and women in terms of responsibility, there is no example of a female elder in the New Testament church and all the references to the qualifications for the office of elder relate to men. Furthermore it cannot be assumed that, while redemption in Christ is accomplished, all the consequences of the fall are as yet fully redeemed. For example Paul talks in Romans about the reality of sin in the life of the believer and about Christians and creation living in the expectation of future glory. This is true of the role of men and women as far as oversight in the church is concerned.

Some reach the same conclusion but on the basis that the emphasis of the creation account is not about the absolute complementarity or equality of the sexes. The Genesis text rather develops the themes of being fruitful and multiplying and the curses after the fall confirm this Submission is to God who delegates stewardship over the rest of creation to mankind– there is no explicit authority or submission in terms of gender. Christ's redemptive act restores the worth and dignity of women but there is no basis for concluding that the unequal relationship between man and woman has been restored. The relationship between Jesus and his Father provide an understanding of authority, equality, role and responsibility and headship remains important in understanding Christ and his kingdom which needs to be observed in relationships though not in terms of authority and obedience, Essentially authority has to be seen in terms of responsibility and service.

(Gen 1&2; John 5:16-30; John 8:12-30; John 10:30; John 14: 9-31; John 15:9-17 John 16:15; Rom.5:19; Rom. 7:21-15; Rom. 8:18-27; Tim. 3:1-; Titus1:5-9; 1 Pet. 5:1-3; Eph.1, 4&5)

Women may teach and may hold the office of elder in the context of team ministry under a male team leader – those holding this view say that the Bible teaches male headship as a creation principle but, in writing to Timothy, Paul was not placing an absolute prohibition on women teaching men. He expresses two antitheses (or inverse parallels) the first between “learn in quietness” and “teach”, and the second between “full submission” and “authority”. The prohibition was against any kind of teaching which infringed the principle of male headship. The primary function of Christian teachers is to teach scripture (“guard the deposit”) and they do not claim authority for themselves but put themselves and their teaching under the authority of scripture. Women, therefore, may teach provided the content is biblical and in the context of a team led by a man.

(Gen.2:15-25; 1 Cor. 11:2-16; 1Tim.2:11-15; 2 Tim. 1:14)

Women may engage in teaching that is not authoritative but may not hold the office of elder – the principle of male headship is again emphasised and, as above, Paul is not understood to be prohibiting women from teaching men in all circumstances. However, male headship is reflected in that women may not engage in authoritative teaching; otherwise they may teach mixed-sex church assemblies. Authoritative teaching is generally all regular, official instruction in the doctrines of the faith which is the role of elders.

(Gen.2:15-25; 1 Cor. 11:2-16; 1 Tim. 2:2; 1Tim.2:11-15; 1Tim. 5:17; 2 Tim. 1:14)

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Response to Discussion Issues and Queries

The following is a brief response to the main issues and queries arising from discussion and submissions received to date and, as appropriate, may set the context for further discussion.

1. Why re-visit this Issue now and raise expectations or fears?

The reasons for re-visiting this issue are set out in the Background section (page 1). The reality is that the church has moved on in terms of its membership, practice and range of views on the issue. There is no hidden agenda beyond these considerations and the same applies to the view that what is being proposed is the thin edge of the wedge as far as female elders is concerned. The elders have divided views on the appointment of women elders and have always acknowledged that this is an issue on which there would not be full agreement within the church. The aim is to set out principles and practice which we can adopt as a church, while recognising the different views held.

2. How has church practice differed from the 1988 paper and how will church practice change?

The 1988 paper, in setting out what women could do, uses words such as 'sharing' and 'leading' in certain contexts. In applying these terms it has been difficult to draw the line between these activities and 'teaching'. For example some groups consider that leading a fellowship group Bible study falls within the principles while others see this as an excluded activity.

How church practice might change essentially awaits the outcome of our discussions but this query seems to suggest that we should have set out the principles more clearly. The difficulty this poses is that we would probably have to go back to the 1988 formula by setting out 'permissions' for women and the elders do not wish to follow this route, being convinced that this would not be helpful.

3. Egalitarianism and eldership

The view that opening the eldership to women is the logical position to come from the egalitarian thrust of the November paper was obviously not one shared by all the elders otherwise this would have been stated. Indeed the November paper pointed out that the office of elder is only described in male terms in scripture and, accordingly, the elders could not achieve consensus on the issue. The fact is, as a whole, the elders have not embraced the view that scripture permits female elders and, even if we had, we would not have been advancing this position in the interests of unity.

