

Religious Gender Inequality

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### **Abstract**

This writer utilized the sources (one book and five articles) used in Contemporary Issues of Leadership IV to produce a research paper that addressed my three questions: 1.) Is there a biblical and theological precedent of women in the Bible when it comes to their role in ministry? 2.) How were women used in the ministry of Jesus, the early church and today in regard to their roles? and 3.) What are the attitudes and perceptions of Beulah Heights University Faculty, Staff and Students in concern to women serving in the ministry including the role of pastoring? Utilizing scholarly articles from ATLA Religion database, GAGILEO and PROQUEST on women in the ministry of Jesus, the early church, the gospel of Jesus and the ministry of women, women in ministry and theological reflections on the role of women in church and society, this writer will provide greater detail and evidence that Jesus moved away from the attitude that the clergy should be a male preserve and towards a view which accepts suitable women with a vocation for ministry into positions of trust. This writer will also explain which research method(s) most appropriate to explore the research question(s) identified in week two of the Contemporary Issues of Leadership IV course. After explaining which method would be used, and why it is best suited to answer the question(s), explore the potential weaknesses of this research method and identify what measures can be taken to compensate for the weaknesses. After examining the first research question, Is there a biblical and theological precedent of women in the Bible when it comes to their role in ministry?, we must find out the number of women who served in the Bible and the impact of their services. This calls for quantitative research where the practical details of the findings are established. The second question, How were women used in the ministry of Jesus, the early church and today in regard to their roles?, aims at determining how women were used in the ministry of Jesus in the early church and today regarding their roles. Qualitative research is best suited for this problem. The third question, What are the attitudes and

perceptions of Beulah Heights University Faculty, Staff and Students in concern to women serving in the ministry including the role of pastoring? tries to establish the attitudes and perceptions of Beulah Heights University students, faculty and staff in concern to women serving in the ministry including pastoring. This question emphasizes on determining the attitudes and perceptions of people towards a given subject. These are attributes that are associated with qualitative research. From the above explanations, both qualitative and quantitative research methodologies are applied to facilitate this research. This combination is known as mixed research methodologies. To prevent the weaknesses brought about by the use of mixed research methodologies as presented above, it's essential that some solutions be availed to avoid the stalling of the research.

This study is significant because there has been much debate about this subject. There has been a great acceptance of women into the ministry, but there is there still room for improvement. In relation to women, Jesus' manner of life is even more instructive than his teaching. Women were Jesus' companions in the days of his ministry; they continued with him through the crucifixion when all men except John had fled, and they were the first witnesses and proclaimers of the resurrection. After having found out all of this information, this writer do not see why women and men cannot serve God's ministry in unity, but this is the problem that continues to exist from the early church until now.

### Religious Gender Equality

The primary purpose of this research paper is produce a research paper that addressed my three questions: 1.) Is there a biblical and theological precedent of women in the Bible when it comes to their role in ministry? 2.) How were women used in the ministry of Jesus, the early church and today in regard to their roles? and 3.) What are the attitudes and perceptions of Beulah Heights University Faculty, Staff and Students in concern to women serving in the ministry including the role of pastoring? The secondary purpose is to explain which research method(s) are most appropriate to explore the research question(s) identified above and after explaining which method would be used, and why it is best suited to answer the question(s), explore the potential weaknesses of this research method and identify what measures can be taken to compensate for the weaknesses. The third purpose is to find research on how women were used in the Ministry of Jesus in the early and modern churches. The last purpose is to aim to bring unity among men and women, serving in the ministry.

Females make up a significant proportion of congregations in most places of worship. However, in most churches, male leadership is still valued, and women are given minimal or no leadership roles at all. For example, in some churches, women are allowed to do trifling chores like cleaning the church grounds or entertaining guests, and when it comes to essential roles such as making announcements at the pulpit, preaching, and leading the service, they are left out. A good instance of gender discrimination is the Roman Catholic Church, where it is rare for women to get ordained as priests (Cole & Guy-Sheftall, 2003). In the end, the women and other marginalized individuals like the lesbians, transgendered persons, and gays feel discriminated, and they opt to leave. These groups are forced to start places of worship where they are welcomed and respected.

