

## **Women in Ministry Leadership**

*by Pam Braman, Superintendent of the Genesis Conference of the Free Methodist Church*

I love the Word of God. As an evangelical Christian, my beliefs are founded upon the Bible, the Word of God. I want the Bible to shape my thinking, my theology, my life. I want my life to be fully submitted to the Word of God.

I grew up in a church that taught me to love the Scriptures. A saying I would hear there was “The Bible says it, I believe it, that settles it.” And I wanted that to be true of me. But then I began to find inconsistencies in the way that particular church handled Scripture. And I began to wonder if it was as simple as reading one verse and having an issue “settled.”

Let me give you two examples:

In 1 Corinthians, the apostle Paul writes about the practice of people being baptized for the dead. 1 Corinthians 15:29 says: *“Now if there is no resurrection, what will those do who are baptized for the dead? If the dead are not raised at all, why are people baptized for them?”*

When I asked a leader at this church about this verse, and how we applied “the Bible says it, I believe it, that settles it” to this passage about being baptized for the dead, he frowned. “Mormons baptize for the dead.” “So are Mormons right?” “NO! They’ve taken one small passage that is hard to understand, and has no evidence in the rest of Scripture, and they’ve made it a core doctrine. You can’t do that.”

“What about three heavens? Paul writes in 2 Cor 12:2: *“I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago was caught up to the third heaven.”* Do we believe in three heavens?”

“NO!”

“Why not?”

“Same thing... Jehovah’s Witness have made this a core doctrine, but it doesn’t align with the rest of Scripture. It’s a difficult passage that we have to look at in light of the rest of Scripture to understand.”

Clearly, there were Bible verses that would NOT “just settle it.”

When a “plain reading” of any Bible verse clashes with the rest of Scripture, we have to pause and ask if our “plain reading” is wrong. We have to ask if there is more at work in these verse that might explain them better.

This is one reason it is SO important to be someone who studies the whole bible... so we can weigh one passage against another to get the correct understanding.

It's one of the reasons I love the Free Methodist Denomination. We have a commitment to looking at the Bible wholly and holistically.

In the church I grew up in, 1 Timothy 2 is used to significantly limit the work of women in the church. It is used to say that women should not lead, or pastor, or be ordained. The verses that appear to limit women begin in verse 9 where women are told to dress modestly, not have jewelry, and not braid their hair. In my church growing up, I saw plenty of women wearing jewelry, and no one had any problem with anyone braiding their hair. They seemed to ignore verses 9 and 10. But when we got to verse 11, then we had to pay attention, as Paul commanded: "A woman must learn in quietness and full submission. I am not permitting a woman to teach or to assume authority over a man; she must be quiet. For Adam was formed first, then Eve. And Adam was not the one deceived; it was the woman who was deceived and became a sinner." Of course, no one could explain to me verse 15: "But women will be saved through childbearing - if they continue in faith, love and holiness with propriety." Were men saved by the blood of Christ, while women were saved by having children? This is what the verse seemed to say ("saved" here is the Greek word linked to salvation).

Here is my question: Does 1 Timothy 2 contain "core doctrine" that we should build on or, like the third heaven or baptism for the dead, is this a difficult passage that needs to be understood in light of the rest of Scripture?

In order to answer that we need to ask: What DOES the whole of Scripture tell us about women leading and preaching?

I believe that when we look at the whole of Scripture, it is clear that women are called to all levels of leadership and ministry in the church. Let's take a look.

Warning: This is a ton of content, and may feel a bit overwhelming... but that's my point. When we look at the whole of Scripture, the evidence is overwhelming.

First, I want you to note that when the Bible talks about Spiritual gifts, there is NO indication anywhere that these gifts are gender based. Women ARE gifted to preach and to lead. We will see examples of that as I go through the Scripture.

Second, at each key turning point in the life of the people of God, it's clear that in the midst of highly male-dominated cultures, where a woman was valued for her dowry and her child-bearing... in the midst of these times and places ... GOD is raising up, gifting, and empowering some amazing women to lead the people of God.

