

# Why is the Ordination of Women such a big deal?

Greetings in the name of Jesus!

Heads up, there will be two parts to this paper:

**[1] Do we really need to worry about the health of our doctrine?**

**[2] How serious is the issue of women's ordination really?**

## Part I

### Do we really need to worry about the health of our doctrine?

Why are some people so touchy about doctrinal matters... fighting for pure and sound and healthy and true doctrine?

Shouldn't we be focusing on loving one another, serving one another, instead of creating more divisions by arguing how to understand this or that passage?

Let me ask you – how do you think about doctrine, about the teaching of the Church? If you had to use a picture, or a metaphor how would you illustrate it?

Some may picture the Church's teaching as a list of statements... Doctrine # 1, Doctrine #2, Doctrine #3, etc. Sometimes a metaphor of pearl necklace is used, where each doctrine is like a pearl on that necklace.

However, the Lutheran Reformers of the 16<sup>th</sup> century had a very different understanding about the doctrine. As historians tell us, they never spoke about doctrines [plural], except when they spoke about false doctrines.

Instead, they spoke about the body of doctrine. The body of teaching. Singular. One body, many members. From Latin, one corpus – one body of doctrine, and many articles – many members of that body.

That gives us a very different picture, if we do think about Biblical teaching as one body of teaching, consisting of many members. And it does make a lot of sense, for we know that, of course, different parts of Biblical teaching are connected.

This "body of teaching" approach offers us a very helpful way of considering doctrinal matters. For example, we can ask: "Are all members in the body equally significant? Are they all essential for us to be alive?"

Of course, not! There are those that are essential, like, heart and brain, and there are those which we could lose and still be alive. Can we live with one lung, one kidney, one eye, one leg, one arm or none, and so on. Sure. We will still be alive. True.

But will we ever think: "Ouch... there is gangrene or cancer in my leg and I can lose it. Eh, that's nothing, I can live without it!" Or if there is a danger of losing eyesight: "That's fine, I will still be able to hear and touch." Or: "That is just a little finger, or just a hand, chop it off, it's not a big deal."

We would never have such an attitude towards our physical bodies, if we are in sound mind. Instead, we would care for our bodies so that they are as well and as whole as possible, so that we can enjoy our lives in their fullness.

Now, doesn't it make sense to have the same attitude towards the body of teaching? Sure, some members are more significant than others. Sure, we can still be alive if some of them are lost to a spiritual cancer or gangrene. But it doesn't make sense to be indifferent to the health of our doctrine. Because that is not some abstract matter, it has very, very tangible consequences. What are they?

As the Scripture teaches us, when the Word of God is spoken, it is always accompanied by the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit comes and indwells in us, He creates and sustains true faith, saving faith in us as we keep listening to the Word of God. But the Holy Spirit only accompanies the Word of God. He only accompanies truthful, healthy, pure and sound teaching. The Holy Spirit doesn't accompany false, unhealthy, impure and corrupt teaching.

When we care about the body of doctrine, when we strive to keep it healthy, this is a matter of our salvation. Where the body of teaching is healthy and well, there is abundance of new life, abundance of saving faith, of hope and joy and eternal life.

If the healthy doctrine is lost, saving faith, hope, joy and eternal life are in real danger. That is what is at stake, dear brothers and sisters. That is why we, with God's help, should all strive to keep our teaching true, pure and healthy, so that we can enjoy God's greatest gifts in their fullness.

May you succeed, by God's grace!

## **Part II**

### **How serious is the issue of women's ordination really?**

What do you think?

There is this naïve and dangerous idea that women's ordination is not such a big deal.

"Sure, we may not really like it, for it does not have Biblical foundation, but... is it really that dangerous? We can still preach the Gospel, right? We can still uphold the article on justification by faith, can't we? The women's ordination is not really a matter of salvation, is it? Can't we just change this one thing – just one thing – and live happily ever after? For the sake of peace, just get over it!"

Besides, our leaders keep telling us that it need not be church divisive. On the contrary, that it can finally bring unity to our church.

No, no, no... false, false, false! The idea that women should be ordained in the office of the public ministry, to become pastors, is not just one separate innocent-ish idea. Just this one thing, nothing else will change. False!

It is impossible for gangrene not to spread further; if you leave it untreated, it will only stop when everything that is healthy is destroyed. And it is impossible for a false, unhealthy teaching – if not resisted – not to infect and destroy other members of the body of teaching until nothing is left.

In fact, the practice of ordaining women as pastors can only come as a bundle deal, yes! with a whole package of false teachings, which cannot coexist with Biblical teaching. Truth and lies cannot coexist!

Let me show you which of the Biblical teachings cannot coexist with the practice of ordaining women as pastors. Let's look at five of them, and this is only a short-list.

A church that embraces women's ordination will eventually lose all of those, and it will happen sooner rather than later.

### **[1] Women's ordination is not compatible with upholding the authority of the Holy Scriptures.**

What do we say in the LCA?

