You know there's an analogy to this. This is when sometimes it pays to be a New Testament person, and that is I think about how Jesus interacted with women in Scripture and what the cultural expectations were, and of course what had happened in Judaism, and you can still see this in certain pockets of orthodox Judaism today, is they were very careful about attempting to follow the law and they built what they call a fence around Torah, and of course that fence, this is your analogy of the high walls, actually ends up not helping you keep the law oftentimes.

It actually ends up being a way of avoiding the engagement that you need to grow and to work through something, and so that's what you see. So Jesus interacts with the Samaritan woman; the disciples are shocked. Jesus has Martha and Mary sit at His feet and the first century that would've been very, very surprising. So you watch Jesus handle women as people if I can say it that way.

Oh yes, beautifully.

And interact with them as He would anybody else, and invite them into the fellowship in the community, have them be the first witnesses to the empty tomb, and in the midst of that what you see is Jesus affirming them as people rather than as dangers.

Yes.

And in the midst of that, building the right kind of community.

Yes. It's a beautiful – and women from all walks of life were absolutely drawn to Him because He treated them as people, as a big brother, a caring person who had their best interests at heart, who forgave them, and you look at all the women of the night, women of ill repute. Look at the women who came and washed His feet, took her hair down in a public place and actually with her tears touched Him.

And Jesus is like &quot;Sorry, stop, stop. I can't do that. We need to unwind this and handle this a different way.&quot;

Think about it. She's massaging His feet with her hair and her tears in a public place with the faracy right over there as the host.
**Darrell**
That sound you hear is the [gasp] going on around Him.

**Sue**
Yes, but He cared so deeply and women follow Him because they sense His wholehearted care not as an object. They never objectified women the way we do in our culture, and in a way when men do this in the church they're objectifying that woman and she's a person.

**Darrell**
Yeah. Their first message is "I view you as a threat rather than as a sister."

**Sue**
Yes. Shouldn't be "How can I keep you away? How can I shut you down?" But "What can we do within the parameters of the Scriptures to unleash you, to help?" If 60 percent of our people are shackled, what is that doing to the church today and what is it doing to the way the church looks? Certainly we don't acclimate to the culture, but we need to consider how the church looks to the outside. I mean women coming in when I was at IBC as minister to women there and a woman comes in, she's a lawyer. She's on the road to becoming a judge.

She comes in and she goes to a meeting and she's shut down. They don't listen to her. She can't participate. She comes to me and she says "Why would I join a church?" And our church is really very women friendly. Why would I ever, in my world I'm listened to. I'm respected. I come here and I don't get the rules. I don't get how I'm being treated. Why would I want to join a community like this? I actually went to my executive pastor and said what she had said, and this was at a time in our service where men were doing everything.

They were greeting. They were passing out – they were doing things that anybody could do, and our executive pastor changed that and really opened up to having women be ushers take and read the Scripture from the stage and take the collection and all the things that women could do. He said let's open this up because six out of ten of the people who are sitting in these pews relate.

**Darrell**
I think it's interesting that we've allowed two things to happen in gender relationships. We've either made the men/women discussion strictly one of power or rank issues, or we've made them about this objectifying thing that we're talking about, and both of those are poisons on community.
Darrell

The way in which Jesus taught that power and rank should be exercised really does everything to, to some degree, nullify power and rank. I mean just look at the way Jesus asked marriages to be handled. Yes, the husband is said to be the head of the wife, but the headship is supposed to be exercised in a way in which Christ gave Himself for the church. In fact, I have an exercise that I have students do when they're in Ephesians 5 and I say "Take your page. Draw a line down the middle. On one side put 'power.' On the other side put 'service.' Now I want you to do is I want you to read through this section on the husband and every place you see something that illustrates service I want you to put a check, and everything you see power being illustrated put a check, and I'm gonna give you five minutes to read the text and put down your checks."

