



The Case For Women As Bishops -*Harry L. Jackson*

“A bishop then must be blameless, the husband of one wife...” - 1 Timothy 3:2

When the apostle Paul states that a “bishop” (overseer) in the Christian Church was required to be the “husband of one wife,” it was because he knew that he was dealing, at that time with a Gentile culture in which it was the norm for men, especially those who were prominent in society, and considered to be “leaders,” to have multiple wives. In stating that the Christian leader should only be married to one person, he was therefore setting a Kingdom standard, stipulating that in God's house there was to be faithfulness, and not multiplicity, especially in marriage, and especially among the church leadership. Additionally, ancient culture generally, in most societies, made allowance for men only to occupy positions of leadership. So Paul was speaking to the culture of his times, and was not particularly excluding women from being leaders, “Bishop,” or otherwise. If one were to examine Paul’s writings, wherein he mentions the names of the people who functioned as part of his “apostolic team,” so to speak, one would find that of the 16-20 Christian workers who made up the list of people who operated with Paul at various times in his ministry, there were a number of women who could be designated as “leaders.” Upon looking up the word for “bishop” in the King James Version of the Bible, we find that it is the same word which is used for “elder” (overseer)- the word is “episkopos.” Therefore, if we look at this case in the modern context, making allowance for the emergence of female “pastors,” if it is “unlawful” for a woman to occupy the “office” of Bishop, then it is just as unlawful for her to occupy the five-fold ministry function of “pastor,” a “pastor” being an “elder” (overseer, EPISKOPOS) who has a “pastoral” call on his or her life, and a “Bishop” being an “elder” who has a “pastoral” call over his or her life, and who oversees multiple local assemblies. It would not make sense to say that a woman can be a “pastor” over a local assembly, but not a “Bishop,” over more than one assembly, because to say so would be to say that a woman may have oversight over ONE local assembly, but not more than ONE. If a woman should not be allowed to function as a “bishop,” then why should she be allowed to occupy the position of “pastor,” seeing as how Paul has supposedly precluded women from holding ANY position of leadership, because it is impossible for a woman to be “the husband of one wife?” So then, if what Paul is saying is to be taken in the context that most opponents of female bishops, and female leadership in general would present it, that would mean, that if the house that the local female pastor currently oversees were to send out workers, and if those workers were to plant a new assembly, i.e. “church,” then that assembly would

have to either consider itself "independent," OR place itself under the "covering" of another overseeing elder, besides the "pastor" who sent forth the workers who planted it, because if it were to continue to be aligned with the assembly that it originated from, that pastor would automatically become a "bishop," whether anyone puts a ring on her finger, a "mitre" on her head and hands her papers, or not. She would, by virtue of her new function, for all intents and purposes, be a BISHOP, and would be required to immediately step down from her position, which would, in most cases, be relationally unfeasible, as well as spiritually damaging to those under her oversight. In addition, aside from the facts stated above, it can be reasonably said that such thinking that divides and assigns leadership roles according to gender, except in specialized circumstances, (i.e. a male is probably NOT the best choice to lead a "women's ministry.") is contrary to "apostolic" thinking, as Jesus came to do away with such distinctions, having poured out His spirit upon ALL flesh, an exception being made as it pertains to headship in the home and marriage. Examples such as the APOSTLES Junia and Priscilla are evidence of God using women in powerful leadership roles in the early New Testament church, and serve to foreshadow His intent to do the same today. Therefore, to use Paul's statement in 1 Timothy pertaining to the marital status of Christian leaders as one that excludes women from leadership by virtue of their gender is, at best, theologically shoddy, as well as socially and historically inaccurate.

Read: "Who Said Women Can't Teach?" by Charles Trombley and "Women, The Ministry, And The Gospel," by Mark Husbands and Timothy Larsen.