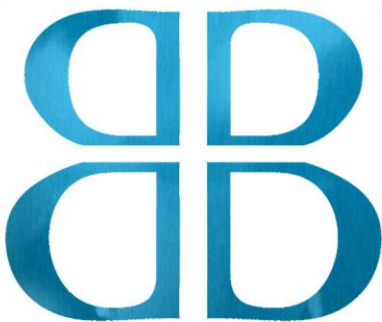


Universal Suffrage

A HISTORY AND ANALYSIS
OF VOTING IN THE
CHURCH AND SOCIETY

by PHILLIP KAYSER, Ph.D.



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Phillip Kayser, Ph.D.

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Introduction

The Meaning of the Term “Universal Suffrage”

The term, “Universal Suffrage,” is being used in this booklet as a synonym for “Democracy.” Historically the term referred to any form of “*individual* suffrage” as opposed to “*representational* suffrage.” Even though the women’s rights movement of the 1800’s was one form of universal suffrage, the term goes far beyond women’s rights. For example, in Indiana’s Constitutional debates in 1850, Mr. Kelso remarked:

According to our general understanding of the right of universal suffrage, I have no objection... but if it be the intention of the mover of the resolution to extend the right of suffrage to females and negroes, I am against it. “All free white male citizens over the age of twenty-one years,” – I understand this language to be the measure of universal suffrage.

Modern minds are immediately focused on the outrage of Mr. Kelso’s racist words, but they fail to see that he was advocating something revolutionary in American politics. We might wonder how expanding the vote to “all white male citizens over the age of twenty-one years” would constitute universal suffrage, let alone be considered revolutionary. Yet he was indeed promoting a form of universal suffrage that America’s founding fathers argued vigorously against. “Why!?” we might ask. Because the founding fathers found democracy far more dangerous than a monarchy. They opted for a very limited form of suffrage found in a republic. So what is the difference between a democracy and a republic?

A democracy is not a nation in which *every* citizen votes. All forms of government limit the vote. For example, Australia is a democracy, yet it keeps the vote away from citizens who are under the age of 18, who are mentally handicapped or who have committed felony crimes. Almost all democracies have such limitations. They also limit the vote to citizens and deny the vote to long-term residents who are not citizens. The difference between a democracy and a republic is not primarily in how many people can vote. Most early democracies only recognized a male vote. The difference can be summarized partially in the following two contrasts:

- A democracy is a nation of *individuals* in relationship with a government. A republic is a nation of *governments* (whether family or state) in relationship with a government.
- A democracy can override minority rights by a majority vote. A republic recognizes rights that can never be changed by any vote. John Adams captured this contrast in these words: "You have rights antecedent to all earthly governments; rights that cannot be repealed or restrained by human laws; rights derived from the Great Legislator of the Universe."

For example, in early America, United States Senators were chosen by the State Legislatures (a lower government), not by the citizens. This was representational government in which a lower government elected someone to represent it. State Legislatures were elected by men who represented families (a lower government), not simply individuals. But all citizens are protected from the government by the limitations of the constitution. As we will see in this booklet, the differences between an individualistic approach to suffrage and a representational approach has profound ramifications.

Universal Suffrage in a congregation or in a state is a fairly recent phenomenon.¹ Though the Arminians of Holland toyed with this practice,² and though strong advocates for women's suffrage could be found in the 1800's, it was not until the 1900's that there was any significant movement toward universal suffrage in either church or state.

¹For a fascinating history of voting in America, see Alexander Keyssar, *The Right to Vote: The Contested History of Democracy in America* (Basic Books: New York, NY, 2001). For a feminist history of this denial of the vote to women in church and state, see Elizabeth Crawford, *The Women's Suffrage Movement: A Reference Guide* (UCL Press, 1999). Also Elizabeth Frost, and Kathryn Cullen-Dupont, *Women's Suffrage in America An Eyewitness History* (New York: Facts on File, 1992). Also Sandra Stanley Holton, *Suffrage Days: Stories from the Women's Suffrage Movement* (New York: Routledge, 1996). For a Reformed analysis, see Thomas McCrie, "On the Right of Females to Vote in the Election of Ministers and Elders," in *Miscellaneous Writings: Chiefly Historical, of the late Thomas McCrie, DD*, edited by his son. Edinburgh, John Johnstone, 1841. He says, "I think it my duty to continue the common practice, not only because it had been the custom, but also because I look on it as well founded." (p. 670). He traces this custom of only males voting from the early church, the Reformation in Europe, the Reformation in Scotland, George Gillespie, John Owen and the agreement entered into by the Presbyterians and Independents in 1690 "where they give the right of election to the brotherhood... that is, the right of such men in the congregation..."

