

The Two Texts do not prohibit women from being ordained

By Joel Cramer

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I am not convinced that the current statement in the Theses of Agreement accurately interprets the scriptures. I am convinced that the two texts which have been quoted in TA VI from 1 Corinthians and 1 Timothy do not prohibit women from being ordained but speak about good order in the church of Paul's time.

Although it might seem to us, in light of years of tradition, that the most obvious reading of these texts is that they prohibit women from ordination, in fact they do not speak about ordination at all. The command of Christ is for love and Paul's concern is for good order. Paul does not specify who could be ordained. In the scriptures Christ does not give a command to ordain anyone. Instead Jesus gives the gifts of the Word, Sacraments and Holy Spirit for the building up of the church and the proclamation of the gospel without defining what form of leadership would emerge. The church began by laying hands on leaders and praying that they be anointed for their special role but this looked different in different church communities.

No pastor had been ordained in the time of Jesus, but the office of the keys was given to all the church where both men and women disciples were present. Women were part of Jesus' ministry wherever he went, even if they could not be accepted as teachers and leaders in many communities (because of cultural limitations of that time). These women were there when Jesus told all his disciples to proclaim repentance and forgiveness to all nations. Women were there when Jesus told the disciples after the resurrection to wait for the Holy Spirit. Women were part of the early church, represented at all levels of leadership in different places.

In my experience as a pastor, many women have been hurt and are being hurt by the current teaching of the LCANZ and its practice to only ordain men. Faithful servants have been made to feel of lesser importance because of their gender. Church people, of all ages have expressed concerns to me that women are not being valued and are being actively discriminated against.

Throughout my ministry I have worked with many wonderful women who have modelled and taught me invaluable leadership skills. I have worked with professional women in our church membership who hold senior positions in private companies, government departments and other institutions. They do not understand why a woman can be a chairperson of a congregation or a church commission, can be a director, a manager, a teacher, etc, but not a pastor in the LCANZ. I share in their frustration. There is no clear scriptural reason why women could not be pastors in our church, this is a man-made rule. And I say man-made because the Theses of Agreement was written by men before women were even allowed to vote.

Not only would I very much like our Theses of Agreement changed to allow women to be ordained but I would like to see the hurts and wrongs of the past healed. I would have our church repent and apologise for the hurt inflicted on our womenfolk, intentional or unintentional.

I would love to work alongside women pastors. I would welcome the wisdom and perspective they would bring to leadership in our church. I would love for our children to be encouraged to be the leaders that they are made to be without restrictions whether they are boys or girls. I would like our church to be real and honest about the mistakes of the past while trusting in the grace and goodness of Jesus for the future.