So I give them five minutes to do it and they come back and inevitably of course what's happening in the passages is that all the checks are on the service side, nourishes and cherishes his own body, etc., those kinds of things, Christ gave Himself for the church, and I sometimes will get one check because "head" is there, okay? And I'll go, "What do you think has happened to that one check in light of all these other checks?"

Sue

Yeah. I kind of had to argue.

Darrell

Exactly right, and the point that I'm trying to make to students is that Jesus redefines the way we think about rank in such a way that rank itself is redefined, and the amazing thing about it is when Jesus talks about this directly He says things like "You're not to lead like the way the world leads where the person in charge holds it over the people around them." No. The son of man came not to be served but to serve, and so you get these examples that show that the whole premise of everything that's going on in ministry is the way in which we can encourage one another, edify one another, serve one another, lock arms around one another, and engage in ministry and mission together.
Sue  Yes. That's the beauty of it. I think Romans 16 as well, you look at Paul, I think there are nine women that he greets with wonderful "You're my sister. You're my mother." Those were women he partnered with, he cared about. Paul I think was extremely relational and he had friends who were women. It takes that other picture that we sometimes put, we say Paul is this way, and just blows it up. He was very close to a number of women. Look at Priscilla. I mean there are just so many things.

Darrell  Now in fairness, because we've got to balance this out, in fairness, the reason these kinds of concerns and rules exist is because there are pressures that take us there, whether they're cultural pressures, whether the way we've been brought up, etc., whether it's the advice that we've received perhaps from godly people who have gone before us, and so it isn't – in talking about this, it isn't just a matter of saying it's got to be different. We also have to be sensitive to where people are coming from.

Sue  Yes.

Darrell  So how do you advice, if I could ask this question, how do you advise making the transition from having kind of one way of thinking about this to thinking about it in a way that might change the dynamics?

Sue  I put it squarely in the place of men. I have found that there are a number of men who champion women, who have the very kinds of attitudes and believe the things you're saying, but when it comes to actually standing up for women with their brothers, many of them are silent. I can be an advocate for another person so much better than I can be an advocate for myself.

Darrell  Right, because it looks defensive.

Sue  It looks defensive. It looks like I'm coming because of something for myself, and that's what I think is really going to make the difference. I'm here at DTS because Mike Lawson decided that it would be a healthy thing to have a woman on his full-time faculty staff and have her partner with male colleagues in the classroom, creating courses together, ministering to students, that they saw this in the classroom.
Darrell

They could model this kind of ministry we're talking about.

Sue

Yes. Now I teach by and large solo, and I have male students that walk in and their eyes just about pop. They had no idea that Dr. Edwards was a woman.

Darrell

Though "Sue" might be a clue.

Sue

They don't get it. It might be. A lot of times they don't look that closely.

Darrell

Right.

Sue

And so they're just flabbergasted. I had one student come to me last semester and sit down and this is also the myth of the exceptional woman, which I want to talk about as well. He just said "Wow." He was from a background, I won't name it, but where women still cover their heads, who have absolutely no say in anything, and he said "I had no idea that I could learn from a woman." He was just so affirming, but I thought this is incredible that for him this was a whole new world that was opened up to him that a woman could bring anything to the table and he was gracious, he was delightful, but Mike Lawson decided that this was a high value, that the church would benefit for the glory of God, that we needed to change some of this thinking, and he set out and he passed over people that were far more qualified to find me, and I was absolutely flabbergasted.

It took me three weeks to say yes because I never saw myself in an academic setting sitting in a room of brothers that were my professors. I was here in the 80's as not the first woman but one of the first women, and I thought I could never do this. I'm a practitioner. I'm not a scholar, but I do bring something to the table related to women's issues and also to the practical. But Dr. Lawson did this because he was championing – it was something that he felt convicted about and he did something about it.

Darrell

And so the point that you're making is that really the first step in wrestling with this are having – you're saying advocates, but in some ways I would say what you need are male people who model the attitude that you're talking about because in one sense I don't want to make it an agenda issue.
It's simply ministering out of Biblical standards and out of Biblical concerns that make an affirmation about the value of the whole of the body.

