

Q&A: Is it biblically acceptable to ordain women into any position of leadership within the church, or are those who do this in error?

I once commented on Mark Driscoll's imprecise consideration of this issue (<http://is.gd/dBDrG>) where I stated:

"Complementarians hold to a "serving, sacrificial male leadership and gender partnership" model of marriage and the home as a clear expression of Scripture. However there is a distinction within this view...

Some are willing to quickly extrapolate the home to the church – and this is not done unthinkingly, as Driscoll demonstrates.

However, others will argue that this extrapolation is not so simple or clearly prescribed by Scripture – where "man/woman" passages can be rendered "husband/wife", where offices and functions within the church are only broadly defined in Scripture. They would argue that allowing a woman to teach, for instance, does not inherently damage or undermine the complementary relationship between husbands and wives. They would cite, gently, that when Driscoll announces that the "sermon" is now over and that his wife is now allowed to join him on stage to answer questions that he is juggling semantics and that the men in the congregation are being taught by his wife just as much as the women – and appreciate it!..."

In this sense I am a "broad complementarian", taking the latter view.

The issue is that church life should not be antagonistic to the life of the families who constitute that church. In other words, a commission to ministry should never undermine a marriage or familial relationship.

Strict complementarians (women cannot be ordained to leadership) tackle this issue in the abstract. I tend to tackle the issue in reality, even on a case by case basis. Does the shape of this ministry require this man to forego serving his wife? Does the shape of this ministry require this woman to forego serving her husband?

The reality of this is reasonable easy to tackle when it's a consideration of women in ministry in the broadly diaconal/service sense (I include serving the body through teaching ministry). Because both ministry and marriage relationship looks like service and it generally just works.

It can get complex, perhaps, in the consideration of women in leadership (although the line between ministry and leadership is fuzzy because they are both acts of service). But the only place where any complexity can (or needs to be) resolved is in the marriage relationship of the servant leader and her husband. He can lead/serve her by championing her leadership/service of others. What that looks like or how that works might need to be sorted out by the couple themselves.

If the husband cannot bless his wife's ministry then that ministry is fraught and probably shouldn't proceed in order to honour the marriage. But I would say the same thing if a wife was unwilling to bless her husband's ministry. (And I know plenty of male ministers who inflict the cost of ministry on their wife and children without their blessing who need to take a long hard look at themselves).

So I have no problem, personally, working under the leadership of a woman. It does not impact on the relationship with my wife at all, or cause that relationship to be feminist or

something.

Having said all that – this is an open-handed issue for me. I know that others read Scripture the other way. Strict complementarians have a place within the church and should be able to minister and lead according to conscience and integrity. The “two integrities” principle creates complexity, but such is life.

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