4. Gal. 3:28 – male and females in the church

There is agreement that this verse is about the status of all believers in Christ. While it does not abolish obvious distinctions between the sexes, these do not matter in Christ as men and women are equal and there is unity in Christ. The thrust of Paul's teaching is diminished if this verse has nothing to say about relationships and roles in the church. F F Bruce (a leading Brethren theologian) says that this was revolutionary teaching for the Jews that wiped out all the male privileges of Judaism and was "...a corollary of Paul's circumcision free gospel that any such religious privilege enjoyed by males over females is abolished."

The reality is that application of this teaching by Paul is either limited or extended depending on which side of the argument you follow. It is one scripture taken along with others which both sides seek to apply as they seek to interpret scripture with scripture.

5. Why did Jesus not choose six male and six female disciples?

We have addressed this in setting out the egalitarian view in this paper –see page 5 under the heading Redemption in the section dealing with Jesus' attitude to women. The question could equally be asked why did he not have six Jews and six Gentiles as his disciples.

6. Word studies – *kephale* and *authentain* (*authenteo*)

Kephale - the argument is not so clear cut as complementarians would suggest. While the lack of any reference in Liddell-Scott to include 'authority' as a meaning of *kephale* has been questioned on the basis of correspondence with the current editor, the lexicon has not been amended. In any event it is not the only lexicon/dictionary to indicate that *kephale* may mean source – Kittell is another as is Henry Patina's Lexicon Dictionarium Graecolatinum (1577). Egalitarian theologians do not agree with Grudem's analysis of 2336 examples from ancient Greek literature from

which he concludes that in 49 cases *kephale* means authority and in none means source in any general sense – they in fact conclude the opposite.

In our paper we recognized the different views theologians have on *kephale* and concluded that we were not in a position to resolve the disagreement among theologians. In our November paper we set out our reasons for concluding that we could not draw too much from the I Cor. 11 passage as far as authority in the church is concerned.

authentain - as with *kephale*, theologians differ over the meaning of this Greek word and some challenge Baldwin's study which is based on root meaning as many linguists today reject the idea of 'root' or 'essential' meanings for words on the basis that words can do different jobs without there necessarily being an 'essential' meaning. It is pointed out that the verb comes from the Greek word 'self' which probably had negative connotations for Christians. Accordingly some hold that it probably carried a subtle negative meaning to the original readers.

The syntactical analysis by Kostenberger that 'teach' and 'authority' have to be viewed as both being either negative or positive is accepted by some egalitarians but not his conclusion on the meaning of 1 Tim 2:12. Howard Marshall, for example, sees a negative connotation in both 'teach' and 'authority'. In this connection Kostenberger's assertion that 'to teach' is always positive in Paul's writings is challenged as demonstrated in Titus 1:11, I Tim. 1:7 and I Tim. 6:3 where 'to teach' is negative.

Accordingly an interpretation of 1 Tim. 2:12 that women were seeking to teach error and assume authority is not necessarily flawed by either the meaning of *authentain* or the structure of the sentence.

7. How can the principle that women should learn before teaching be drawn from I Tim. 2 when the text is clear?

The elders have dealt with this query on pages 12-19 of the FAQ section of the November 05 paper. As pointed out in the original paper not all agree that the text is clear, particularly when it is considered within the broad canvas of scripture. We recognised that both the complementarian and egalitarian interpretations raise difficulties but, having regard to biblical texts which are clear, concluded that there is no permanent prohibition on women teaching men or holding leadership roles in the church (other than elders as we could reach no consensus on this).

8. Does the relationship of man and woman mirror the role of the Father and Son in the Trinity?

The Trinity, a term which, although it does not appear in scripture, is used to describe how the Bible presents this unique and mysterious reality of one God who at the same time is three persons – Father, Son and Holy Spirit. These distinctions must not be allowed to obscure the fundamental truth of divine unity whereby all three are involved in the activity of any one. Creation is an example of this – while it is particularly assigned to the Father (*Gen. 1:1* but also note the plural in *Gen. 1:26*), it is associated with the Son (*Jn. 1:3*) and the Spirit (*Is. 40:13*). The subordination of Christ is clear in his becoming man. However, Jesus is also God and Bruce Milne warns of taking a view of the subordination of the Son and the Spirit to the Father which results in an understanding of the 'Godhead' of the Father which distinguishes him from the Son and Spirit. The Godhead is comprised of all three persons equally and this is the essence of the unity of God in the Trinity. Jesus is, therefore, both subject to the Father and at the same time at one with him as he is God. We struggle to understand this plurality of unity in the Godhead and it has no clear parallel in human experience or relationships. The pattern of relationships within the Godhead cannot easily be translated into the relationship between men and women generally. Christ's servant-model as saviour of course remains as the example for all to follow.

