

AGENDA 2.3.2

The theological basis for the ordination of women and men

(See also Agenda 2.2.3, 2.3.1, 2.3.3, 2.3.4 and 2.3.5)

PROPOSED MOTION

Submitted by Redeemer Lutheran Congregation, Toowoomba Qld

BE IT RESOLVED that the Synod not endorse *A Theological Basis for the Ordination of Women and Men: Draft Doctrinal Statement*, since it is inconsistent with biblical teaching.

REASONS FOR THE MOTION

- A. Scripture teaches us the following about the office of the ministry: (1) Christ chose the Twelve and Paul to serve as his Apostles, all of whom were men; (2) when the early church selected a replacement for Judas, the Apostle Peter insisted that this replacement could not simply be any eyewitness of the resurrection, such as Mary Magdalene, but needed to be a man (Acts 1:21–22);¹ (3) Christ, through the Apostle Paul, then instructed the church to ordain men who fit certain God-given criteria to continue on the ministry of Christ’s word that was begun by the Apostles (1 Tim 3:1–7; Titus 1:5–9); and (4) he prohibited women from carrying out the central function of the pastoral office, which is the authoritative preaching and teaching of Christ’s word within the church as it gathers for divine service (1 Cor 14:33b–38; 1 Tim 2:11–15). In this way the New Testament, both by its example and by a command given not once but twice, teaches us that women should not be ordained.
- B. The Draft Doctrinal Statement (DDS) tries to overturn this teaching with a series of six paragraphs that either misrepresent biblical teaching or else fail to warrant the conclusion that is drawn from them. This can be demonstrated as follows:
1. The DDS asserts that “the precedent of male apostles does not require that pastors be male today.” This might be true if the precedent stood all by itself and was not supported by wider biblical teaching. Yet that is not the case.
 2. The DDS reminds us that Jesus included women in his wider circle of disciples. This is true. It just doesn’t warrant the conclusion that women should be ordained. According to New Testament teaching, being a disciple of Jesus Christ is a necessary qualification for being a pastor, but not a sufficient one (1 Tim 3:1–7; Titus 1:5–9).
 3. The DDS then points us to examples of women in the New Testament who were involved in various forms of ministry. Some of this data it presents accurately. At other points it makes claims that go well beyond the data, such as when it asserts that there was a female Apostle called Junia,² that Phoebe and Timothy both

¹ The Greek word that is used here is *andrōn* (which means men as opposed to women) and not *anthrōpōn* (which can be used generically for either men or women).

² The evidence for this claim is weak at best. First, we do not know for sure that the person mentioned in Romans 16:6 was a woman, since in the original Greek it is impossible to tell whether the name should be “Junia” (a woman’s name) or “Junias” (a man’s name). Second, we do not know that this person was an Apostle, since the Greek phrase that is sometimes rendered “well known among the Apostles” can just as easily be translated “well known to the Apostles.” For example, when the Greek playwright Euripides says in his play *Hippolytus* that “Aphrodite is well known to mortals,” he uses the same Greek construction. In this case it is clear that Aphrodite is not one of the mortals, just as Junia / Junias is unlikely to have been one of the Apostles.

occupied the same office,³ and that Priscilla was a “teacher of the church.”⁴ Unless the data is creatively stretched in this way, it is impossible to make the case from it that women should be ordained. This is because both sides in this debate agree that both laymen and laywomen can share the Gospel, encourage others through God’s word, and engage in ministries that are auxiliary to that of the pastoral office (*Theses of Agreement* VI, 9–10). Since it cannot be proven that any of these women were pastors, and were not serving in some auxiliary role, none of this evidence warrants the conclusion that women can be ordained.

4. The DDS uses much speculation regarding Paul’s motives and the cultural context of his day to relativise his prohibition against women preaching and teaching in the church, and to suggest that it only applied in certain first century contexts and not today. Such speculation is unnecessary, since Paul tells us in Holy Scripture why he gave this prohibition. When we examine his stated reasons it is evident that both his reasons and the prohibition that flows from them still apply today.

The chief line of speculation the DDS offers is that Paul prevented women from teaching in Corinth and Ephesus out of cultural sensitivity. It suggests that for women to have taken a prominent lead in public would have been so offensive in first-century Jewish culture that it would have hindered the spread of the Gospel, and that this was Paul’s overriding concern. Given how little Paul says about any of this in the immediate context,⁵ how little we know about first century culture, how much the Scriptures tell us about the cosmopolitan nature of the churches in Corinth and Ephesus,⁶ and how often Christ and his Apostles displayed a willingness to offend people’s sensibilities, this line of argumentation is mostly speculative and not entirely plausible. Yet even if there is some truth to it, and Paul was trying to be sensitive to cultural norms, this does not nullify the other reasons he had for this prohibition, which he carefully spells out for us.

Paul tells us that this prohibition is grounded in the headship God gave to men at creation, the consequences of the fall for women, and a command of the Lord. Furthermore, he tells us that this prohibition applies not only in one local context, but “in all the churches of the saints.” If Paul had given different reasons the case

³ The Greek word *diakonos* simply means “servant.” Sometimes this word is used as a title, such as in Philippians 1:1 and 1 Timothy 3:8–13. At other times it is simply used as a description of the kind of role that all Christians should be willing to assume, such as in Matthew 20:26. In neither Romans 16:1 nor 1 Timothy 4:6 is it clear that this word is being used as a title. Yet even if it is being used this way, the evidence from both the New Testament (see 1 Tim 3:1–13 and Acts 6:1–6) and the early church is that the office of deacon was different from that of the elders / overseers, with the former being an auxiliary office of Christian service and the latter being the equivalent of what we now know as the pastoral office.

