**What is the role of women in the Church (part 1)**

1. **Women have been oppressed throughout history**

1a) In almost every culture and nation in history women have been oppressed, marginalised, silenced and put down, their freedoms denied, their voices silenced, their gifts not welcomed or recognised, their contribution to society limited.

1b) The church has been no better. Britain had a woman prime minister 15 years before the Church of England allowed women to become a priests.

1. **Jesus called women to be His disciples**

2a) In Jesus’ day, the Jewish rabbis had a particular prayer that they would pray virtually every day. “Blessed art thou, O God, for not making me a Gentile, slave, or woman.”

2b) Women could not become priests or governors, or even witnesses in a court of law. They were not even allowed to participate in the studying of the Torah. The Talmud states “It is foolishness to teach Torah to your daughter” (Sotah 20a).

2c) Jesus broke that culturally accepted pattern. He started calling women to become his disciples and to accompany him on his travels. ***“After this, Jesus travelled 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 …”*** (Luke 8, 1-3) That would have seemed scandalous in a society where women were not allowed to stay outside of the home of their husband or brother unless they were staying with other families.

2d) Jesus opened up the possibility for both men and women to become his disciples. ***“WHOEVER wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me”*** (Matt. 16, 24).

2e) For those who question whether Jesus had women disciples, the following verse makes it indisputable that Jesus regarded women as his disciples. “Someone told Jesus, ‘Your mother and brothers are standing outside, wanting to speak to you.’ He replied to him, *‘Who is my mother, and who are my brothers?’* ***Pointing to his disciples****, he said, ‘Here are* ***my mother*** *(female followers) and my brothers* (male followers). (Matt. 12, 47-49).

2f) In the story of Mary and Martha (Luke 10, 38-42), ***“Martha had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord’s feet listening to what he said.”*** In Bible days, the expression “to sit at the feet of a rabbi” meant that you were a disciple of that rabbi, something that was not allowed for women. Martha was frustrated with Mary because she had neglected to fulfil the role of a woman and had taken the role of a man! But Jesus says that ***“Mary has chosen what is better and it will not be taken away from her”***. In a culture that believed that teaching women the law was inappropriate and disgraceful, Jesus defends Mary’s choice to be his disciple, to sit at his feet, and learn.

1. **Women – where did it all go wrong?**

3a) Women were created in the image and likeness of God. “God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them” (Gen. 1, 27).

3b) Women were originally created as equal partners with men and jointly given the commission to exercise leadership over the world. ***“Male and female he created them. God blessed them and said to them ….rule over every living creature that moves on the ground”*** (Gen 1, 27-28).

3c) God originally created Adam alone - in the full likeness and image of God (Gen 2, 7). Adam was perfect but not complete. ***“It is not good for man to be alone”*** (Gen 2, 18)

3d) Later God removed the woman out of the man ***“God took one of the man’s ribs and then closed up the place with flesh. Then the Lord God made a woman from the rib He had taken out of the man”*** (Gen. 2, 21-22).

3e) It’s only when you have both a man and a woman together that you have the full image and likeness of God.

3f) Man was “**formed”.** Woman was “**fashioned”**. “Form” is a word about building and shaping. **“Fashioned”** is a “second process” word, taking what is there and upgrading it. It’s a more delicate, intricate, complicated process. Woman was a more complicated, fashionable upgrade on man!

3g) Man was formed out of the ground- see man’s connection with the ground. He was made more rugged, simple, strong. His default connection is the ground. Farming, hunting, growing, building.

3h) Woman was fashioned from one of Adam’s ribs. Her default connection is husband, children, people & relationships.

1. **Women – man’s partner**

4a) ***“It is not good for man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him”*** (Gen. 2, 18). The word “helper” is the Hebrew word Ezer- rעֵ֖זֶר.

4b) This word is never translated “servant” and doesn’t mean that a woman’s role is to clean man’s cave and cook his food.

4c) Ezer never refers to a “lesser” helper - i.e. a servant. Always an equal or greater helper.

4d) The word Ezer comes 19 times in the OT. It is twice used to describe a wife and seventeen times to describe God Himself. “Our help (ezer) is in the name of the Lord (Psalm 124, 8. See Psalm 146, 5, Psalm 33, 20, etc). The name “Eliezer” means “God is my helper”.

