

Book Review: *How I Changed My Mind about Women in Leadership*

Edited by Alan F. Johnson (Zondervan, 2010)

REVIEWED BY SHIRLEY L. BARRON

Alan Johnson, emeritus professor of New Testament and Christian ethics at Wheaton College (Illinois), has put together autobiographical accounts of twenty-seven evangelical leaders, both men and women, from many denominations. These stories recount journeys from belief in a restrictive role for women to a realization of freedom for women to use all their gifts and callings for God's kingdom. In many of these accounts, the implications for Christian marriage are brought out: a side-by-side partnership of mutual love and submission, where no one is "boss" and no one needs to dominate.

The book's intended audience is twofold. First is the lay evangelical Christian who may not know that there are numerous faithful, Bible-believing Christians who believe that subordination of half the human race is wrong, but who may not have heard the many credible, committed evangelicals who have come to understand that faithful adherence to Scripture does not require this restrictive view. The second purpose is to encourage women and men who have come to know that God intends both genders to serve freely in his kingdom and mission.

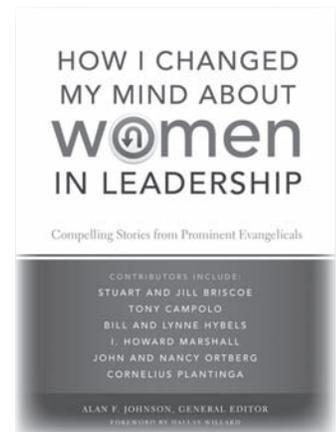
The contributors have each written a 10 to 15 page account of their own experience, usually starting with childhood memories of their parental families, proceeding to eventual questioning or confusion about gender roles, and then of a searching of Scripture for God's will in this area, concluding with their realization that the whole sweep of Scripture is toward redemption from the fall and the curses caused by sin and toward freedom (for both genders, all races, and all social conditions).

The contributors come from denominations as varied as Baptist, Plymouth Brethren, Anglican, Mennonite, etc., mostly American, but also Armenian, Swiss, British, and Canadian. Some of the people who contributed to this book are Stuart and Jill Briscoe, Stan Gundry, Tony Campolo, Bill and Lynne Hybels, Ron Sider, Roger Nicole, Alice Mathews, Walter and Olive Fleming Liefeld, Gilbert Bilezikian, Cornelius Plantinga

Jr., I. Howard Marshall, John Stackhouse, and the editor himself. Their stories are highly engaging, upbeat, and positive. The writers do not use polemics or blame, but revel in the joy of freedom from the old restrictions. A recurring theme for many of the writers is the presence of strong, knowledgeable, godly women (mothers, aunts, Sunday School teachers, etc.) in their early lives. Often, these women functioned within a very repressive framework, but their effectiveness gave the lie to the restrictive rules. However, the inconsistency was noticed by the young person and often led to confusion and questioning of the restrictions. He or she then usually searched the Scriptures for the truth.

There is very little that one can say that would be negative about this interesting collection of personal accounts. I have heard that one reader was critical of the book because detailed scriptural analysis of controversial passages is not included. However, that is not the book's purpose. There are a number of other books that provide such detail. This book fulfills its stated purpose very well indeed.

In summary, this is an extremely readable collection of personal stories by twenty-seven prominent evangelicals, recounting their journeys from gender-restrictive views to views that women, as well as men, should have the freedom to serve God in whatever ways he may call them, without male supervision, and that, in marriage, mutual submission is the appropriate relationship between husband and wife. I highly recommend this excellent book.



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