Although the role of women contribution towards religion development and establishment has been phenomenal, the fact remains that they face a lot of challenges just

like other women in the societies in which they originate. In many instances, women and female colleagues are viewed as insignificant parties in most spheres of life, and surprisingly, this has been noticed from the religious perspective. Traditional attitudes, mindsets, and practices are some of the compelling factors that have facilitated the discrimination of women in society, and in this case in the religious community. Some individuals argue basing their facts on different perspectives, in regards to the role of women in the church. The famous scripture used from the Bible, 1 Corinthians 14:34, has been used to keep women out of positions in the church that have been deemed as male-dominated roles such as pastoring and preaching because it advises women to keep silence in the church.

Respect and recognition of women in society is a subject that has received worldwide attention. Individuals, civic organizations, and governments are trying to ensure that the roles of men and women are equally recognized and respected. It is because, from a general perspective, gender inequality, especially towards women is the most common form of social injustice that is prevalent in our modern society. Religion plays a very significant role towards the shaping of the nation. Therefore, a clear understanding should be in place to enhance positive moral and ethical codes in our communities. The church will understand the roles of men and women and their prevalence towards the existence of the church.

The status of men and women in all perspectives, i.e., religion and the broader society, is the result of interpretation of the biblical texts. An in-depth look at the Bible gives a clear picture of the role and importance of women, a fact that should be adopted in the modern day society. Although Jesus, according to the Bible worked with men, the existence of women leadership is also evident in the Bible. They are among the characters that are known to have shaped the nature of Christ and influenced some of his actions. An excellent example of this is the story of water being turned into wine by the request of Jesus' mother, and this was deemed as the first Miracle of Jesus.

To complement the effectiveness of this research, this writer is going to provide answers to several questions regarding the precedent of women in the Bible. The focus of the questions are on how women were used in the ministry of Jesus and the through research what would be the attitudes and perceptions of students, faculty and staff of Beulah Heights University regarding women serving in the ministry and in the role of pastoring.

### **Significance of the Study**

Iris Bohnet, author of *What Works: Gender Equality by Design* argues that it is dangerous to think that the discussion regarding gender equality is a thing of the past. In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, no one is immune to gender bias even if society has shifted attention from feminism to the neglect of the male child. Society has been forced to believe that we live in an equal world where all can thrive regardless of their gender.

In Bohnet's book, *What Works: Gender Equality by Design*, she convinced this writer she manages to convince readers that sexism is still prevalent. She uses a couple of examples to cement her idea that unconscious bias is always a limiting force. Numerous attempts to de-bias people thoughts have proven futile (Bohnet, 2016, p. 54). Bohnet argues that there are better ways and approaches of addressing the issue of gender equality in the contemporary world.

This research will contribute significantly towards the benefit of the church and religion at large, considering that there has been much debate about this subject. There has been a great acceptance of women in the church today, but it there is still room for improvement and has been viewed as insufficient in the eyes of many that feel that women have a right to participate and contribute to ministry as men. Additionally, the study will be fundamental in providing insight to the underlying problem; few women serving in the ministry, yet they were among the individuals who were close to Jesus in the days of his

ministry all through the crucifixion and resurrection. This study will also provide empirical evidence on how some women ministers trained and mentored are competent in their leadership roles, making an impression on the need of such leaders in the modern church.

### **Limitations of the Study**

Gender is a very diverse field to the extent it becomes difficult to be efficiently covered by one study. As a result, this research is limited to gender equality as it concerns men and women serving in the ministry. Examples supporting the facts presented in this paper will be drawn from the role of women in the early and modern churches. However, this will be a fundamental aspect towards the realization of the objectives of this study. A few examples, as mentioned will be looked upon and assumptions will be made based upon them.

