

Called to give themselves up for the Church

In search of “**why**” behind
the God’s ordering of His Church.

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Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

I pray that this essay would help us to grow more towards “having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind”. During the last 30 years our LCA has spent a great deal of time and efforts trying to question and clarify the Biblical teaching on who, according to the ordering of the Triune God, can and cannot be ordained to the office of the public ministry.

In this essay I would like to focus on another important facet of this issue, one that at least in my experience has been neglected and left almost unexplored, that is – **what is the “why”, what are the underlying reasons** for the ordering of God’s household the way the Holy Spirit has instructed us through the authors of the New Testament?

What will we do in this essay? [1] We will briefly review how we as Lutheran Christians approach the Holy Scripture. [2] We will briefly summarize what the Biblical teaching on the office of the public ministry is. Then [3] we will look at what the Biblical reasons for such ordering of Christ’s Church are.

[1] How do we approach Scripture?

When we live out in practice what we confess to believe, that “the Holy Scripture is the only infallible source and norm for all matters of faith, doctrine and life” (Article II), then we gladly place ourselves under the authority of the Word of God.

If we want to know what the Word of God teaches about anything, we ask it. If we want to know who our God is, we ask: “What does Scripture say about God?” We do not begin with our ideas about God and then search Scripture to find out whether there is something that may contradict or exclude our ideas. If we begin with the latter, then we are simply paying lip service to Scripture, when in fact we are listening (fearing and loving) some other authorities more than the Triune God.

Similarly, if we want to know what Scripture teaches about God’s guidelines for ordering our life in our families or in the Church, we ask: “What does the Bible teach about it?” We do not begin with “this is what we want to do” only afterwards seeing whether we can use Scripture to justify what we have already decided.

[2] What does the Bible teach on the ordering of the Church?

Our Lord Jesus Christ Himself laid foundations for the New Testament office of pastors choosing twelve men as His apostles (Luke 6:12-16) and then commanding that that is how the household of God is to be ordered (1 Cor 14:37, 1 Tim 3:15). The command of the Lord was clear to the Church, when looking to replace Judas they chose “one of the men” Matthias, even though the women who had accompanied Jesus were there as well (Acts 1:13-14, 21).

Later the apostles followed Jesus’ instructions choosing and appointing other men fit for the task of being the stewards of God’s mysteries (1 Cor 4:1) and shepherding the household of God (1 Pet 5:2, Acts 1:21-22, Titus 1:5, etc.).

Then, most notably, the Holy Spirit through Paul the apostle, has given us a very specific description for the office of pastors (1 Tim 3:1-7, Tit 1:5-9). Frankly speaking, that is a humbling and even frightening description, made even more alarming by the warning of the Lord’s brother that those “who teach will be judged with greater strictness.” (Jam 3:1)

In two places the Holy Spirit speaks emphatically through Paul the apostle prohibiting women from ignoring the command of the Lord and the universal practice in all the churches of the saints by attempting to assume the role of pastors (1 Tim 2:11-12, 1 Cor 14:34-35). He adds that “if anyone does not recognize this, he is not recognized” (1 Cor 14:38). Interestingly, He speaks to congregations in those cities – Corinth and Ephesus – where female priests were commonplace in many pagan cults and religions.

Furthermore, this New Testament ordering for the Church is nothing new, as it stands in continuity also with the Old Testament practice. When Paul provides reasons for the ordering of God’s Church, they bring us back to the very beginning. In the creation accounts we learn that it was the first man Adam who was called into the worship and teaching ministry even before Eve was created (Gen 2:15-17) and it was Adam who was held accountable for failing in those responsibilities (Gen 3:9-11).

Then we can see that Abraham (Gen 12:7-8), Jacob (Gen 35:7), Job (Job 1:5), and then select men in Levitical priesthood all exercised similar functions of spiritual headship, teaching and guarding the faith (Lev 10:10-11). While there are instances in the Bible where godly women have been used in different positions of leadership, there is not a single example where our Lord had appointed any woman to serve either as priest or pastor.

“From the beginning of God’s story till its end we can witness the emergence of one consistent picture.”