² Thomas McCrie, *Ibid.*, p. 675.

History in the United States of America

It is well known that early American states denied the vote to women, slaves and children. What is not quite so well known is that the vote was denied to most men. Though the conditions for voting varied from state to state, it was clear that there was strong prejudice against democracy. Indeed, democracy was feared more than the monarchy. Many essays vilified democracy as “mob rule.” Thus, citizens were encouraged to improve themselves before they were given the right to vote. There were several requirements in some states, including the ability to read and write, sufficient income to pay taxes and (in the early years), even church membership. But the most common qualification was that a citizen must own property. The following quote from John Adams, gives a little insight into the 18th century mind.

The same reasoning which will induce you to admit all men who have no property, to vote, with those who have, ... will prove that you ought to admit women and children; for, generally speaking, women and children have as good judgments, and as independent minds, as those men who are wholly destitute of property; these last being to all intents and purposes as much dependent upon others, who will please to feed, clothe, and employ them, as women are upon their husbands, or children on their parents... Depend upon it, Sir, it is dangerous to open so fruitful a source of controversy and altercation as would be opened by attempting to alter the qualifications of voters; there will be no end of it. New claims will arise; women will demand the vote; lads from twelve to twenty-one will think their rights not enough attended to; and every man who has a farthing, will demand an equal voice with any other, in all acts of state. It tends to confound and destroy all distinctions, and prostrate all ranks to one common level. – John Adams, 1776

John Adams’ view predominated, and the newly crafted Constitution did not change the vote, but allowed states to continue the qualifications already being practiced. However, there were steady changes in the laws for voting in the century that followed. The property requirement was eliminated by Delaware in 1792 with other states gradually following. But it was not until 1850 that Virginia became the last state to overturn a property holding requirement for all voters.

Angelina Grimké made history on February 21, 1838 as being the first woman to address any legislative body in America when she spoke to the Massachusetts legislature about the abolition of slavery. What makes this date stand out in feminist history books is that in 1838, no church in

America except the Quakers allowed women to speak in church or to vote in church.³ However, there was a growing opinion that this should change. John Quincy Adams gave a speech in that same year that advocated women's suffrage.⁴ The American Suffrage movement for women began at a convention in Seneca Falls, New York, in 1848. Numerous women's rights movements sprang up in the years immediately following. The first woman pastor in a mainline denomination was Antoinette Louisa Brown Blackwell, who was ordained to office in the First Congregational Church of Butler and Savannah, in Wayne County New York on September 15, 1853.⁵ This event created a great deal of concern within the denomination. But the movement toward feminism had gained a foothold.

In 1860, some radical feminists in New York asserted that "In the church, too, behold the spirit of freedom at work. Within the past year, the very altar has been the scene of well-fought battles; women claiming and exercising their right to vote in church matters, in defiance of precedent, priest, or Paul."⁶ Though permission to vote was sporadic and only on a congregational level in most cases, there was a growing momentum. In 1869 both Wyoming Territory and Utah Territory extended equal suffrage to women. However, Utah's act was revoked by the United States Congress in the Edmunds-Tucker Act of 1887.

Both state and church seemed to wrestle with feminism at the same time. Anna Howard Shaw became the first woman preacher in the Methodist Church in 1880. More and more local churches began to allow women to vote before the 1900's, but it was from 1902 and on that the feminist arguments for suffrage began to become deeply entrenched. The International Woman Suffrage Alliance formed in 1902. In 1920 the nineteenth amendment to the US Constitution was ratified. Though many denominations in America resisted this feminist movement, it was not long before a majority of denominations gave women the vote.

³ Elizabeth Frost, and Kathryn Cullen-Dupont, *Women's Suffrage in America An Eyewitness History* [book on-line] (New York: Facts on File, 1992, accessed 1 March 2007), 16; available from Questia, <http://www.questia.com/PM.qst?a=o&d=59298519>; Internet.

⁴ John Quincy Adams, "Speech . . . Upon the Rights of the People, Men and Women to Petition," 1838, in Flexner *Century of Struggle*, 51

⁵ Frost and Cullen-Dupont, *Ibid*, p. 411.

⁶ Frost and Cullen-Dupont, *Ibid*, p. 374.

History in Britain & Europe

In England, the Church League for Women's Suffrage was founded in 1909 by a Rev. Claude and Mrs. Hinscliffe in order to "band together, on a non-party basis, Suffragists of every shade of opinion who are Church people in order to secure for women the vote in Church and State, as it is or may be granted to men." That same year, "A Declaration of Representative Men in Favour of Women's Suffrage" was issued by the League and was signed by 83 office holders, 49 church leaders, 24 high ranking army and naval officers, and 86 academics.⁷ This organization became more and more militant, engaging in arson⁸ demonstrations, petitions, disruption of public meetings and intimidation in order to accomplish its purposes. After World War I it was renamed The League of the Church Militant.

