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FAITH AND GENDER: EQUALITY FOR WOMEN AND MEN.



Repositioning Women's Equal Access to Power Structures

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Introduction

Greetings from my Daddy Bro Charles Ibekwe, my mentor and spiritual cover, Apostle Grace Lubega.

Greetings also from my dear Husband and friend, my love and "Ish" Nelson Anumaka,

Background: Building from the concept of Gender, where gender is viewed from Biological or physiological perspective, having male and female gender. -this is the way God views man-as Adam is male (man), Eve is female (woman). From the beginning (Genesis 1:26-27), God made man in His image and likeness: male and female created he them. Eve (the woman) was inside Adam at creation (Genesis 2:21). The bible states that Eve (woman), "the womb man" was taken out of Adam (Man).

Differentiation of roles came as a result of the fact that one individual has to be given responsibility of ensuring that principles and order are kept and it has to be the first, the first to be created-Adam. It is very obvious that God did not view, is not viewing and will never view female as lesser creation... "God blessed them..." (Genesis 1:27-28). Galatians (3:26-29) reiterates that men and women are of equal respect: are viewed as one (same way) in Christ,

because male and female share same measures of faith in Christ Jesus as far as baptism into Christ is concerned and they have put on Christ Jesus. Note that **measures** here mean -offered same privilege or opportunity of both saving grace, sustainable grace and grace for exploits Verse 28 emphasizes that in Christ there is no male nor female (Gal 3:28KJV).

Roles as ordained by God

The differentiation of roles of man and woman was initiated when the serpent beguiled the woman. That deception was done separately. The woman 'saw' because now her eyes have been coloured by inordinate description (Genesis 3:6). She could not process the deception in the right perception because she **paid attention**. The eye as we understand is a door to the soul, it can open as a gate for perceptions and this became the very means of deception for Eve the womb man- a name, role and responsibility which came after the fall. It is a means of gazing or seeing what is in the world, and the mystery of life and living. Eve fell into the attraction in the world "lust of the flesh, lust of the eyes, pride of life(1 John 2:16) dragging the man, Adam into it. This deception leads to gender role differentiation. The deception which led to role identification degenerates into a curse or a punishment from God for disobedience. In the principle of heaven every disobedience (Sin) has a corresponding **punishment** which is like a **curse**. Eve's doubt led to unbelief ,unbelief led to disobedience, disobedience led to punishment /curse (Gen 3:16b).This chain was broken by second Adam, Jesus Christ – and thy desire shall be to thy husband (the first time the word **husband:"Hb word Ish"**appeared in the bible) and he shall **rule** over thee.(Hb " Isha").Here God gives the Ish authority over the **"Isha"**(woman).

The fall of man necessitated the role identification so that one will bear the responsibility of ensuring that order and obedience is kept to rules, instructions pertaining to life, living and godliness.

Historical view of Women's Role

The role of women in Judaism is determined by Hebrew Bible, the Oral law (the corpus of rabbinic literature), **by custom** and by cultural factors. In the Torah, the female is depicted as hidden gender in obscurity (to be rarely seen, nor heard). Mostly with restriction on her visibility. In Judaism, Jewishness is passed down through the mother, yet the sons and daughters are described using the father's name. In the Torah for example "Dinah, daughter of Jacob" (Genesis 34: 3).

Role of Biblical Women in Torah, Talmudic Times

Torah, Hebrew Bible, Talmud, responsa, rabbinic literature and similar works are Judaism's religious texts, mentioning few women by name because women were rarely in the forefront of public life. There are few exceptions like Matriarchs Sarah, Rebecca, Rachel, Leah, Miriam the prophetess, Deborah the prophetess and judge, Huldah the prophetess, Abigail wife of David, Rahab the harlot that saved the spies, Esther and Ruth. These women did not meet opposition for the public presence they had. In Torah, God related with both Israelite male and female without discrimination or gendered insinuations. However, men were given responsibility of ensuring that women, slaves and children act on the law. This made it seem as if law bounds women indirectly, and not men in certain aspects. This cultural belief associated with traditions and Jewish practices was displayed even in Jesus Christ time (The woman caught in adultery-John 8:1-11). Even in the dispensation of conscience (before Decalogue), culture and tradition negates recognition of women in public. This and other heathenish and religious practices waded their way into Judaism, Jewish and Hebrew laws and practices even before Mosaic and Levitical laws.