Let's take a look at some of these women.

Let's start at the beginning with Eve. As in: Adam and Eve, Genesis Chapter 1.

God says: "Let US make humankind in our image, in our likeness, so that THEY may RULE (reign) ....So God created humankind in His own image, in the image of God he created THEM, MALE and FEMALE He created them."

Eve. Created in the image of God, to rule and reign with Adam. Note here: you need both men and women working together to fully reflect the image of God.

Now I know someone here is thinking: "But Pam! Remember Genesis 2! God created Eve as a HELPER for Adam!"

The Hebrew word that God uses for Eve as a HELPER is "EZER." Ezer is only used a few other times in Scripture: speaking of GOD as our helper, and speaking of military help.

An example of the word "ezer" is in Psalm 121:

"Where does my help - my ezer - come from? My help, my ezer, comes from the Lord, the maker of heaven and earth."

Eve is created as an EZER like The Lord ..... a mighty ally.

Adam and Eve were created as partners and allies, who reflect the image of God, and who are called to rule and reign together.

On to Abraham and Sarah, who were given the promise by God of a son in their old age.

BOTH Abraham and Sarah assume that the promise is for Abraham - the man. They assume that God would not bother with a woman.

That wrong assumption is how we get the mess with Hagar. They assume that God has promises for the man, not his wife.

But God says the promise is for Sarah - the woman - as well. He gives BOTH of them new covenant names. In this culture ... that would have been seemed radical, crazy.

From Abraham and Sarah we speed along in the history of the people of God, to the Exodus from Egypt. During the Exodus we begin to see a foreshadowing of the three Old Testament leadership roles that come together in Jesus ... the Prophet, the Priest, and the King.

Moses is a foreshadowing of the king ... a governmental ruler, if you will. His brother Aaron is clearly the priest. And while Moses is a prophet, his SISTER MIRIAM is a prophet, as well.

So the first time that we catch a glimpse of the prophet, priest, and king roles of leadership that Jesus will fulfill... the Lord very intentionally, very much against the culture, places a woman - Miriam - in one of those roles. But of course it makes sense... because we are told in Genesis 1 that it will take us together to reflect His image.

Moses-Aaron-Miriam.

And then the people of God enter the promised land, and the time of the Judges begins.

Judges were political leaders ... but they were not voted in, or born to their position. The Judges were people clearly called and empowered by God to lead His people.

One of the Judges is a woman - Deborah.

And Deborah is one of only two judges that God gifts as both a Judge AND a prophet.

The Judge was the governmental leader. The prophet was the spiritual authority who called people to God. Deborah was both a political and a spiritual leader!

Sometimes when I talk to people who don't believe that God raises women leaders, if I mention Deborah they'll say this: "Oh, God will ALLOW a woman to lead when there's NO MAN who can do it."

I find it astounding that some believe that a God who can create out of nothing, can't find a man to gift and empower. I do not believe that God is powerless. No. Instead, God intentionally called and gifted and empowered a woman named Deborah to lead the people of God in both governmental and spiritual matters. God was making a statement.

Both women and men are called and gifted by God to lead His people. Deborah.

During the time of the last Judge, Samuel, the people ask for a king.

They are asking for a one-man ruler, passed along by birthright, not gifts or calling, who has to be male.

A king is not God's idea ... it's the people's idea.

In fact, the Lord says that in their asking for a king, the people have rejected God as their King. But in His grace, God still allows for a king.

In the midst of this human request, for a male-only leadership system, God seems to have a bit of fun.

Who is the only monarch to have their story told in their own book in the Bible? QUEEN ESTHER! And interestingly enough, Esther is set up to be a model of what a good king should be ...willing to risk her life for her people. A woman of faith and bravery and boldness.

I think that in the midst of God's people saying: "We want one man to rule us!" God chuckles and puts Queen Esther in place "for such a time as this."  
Esther.

On to the New Testament, to Mary, the mother of Jesus.