Numerous other women's suffrage organizations sprang up in the early 1900's. There was the Scottish Federation of the National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies in 1909, followed by the Scottish Church's League for Woman's Suffrage in 1912. The Men's International Alliance for Woman's Suffrage (founded 1912) developed chapters in Holland, France, Hungary, the United States, Sweden, Germany and Denmark.

The following timeline shows the advance of feminism in various countries on the issue of the vote.⁹

1893-New Zealand (to vote)

1894-South Australia (to Vote and stand for election)

1902-Commonwealth of Australia* (to vote and stand for election)

1906-Finland

1907-Norway (to stand for election)*

1913-Norway**

⁷ Crawford, *Ibid.*, p. 406.

⁸ St Catherine's Church, Hatcham, England was burned to the ground by Suffragist on May 6, 1913. Numerous other examples of arson followed including the burning of churches and houses, breaking windows, throwing stones, defacing statues, etc. The women who were jailed went on hunger strikes and were force fed with nasal tubes.

⁹ These figures are given on both government and non-government websites such as:

<http://www.ipu.org/wmn-e/suffrage.htm>,

<http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/naw/nawstime.html>,

http://womenshistory.about.com/od/suffrage/a/intl_timeline.htm,

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Timeline_of_women's_suffrage

* Right subject to conditions or restrictions.

** Restrictions or conditions lifted.

1915-Denmark, Iceland*

1917-Canada* (to vote)*, Netherlands (to stand for election)

1918-Austria, Canada* (to vote), Estonia, Germany, Hungary, Ireland*, Kyrgyzstan, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Russian Federation, United Kingdom¹

1919-Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Belgium (to vote for municipal elections), Georgia, Luxembourg, Netherlands (to vote), New Zealand (to stand for election), Sweden*, Ukraine

1920-Albania, Canada* (to stand for election)*, Czech Republic, Iceland², Slovakia, United States of America* (to vote)

1921-Belgium (to stand for election)*, Sweden**

1922-Irish Free State

1924-Kazakhstan*, Mongolia, Saint Lucia, Tajikistan

1927-Turkey

1928-United Kingdom**

1929-Ecuador*, Romania*

1930-South Africa* (Whites), Turkey (to vote), Greece (to vote for municipal elections)¹

1931-Chile*, Portugal*, Spain, Sri Lanka

1932-Thailand (with first constitutional monarchy), Brazil, Maldives, Uruguay

1934-Cuba, Portugal¹, Turkey (to stand for election)

1935-Myanmar (to vote)

1937-Philippines

1938-Bolivia*, Uzbekistan

1939-El Salvador (to vote)

1941-Panama*

1942-Dominican Republic

1944-Bulgaria, France, Jamaica

1945-Croatia, Guyana (to stand for election), Indonesia, Italy, Japan, Senegal, Slovenia, Togo

1946-Cameroon, D.P.R. of Korea, Djibouti (to vote), Guatemala, Liberia, Myanmar (to stand for election), Panama**, Romania**, The F.Y.R. of Macedonia, Trinidad and Tobago, Venezuela, Viet Nam, Serbia, Montenegro

1947-Argentina, Japan, Malta, Mexico (to vote), Pakistan, Singapore

1948-Belgium**, Israel (same year of independence), Niger, Republic of Korea, Seychelles, Suriname

1949-Bosnia and Herzegovina, Chile**, China, Costa Rica, Syria (to vote)