“The Church accepts without reservation the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, as a whole and in all their parts, as the divinely inspired, written and inerrant Word of God, and as the only infallible source and norm for all matters of faith, doctrine and life.” (Article II, the LCA Constitution)

If this was true, if the Bible was our highest authority, then with regards to the office of the public ministry we would ask the following question: “What does the Word of God teach us about it?” And then we diligently gather all the passages that deal with this question, and we get the same teaching that the Church Universal has upheld for two millennia.

If the Bible is our highest authority, we do not even ask the question: “Does the Bible prohibit the ordination of women?” The question itself indicates that the very idea comes from different authorities? Can you see it?

It means that the idea is picked up somewhere else and we just want to make sure that the Bible doesn't stand in our way. That is exactly what historically happened. No one has ever decided to introduce the ordination of women “because the Bible tells me so”. It has always come from outside, from anti-Christian ideologies.

And if we listen to other authorities more than the Word of God, we already have chosen to ignore the 1<sup>st</sup> Commandment. We already have decided that we will in practice listen to other gods, other idols and ideologies of this world.

We cannot have women's ordination and have the Bible as our highest authority. The two are not compatible, and I would say that thus we would lose quite a central member in the body of teaching, the very source of life for the Church.

### **[2] Women's ordination is not compatible with Biblical teaching on salvation history, on proper relationships between Creation and Redemption.**

Biblical narrative tells us that God created everything very good, including His good design for our relationships, marriages, and different roles for men and women. Through the Fall sin came into the world and this goodness was corrupted.

The Son of God came to restore His creation, through His death and resurrection He has freed us from the curse of sin and now enables us to strive to live according to God's loving instructions for our lives by the power of His Spirit; in our marriages, families, workplaces and in the Church.

But those churches that embrace women's ordination usually tell another story.

Before Christ came, the Law was our master and now the Gospel has freed us from the Law and made us a new creation in Jesus. Now we are free to live as God's people.

Sounds nice at first. Except, in this story our problem is not sin, but God's oppressive Law. And Jesus, it appears, has freed us from the Law, that is, from God's very good design for our lives. Anything that tells "you shall/or you shall not" belongs to the old order and is not relevant for us anymore. Now we are free to do... I guess, whatever we believe to be good, and if we believe that women need to be pastors, who is to say no?!

We cannot have women's ordination and retain Biblical teaching on salvation history, on proper relationships between Creation and Redemption.

### **[3] Women's ordination is not compatible with Biblical anthropology, with the teaching on who we are as human beings and that has direct implications to Biblical teaching on marriage.**

According to God's revelation all human beings are created in God's Image and likeness, all equal in their worth and dignity. However, not all the same. There are different roles designed and built into us by our Creator God for men and women.

If interested you can watch Wisdom 4 Relationships course episodes of how different we are on [Wiseberg.com.au](http://Wiseberg.com.au)

Not so for those who promote women's ordination. Their perception is shaped by ideologies where women can only be equal to men and justice can be achieved only if women do all the same things that men do.

That's why the big fuss about the office of the public ministry. "It is a matter of justice, equality and fairness, we cannot accept such discrimination in the Church!" Except, those are worldly ideas, nothing to do with the good and loving design of our God for families and the Church. There is no place in the Bible where God's good ordering for His Church is called unjust, unfair, or discriminatory.

But if humanity is seen through the lens of worldly ideologies, there is no place for Biblical ordering for marriage either, where husbands and wives could flourish living according to God's good and wise instructions. That needs to go!

We cannot have women's ordination and retain Biblical anthropology, the teaching of who we are as human beings, or to retain Biblical teaching on marriage. But today in our society we need it so desperately...

### **[4] Women's ordination is not compatible with the Gospel of repentance and forgiveness, with the very central article of our faith – justification by faith.**

Yes, this is where it gets really scary. I almost wish this wasn't true, but it is.

Influential for those who promote women's ordination is the famous passage from Paul's letter to Galatians:

"There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus." (Galatians 3:28).

They emphasize that Jesus welcomes and accepts everyone, everyone is included in this new community that Jesus brings forth. To love is to accept and include, instead of judging people and making them feel uncomfortable. The more radical your love, the more radical your inclusion. Everyone should be welcomed and included as they are... and this is the focus in those churches.

Sounds quite pleasant, I have to admit. There is a lot of truth as well. As Jesus welcomed sinners so should His Church welcome anyone who comes to Jesus. There are no preconditions for God's grace, you don't need to get your life in order to belong to the Church, come to Jesus and your gracious Father Himself will renew and transform your heart and your life with the power of His Word and His Spirit.

The problem is that the new gospel of inclusion and acceptance replaces the Biblical Gospel of repentance and forgiveness. In their proclamation there is no need for repentance. There is no need for repentance for they really don't like the Biblical teaching on our sinful condition. In those churches sin is much more about the lack of tolerance and inclusion, about judging others, about oppressive structures out there, like the mythical evil patriarchy... and so on.

But if sin in our very hearts is not our main problem, then there is no need for repentance, and there is no need for forgiveness either. Neither is there a need for new life in Christ.