9. Male headship in marriage

The concept of a male headship in marriage based on the servant- model of Christ is not at odds with the egalitarian position

In Eph. 1 & 4 the emphasis of the headship of Christ is in terms of his providing for the church's growth - the function is not one of authority but of servant-provider of what makes the church's growth possible. He is the head and from him "*the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work.*" (*Eph. 4:16*)

In Eph. 5:23 the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the saviour. If 'head' had meant authority, the appropriate designation for Christ would have been 'Lord' instead of 'saviour' which is consistently a self-sacrificing, life-giving servant-role in the New Testament.

'Head', therefore, describes the servant function of provider of life, growth and development. This function is not one of top-down oversight but of bottom-up support and nurture.

Understanding the New Testament metaphor of headship in this way protects it from corruption by meanings foreign to the text, and it describes perfectly the relationship of Christ to the church and of husband to wife as servant life-givers. The fall resulted in Adam ruling over the woman (*Gen. 3:16*) and Christ makes husbands servants to their wives in their relationship of mutual submission (*Eph. 5:21*).

John Stott, a moderate complementarian, summarises it this way in his BST commentary on Ephesians:

“We have seen that the essence of Paul’s instruction is ‘Wives submit, husbands love’, and that these words are different from one another since they recognize the headship which God gives to the husband. Yet when we try to define the two verbs, it is not easy to distinguish clearly between them. What is it to submit? It is to give oneself to somebody. What does it mean to love? It is to give oneself up for somebody as Christ ‘gave himself up’ for the church. Thus ‘submission’ and ‘love’ are two aspects of the very same thing, namely of that selfless self-giving which is the foundation of an enduring and growing marriage.”

I Pet. 3, where wives are told to be ‘submissive’ to their husbands and there is reference to Sarah obeying Abraham and calling him ‘master’, is not a basis for a wife’s submission to her husband as leader in the marriage. The following points are significant:

1. Submission here is largely in the context of witness to an unbelieving husband and in broad terms should be understood in terms of the model set out in Eph.5.
2. There is no command here that wives are to obey their husbands or anywhere in scripture – some have turned this into a command.
3. There are examples of Abraham obeying Sarah – once at God’s command (*Gen16:1-6* and *Gen.21:11-12*).
4. The reference to Sarah calling Abraham ‘master’ may be taken as simply recognition of him as her husband. In any event the context in *Gen 18:12* is hardly flattering or respectful!

These texts do not require to be understood as providing a case for a husband having authority over his wife or being the ‘boss’ in the relationship. This does not downplay Christ’s role as either head of the church, but this relationship (as presented in key texts) is seen in terms of him as saviour, not his authority over the church as Lord.

10. Egalitarianism: a recent view

While advanced more widely in recent years, the egalitarian view has been advocated in the past. The Quaker and American revival movements of the seventeenth, eighteenth and nineteenth centuries are examples. The scripture must speak to its generation and there has been a significant change in the attitude to the role of women in society in the West, particularly after World Wars 1 and 2. This has led to a re-examination of scripture not by applying secular feminist thinking but by trying to understand what the role of women should be in the church. By analogy it took until the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries when views on slavery changed and many Christians took the lead in achieving its abolition. The critical issue is not the newness of this view but its approach to scripture as God’s word and the only mandate for practice in the church.

11. Egalitarianism leading to liberalism including homosexual marriage

There is no question of us following a liberal church movement as our approach is to understand scriptural teaching on an issue where there are genuine differences of views among evangelical Christians. In our paper we do not conclude from the creation texts that men and women are the same but rather that they complement one another by making the creation of mankind complete and thereby able to fulfil the commands to be fruitful/multiply and to jointly rule over creation. The *Gen 2* text, as David made clear in his exegesis, addresses in particular how man and woman relate in marriage. Whatever view is taken of *Gal.3:28*, whether complementarians or egalitarian, no one is saying that it removes all differences between men and women. It does not change the creation principle of marriage between man and woman or open the door to homosexual marriage.

12. The Genesis text is essentially about being fruitful and multiplication (procreation) rather than authority relationships

Gen. 1 seems to be fundamentally about man and woman being created in the image of God with both being given two commands – to rule over the earth (referred to twice – v.26 and 28) and to procreate. Both ruling and procreation appear as commands and there is nothing in the text to suggest that one is of more significance than the other. It is

surely an assumption to conclude that Gen. 1 is interested in their function mainly in respect of their role in procreation and not rule. While the text does not say anything about delegation of ruling responsibilities between the sexes, the critical point that cannot be dismissed is that *'there is no question of priority, let alone superiority'* (F F Bruce) - they were to rule together with neither one ruling over the other.