Thus, from the beginning of God’s story till its end, we can witness the emergence of one consistent picture teaching us God’s ordering for His household of faith. This ordering has been clear to the Church Universal till the middle of 20th century, and it still is clear to the vast majority of Christians around the world in Orthodox, Roman Catholic, Anglican, Lutheran and other denominations. It used to be sufficient for Christians that something “was written”. It seems that today that is no longer the case and this is why we will attempt to make the next logical step and to look for the rationale behind this Biblical teaching.

[3] What are the Biblical reasons for such ordering?

This essay will not deal with the main functions of the office of the public ministry. They are comprehensively described elsewhere (e.g., the Book of Concord, TA VI). Here we will focus on exploring **what is the “why”, what are the underlying reasons for this God given ordering** of His Church, where the responsibility to shepherd Christ’s Church is entrusted to carefully selected men.

A. Objections against this ordering.

Lately God’s ordering for His Church has been questioned and challenged. However, this

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questioning is not based on any new discoveries in Scripture [not based on Scripture!], but rather it is based on the influence of secular ideas and trends in society; such as pursuits of equality (sameness) of both sexes, denial of any essential differences between males and females, empowerment of women (with the underlying assumption that true equality can only be achieved when women and men perform exactly the same functions), and also the

elevation of individual’s right to choose whatever they want as the ultimate good.

The objections against the current teaching of the LCA have been made arguing that Biblical teaching is culturally determined, does not facilitate the equality of sexes and empowerment of women, is unjust, discriminatory, and even fuels domestic violence, is detrimental to the mission of the Church, etc. In fact, the very opposite is true. Note that none of these objections or critiques come from Scripture. It is disheartening to see when Christians side with the secular and ever-changing world instead of siding with the Word of God that will remain forever (1 Pet 1:25).

B. Wonderfully made.

At this point it would be good to be reminded that the Bible in a very unique and unprecedented way teaches that all human beings of both sexes are wonderfully made in the image and likeness of the Triune God – equal in their God bestowed dignity and infinite value (Gen 1:26-27). At the same time, the Bible also teaches that both sexes are created different, with different and complementary gifts, with different strengths and for different and complementary roles (Gen 2:15-18).

“Both sexes are wonderfully made equal in their God bestowed dignity. At the same time – different, with different and complementary gifts.”

Today these differences beyond any reasonable doubt have been confirmed by medical and social sciences. Furthermore, the Bible teaches that every role entrusted by our Creator God is our place of loving service to our neighbours, where our Creator Himself serves through us as His masks.

Thus, as Christians, we see every calling as a calling to serve imitating our Lord (Matt 20:28, Mark 10:45, Phil 2:5f, etc.) For us the joyful affirmation, cultivation and nourishing of those sex-specific unique gifts and strengths is our way of living out the wise and good design of our Triune God as His redeemed, restored and Spirit filled people.

C. Survival of the fittest.

In a radically opposing way, the secular world sees all human relationships, not as places of loving service, but through the lens of power struggle, where the struggle between sexes is just one of its aspects. The world teaches that men (patriarchy) have all the power, that women can only become equal with men if they can obtain the same power and do exactly the same things as men do. In the Church setting, according to this secular thinking, that would mean – taking on the responsibilities of pastors.

“The secular world sees all human relationships through the lens of power struggle.”

The world essentially believes that those unique and irreplaceable feminine gifts and roles that our Creator God has given to women – such as callings of wives and mothers – are worth nothing, but active participation in economic and political spheres is the only thing that matters.

Such anti-Biblical, anti-Christian and anti-family ideologies have turned the Biblical view on humanity upside down. They deny deep objective differences of both sexes, they deny intrinsic God-given equality and worth of both sexes, they replace the purpose of loving service in all our God given callings with the idea of ongoing power struggle and then they try to forcefully remould our beautiful Creator given nature in an effort to construct a society that fits their secular utopia.

D. Rooted in God's good and wise design.

But what does Scripture teach? What are the underlying reasons for such ordering in the Church as we reviewed it in Section 2? We could answer this way: **because pastors are called “to give themselves up” for the Church.**

What does this mean?