### **Research Methodologies**

The importance of research methodologies cannot be undermined when carrying out research. According to experts, different types of research fit specific environments, based on the variables at hand. In some instances, to produce accurate results, researchers are forced to apply the two types of research, that is, qualitative and quantitative.

The research methodologies adopted in this study is aimed at exploring the critical queries that form the basis of this research. The first question seeks to find answers whether there is a biblical and theological precedent of women in the bible when it comes to their role in ministry. In a pure form, this question requires us to prove whether there have been early events or actions that could be used as examples today about the role of women in a biblical and theological perspective.

While studying this question, many women who served in the ministry are chosen, as per the Bible. For example, to answer this question, we must find out the number of women who served in the Bible and the impact of their services. This calls for quantitative research

where the practical details of the findings are established. As Coyle et al., (2008) mentions, quantitative analysis aims at measuring something (p. 57). In the same perspective, this can call for qualitative research. The role of women in their natural settings can be observed in the Bible.

To efficiently come up with sound answers to this question, one has to make a comparison of the roles of women as provided in the problem. After getting a clear glimpse of the women in the Bible, one would be required to make comparisons with the current situation in case any question is posed in the modern world. The comparison is relevant as it will facilitate knowing the ratio of women in ministry in the biblical times to that in the contemporary world. The application of qualitative and quantitative research of this question is enhanced by giving the correct answers to the problem.

The second question aims at determining how women were used in the ministry of Jesus in the early church and today regarding their roles. Qualitative research is best suited for this problem. Unlike quantitative analysis which is aimed at measuring something numerically, the qualitative research seeks to understand the attitudes, beliefs, and experiences of given groups. For example, as experts argue, the quantitative study aims at answering how, when and why some events happened and their impact on the experiences of an individual. Qualitatively, the same is achieved by studying the scriptures to come to an appreciation of how women were used in the ministry of Jesus. The perspectives of qualitative research are evident with this research question, therefore, making it the best mechanism to be used.

The third and last question tries to establish the attitudes and perceptions of Beulah Heights University students, faculty and staff in concern to women serving in the ministry including pastoring. Just like the previous question, this one emphasizes on determining the

attitudes and perceptions of people towards a given subject. These are attributes that are associated with qualitative research. Coyle attributes qualitative research as a focus towards realizing the perceptions and experiences of people. Several standard qualitative methods can be used here by the researcher, for example, observe the students, faculty and staff of Beulah Heights University and how they relate to women at Beulah Heights University in the classroom, chapel and the church. Based on the observations, the researcher makes a conclusion. Additionally, the researcher can interview many individuals within the institution, and make assumptions regarding their perceptions and experiences.

From the above explanations, both qualitative and quantitative research methodologies are applied to facilitate this research. This combination is known as mixed research methodologies. This method allows the researcher to analyze questions to produce the right answers critically. The common disadvantage of this research is that the researcher's focus will be one more than one discussion, therefore trying to prove more than one point. On the other hand, this type of research is disadvantageous in that it requires a lot of time to make more analysis. Such might call for the need of an extended period to carry out the research which might make the researcher feel bored. Additionally, many resources might be needed to run this investigation (Bohnet, 2016, p. 14).

To prevent the weaknesses brought about by the use of mixed research methodologies as presented above, it's essential that some solutions be availed to avoid the stalling of the research. For instance, the researcher, before embarking on the study is expected to draft a work plan that will capture his/her schedule, requirements and other relevant information. The work plan helps the researcher establish the best approaches towards the research. To facilitate the study, the researcher should look for financial resources and hire assistants who will help in the study and consequently, this will assist the economic aspect of the research.

### **Gender Roles**

Different communities have a set of specific roles that each sex is expected to carry out. In the context of the society, gender is a social construct of what is expected of men or women, whereas sex implies the anatomical or biological features. Women and men learn their roles and responsibilities from their cultures as they interact with other individuals such as caregivers, childhood and adolescent friends, workmates, and from family responsibilities (Waseem, 2015). Of the two genders, the females are more likely to be discriminated against as compared to their male counterparts. Although most nations have policies in place that address gender inequities, inequalities remain high. Depending on how either sex correlates with members of the society, men and women develop differently in emotions, attitude, and behavior. These differences maintain and form the foundation for the gendered societal directive. Gender inequality also implies that women have a lesser say in politics, civil, economic and cultural matters.

