

# Christ and Gender Roles

## A Case to be Addressed

John Launchbury

# The traditional view — isn't it obvious from Scripture?

**1Cor 14:34-35** women should remain silent in the churches. They are not allowed to speak, but must be in submission, as the Law says. If they want to inquire about something, they should ask their own husbands at home; for it is disgraceful for a woman to speak in the church.

**1Tim 2:11-14** A woman should learn in quietness and full submission. I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man; she must be silent.

**1Tim 3:2** Now the overseer must be above reproach, the husband of but one wife, temperate, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, ...

**1Cor 11:3** Now I want you to realize that the head of every man is Christ, and the head of the woman is man, and the head of Christ is God.

**Eph 5:22-24** Wives, submit to your husbands as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the Savior. Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything.

**1Pet 3:1** Wives, in the same way be submissive to your husbands so that, if any of them do not believe the word, they may be won over without words by the behavior of their wives ... like Sarah, who obeyed Abraham and called him her master. You are her daughters if you do what is right and do not give way to fear.

# The traditional view

“The message from these verses is clear, consistent and in harmony with the rest of the Bible. We would challenge anyone to read them objectively and come to any conclusion other than that which has always been held by the Brotherhood.”

Bro Mike Lewis, Nov 1986

... and yet many in our community have come to a different conclusion

# In typical Christadelphian practice...

## sisters may not...

- exhort on a Sunday
- lead a Bible study (e.g. Bible class)
- read scripture from the front of the hall
- serve the communion emblems
- lead a prayer in a group setting
- ask questions out loud at Bible class (in earlier times)
- serve on an ecclesia arranging board

## yet sisters may...

- write an exhortation for it to be read
- publish a Bible study in a magazine
- read scripture around in a circle
- prepare the emblems (in most ecclesias)
- lead music and worship in a group setting
- contribute actively in discussion (nowadays)
- serve on a Bible school board, head up the Sunday school, or the Bible class program

If it is “obvious”, what is the principle?

## Back in the 1800s...

“If a sister is an intelligent, active, useful, noble servant of Christ, her being a sister is no disqualification or barrier; it only precludes her from the act of public speaking and involves subjection to her husband.”

(Bro Robert Roberts, The Christadelphian, July 1874)

“If the Scriptures appoint man as her head, they do not exclude her from partnership in all that concerns their mutual well-being. They show us women “labouring with Paul in the gospel” (Phillip iv. 3): as official servants of an ecclesia with business in hand, which the ecclesia was called upon to promote (Rom. xvi.1-3): exercising the prophetic gift (Acts xxi. 9); prominently ministering to Christ himself (Luke viii. 2-3): sometimes leaders in Israel, like Deborah (Judg. iv. 4). The denial of public speech to women is as far as we are justified in repressing them.”

(Bro Robert Roberts, The Christadelphian, February 1897)

Why are we more restrictive than Robert Roberts?

# Arranging board membership

[In New Zealand] “I was also introduced to sister Dexter, whose characteristics are described in many a Scripture specification of womanly excellence, and whose serving capacities are so highly appreciated that she has been appointed “a managing brother!” Deborah, the wife of Lapidoth, was an excellent managing brother, to whom Barak naturally took the second place.” (Bro Robert Roberts, The Christadelphian, Nov 1896)

“In visiting various ecclesias I have learned of many duties undertaken by sisters which are usually performed by brethren. In one ecclesia the Managing Committee consists of both brethren and sisters. Two ecclesias have a sister for secretary... Evidently these ecclesias considered that the work was of more account than the worker. And so it should always be. The work is the thing that matters. Where a sister can do a particular piece of work better than a brother, it cannot be wrong for her to do it. Where an ecclesia has three sisters to every two brethren, would it not be an advantage to have the sisters’ help and their point of view represented on the committee which manages that ecclesia?” (Sis E. L. Blackmore, The Fraternal Visitor, Nov 1929)

The “usual” of the 1800s and 1900s became normalized as a “rule”

# Believe in a conscious Devil? Isn't it obvious?

**Job 1:6** The angels came to present themselves before the LORD, and Satan also came with them. The LORD said to Satan, "Where have you come from?" Satan answered the LORD, "From roaming through the earth."