Yes, and I don't want it to be an agenda with an edge, but I do think it's worthy of intentionality on the part of men, and I think an awful lot of these attitudes are because men grew up with their mentors in an age when this seemed to be the right thing to do and they listened, and these are men they've respected. And so to look at something differently is very difficult for them.

And I think something we underestimate as we talk about this, which is kind of where we started, which is the change in ministry over 30 years has changed the game, it really has, because now there are a series of ministries that take place in which women are alongside. They are brought on to the staff. 30-35 years ago that would've not necessarily been the case.

That's right.

So in some ways it was easier to build those walls and operate with those fences because the lines were so clearly drawn. Now we in some senses have invited women into ministry and have said, "We want you to partner alongside of us. We recognize the value of this."

But when you do that with kind of the older structures in place, new wine requires new wine skins, you end up having this awkward kind of half and half thing that you've described in the staff meetings in which, well, we're going to invite you on the staff, but we really want you to be quiet, and that just doesn't work. So there are tons of situations that I see regularly in the context of ministry where I go, not only am I glad women are ministering alongside of me, but it's almost necessary that they be there because there are certain ministries that they have and certain capabilities and certain sensitivities that they have that I won't have and that I can't have, and so I need them alongside me and I don't need them merely as a presence. I need them as a voice.

Yes.
And so getting beyond any kind of tokenism and actually engaging directly in which the affirmation is we're in ministry together and we are very much in ministry together and I value what it is you bring to the table and in fact in some cases I'm going to ask you to take responsibility for what is going on.

Yes, and when that occurs I can assure you women are so grateful, because women feel a call to serve just like men do and the opportunities to do that, and the men are the ones who can open the doors. Without that we simply sit on the sidelines and there are many women who do sit on the sidelines, and we are according to Barna's 2011 state of the church survey we are losing more women from the church than any other demographic at this point, which is very sad because they're not going to atheism by and large. They're going to alternative spiritualities, which are extremely unhealthy, but who feel more empowering to women, and that's frightening, our young women particularly.

Now I'm hoping you remember this because about 10-15 minutes ago you said there was another kind of woman that you wanted to talk about.

Right, the exceptional woman.

Okay. Very good. The category had slipped my mind.

Yes. Well that is also something that we deal with, that those of us who have made our way into a position that some men would say would be for men, say as a seminary professor or as a leader on a church staff, not as a senior pastor. I mean there are about 60 to 70 documented executive women, pastors, who do fabulous jobs and a lot of us are put into the category of, well, yes she's exceptional, but what I want to say to that is no, we have just been given the opportunities and there are millions of exceptional women if they were given the opportunity, and they're very frustrated out there many of them because – and so they end up using their gifts, either they walk away from the church altogether or they use their gifts in the secular arena or in a para church kind of place, and they walk away from the church.
The church is hurting right now. My husband uses the analogy of, we're in a canoe and the canoe is going down and everybody needs to bail. The water is coming in, but the guy in the front goes "Okay, all women sit there with your hands folded. We will bail."

**Darrell**  
"We'll take care of it."

**Sue**  
"We'll take care of it", and you're going, "We're going down. Everybody needs to be on board and bail." And yet over some of these kinds of issues, the in-fighting and the back biting and some of the stuff that goes on that is partly because in many places they never even address the issue. So women just don't have a clue where they stand and that shuts them down, and we understand it's controversial. It is controversial, but this affects six out of ten out of our people in the church.

**Darrell**  
Well it actually affects ten out of ten because how we interact with women actually and how we model it actually impacts the way men think about it and approach it.

**Sue**  
Yes.

**Darrell**  
So everybody is actually. There is no escape. Everybody really engages with this. Well we're talking about making the transition, you said one of the things that's important is having a male who is an advocate. I suspect that another very helpful thing is to have venues that are very, very conscious in which you see the actual model itself working itself out.