In Gen. 2 there is no specific reference to childbearing; rather the context is man's care (or rule) of the garden. That is the context of his 'aloneness'. God declares that this is not good and woman is made to help him in his task; the emphasis is the unity of man and woman and their need for each other to achieve 'wholeness' as David set out in his exegesis of this passage. While this obviously makes procreation possible, it does not appear as the thrust of the text and the conclusion that the help the women provides is essentially childbearing and that this is the only aspect of her role being addressed in Genesis 2 is not easy to sustain. The text seems rather to develop the equality and complementarity of man and woman in their creation in God's image rather than being fruitful and multiplying.

In Gen. 3 the curses pronounced do not appear to be expressed 'solely' in term of the roles addressed in Genesis 2- childbearing and managing the ground. As already pointed out, Gen 2 does not specifically address the former but rather the latter. Also the curse in Gen 2:16 addresses the relationship of man and woman - *'Your desire will be for your husband, and he will rule over you'*. This curse directly addresses the equal and complementary relationship found in Gen1&2.

13. Women leaders in the OT are weak examples

In Exodus 15 we read that Miriam the 'prophetess' led the women and sang to *'them'* (21). Alec Motyer in his BST commentary on Exodus points out that *'them'* is masculine and refers to the Israelites or, as he puts it, literally 'the sons of Israel'. She does not just lead the women in worship but like Moses she leads all the Israelites in worship. While Miriam is struck by leprosy and not Aaron after speaking against Moses (Numbers 12), it is hardly because she is a woman – possibly Aaron escaped as he was High Priest. It is notable however that the Lord tells Micah that *"I have sent Moses to lead you, also Aaron and Miriam"* (Micah 6:5)

During the period when judges were prominent in Israel it is clear from Judges 4 that Deborah takes the lead, just as the other judges did. It is Deborah to whom God reveals his command and it is she who delivers the message to Barak (verse 6). Furthermore Barak seems to recognise her leadership as he asks her to accompany him in fulfilling the task (verse 8). Deborah also instructs Barak to go into action in verse 14. The thrust of chapter 5 seems to be that God is the leader of Israel and the reference to *'the princes of Israel'* (verse 2) is to their offering themselves to follow Him and not necessarily a suggestion that men were spineless.

Miriam and Deborah are hardly weak examples of female leadership in a male dominated world.

14. Redemption – the male/female creation relationship of equality disrupted as a consequence of the fall is not yet fully restored

Clearly on the cross Jesus restored the worth and dignity of mankind in that the broken relationship with God has been bridged. However, in introducing his kingdom now, many find it difficult to escape the conclusion that the process of addressing the consequences of other broken relationships has not begun. We see this in terms of:

- > man and nature, where as redeemed people we should be in the forefront of responsible and caring stewardship ensuring that creation continues to proclaim the glory of God, working towards that day when it will finally be delivered (Romans 8); and
- > the pain of childbirth, which has been progressively diminished through the creative skills and knowledge that God in his grace has given mankind.

Why then should the broken relationship between man and woman remain a feature of organisational church life in the new kingdom that was introduced with the advent of Jesus? F F Bruce puts it this way – *"If the work of Christ involves breaking the entail of the fall, the implications for the liberation of women is plain"*. Are we not in danger of limiting the work of redemption if we conclude otherwise? Of course we are fallen imperfect people and the tension in male/female relationships will continue in our working relationships but that is different from seeking to perpetuate the consequence of the fall in terms of the structure of church life by excluding women in principle from teaching and leadership role.

15. Implications of Adam as representative of mankind

Although both the man and woman sinned in Eden, it is clear from Romans 5 and I Cor.15 that Adam bears the responsibility and, therefore, represents mankind in terms of our sinfulness and the punishment of death. As a consequence all men and women are sinners, all face death and in Christ all believers, men and women are forgiven and will be delivered from death. This representative status of Adam reflects the unity and equality of men and women before God in terms of both sinfulness and salvation and has nothing to say about authority or the respective roles of men and women in the church. This position is not undermined in the scriptural teaching in the November paper.

16. The key texts only permit a male eldership

There are different views and some understand passages in I Tim. 3 and Titus 1 to endorse eldership being confined to males. Others see these passages as Paul's acknowledgement of the factual context of the time – elders were male and indeed it would seem married, but they do not prohibit either females or single people from being elders.