4e) Just like the man should co-labour with the Lord, lean on Him for his strength and wisdom and allow the Lord the space to direct him and speak to him, so the man should co-labour with woman, lean on her for strength and wisdom and allow her the space to direct him and speak into his life.

4f) It is not good for man to be alone – it is not good for man to lead a church alone, because if you want the full character and likeness of God to be passed onto your spiritual children in the church, you need both the strength and protection of the man and the insight and nurture of the woman, both governing and serving together in perfect balance.

1. **God’s curse changed women’s destiny – from freedom and leadership to subjugation and slavery**

5a) When Adam and Eve turned away from God, God put His curse upon them and their environment.

5b) To the woman He said; ***“I will make your pains in childbearing very severe; with painful labour you will give birth to children. Your desire will be for your husband, and he will rule over you.”*** (Gen 3, 16).

5c) The Hebrew word “Mashal” means to rule, have dominion or govern. As a result of her disobedience, God’s curse on woman was that her leadership was taken away and that man would rule over her.

5d) From that time, instead of being friends and lovers, equal partners, man started dominating women, taking away their choice and freedoms, being abusive and arrogant towards them.

5e) Consequently, the world has been shaped much more by dominant males than nurturing females.

5f) Men commit 80% of all the crimes in the world? In the UK, 95.9% of prisoners are male, while women commit only 0.04% of all violent crimes. Men are also responsible for starting the vast majority of all wars in history, committing the worst atrocities ever chronicled and inciting nearly every genocide in the history of the planet. Men account for most of the rapes, serial killings, thefts and even white collar crimes. It was men who put Jesus on the cross. Not a single female was involved in the crucifixion. As a matter of fact, Pilate’s wife tried to talk her husband out of crucifying Jesus.

5g) God’s curse also fell on men, turning their labour into painful toil. The curse even fell on the ground bringing forth thorns and thistles, and because Adam was made of the ground, the curse that brought forth thorns and thistles in the ground brought forth sickness and disease in mankind.

1. **At the cross, Jesus broke the curse**

6a) The death and resurrection of Jesus were the most significant turning point in the history of the world. Jesus carried all of mankind’s sin and disobedience on the cross and overturned every area of curse that had originally fallen on mankind. He overcame the curse of sin and sickness and separation from God and death and made it possible for people to be forgiven, healed, draw close to God and to overcome death and live with God forever in heaven.

6b) Paul explained it like this. ***“Christ redeemed us from the curse of the Law, having become a curse for us ….”*** (Gal. 3, 13). When Jesus died on the cross, He broke off every area that had been affected by the curse of God.

6c) If the curse over men was broken so that they could be healed and forgiven and draw near to God, it follows that the curse that allows husbands to dominate their wives was also broken.

6d) God is calling Christian women to rise up into their calling and become partners, co-rulers with men. Christian women should be among the most powerful people on the planet.

1. **Jesus personally commissioned women to be the first preachers in “the Church”**

7a) The first message that Jesus gave to the newly formed church after he rose from the dead was that he wanted to break the curse over women who had been to be subjugated to men and that they had no role of influence or leadership to play.

7b) Remember that women weren’t allowed to give testimony in a court of law in Jesus’ time. Though Jesus could have first appeared to men after his resurrection, he deliberately chose to be seen first by women.

7c) Jesus personally commissioned the women to be His first witnesses to the most important message in history.

7d) The New Testament word for church in Greek is “Ekklēsia”. It doesn’t refer to a building. Rather it was the normal word for an assembly or a gathering of people. The early church often just gathered together in houses, so it was called a “gathering” or a “Church”.

7e) The first command that Jesus gave after He rose from the dead was to tell the women to go to the “gathering” of disciples (the church) and “preach***”. “Go to my brothers and tell them, “I am ascending to my Father.”*** (John 20, 17).

1. **Jesus commands his disciples (men and women) to preach the gospel**

8a) We saw earlier that Jesus’ disciples included both men and women.

8b) Jesus commanded his first disciples to make others their disciples (both men and women). ***“Go and make disciples of all nations …teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.” (Matt. 28. 19-20).***

8c) The command to obey **EVERYTHING** that Jesus commanded the first disciples to do, obviously included his command to “***Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation”*** (Mark 16, 15).