The Biblical answer goes to the very heart of who we are as designed and created by our all-wise God. We do not have exact Jesus' words recorded where He explains why He chose twelve men as His apostles, instead of including some women disciples among them. Perhaps the struggles and challenges (1 Cor 4:9-13, 2 Cor 6:4-10) and the fate of all the apostles gives some indication – they all were violently murdered for refusing to deny or compromise the truth of the Gospel. How would your view on Jesus change if He had called His faithful female disciples into the apostolic ministry knowing what terrible trials and deaths awaits them (Matt 20:23 John 21:18)?

However, according to Paul the apostle – specifically chosen and taught by our Risen Lord Jesus Himself – that was the Lord's own command (1 Cor 14:37) that this particular office of pastors was to be occupied by carefully select men (1 Tim 3:1-7, Tit 1:5-9). As it was mentioned in Section 2, Scripture paints one coherent picture of who is to carry the responsibility of overseeing the teaching of the faith.

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Besides, there are quite a few passages that help us to recover and reconstruct the reasons behind this ordering for the Church. Whenever Paul speaks polemically against women trying to take on the role of pastors, he grounds his argument no less than in God's good order of Creation (1 Tim 2:13-14, 1 Cor 14:34), which then defines the universal practice in all Christian churches (1 Cor 14:33).

So, what does the account of Creation and Fall reveal to us about God's ordering for our most important communities – our households (marriage / family) and God's household, the Church? Genesis 1 makes it plainly clear that both – male and female – were created in the image and likeness of God as His own emissaries to take care of His creation; both of them equal in their worth and dignity.

Genesis 2 gives us a more nuanced view. We can summarize the creation story in Genesis 2 saying that the first man Adam was created for task, for mission, and the first woman Eve was

“Adam was created for mission, and Eve was created for relationships.”

created for relationships, for support. Or, that the first man was created to be interested in things, and the first woman – to be interested in people.

The reality of these profound differences and different strengths for both sexes has been commonly acknowledged since times immemorable and only

lately has been disputed. However, today we have more research data than ever in the history of humanity that shows that this is who we are as male and female – profoundly different – with our sexual differences going to the very heart of who we are, how we think, how we operate, what we value, what we long for, and so on.¹

¹ Two books that summarize the findings of contemporary research and also provides wealth of useful bibliography are Steven E Rhoades “Taking Sex Differences Seriously” and Lucas Carry “The Politically Incorrect Guide to Women, Sex and Feminism”.

E. “Working and keeping”.

In Genesis 2 we further read that the eternal Son of God entrusted the first man Adam with the task “to work and to keep” the garden. The phrase “to work and to keep” in the immediate context most likely has two overlapping and complementary meanings.

One has to do with our relationships within creation – working and keeping it, caring for and protecting it. Another has to do with our worship, with our relationships with the Creator – working with and keeping pure the Word of God.

Note, this is exactly what Adam was held responsible for after the Fall. He had taught Eve the Word of God (Gen 3:2-3), but he had neglected his responsibility to keep the teaching pure, to refute the original false teacher, the father of lies, and Eve was deceived. “Pastor Adam” had failed in his pastoral responsibilities “to work and keep” the Word of God, while Eve had assumed Adam’s role “to work and keep” and the result of this disorder was... the Fall.

“Adam was entrusted to work with and keep pure the Word of God.”

Even as the curse made difficult our service in the primary roles for men and women, entrusted to us at the Creation, our God has not changed His very good ordering. We see Noah and Abraham and the patriarchs serving as teachers of the faith over their households. When the Levitical priesthood was introduced, it was their specific task “to work and keep” the Word of God (Lev 10:10-11), to teach and proclaim what was the will and ordinances of our God and to refute and reject what was contrary to them.

John the Baptist began his ministry with the proclamation: “Repent and believe!” (Matt 3:2) Or we could rephrase it: “Turn away from false idols to the true God!” Jesus began His ministry with: “Repent and believe in the Gospel!” (Mark 1:15)

Then the apostles were sent with the same message: “Repent and believe in the Gospel!” (Acts 2:38) They went out rebuking all falsehood and confessing the truth of God, experiencing adversity of the world and of false teachers just as Jesus had foretold (Matt 10:16-25, Matt 24:9-13) and their faithfulness cost them their lives.