**Ezek 28:13-15** You were in Eden, the garden of God... You were anointed as a guardian cherub. You were on the holy mount of God... You were blameless in your ways from the day you were created till wickedness was found in you.

**Zech 3:1-2** Joshua the high priest standing before the angel of the LORD, and Satan standing at his right side to accuse him. The LORD said to Satan, "The LORD rebuke you, Satan!"

**Matt 25:41** Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels.

**Luke 4:13** When the devil had finished all this tempting, he left him until an opportune time.

**Luke 8:12** Then the devil comes and takes away the word from their hearts

**John 8:44** You belong to your father, the devil... He was a murderer from the beginning

**John 13:2** The devil had already prompted Judas Iscariot to betray Jesus.

**Acts 10:38** He went around doing good and healing all who were under the power of the devil

# Believe in a conscious Devil? Isn't is obvious?

[2Cor 11:14](#) Satan himself masquerades as an angel of light.

[Eph 4:27](#) Do not give the devil a foothold.

[1Tim 3:6](#) He may fall under the same judgment as the devil.

[2Tim 2:26](#) Escape from the trap of the devil, who has taken them captive to do his will.

[Heb 2:14](#) Destroy him who holds the power of death — that is, the devil

[Jas 3:15](#) Such “wisdom” does not come down from heaven but is ... of the devil.

[Jas 4:7](#) Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.

[1Pet 5:8](#) Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour.

[1John 3:8](#) The devil has been sinning from the beginning.

[Rev 2:10](#) The devil will put some of you in prison to test you

[Rev 12:7-9](#) Michael and his angels fought against ... the dragon and his angels, ... they lost their place in heaven. The great dragon was hurled down — that ancient serpent called the devil, or Satan, who leads the whole world astray. He was hurled to the earth, and his angels with him.

[Rev 12:12](#) woe to the earth and the sea, because the devil has gone down to you! He is filled with fury

[Rev 20:2](#) He seized the dragon, that ancient serpent, who is the devil, or Satan, and bound him for a thousand years.

# Heaven and Hell at Death? Isn't it obvious?

[Is. 14:9](#) Hell below is all astir to meet you at your coming; it rouses the spirits of the departed to greet you

[Is. 66:24](#) And they will go out and look upon the dead bodies of those who rebelled against me; their worm will not die, nor will their fire be quenched, and they will be loathsome to all mankind.

[Mark 9:43-48](#) If your eye causes you to sin, pluck it out. It is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye than to have two eyes and be thrown into hell, where “their worm does not die, and the fire is not quenched.’

[Luke 12:4-5](#) I tell you, my friends, do not be afraid of those who kill the body and after that can do no more. But I will show you whom you should fear: Fear him who, after the killing of the body, has power to throw you into hell. Yes, I tell you, fear him.

[Luke 16:22](#) “The time came when the beggar died and the angels carried him to Abraham’s side. The rich man also died and was buried. In hell, where he was in torment, he looked up and saw Abraham far away, with Lazarus by his side.

[John 14:1-3](#) “Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God; trust also in me. In my Father’s house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am.

[Acts 2:27](#) because you will not abandon me to hell, nor will you let your Holy One see decay.

[1Cor. 3:14-15](#) If what he has built survives, he will receive his reward. If it is burned up, he will suffer loss; he himself will be saved, but only as one escaping through the flames.

[2Cor. 5:1](#) Now we know that if the earthly tent we live in is destroyed, we have a building from God, an eternal house in heaven, not built by human hands.

[2Cor. 5:6-8](#) Therefore we are always confident and know that as long as we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord. We live by faith, not by sight. We are confident, I say, and would prefer to be away from the body and at home with the Lord.

[James 3:6](#) The tongue also is a fire, a world of evil among the parts of the body. It corrupts the whole person, sets the whole course of his life on fire, and is itself set on fire by hell.

[2Pet. 2:4](#) For if God did not spare angels when they sinned, but sent them to hell, putting them into gloomy dungeons to be held for judgment;

[Rev. 20:10](#) And the devil, who deceived them, was thrown into the lake of burning sulfur, where the beast and the false prophet had been thrown. They will be tormented day and night for ever and ever.