⁴ In Acts 18:26 we are told that Priscilla, together with her husband Aquila, took Apollos aside privately to instruct him more accurately in the way of God. It is quite a stretch to conclude from this that she was regarded as a teacher to the church as a whole.

⁵ In 1 Timothy 2 Paul says nothing about any need for cultural sensitivity. In 1 Corinthians 14 he says that “it is shameful for a woman to speak in church.” Given that he does not spell this out further, this could mean “shameful in God’s sight,” or it could mean “shameful according to cultural norms,” or it could mean both. Even if it means the latter, this is a slender basis on which to build an entire case, and does not nullify the other reasons Paul gives for his prohibition.

⁶ The book of Acts tells us that in Ephesus so many Gentiles converted to Christianity that the silver smiths, who profited from making idols, rioted because of how much business they lost as a result (Acts 19). In Paul’s letter to the Ephesians he devotes considerable attention to this incorporation of Gentiles into the church (Eph 2:11 – 3:6). Then, in 1 Corinthians he continually addresses issues that were of concern for people influenced by Greco-Roman culture rather than by Jewish culture. Evidence of this kind makes it hard to sustain the argument that these congregations were predominantly Jewish in their cultural orientation.

would be different. If he had focused exclusively on the local context or the need for cultural sensitivity then it would be possible to argue that this prohibition does not apply to us today now that the culture and context have changed. But he did not. Instead, the Holy Spirit, speaking through the Apostle Paul, points us to creation and the fall and a command of the Lord as the reasons for this prohibition.⁷ These reasons are neither time-bound nor culturally relative. Therefore one cannot argue that this prohibition no longer applies to us today unless one is willing to say that Scripture errs when it gives us these reasons.

5. Paragraph 5 of the DDS assumes that the great obstacle to women's ordination has been "barriers built by humans." Furthermore, the accompanying background paper suggests that these barriers have arisen because people have accorded a lower status to women than to men. It then argues that the new status women have by virtue of their baptism into Christ breaks down these barriers. The problem with this line of reasoning is twofold:
 - First, it is true that the unity and equal share in God's kingdom that all Christians enjoy by virtue of our baptism (Gal 3:27–29) should eliminate prejudice or partiality that is based on human criteria (James 2:1–9; Rom 2:11; Gal 2:11–14; Eph 6:9; Col 4:1; Philemon 16; 1 Cor 7:17–23). However, this is of no relevance to the matter at hand, since it is God's Word that prohibits women from being ordained, not "barriers built by humans."
 - Second, the New Testament's endorsement of the male-only pastorate does not stem from cultural assumptions about women being of a lower status than men. The pastoral office is not about status, but humble service. The New Testament calls pastors to follow Christ by acting as servants of all. It instructs them not to lord it over anyone, but to act as examples to the flock by serving in a self-sacrificial way and treating others as more significant than themselves (Matt 20:20–28; 1 Pet 5:3; 2 Cor 1:24; 4:5; 2 Tim 1:8; 2:3; Phil 2:3; cf. Eph 5:22–33a). This call to spiritual responsibility and Christ-like service without regard for personal status is counter-cultural in every age. If the church were to ordain women, this would not involve any elevation of their status, but would rather be a call for them to lower themselves beneath others.

The DDS tries to claim that the ordination of women fits with the view of the public ministry that is articulated in the Lutheran Confessions. Such a claim is false. The Confessions teach that the pastoral office has been instituted by Christ for the sole purpose of serving his word.⁸ This means that ordaining women in defiance of God's word undermines both the foundation and the purpose of the office. Any women who are ordained will be ordained by human beings and not by Christ, and their ordination will embody within it a rejection of at least one part of Christ's word. When a woman then presides at the Lord's Supper, this raises doubts as to whether this sacrament is administered "in conformity with the divine Word," (AC VII, 2) since an element of disobedience to the divine Word is embodied in the celebration.

⁷ The DDS tries to argue that Paul's statement in 1 Cor 14:37, "the things [plural] I am writing to you are a command of the Lord," refers exclusively to the command to "pursue love" [singular] given 36 verses earlier and not to the verses that immediately precede it (paragraphs 11 and 12). Not only is this grammatically implausible, it means wrenching the statement out of its immediate context

⁸ AC V; VII; VIII; XXVII, 12; XXVIII; Apol. XIII, 11; XXVIII, 13–14; *Treatise on the Power and Primacy of the Pope* 10, 26, 60–72; LC III, 86; SD X, 10; XII, 30.

The DDS then concludes its case by saying that the power of God's word to effect salvation is in no way dependent on the person who speaks it. Therefore it does not matter if this person is male or female, and we can ordain women. This argument boils down to saying that because it is the power of the word that ultimately matters, therefore we can overturn what the word has to say about the male-only pastorate. It should be evident to all that we can't take our stand on the power of the word while at the same time ignoring what it has to say. This argument plays on a half-truth. Yes, the Gospel remains true and has power to save no matter who speaks it. Nevertheless, the church would be unwise to presume that the ministry of the Gospel will not be adversely affected if it fails to teach the whole counsel of God, and deliberately ignores Christ's directions regarding who he wants to lead this ministry.