

## ***Women Leaders and the Church: Three Crucial Questions***

Linda L Belleville (Baker Books, 2000)

This book sets out to answer three crucial questions which face all evangelicals, especially women who sense a calling to ministry:

- In which ministries can women be involved?
- What roles can women play in society?
- Can women hold positions of authority?

In answering these questions, the author goes beyond the texts which are often used to limit the ministry of women, and she looks at the place of women in Greek, Roman and Jewish societies, at women in ministry in the early Church, as well as at passages such as 1 Corinthians 14 and 1 Timothy 2. She shows how preconceptions and mistranslations have sometimes coloured our reading of certain texts.

Belleville draws on contemporary scholarship, but writes in a way which is very accessible and readable. She gives fascinating insights into life in the first century, which help readers to gain deeper insight into the biblical texts which refer to women in ministry or appear to limit their roles. She shows how radically counter-cultural much of Paul's teaching was, rather than, as it is sometime popularly (mis)understood, of its time or misogynist.

Where women had difficulty in handling their new-found freedom, Paul urged them to be restrained, for the sake of the gospel. But the relationship between the sexes was to be one of mutual submission.

Her conclusions:

- God gifts women in the same ways as he gifts men
- God intended the male-female relationship to be equal and mutual
- Church roles are nowhere defined in the NT on the basis of gender

She points out how leadership has often been misconceived as authority, when biblical leadership should be about service. Ministry and leadership in the New Testament are co-operative, and this should be the model of leadership for the twenty-first century.

'Ministry and leadership in the New Testament are a cooperative venture, whose success depends on the gifting and empowerment of women and men committed to serving Christ and his church. As we move into the twenty-first century, may we labor faithfully at providing men and women every possible avenue to function as the partners and coworkers God created them to be,' (p183)