[Rev. 20:11](#) If anyone’s name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.

# Our Christadelphian heritage

We have always believed in

- seeking revealed truth by resolving the rich complexity of Scripture
- considering text, context, original words, local circumstance, intended meaning, echoes, parallels, and broader revealed message

We recognize that the superficial reading of a verse may not reflect its actual meaning

# Scripture alerts us to the need to dig deeper

- [Ex 15:20](#) Then Miriam the prophetess, Aaron's sister, took a tambourine in her hand, and all the women followed her, with tambourines and dancing.
- [Judg 4:4-5](#) Deborah, a prophetess, the wife of Lappidoth, was leading [judging] Israel at that time. She held court under the Palm of Deborah between Ramah and Bethel..., and the Israelites came to her to have their disputes decided.
- [Judg 13:11-13](#) Manoah got up and followed his wife. When he came to the man, he said, "Are you the one who talked to my wife?" "I am," he said. So Manoah asked him, "When your words are fulfilled, what is to be the rule for the boy's life and work?" The angel of the LORD answered, "Your wife must do all that I have told her..."
- [2Kings 22:14](#) Hilkiah the priest... went to speak to the prophetess Huldah, who was the wife of Shallum
- [Luke 2:36-38](#) There was also a prophetess, Anna... She never left the temple... Coming up to them at that very moment, she ... spoke about the child to all who were looking forward to the redemption of Jerusalem.
- [Luke 10:42](#) Only one thing is needed. Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her."
- [Matt 28:5-7](#) The angel said to the women, ... He is not here; he has risen, just as he said. Come and see the place where he lay. Then go quickly and tell his disciples

# Scripture alerts us to the need to dig deeper

- [Acts 2:16-18](#) God says, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your young men will see visions, your old men will dream dreams. Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days, and they will prophesy.
- [Gal 3:28](#) There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.
- [Acts 18:26](#) [Apollos] began to speak boldly in the synagogue. When Priscilla and Aquila heard him, they invited him to their home and explained to him the way of God more adequately.
- [Rom 16:1](#) I commend to you our sister Phoebe, a deacon of the church in Cenchrea.
- [Rom 16:7](#) Greet Andronicus and Junia... They are outstanding among the apostles, and they were in Christ before I was.
- [Acts 21:8-9](#) We stayed at the house of Philip the evangelist, one of the Seven. He had four unmarried daughters who prophesied.
- [1Cor 11:5](#) And every woman who prays or prophesies with her head uncovered dishonors her head

# Why the topic of gender roles can make us uncomfortable

- There is the potential for divisiveness — is it worth it?
  - ➔ People are leaving our community because of our gender-oriented practices
- We may worry about the motivation for studying this. The world?
  - ➔ Or had we been mostly following the world's previous norms rather than scripture?
- There may be emotional turmoil associated with the topic. Will people feel hurt?
  - ➔ There will be fears and reactions on both sides — gentleness and graciousness are required
- The topic provokes uncertainty about change. What might happen next?
  - ➔ Separate (1) what happened in biblical times? from (2) what should our practice be?

# Two possibilities...

If Christadelphian practice is mostly right, then we need to

- develop a shared understanding of “why”;
- be more consistent in the outworking of the principles; and
- ensure it does not diminish or deprecate our sisters

If Christadelphian practice is mostly wrong, then we are

- wrongly discriminating — and doing so in the name of Christ;
- requiring sisters to bury some of their God-given talents in the ground; and
- driving people away from our church because of unbiblical practices

Either way we have serious work ahead of us

# Summary

- The apparent Biblical evidence for
  - a literal, personal devil, or for
  - going to heaven/hell at death, or for
  - the trinity, etc, etc,

is far stronger than the apparent Biblical evidence for limiting the role of sisters

- In those cases we have been willing to dig deep to find God's revealed truth

- We have seen there is a case to be addressed with regard to our gender-role practice
- Let us be as willing to examine scripture with an open mind as with other topics
- The main passages used to limit the role of sisters will turn out not to be so obvious when looked at closely
  - just like passages for the devil etc.
- This will need work and lots of graciousness on our part

It is our heritage to examine (and re-examine) Biblical doctrines and teaching