### **The Role of Women in the Early Church**

In this subsection, this writer is going to provide analysis based on women in the Old Testament, New Testament and ancient accounts per history. Historians and theologians believe that women were a part of the congregation of Jesus Christ in the New Testament. The female involvement, therefore, as Bohnet (2016) writes, offered them significant roles in the early church (p. 9). According to Bohnet, there were no divisions or rather discrimination towards the presence of male and female counterparts in the church. He argues that depending on one's gifts and talents, leadership positions were equally divided among men and women. He attributes the separation of women in the church to the misinterpretation of the Bible, especially in the Letter of Paul. He proves this argument on the explanation that early on, Paul had written to the people insisting that both men and women are equal. He

continued to encourage this message when he instructed the Galatians in his letter to them, to shun the conventional cultural practices that disregarded women in the society.

Other historians, in the same perspective have reflected the perfect portrait of women, as demonstrated in the Bible to be remarkable. A brief look at the Old Testament, one encounters legendary women leaders, and inspirers, who stood their ground to facilitate positive events in their lives and shaping lives of those who were close to them. Some of these women are Sarah, Deborah, Rebekah, Leah, Rachel, and Esther (Eriksson-Ztterquist & Renemark, 2016, p. 370).

Whereas women were in some instances viewed as inferiors, and weak as compared to their male counterparts under the Mosaic Law, they were treated with respect, enjoying dignities in the state of Israel. This was many years before the descending of Jesus. Deuteronomy 12 notes, anyone who showed a form of misbehavior or disrespect towards their mother could face death under the Mosaic Law.

Newkirk & Cooper, (2013) points out that, in the same instance, although a woman was considered to be inferior, it was the role of the man to love and cherish his female companion, in this case, a wife (p. 324). Among other tasks, the law gave permission to the man to redeem his wife on instances of oppression towards her.

In the New Testament, the Bible gives a clear picture of the status that women should be accorded under the instructions of Christ. Unlike in the Old Testament where rules were based on the Mosaic Law, redemption had been achieved in the New Testament, under the guidance of Jesus. Among the first verses in the New Testament, the Bible shares the factors that led to our salvation and women were included. It is through the birth of Jesus Christ by Mary the virgin. Some religious experts argue on women ministrations. The birth of Jesus by Mary became the turning point of women, according to their stand on religion and societal

perspective. The conception of Jesus Christ by virgin Mary was the first conversation debate in concern to the importance of women in the society and how they should be respected and viewed. To be specific, they should be allowed to express themselves and carry out religious norms, just like their male counterparts because God allowed the Savior to be conceived through a woman.

The Old Testament provides insights to women to rule households. It is a role traditionally attributed to men. Why would the Bible recommend women from the same perspective? This is an example to show that Jesus understands the ability of women to rule. The woman is expected to manage the affairs associated with the family; it is clearly pointed out in the Bible.

### **Role of Women in the Modern Church**

Most leadership roles in the modern church have been allocated to men. In a general perspective, women are not allowed to serve as deacons and priests in the Orthodox and Roman Catholic churches. In the recent past, the Protestant church has not been allowing women to be anointed, though the same has been adopted of late. In regards to the same, the anointing of women to serve in the ministry has faced a lot of challenges, with few women serving as compared to their male counterparts.

Statistics available indicates that there are a high number of women attending the church as compared to men, with 61% and 39% respectively. In the United States of America, more than 25% of married women attend the church without husbands whereas midweek activities show that up to 80% of women participate (Coyle, 2007, p. 60). The figures further reveal that more than 70% of young boys raised in the church abandon it during their teens and twenties, never to return. The most shocking part of these figures is the number of

employees, where apart from the ordained clergy (mostly men); women are the majority of church employees.