A view of some of these Jewish practices Found in Torah, Bible that does not favour women: -

Marriage– man could divorce the wife if he chooses but wife cannot. Deuteronomy 24:1, Numbers 30:9.

Levirate marriage – from Latin word “Levir” meaning husband’s brother. The childless widow marriages brother – in – law. Or performs Chalitza – **but must marry within the tribeto retain land-holding.**Deuteronomy 25: 5 – 10.

Loss of virginity does not mention male equivalent – Lev 21:13, Deuteronomy.22:15., Deuteronomy 22:20 – 21 (the girl is stoned to death).

However, other roles in ritual life were performed by both men and women for example pilgrimage to Temple in Jerusalem once a year, Passover sacrifice, Todah (thanks giving but after child birth) – but the law to “Tefillin “ is applied (cleansing after menstrual flow – purification) otherwise she contradicts**Halach**(permission to go) and **tzitzis**.(the liturgy and the ceremonial wears for worship).The Tzitzis is fringes affixed to corners of clothes as commanded by God to Israelites as a constant remembrance of His commandments(Numbers 15:38 – 40).

Classical Jewish literature (Talmud) gave powerful statements about women, viz;

- More intuitive,
- More spiritual
- Carry more divine presence,
- Greater faith etc.

Rav Yosef b Hiyga was quoted as always saying, “Let me arise before the approach of the divine presence” as his mother’s approaches.

- But no woman authored rabbinical works

- Eleazar ben Arch, when asked to be “Prince” or President of Sanhedrin (supreme council of rabbis), was quoted to have replied “Let me first take counsel with my wife -Ima Shalom”, which they said he did.
- There were no woman Sanhedrin at the time of Jesus. Women were not allowed in those days to hold(sacred) religious positions, nor elected in councils.

Women Role in middle Age, Medieval/ Dark Ages

This dates as far as 500 – 100 AD, after the fall of Roman Empire. This is between 5th and 15th centuries. However, the beginning of the medieval period is referred to as “dark ages”. In medieval period, women’s role came to limelight, they were recognized. Gossman in his writings, argued that women’s status in this period rose very significantly. **Kabbalistic work** of “Sefer Hakanah” demanded that women also fulfill **mitzvot** in a way equal to men, (mitzvot :613 commandment identified in the Torah).

Milestones in medieval period:

- Torah was taught to women unlike earlier.
- Women participated in synagogue but separated (Halacha) – limited women’s role.
- Led the cantor and gradually became more involved.
- By 13th century, they did more works in synagogues.
- Were granted divorce – (Maimonides law) in a rabbinical court. Haim Yosef David Azulai wrote that women can learn and teach the Torah.

Emerging roles of women to power structure in present Day

Joseph Solovetchik institutionalized education of women, alongside other advocates for women education. The past 20 years have witnessed advancement in women scholarship and power circles, full participation in

synagogues, churches, society and family. In 2010 Sara Hurwitz became first woman to be ordained as Rabbi in Bronx, New York. In 2013 Yeshivat Maharat in Manhattan, New York, became the first Orthodox institution to consecrate female clergy. In 2015, Jennie Rossenfeld became the first female orthodox spiritual advisor in Israel. Though controversies arose, the list is unexhaustive as at today because more women have been ordained as “rabba” or rabbi, despite controversies.

Repositioning Women access to power structure-From New Testament to present Day

In Judges 4:4 Deborah was a prophetess, a wife and a judge. She was the fourth judge of Israel. Deborah was the highest in power structure as all Israel depended on her. Huldah (2 kings 22: 14 – 20) was also a very powerful prophetess with extra ordinary boldness. A cursory observation shows that Deborah, though a renowned warrior, was not mentioned among the (s)heros in the hall of fame by the writer of Hebrews in Hebrews chapter 11. In the New testament, we find Anna (Luke 2: 36) Philips daughters (Acts 21: 9). The young prophetess present on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:1). In leadership, we also find Lydia (Acts 16: 14 – 15), Priscilla instructs Apollos (Acts 18: 24 – 26), Phoebe became a deacon in church, and quite a lot of women not mentioned as recorded.