**Sue**  
Yes absolutely. Like my partnering with a male colleague, that kind of thing, and our book is packed full of examples and quotes that actually male leaders gave us of just some of the nuances, some of the benefits of working with women. But it's interesting, it's still by and large a female conversation and that should not be.

**Darrell**  
So it's what women are talking about.

**Sue**  
Yes, and what I work with with women very often is not to harbor a bitter spirit, that not to have an agenda or get this edge in which you're so wounded that you become mean-spirited and aggressive. Then it's counter productive. Then you're that woman they say "See? That's what happens."
Or it also can create kind of this – I'm going to put two words together that don't often go together, but this kind of hostile timidity that is actually very, very unhealthy.

Yes. It's a poison, and a lot of Christian women, yes, there's that, but there's also that they decide "I won't develop myself as a person", and we need women to develop themselves. The fruit of the spirit is male and female.

If they give up and become resigned to the situation, that's not healthy.

It's not healthy if they're married. They end up sabotaging their marriage. They end up not parenting in healthy ways. They end up sabotaging at church. We have a lot of conflict going on at church and it's if women – what's the saying? She may be sitting down on the outside, but she's standing up on the inside. You're going to have troubles and the conflict that she can cause, if mama ain't happy, ain't nobody happy.

Right.

She has ways, and I try to teach women to rid themselves of this passive-aggressive kind of way that women interact and say "I can't have power, so I'm going to go behind the scenes. I'm going to manipulate. I'm going to be indirect. I'm going to gossip. I'm going to create factions." We have all that kind of thing going on, which women are seeking power in unhealthy ways. See, we don't get a pass on Matthew 18, which tells us how to interact with people when there's difficulty just because we're female, and men don't get a pass on being relational and caring about women just because they're male and it may be easier.

Right.
The Table Podcast  Mixed Ministry: Brothers and Sisters in Christ

Sue  So if all of us are called to the fruit of the Spirit to treat each other as people made in the image of God, the Holy Spirit is within each of us. You can't lust then after someone. That's what one male student told me. He said "I see her with the Holy Spirit in her. When I start to feel lust I go, that's the Holy Spirit. I can't do that." I said "That's great. You see her as a sister." All of these things, I think they are changing with our younger generations, but there's a lot of work to do and that's what we do is I work with women to help them not let this take over and they become bitter and mean-spirited and poisonous and indirect and unkind. We have too many women that are like that.

Darrell  You just raised another issue that is part of the equation that is hard for everyone to adapt to to some degree, and that is because there are differences in how the various generations handle this area and the expectations that that creates, helping the older people understand the young people and the younger people understand the older people and why they interact the way they do and perhaps some of the baggage that the older group has had. We've experienced, if I can say it this way, we've experienced the shift, but that doesn't mean we've shifted.

Sue  That's right.

Darrell  And so in the midst of that, having a community that will help people transition and settle well is important.

Sue  Yes, and the whole mentoring piece has just been blown out of the water because of these differences. That's what Barbara Newman who is one of my D.Min. students did her research interviewing younger women about what they needed in a mentoring relationship and exactly what you're talking about came out, these differences cause all kinds of problems.

Darrell  So helping people sort through, if I can say it this way, what is cultural that they've inherited and the way they're interacting with and it can be a church culture that is not necessarily healthy, what they've inherited culturally and getting people – it's kind of what we were doing in the middle part of this, which is getting people to understand why that was there, because in most cases it wasn't at all maliciously motivated at all. It was very well-intentioned.
But at the same time understand the risks and limitations that some of that created, and then thinking through well how and if there are just – I mean certain people are made certain ways, they probably shouldn't adjust, but other people can flourish in the opportunities and in the differing environment. You do that cross-generationally, I mean all of a sudden this simple conversation can actually become quite complex.

*Sue*  
Yes, very complex, and people are complicated, but I think we just have to stay with it, and when they hear people like you who are saying to them a perspective that maybe they have never even thought about before, my hope and prayer is that it will help them to just begin to wrestle with some of these in an honest way with others, both men and women, have honest conversations, not to demean what was in the past but to say if the church is going to be healthy in the 21st century there has to be some changes in the way that we look at particularly men and women interacting.