But if there is neither repentance, nor forgiveness, there is no salvation and no eternal life. Then there is no place for the Gospel of Jesus Christ, and there is no justification by faith. These members of the body of teaching are chopped off and gone. And here we are not talking about little fingers, we are talking about the very heart of God's message to us. As Paul the apostle said in the same letter to Galatians:

“I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting him who called you in the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel— *not that there is another one, but there are some who trouble you and want to distort the gospel of Christ*. But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach to you a gospel contrary to the one we preached to you, let him be accursed.” (Galatians 1:6-8)

I know this may come as a shock, but we cannot have women's ordination and keep the Biblical Gospel of repentance and forgiveness, nor the central article of our faith – justification by faith, the article on which the Church either stands or falls.

### **[5] Women's ordination makes true Christian unity impossible.**

But isn't our unity what the Way Forward framework promises us?! It certainly does.

This is what we as Lutheran Christians believe, as it is written in the Augsburg Confession:

“And to the true unity of the Church it is enough to agree concerning the doctrine/teaching of the Gospel and the administration of the Sacraments.”

Notice! The doctrine/teaching – singular. One body of doctrine. Not just one stand-alone article. This is why we have 28 articles of faith in the Augsburg Confession. They all are members of the teaching of the Gospel.

When women's ordination is introduced, there is no more agreement concerning the teaching of the Gospel. There is inevitable disagreement on so many different articles of faith. Those that we listed so far and, if we dig deeper, many others.

There is no agreement on the administration of the Sacraments either. How could it be if some believe that the stewardship of God's mysteries according to God's gracious will is entrusted to select men, while others believe almost anyone can do it. Which very practically means that introducing the ordination of women the division is created where the true unity should be celebrated, where the very heart of the Christian Church beats, in the Divine Service at the Lord's Table.

Further, we cannot be united in the very purpose of the Church's existence, the Great Commission of making disciples of Jesus either. How could we do that? What sort of mission efforts can we engage together? Some will preach: "No need for repentance and new life, you are good as you are!" While others will preach as Jesus and the prophets and the apostles did: "Repent and believe in the Gospel!"

We cannot have women's ordination and enjoy true Christian unity, or true Christian fellowship at the Lord's Table, or to participate together in the Great Commission. None of that is possible. Even when the official communication from our church leaders tells us that "No, the ordination of women need not be church divisive."

Please, use your God given reason, pray for the wisdom and discernment of the Holy Spirit, examine everything against the Word of God!

And ask again those questions – is the ordination of women such a big deal? Can it endanger our salvation? Reflect carefully – how many healthy members can we afford to lose until we can't survive anymore? How many members of the body of teaching can we afford to lose before we lose our faith and salvation? How about losing the heart?

Shouldn't we be rather asking how can we keep the body of Biblical teaching as sound and healthy as attainable and our spiritual food as nourishing as possible?

I imagine that this is a lot to take in. If you haven't heard this before, the first reaction may be denial. "This can't be true! It can't be that serious! Our leaders would not lead us on such a path that may potentially endanger our faith and salvation!"

Do not just accept what you learned here! This is too important not to get to the bottom of it. It is really about your salvation and the salvation of your fellow saints, about your loved ones, about the next generations.

Do not be lazy! Do your homework! How, you may wonder?

Check for yourself what do those churches that ordain women teach and practice? Check what those rich and influential Western Lutheran churches who set a tone in the Lutheran World Federation teach and practice? There is no time for ignorance and indifference.

Look at those churches that have departed from the Biblical teaching on the office of the public ministry and do ordain women. How do they uphold the authority of the Bible? How do they uphold Biblical anthropology, how do they teach God's good design for marriage, the most important human institution?

Where do they teach that Christ has redeemed this fallen creation and by the power of the Holy Spirit restores us and enables us to strive to lead holy lives? Where do they teach the seriousness of our sin, where do they call sinners to repentance and proclaim the forgiveness of their sins in the name of Jesus? Where do they exhort us to lead new and restored lives in Christ?

Brothers and sisters, don't be deceived!

The ordination of women is not one isolated issue. If endorsed, it does away with the authority of the Bible, it does away with the 1<sup>st</sup> Commandment, and to some extent with others as well. It does away with Biblical understanding of humanity, male and female, sexual ethics, with God's good design for marriage.

It does away with Biblical teaching on sin, repentance, forgiveness, with the very Gospel of Jesus Christ. It does away with true Christian fellowship in faith and at the Lord's table, it does away with the Church's mission. Ultimately, nothing less than our very Christian faith and salvation is at stake.

That explains the dark spiritual background for why the push for women's ordination is so relentless that all means are justified to make it happen as we have exceedingly witnessed it also in our LCA during the last few years. Because a lot is at stake.

Our gracious and patient Lord certainly has given us scary freedom to make different crazy choices, but... He also has given us pastors, to warn us where those choices will lead.

I pray that those, who have ears to hear, would take this seriously.

Reflect, test everything and if this is true, share with your fellow saints!

May the good Lord Jesus Christ be gracious to us!

## **Soli Deo Gloria!**