Paul the apostle, addressing pastors in Ephesus urged them to care for Christ’s flock (Acts 20:28-30) and to protect them from fierce wolves. The calling of shepherds involved not only feeding the flock, but also protecting it from predators (e.g., 1 Sam 17:34-35). Then, in his pastoral

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letters, specifically addressing his fellow pastors, Paul highlights the importance of “working and keeping” the Word of God pure, and rebuking and silencing those who teach otherwise (1 Tim 1:4-5, 2 Tim 2:24, 4:2, Tit 1:9, 11, 13, 2:15, etc.).

It seems that these two aspects of the pastoral ministry in a way are manifestations of what men are created to do – *to teach* the true faith and *to protect* it

from the attacks of the ancient serpent. The Lutheran church has been very good with both “work and keep”. As our foundation documents in the Book of Concord reveal, we confess the truth and at the same time we vocally reject all false teachings – “we confess and reject” (AC, FC, etc.).

F. Ordered to receive God's blessings.

Similarly, as in the Creation account also in the New Testament, there is a great overlap when it comes to how the Holy Spirit instructs us for Christian life in our households and in the household of God.

Those who desire to oversee the household of God, should be competent and able to oversee their own households, men after Christ's likeness, willing to sacrifice themselves in service to others, apt to teach the law and the Gospel, to confess the truth and to reject all falsehood (1 Tim 3:1-7 Tit 1:5-9).

Our God by His very eternal nature is a giving and generous God. We can see it everywhere in His ordering of His good creation and our lives. Everything is ordered with the purpose of loving service in mind. This is how Paul summarizes it in 1

Corinthians 11: "But I want you to understand that the head of every man is Christ, the head of a wife is her husband, and the head of Christ is God." (1 Cor 11:3)

"The head of every man is Christ, the head of a wife is her husband, and the head of Christ is God."

God... Christ... husband... wife... children. Every relationship is ordered according to the very good design of our Creator. Christ places Himself under the loving and caring authority of the Father and gives Himself up serving His Church.

Husbands place themselves under the gracious authority of Christ, entrust themselves into His care, and then lovingly serve their wives, giving themselves up for them. Wives place themselves under the authority of their husbands, relying on their love and in their turn caring for their children, and so God's blessings flow from God the Father through to our children.

We know that Jesus Christ gave His life up for the Church. We know that loving husbands do sacrifice themselves for their wives. We know that loving mothers pour out their lives caring for their children. This is a good and wise order of our Creator God, and we all thrive when we are blessed to live according to this wise ordering.

"We all thrive when we are blessed to live according to this wise ordering."

We also know that disobedient children cannot receive much from their parents. We know that when relationships between spouses are seen as a power struggle, there is almost no room for husbands to sacrificially care for their wives. And we

know that if a church does not place herself under Christ's authority, such a church has cut herself off the life-giving vine. Where there is disorder, we cannot receive God's blessings.

Similarly with God's ordering for His Church. Jesus called and sent out the apostles: "As the Father has sent me, so I am sending you..." (John 20:21-23). As Jesus gave Himself up for His Bride, the Church, so they were to continue in the same ministry, in the same Spirit. As men are created and called to be caring heads of their households in loving service to their wives and children, so similarly a select few of them are also called to be faithful heads in the household of God, serving the Bride of Christ on behalf of Him, just as Christ Himself serves us through them.

As a beloved wife can dwell safely fully trusting that her loving husband will care for her and protect her and will give himself up for her, so also the beloved Bride of Christ can dwell safely fully trusting that those men, who are called to represent her loving Bridegroom Christ, will care for her with the Gospel, will shelter her from the attacks of the lying enemy, and if needed – will give themselves up for her. On the other hand, if we haven't experienced these blessings in our lives, we may be deceived to expect secular ideologies to deliver what we have been missing.