### **How Did Jesus View Women?**

As mentioned in the beginning, Jesus, in the Bible shares a lot with women. In fact, women in some instances influence his actions. Nevertheless, we have seen the presence of women from the beginning of Jesus' ministry, through his crucifixion and ascension to heaven. Such, as explained in the preceding paragraphs, demonstrates that the role of women in the ministry has been prevalent and should be embraced wholly in the modern church.

Newkirk and Cooper explains in his book, "The Temple: Its Ministry and Services," in which was during the time of Jesus Christ, at no instance, did Jesus underrate the role of women, as modern society does. Jesus felt women had an intrinsic value, just as men. Biblical creation accounts upholding the position of women as that of men originates from the Old Testament. It is also evident in the New Testament where Jesus taught on impartiality. In the Old Testament, in the creation day, the creator made them male and female (Gen 1:27). In the New Testament, Jesus illustrates that women are created in the image of God, just like men. Therefore, just like their male counterparts, women represent the image of God. As a result, they should be allowed to have self-awareness, a measure of determination, expression and above all, they should have personal responsibility for their actions.

The second example of Jesus' regard towards respect of women is how he addressed women. Accounts in the Bible reveal that he spoke kindly and politely towards them, an aspect that some religious heads at the time could not tolerate (Davidman & Greil, 1994, p. 100). While addressing women, he spoke in a thoughtful manner, in order not to provoke them. On some occasions, he treated them as "daughters."

Christ's intrinsic view on women does not end with the above example. A case of the Samaritan woman is another example that demonstrates how Jesus valued women. In this case, Jesus speaks directly to the Samaritan woman at the well, a move that amazes his disciples. According to their expectations, the Samaritan woman, a sinner, lacked the moral authority to be addressed by Jesus.

In the story of the woman accused of adultery, Jesus spoke freely with the woman. A crowd, comprised of a more significant number of men had gathered to punish the woman according to the Mosaic Laws. The crowd thought that Jesus, a spiritual Savior, was going to condemn the woman but instead he asked them to prove their innocence of not sinning and stone the woman. In that instance, men started leaving the scene. In respect of the woman's values, he politely requested her to leave and urged her to stop sinning. This writer thinks this case would have been different with men or rather the modern society.

An explanation relating to Jesus's attitude toward women is given by Newkirk & Cooper (2013, p. 330). As he notes, Jesus was kind and gentle to women. In cases where he wanted to correct them, he did so in a gentle manner. In his explanation, this author states that Jesus defied the odds and spoke to women, although the Rabbis had prohibited it. Therefore, Jesus still counted women on his list of friends, a fact that is explained in the Bible account which describes how Jesus loved his friends, Mary and Martha (John 11:15).

Jesus was compassionate with women. From the facts presented, he believed in equal treatment with men and women. In this instance, the Rabbis had also prohibited Torah teachings to women. In the story of Mary and Martha, Jesus instructed Mary to prepare food which could have been viewed as a counter teaching to the Rabbical law. Jesus highlighted her actions as law rather than demeaning her as just a servant. Newkirk further explains that

Jesus did not restrict Martha to stop serving. Instead, he gently corrected her attitude about Mary.

The reflection obtained from the Mary and Martha story is a clear demonstration that Jesus had such high regards and respect for women that he was mindful of his approach with them. Instead, he extends his heavenly behavior and warns gently. In other words, Jesus did not see the importance of abusing or disrespecting women. From the above readings, Christ respected Mary, Martha, the Woman of Samaria, and other females during his stay on earth. There are growing examples in today's world where women are mistreated and not regarded equal to men.

### **Explanations and Assumptions**

It's clear from the above observations and explanations that Jesus highly respected women, and was keen on their establishment in the society as well as in the religious community. In understanding this, we can relate it to the gender equality aspect of the church. Events leading to these assumptions explain or instead demonstrate that there has been a biblical and theological precedent in the role of women in the ministry, traced back to the times of Jesus (Grown, et al., 2016, p. 315).