One of our Free Methodist bishops was fond of saying this:

If the physical body of Christ was entrusted to a woman, to Mary as His mother...why shouldn't the spiritual Body of Christ -the church- be entrusted to women as well?

On to Jesus. I know Jesus chose twelve men as His apostles.

Of course He did ... the apostles had to reflect the twelve tribes of Israel.

But sometimes people stop there. They say: "Jesus had 12 male leaders!" and they conclude that their church should have all male leaders. By the way, Jesus had 12 Jewish apostles as well, but we don't require all of our pastors to be Jewish now, do we?

Please don't stop at 12 male apostles. If you do, you're missing WAY too much.

Do something for me. Picture, in your head, the boat in Luke chapter 8 when Jesus and his disciples are in a storm.

Picture the boat. Picture the disciples. Picture Jesus asleep as the boat is in turmoil. Did you picture it?

Now be honest. When you pictured the boat in your head, were there any women in the boat?

In the beginning of the chapter where Jesus calms the storm - Luke, chapter 8, Luke writes this:

"Jesus traveled about from one town and village to another, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom of God. The Twelve were with him, and also some women ... Mary

(called Magdalene) ... Joanna the wife of Chuza,... Susanna; and MANY others. These women were helping to support them out of their own means.”

May I point out how radical it would have been for a male rabbi to be traveling with an entourage that included women?

May I also point out that if these women were traveling with Jesus, then in SO many of our Bible stories, where we have pictured only men, women are actually there.

Like in the boat! Mary, Joanna, Susanna, Salome. Know their names! And when you read a story about “the disciples” or “the Twelve” picture the woman among them.

And when the other Mary, sister to Lazarus and Martha, sits at Jesus’ feet, in the position of a learner with a Rabbi, she is behaving radically. She is assuming that Jesus - as a Rabbi - will accept her as a pupil.

Martha thinks is nonsense. Martha asks Jesus to tell Mary to come and help her in the kitchen.

In other words: "Jesus tell Mary to behave like a lady!"

And Jesus crashes into the culture, and says that Mary, sitting at his feet in the position of a rabbinical student, has chosen better than Martha, who has chosen to do what her culture has asked.

When Jesus is resurrected, and He knows that another new era is coming for the people of God, the era of the Holy Spirit, Jesus prepares His disciples for this new era when both women and men will be empowered to preach, to teach, to lead.

How does Jesus do this?

In the garden after He is resurrected, he appears FIRST to Mary Magdalene with a command: "Go and tell the brothers" that I have risen.

Mary is the first preacher of the good news.

An early church father called her “the apostle to the apostles.”

And even though the twelve don’t believe her or listen to her, it begins to prepare them for the day of Pentecost; the day of the coming of the Holy Spirit.

120 people - men and women - are in the room, and the Holy Spirit comes on them like flames of fire, and gives them the ability to preach in other languages.

In Jerusalem on that day were people from EVERY NATION. There are over 120 languages in the world. That would mean that every person who was given the gift of tongues should have been given a different language.

Which means that some of the people who heard the good news preached in the streets on that day of Pentecost, ONLY heard it through the preaching of a woman.

Should women preach? They certainly did on the day of Pentecost. They were driven by the Holy Spirit to preach.

What about leadership in the early church? Let's look at one example, Romans 16.

Romans 16 starts with us discovering that the letter to the church in Rome is being delivered by Phoebe, a woman who is a minister - a diakonos - in an official ministry capacity - from the church of Cenchreae.

The letter to the Romans is the most theologically complex book in the New Testament. It is given to a woman minister to deliver, and the expectation would have been that she would have to explain the letter, to the Romans, in all its theological complexity.

Phoebe was clearly a spiritual leader in the early church.

Continuing on in Romans 16, Paul greets 28 leaders in the church of Rome.

TEN of them are women. And not just any women! Priscilla, who is abnormally listed prior to her husband, which would seem to indicate a higher position of leadership. And Junia who, Paul says, is "outstanding among the apostles." A woman with strong apostolic leadership gifts.

The early church had women leaders and preachers.