Surely the spirit of legalistic limitations on women had been broken by Christ. The Samaritan woman at the well became an evangelist. (John 4: 28 – 30). Christ did not discriminate against women though he didn't appoint any as an Apostle, they were leaders, also as disciples, example; Mary, Martha, and other women. Christ appeared to women first on resurrection, giving them message to the rest of His disciples. -this was not by accident. The men hid, the women showed boldness. The New Testament writers discriminated against women as some of the writings depict –Feeding of 5 thousand men (Mathew

14:21, Mark 6: 44,Luke 9:14,John 6:10) interestingly,Luke ,Mark, John never mentioned women, nor even child

ren in their narrative. Were there only men, was this intentional, traditional, or outright negligence?

God has given women the role of motherhood and household-care as responsibility, but Christ did not limit the measure of faith, Holy Spirit or measure of love for women. He loved women equally and gave equal access to both man and woman to be close to Him. The question is: **where is the repositioning aspect?** In this context, it is in transforming of mindsets from cultural paradigms to Christ standard.

“For the Grace that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men” ; *women inclusive*(KJV Titus 2:11, italics mine)

Some cultural and religious practices try to follow ancient and obsolete Judaism and Hebrew cultures, where women are not allowed to lead. Because of confusion that time, Paul tried to bring order by asking women to keep quiet about asking too many questions bringing debates. Obviously, he did not include Mary, Martha, Phoebe, Anna, and a lot of those women who walked and worked with the 12 Apostles in these categories of women. Due to responsibility of home -keeping it becomes necessary that married women observe the “**delicate balancing**” in their roles and responsibilities. Research has proven that female administrators are better and less corrupt and show even more dedication to duties in leadership roles than male counterpart. The misconception in this, is the agitative, antagonistic groups called “**Women liberations**”. The question is **who bound them?** If the Son therefore make you free, you shall be free indeed (John 8:36). This freedom is all encompassing- from sin, intimidation, oppression, subjugation, suppression -WHATSOEVER!!!

Whoever the son of men has made free is free indeed. Christ always used the word “whosoever” meaning both men and women. No discrimination.

These days churches (especially orthodox), allowing women to lead are declared heretical. Christian women are serve in offices as, Apostles, Prophets,

Evangelists, Pastors and Teachers as Ephesians 4:11 did not specify “some” as meaning “men only”. Government and public sectors and politics advocate for gender sensitivity, genderbalancing, equality of rights and equal access to powerstructure. Women have written music and even founded churches. It is good to acknowledge women’s equality before God and acknowledge the liberation work of Christ for women as contrary to mere WOMEN LIBERATION advocacy in the flesh. Many denominations, even some Pentecostals do not let women preach or be ordained. The present-day women are being repositioned, being challenged by the women like Gail Song Bantu, executive Pastor of Seattle Quest church; Vicky Beeching, a theologian, broadcaster and feminist activist; Joyce Meyer, preacher, pastor, and evangelist, business women.

Kate Kelly said:

“Societal parity for women will never be fully actualized until women are spiritually integrated as equals into every major faith tradition in the world”.

I believe, that any church or government sector excluding women from leadership or even top leadership roles is clearly missing out of 50% of the potential, talents and wisdom of its adherents. We do not have only religious discrimination, it had leaked out to other sectors of the society- education, business, politics, etc. Today’s women are put below men in all sectors by not just offering them certain positions using mind games, emotional games and gimmicks but by strong Christ-like understanding.

My Prayer as I conclude, women should know that liberation means “emancipating our minds from mental slavery”. It starts from our spiritual awakening and telling ourselves we have equal access to power structures, attainable by acts of piety. Our young women should respect their God-given privileges, stop exposing their bodies in a bid to attract attention, show true and pure feminism, deny being used as pornographic adverts for bumper sales, music shows and clubs. Our married women respect and honour their

husband's **authority in the Lord**. Obviously more advocacy for repositioning women's access to education and power structure abound- from fightingFGM, to resisting early marriages, to girlchild labour,certain legal issues marginalizing women.

Much as the paper is interwoven with epistemological and ontological aspects, it carries with it a strong spiritual undertone. Let us get more involved in spiritual reawakening of our times and prove ourselves worthy to be entrusted with power at both middle and top levels in any spiritual or temporal callings. This reposition calls for maturity, prayer and consciousness of the fact that we are responsive and responsible. Africa is rising in spiritual consciousness in this dispensation. We need to fully queue into what the Spirit is **doing** and **saying** in the NOW.Sensitivity is required to achieve our divine purpose as we relate with the need to understand our roles, first as Christians, and as spiritual entities and agents of transformation.

May God give us the understanding in Jesus name, Amen

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