*Darrell*  
So we walk into a staff meeting. We kind of started with the staff meeting in which the woman is there, but she doesn't get to express herself, so let's close with another picture and perhaps a different one. So you walk into a staff meeting. Everyone is participating. Everyone's opinion is being taken seriously and depending on the strengths and ministry positions of various people, certain people are being asked to take certain responsibilities for certain things, and what you have is a table in which yes, there are men and women present, but more importantly there are brothers and sisters in Christ sharing in ministry together who are all engaged in trying to perform the same tasks and sorting out who's best suited to do this portion of what's going on.

*Sue*  
Yes, and that's beautiful, and you actually have a place where both men and women can express themselves honestly, and sometimes you have more aggressive men and sometimes you actually have more aggressive women. In our staff meetings at IBC, I'll finish with this, our executive pastor wanted to give freedom to everyone, but he also realized that when the men began to get – what is it – a little bit the way guy do, a little extra assertive, which tends to shut women down, he had NFL flags all around, and if a woman or a man, if a woman started to get a little bit push they could throw a flag on the plate and it meant everybody let's stop. Let's listen. We're brothers and sisters. We love each other. We're all on the same team. Let's figure this out together. It can become a very healthy way to minister.
Darrell  Yeah. There's a passage that I love in the Gospels in which Peter is struggling with whether or not he's left everything to follow the Lord, and so Jesus's response to him, and he's really looking for reassurance because this is in the rich young ruler passage and rich young ruler has walked away, and if a rich man isn't blessed, who in the world can be? Peter is kind of asking for this assurance. "Well have we left everything? Have we done this?"

And the reply that Jesus makes has within it this idea of no one who's left mother and father and home, etc. who will not receive much more in this life and in the world to come, and I think we always hear "and in the world to come" part and we miss the "in this life" part in which part of what community is designed to do, part of what the body of Christ is supposed to do is to give us that family that we may now miss at a biological level, or to give us that community, that functioning community, that hoard of brothers and sisters if I can say it that way, that we can minister alongside and work with in the pursuit of ministry and have successful mixed ministries as a result.

It strikes me we've only – the people who listen to this podcast always give me a hard time – you always say "We only scratched the surface." Well here it comes. We've only scratched the surface. There's the whole dynamic of mixed ministry and how that works and why that can be effective and why certain ministries may actually be very well suited to have a mixture of input. We haven't even discussed that at all, and so that's a whole other area that I'm sure I'm going to invite you back in the future, Sue to discuss with us, but I really do appreciate you coming in and discussing.

Sue  I appreciate the opportunity. Thank you so much.

Darrell  The logistics of the relational elements of mixed ministry and how sometimes the walls that we put in place actually get in the way of our potential effectiveness. Is there any kind of final word you want to give us before we…
Sue: I suppose I just – I think you can probably tell I'm pretty passionate about this, but I do believe that one of the reasons why the church is struggling is this issue, and if we could become healthier. Titus 2:3-5 ends with a beautiful passage that talks about older shepherding younger, and then it ends in if the clause that seems to be that purposes statement, "So that the Word of God, no one will malign the Word of God." I don't really know completely what that means, but it's very positive that we shine as a light to the world and we should be the example of men and women working together in healthy ways and sadly in some places. It's getting better, but we have a lot more work to do.

Darrell: You know when you walk into a community and it shows that there's love present, there's mutual caring, there's evidence of genuine reconciliation, there's authenticity even in the way challenges and conflict is handled, etc. that becomes an attractive place.

Sue: That's right, and that can only happen when men and women in my opinion see each other as family.

Darrell: Well we thank you for coming in to talk with us, Sue and look forward to like I say having you back. I thank you for helping us with this.

Sue: Absolutely my pleasure.

Darrell: And we thank you for being a part of The Table and for joining us and we hope to see you again soon at The Table where we discuss issues of God and culture.