Although historians claim that many activities, relating to the role of women in the church were either deleted or re-written, there has been some evidence in regards to this as shown in the history of the women in the early church and in how Jesus viewed women. It is critical that we examine the history examples in order to understand the importance of women in the ministry.

First and foremost, Christ viewed women as friends, enjoyed their company and thoughtfully spoke to them. Christ as spiritual leader did not disrespect women. Provided that we follow the teachings, and doings of Jesus, this should be supported and practiced in

the modern church. Respecting women and viewing them as friends, as Jesus did, gives women them the feeling of being wanted, appreciated, hence necessitating the need to serve as Clergy.

On the other hand, the Biblical stance on men and women is that both of them are equal, and dependant on each other. Whereas previous recordings in this research contribute to this, about the indiscrimination and justice Jesus portrayed to women. The Bible complements these facts in the book of Corinthians. It also stresses the importance of women and men working together and creating completeness. Neither woman nor man is encouraged to live a solitary life without a spouse. (1 Corinthians 11:11). This mutual dependence expressed in the Bible is vital in the modern church. It should not only apply to home or the society, but it should also be adopted in the church, to facilitate sound leadership as per biblical teachings.

Drawing this assumption from the Bible and Jesus' values, men and women are equal in salvation. This best explains why Jesus spoke with women, even after a prohibition that had been imposed by Rabbis. It also provides reflections as to why upon visiting Mary and Martha, Jesus spoke about religion to Mary, yet the Rabbis had warned against Torah teaching to women. As explained before, Jesus did not see any need for this. Perhaps the reason why Jesus ignored Rabbi's instruction in regards to women is that their view on women was ineffective, and disregarded the role of women in the religion. Christ served as a living example whose teachings should be embraced by all. This writer believes that the teachings of Jesus and most importantly the examples of how Jesus treated women should serve as a model to little girls and women. As a result of knowing our history, the current generations could be aware of the importance of girl child, and precisely the role of women in the church. Such essential virtues of respect would be passed to the next generation. Lastly, the gospel through Christ emphasizes the equality of men and women before salvation.

According to the Bible, men and women stand on an equal footing before God. In Galatians 3:28, women and men hold equivalent positions before Christ (Galatians 3:28). Additionally, this verse is in harmony with the writings in 1 Peter which draws attention to the equality of men and women.

### **Recommendations**

In this section, this writer is going to share reasons why she thinks this research would be of great importance towards realizing the role of women in the church. Many of the recommendations are drawn from a biblical perspective and this writer is going to provide a few details that will enhance the understanding of the role of women and men in the church, to bring a clear understanding towards the same. First, it's vital that we read the Bible from a broader perspective, instead of taking some parts of the scripture, out of their theological concept. As a result of putting this into action, we will find solutions to problems that have been thought to be complicated or rhetorical. This principle will guide us to understanding Bible verses such as 1 Corinthians, which some have used against promoting the role of women in the society. For extended reading and understanding focus on I Corinthians 40.

The second and last recommendation is in order for us to understand the role of women in the church, we must master and understand what the New Testament teaches in regards to the same. In many aspects, the New Testament provides examples of women in concern to respect and the importance of the women in the religious community. Importantly, respect for humanity and related perspectives create a good environment through which women can operate. Such points facilitate their participation in religion, as religion shapes the society. Therefore, we ought to embrace women in the church.

### **Conclusion**

This study is significant because there has been much debate about this subject, Gender Equality. There has been a great acceptance of women into the ministry, but there is still room for improvement. In relation to women, Jesus' manner of life is even more instructive than his teaching. Women were Jesus' companions in the days of his ministry; they continued with him through the crucifixion when all men except John had fled, and they were the first witnesses and proclaimers of the resurrection. After having found out all of this information, this writer has come to know that we should emulate the character traits of Jesus and ensure that women be treated with respect and dignity. This will give women the morale of venturing out into positions such as the ones held by Clergy. This writer does not see why women and men cannot serve God's ministry in unity, but this is the problem that continues to exist from the early church until now.

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