And then... at another key turning point in the history of the early church, a significant woman shows up.

The Apostle Paul is on his missionary journey with Silas and Luke and Timothy. They have been traveling in Galatia, in Asia Minor, modern day Turkey.

They try to enter Bithynia, still in Asia Minor, and the Lord's Spirit won't allow them to.

And in the night, Paul has a vision. A man from Macedonia, is standing and begging him: "Come to Macedonia to help us."

And so the team concludes that the Lord is leading them to Macedonia. This is the first time that a missions team is headed to church plant in Europe.

This is new territory.

And they get to the first city in Macedonia, Philippi.

I'm guessing that Paul has described this man from Macedonia from his vision, and everyone is looking for this man.

But surprise! The man from Macedonia ends up being... a woman! I understand why the vision that the Lord gave Paul was not the vision of a woman in the fashion industry named Lydia. I'm not sure Paul would have concluded the vision was from the Lord! But here she is. Open to the Lord. Winning her entire household to him. Offering to host the team. Opening her home for the first church in Europe.

It's a WOMAN that opens up Europe to the gospel.

I could keep going but that's probably enough for the moment.

We started in Genesis 1, where we are told that both men and women were created to rule and reign. And we will end in Revelation 22, the last book of the Bible.

At the end of time...

(Revelation 22:3-5): "The throne of God and of the Lamb will be in the city, and his servants will serve him. They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads....And they will **reign** for ever and ever."

Those who SERVE HIM - not just men, but all who serve him, women included - will REIGN and RULE for ever and ever... just like Genesis 1.

When we look at the whole scope of the Word of God, when we look at what God has been up to, not people, but God ... we see God raising up, empowering, women leaders and preachers.

Do you see why I don't understand how people can take one or two passages and form their theology around that when the sweep of the Scriptures is this?

Eve, Sarah, Miriam, Deborah, Esther, Mary, Joanna, Susanna, Mary and Martha, Phoebe, Priscilla, Junia, Lydia...

... and I haven't had time for  
Shiphrah, Puah,  
Rahab, Jael, Abigail,  
Huldah, Anna, Euodia,  
Narcissus, Tryphena, Persis...  
... I'll stop now.

But do you get the idea?



So why is this important? There are three reasons.

First, this world is in rough shape. And we need everyone on the mission of God. PLEASE... don't ever discourage a woman who is being called by God! Don't discourage her simply because of her gender.

Second, we MUST be people of integrity. As Free Methodists, we ordain women. Our churches must be open to the best person being the pastor, regardless of gender. It's a matter of living what we say we believe.

Third, it is only together, as men and women, do we fully reflect the image of God. If our children only see a man as pastor, they will not see the full image of God in the pastorate, the very place we should most be reflecting the Lord.

As the Body of Christ, we need to be praying for and working towards raising up a new generation of leaders.

I believe God will honor our prayers and our work and will provide.

But I also believe that many that God will call in this new generation will be women.

Our churches must be prepared for this. When God answers our prayers for next generation leaders, we must be ready to thank Him for His provision, not refuse those He's calling.

In order to prepare ALL of our churches to welcome women pastors ...

Include women preachers at your church. Talk to your members and board about this commitment we have. Prepare your churches for now and the future.

Also, look for next generation leaders that God may be calling. Look for both men and women.

Prepare your church to be open to WHOMEVER - woman or man - that God raises up to lead them in the next season.

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**Other resources:**

**General:**

English:

<https://www.cbeinternational.org/>

<https://juniaproject.com/>

Francais:

<https://www.cbeinternational.org/fr/>

*Other articles:*

<https://www.christianpost.com/voices/does-the-bible-teach-male-headship.html>

<https://www.christianpost.com/voices/does-1-timothy-212-15-prohibit-women-having-authority-over-men.html>

<https://www.christianpost.com/voices/what-ephesians-5-really-means-about-husband-wife-submission.html>

<https://www.cbeinternational.org/resource/there-head-house-home/>

<https://juniaproject.com/paul-turns-headship-head-ephesians-5/>