G. The order of creation and the order of redemption.

You may have encountered the idea that the old law-based order of creation is now surpassed and replaced with the new Gospel-based order of redemption, where all the old categories and distinctions are erased (Gal 3:28, 1 Cor 12:13 Col 3:11). Therefore, at least thus the argument goes, there are no restrictions for who can be ordained in the office of pastors. Interestingly, Scripture paints the very opposite picture.

The Triune God guides everything towards His eternal purposes (Eph 1:3-10). The order of creation is not something that has been replaced by the order of redemption. Rather we could say that the order of creation reflects the very nature of the Triune God. Or we could say that the order of creation is like a [proto] type of the ultimate ordering of God's household which will be made manifest in the age to come.

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What does this mean? God the Father by His very nature is a giving God. He reveals His nature in His Son (John 1:18, 14:11). The Son becomes flesh as the man Jesus of Nazareth and remains so for eternity (John 1:14, 20:17). The Son manifests the Father's giving nature in His relationships with His eternal Bride, the Church. How? He gives life to the Church from His pierced side through the water and blood (John 19:34) and He gives Himself up for the Church (Matt 20:28).

The same giving nature of God is reflected in His created order for family and the Church. Adam was created as a [proto] type of Christ (Rom 5:14). Similarly, as Christ gives life to the Church, also Adam through the creative act of God gave life to Eve from His side (Gen 2:21-22). As Christ lives in eternal marital relationships with His Bride, the Church, where He gives and she receives, so also the marriage of Adam and Eve, and every marriage since, is designed to reflect the same giving-receiving relationships (Eph 5:21-33). As Christ gives Himself up for the Church, so every husband is instructed to give himself up for his wife (Eph 5:25).

In the same way, the very nature of God is reflected in His ordering of the Church. Just as husbands reflect the very nature of God by giving themselves up for their wives and families, in the same way carefully selected male pastors reflect the nature of God giving themselves up for the Church. They literally stand, speak and act in place and on behalf of Christ, the head of His Church, and ultimately on behalf of God the Father.

The ordering and realities of this creation and the Church in this age foreshadow and teach us the greater reality of God's eternal household. The order of creation is not something that has

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now been made obsolete. It is the reflection of the eternal ordering and purposes of our giving God. The order of redemption has not replaced the order of creation. Instead, it has enabled us to appreciate and enjoy it more fully.

Thus, at the very heart, it is the very nature of the Triune God that is the underlying reason and "why" for His ordering of the family household and also of the

household of God, the Church. Once we, by God's grace, understand His divine wisdom, all the rest of Biblical instructions for the office of pastors harmoniously fit into this magnificent picture of God's eternal purposes for us.

I pray that all the above enlightens us and helps us to appreciate the wonderful wisdom of our Triune God and the deep roots of the Biblical reasons for our God's ordering of His Church and the office of the public ministry the way He has done it.

H. The curse manifested.

The Creation account and the Fall also provide for us Biblical insights that help us to understand the situation in many churches that have decided to act against Biblical ordering for Christ's Church. The Fall came with the curse, and each sex was cursed to experience the most difficulties in their main God given roles (Gen 3:15-18).

Men would struggle with their responsibilities and therefore would tend to neglect them. Women, on the other hand, would desire to take on the role of their husbands (Gen 3:16), and that is exactly what the late secular ideologies have been a manifestation of: women in secular society despising their unique God-given gifts and feminine strengths as worthless and even as obstructive and instead desiring to become and act like men.

As the Creation account and contemporary science so wonderfully summarize – women are designed for and flourish in relationships. Men according to their God designed nature are apt to stubbornly “work and keep” the truth, even when it means to endure conflicts (Matt 10:16-25) and sacrifice relationships (Tit 3:10, 1 Tim 1:4-5, 2 Tim 2:24, 4:2, Tit 1:9, etc.).

Women, on the other hand, according to their God given feminine nature, tend to value relationships above the “working and keeping” the truth. That is exactly what we can see manifesting in those churches that have abandoned God's wise ordering for His Church; they focus on relationships, on including everyone and making everyone feel good – which on itself would be a commendable Christian practice – but such churches fall, because they elevate easy outwardly relational peace even at the cost of silencing God's truth, endorsing sin and redefining the Gospel.