17. What is authoritative teaching?

Some complementarians make this distinction and they generally state that it is essentially doctrinal teaching expected to be carried out by elders. Teaching is authoritative not by virtue of who it is that is speaking or their office in the church but by virtue of the teachers' faithfulness to the authority of scripture. Authority in teaching is not derived from office but from gift and faithfulness to scripture. The responsibility to guard the teaching in the church is a function of the elders in their oversight. We do not hold to a 'clerical' model of ministry. It is the word of God that is authoritative and most teaching/preaching will include some explanation of doctrine, not least in setting out the gospel in evangelism. This is a question for those who tend towards complementarianism to address.

18. If women have the gift to teach why should they not be elders?

In discussion it was pointed out that teaching was the sole distinguishing qualification between elders and deacons and it was asked if someone (presumably a woman) had the gift to teach, why could they not be an elder? The egalitarians would say they could be appointed as an elder whereas complementarians would say they should carry out their teaching gift appropriately but not in teaching men or only in teaching men under certain circumstances.

19. Third Way recognizing both complementarian and egalitarian viewpoints

This is a positive suggestion raised during discussion and this revised paper has been prepared on this basis. It addresses concerns expressed about the implications of the November 05 paper for future leaders, pastors, wider church links and possible division by setting out a range of scriptural positions. However, there is also need to accommodate the views of those who believe in a wider role for women in church and the principles and practice drawn up for discussion seek to reflect the different views emerging within the church.

APPENDIX

Women in the Church (March 1988 Position)

The issue of women in the church involves consideration of Biblical teaching relating to the pattern of creation, headship and authority, instructions that women should be silent in church, the offices of the church and the status, gifts and responsibilities of all members of the church. The key passages of scripture are Gen. 1-3, Rom.12:1-8, 1 Cor. 11:3-16, 1 Cor. 12:12-30, 1Cor. 14:26-29, Gal. 3:26-29, Eph. 5:18-20, Col. 3:15-17, 1 Tim. 2:11-15, 1 Tim. 3:1-13 and 1 Pet.4:10-11.

Evangelical Christians, having considered these and other scriptures, have reached different conclusions on Biblical teaching in respect of the role of women in the church and the broad views which have emerged are summarised below.

1. Many Christians, having regard primarily to Genesis and 1 Timothy passages, hold that the Biblical model is of a male authority structure in the church based on man's priority in creation and male headship. Women may be permitted to pray and read the scriptures in public but their teaching role is largely restricted to children's and women's work. The offices of elder and deacon are restricted solely to males.
2. Another view, based largely on the same general principles, sees 1Tim. 2 within the context of authoritative teaching from which women are prohibited. The New Testament pattern is seen to be that of male leadership in the church by elders although women, like men, may be appointed as deacons. In this connection 1 Tim. 3:1 is taken to refer to women deacons, not deacons' wives. Women are allowed to engage in teaching under the authority of the elders.
3. More recently some Christians have stressed the general thrust of New Testament teaching regarding the availability of gifts to all members, the equal status of men and women in Christ and the injunctions to all to teach one another (Rom. 14, 1 Cor. 12, Gal. 3:23-26, Rom. 15:14, 1 Cor. 14:26, Col.1:26-28 and Eph. 5:19). Within this context the instructions on women's silence in the church are not seen to have been of permanent duration and Paul is seen to be stressing that women, like men, should learn as both were created by God. The deception of Eve is seen as a reflection of her lack of understanding of God's instructions to Adam.

It is generally recognised that each view raises problems of interpretation within the overall context of scripture and, accordingly, there is need to be sensitive to the views of others.

The Role of Women in the Church

Having regard to the principles laid down in scripture, bearing in mind the liberty of the individual conscience, avoiding giving offence to others and seeking to maintain the unity of the Spirit, the elders unanimously recommend to the church that at present the role of women within our church may be expressed in the following ways.

In addition to the very valuable work which is being carried on in the church by many of the ladies in the context of the B.W.F., Focus, the Sunday School, Children's Church, Crèche, Mother and Toddler Group and in private visitation we hold that the women be encouraged to participate in the life of the church by:

- a) reading the scriptures in public
- b) praying audibly in the church prayer meeting
- c) leading in prayers of intercession in public worship
- d) sharing in times of open worship
- e) giving thanks at the Lord's Table
- f) presenting reports on the work of God
- g) recounting the dealings of God in their lives
- h) leading the church prayer meeting
- i) giving the children's address
- j) sharing their expertise.