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When a church commits to such a false “gospel of inclusion” – which is no Gospel at all – soon the circle closes as everyone is included, except those who still want “to work and keep” the Gospel truth. Today such tragic examples abound in churches in Europe, US and Australia and one needs to be wilfully blind not to see them.

I. Our Good Shepherd and under-shepherds.

Great News! Jesus is our Good Shepherd and we are His sheep (John 10). He cares for us through His carefully selected, prepared and appointed under-shepherds (1 Tim 3:1-7, Tit 1:5-9). Being sheep, we cannot always know which food is good and healthy, and which water is pure and life-giving. We cannot always recognize predators as they often come in sheep's clothing (Matt 7:15), and as they often come from our midst and act secretly (Acts 20:29-30, 2 Pet 2:1-3, etc.) As Jesus' sheep on our own we are exposed and vulnerable.

This is why He has given to us this gift – His under-shepherds – pastors. How good it is to rest in assurance that our shepherds are called by Jesus and serve us according to the Lord's command and His instructions, faithfully delivering to us God's mysteries (1 Cor 4:1-2), not trying to please wolves, and not running when they come (John 10:10-11), but protecting us with the sword of

God's Word, imitating our Good Shepherd is all they do, and if needed – giving themselves up for Jesus' sheep.

J. The cherry.

But the Church as God's household needs not only pastors. She also needs faithful Christian wives, mothers, sisters, aunts, grandmothers, daughters, she needs these women to be rooted in the Word of God and pray (2 Tim 1:5, 1 Tim 2:11). The Church needs these women to model repentance and piety. The Church needs women to support their husbands and fathers, to pray for them, comfort them, care for them, to encourage and remind them of their responsibilities, when they are tempted to be lazy or give up (Ex 10:24-26, Judges 4, Acts 21:4, 2 Kings 22:14).

The Church needs women to raise Christian sons and daughters, teaching them about Jesus, about what He has done for us, and bringing up the next generations of great Christian men and women (Tit 2:5, Phil 4:3, John 20:17). The Church needs women to assist with congregational needs (Acts 16:14-15, Col 4:15), to serve as deaconesses (1 Tim 3:12, Rom 16:1), organists, teachers (Acts 18:26), to babysit for single mothers, sit next to widows, to visit the sick and homebound, to squelch gossips, to uplift others in need of encouragement (1 Tim 5:10f) to lead chaste lives and to fight in prayer (Luke 8:2-3, Acts 2:37, 1 Tim 5:5).

The Church needs women who seek the company of other faithful women and to rejoice in the goodness of the Lord. The Church needs women who can do all of this and much more in joyful Christian freedom, while the burden of "working and keeping" the truth of the Gospel is not theirs to bear (1 Tim 2:11, 1 Cor 14:34).

Every church and every congregation would act wisely if they welcomed and celebrated the abundance of gifts and talents given to godly women and used them to earn more talents for our Lord and Master Jesus Christ (Matt 25:14-30).

Conclusion.

I pray that we would all gladly learn the beautiful and wise design of our only wise God. We all are equal in His eyes: equally valued (Gen 1:26), equally loved, equally redeemed (Gal 3:28, 1 Cor 12:13, Col 3:11), equally destined for the eternal life in His New Earth and New Heavens (1 Pet 3:7). We all are made equally children of God, members of His family, co-heirs with Jesus, royal priesthood, chosen nation, called and sent to proclaim the excellences of our wonderful God to all nations and to bring all our needs into His presence (1 Pet 2:9).

May the Holy Spirit help us to marvel at this incredible privilege, rejoice in these responsibilities and bear much fruit that will remain. At the same time, I pray that the Holy Spirit would enlighten us and would allow us to grasp the treasures and the depth of God's wisdom, so that we can rejoice in and gratefully appreciate His very good and wise design for all our relationships, and especially for those that reveal and teach us His eternal purposes, that is – our households and the household of God. Amen.

Please, share this essay with our brothers and sisters who still may have doubts, for we do not want anyone to come under the terrifying warning "if anyone does not recognize this, he is not recognized", instead, we pray that we all may be "of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind" (Phil 2:2-3).