- 1950**-Barbados, Canada (to vote)**, Haiti, India
- 1951**-Antigua and Barbuda, Dominica, Grenada, Nepal, Saint Kitts and Nevis, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines
- 1952**-Bolivia**, Côte d'Ivoire, Greece¹, Lebanon
- 1953**-Bhutan, Guyana (to vote), Mexico (to stand for election), Syria**
- 1954**-Colombia, Belize, Ghana
- 1955**-Cambodia, Ethiopia (and Eritrea, as then part of Ethiopia), Honduras, Nicaragua, Peru, Greece
- 1956**-Benin, Comoros, Egypt, Gabon, Mali, Mauritius, Somalia
- 1957**-Malaysia, Zimbabwe (to vote)**
- 1958**-Burkina Faso, Chad, Guinea, Lao P.D.R., Nigeria (South)
- 1959**-Madagascar, San Marino (to vote), Tunisia, United Republic of Tanzania
- 1960**-Canada (Indian Canadians - to stand for election)**, Cyprus, Gambia, Tonga
- 1961**-Bahamas*, Burundi, El Salvador (to stand for election), Malawi, Mauritania, Paraguay, Rwanda, Sierra Leone
- 1962**-Algeria, Australia (aboriginals), Monaco, Uganda, Zambia
- 1963**-Afghanistan, Congo, Equatorial Guinea, Fiji, Iran, Kenya, Morocco, Papua New Guinea (to stand for election)
- 1964**-Bahamas**, Libya, Papua New Guinea (to vote), Sudan
- 1965**-Botswana, Lesotho
- 1967**-Democratic Republic of the Congo (to vote), Ecuador**, Kiribati, Tuvalu, Yemen (D.P.R.)
- 1968**-Nauru, Swaziland
- 1970**-Andorra (to vote), Democratic Republic of the Congo (to stand for election), Yemen (Arab Republic)*
- 1971**-Switzerland*
- 1972**-Bangladesh
- 1973**-Andorra (to stand for election), San Marino (to stand for election)
- 1974**-Jordan, Solomon Islands
- 1975**-Angola, Cape Verde, Mozambique, Sao Tome and Principe, Vanuatu*
- 1976**-Portugal**
- 1977**-Guinea Bissau
- 1978**-Nigeria* (North), Republic of Moldova, Zimbabwe (to stand for election)
- 1979**-Marshall Islands, Micronesia (Fed. States), Palau
- 1980**-Iraq, Vanuatu*

1984-Liechtenstein, South Africa* (Coloureds + Indians)

1986-Central African Republic, Djibouti (to stand for election)

1989-Namibia

1990-Samoa, Switzerland*

1993-Kazakhstan*, Republic of Moldova*

1994-South Africa* (Blacks)

1997-Qatar*, Eritrea* (stipulated by sovereign constitution)

2002-Bahrain

2003-Oman

2005-Kuwait

2006-United Arab Emirates*

2007-Qatar*

Reformed Theologians on the Importance of the Issue

Undermines Representational Principle

Reformed churches have generally believed that the New Testament presents voting as a leadership/representational issue that was only appropriate for men (see Acts 1:16,23; 14:23 (Gk), 1 Cor. 14:34-35; 1 Tim. 2:11-12 and 1 Cor. 11:3-16), and that this New Testament practice was simply the continuation of the Old Testament practice of voting by heads of households (see for example the implications of 2 Sam. 16:18; Deut. 1:13; 27:14; Josh 24:15; Judges 9:2,3,6; 1 Sam. 11:1; 2 Sam. 16:18; 17:14; 19:14,42-43; 1 Kings 1:9). In their minds this automatically ruled out the vote for children, since children must not rule over men (Isaiah 3:4,12), and it also ruled out the vote for women, since they were not to exercise authority over men (1 Cor. 14:34-35, etc). However, in the last 150 years feminism, democracy and socialism have gained such an influence in society that Reformed denomination after denomination has reversed this ancient practice of voting by head of household. Now it is common practice to give the vote to all communicant members.

Undermines Family Role in the Church

R. L. Dabney complained about the new innovations that were taking place in his day, and said that universal suffrage is not only unbiblical, but that it is also highly destructive of the family's position in the church.¹⁰ The leadership of a father as the representative of his family within the church is completely removed when he no longer casts the only vote for his family. Churches with universal suffrage are no longer made up of families – they are made up of individuals.

This is why modern churches feel free to bypass the father and to work directly with the children and the women. If the family can bypass the father's leadership in the church by way of representation, is there any logical reason why the church cannot bypass the father's leadership by way of ministry? It is no wonder that family interests are being unwittingly undermined in most modern American churches through

¹⁰ See for example, "Women's Rights Women" in *Collected Writings*, vol. 4, pp. 489-505

women's and youth ministries.¹¹ The church is no longer a republic - it is a complete democracy. Family members can cancel out each other's vote, thus breaching the family solidarity. Family-Integrated churches are beginning to recognize the many destructive forces that are at work in modern churches. Universal suffrage is one of them.

Undermines the Regulative Principle of Government

Perhaps one of the most important doctrines to come out of the Reformation was the Regulative Principle of Government: that is, churches only have the authority to do what is explicitly authorized in the Bible. Big Church Government was just as anathema to the Reformers as Big State Government. So the Reformers insisted that it was not enough to say that the Bible didn't forbid a given church practice. They insisted that the Bible must explicitly authorize a given practice. Presbyterians have always been the strongest advocates of this doctrine of the Regulative Principle of Government.¹² As James Henley Thornwell said,

¹¹ See the National Center for Family Integrated Churches for documentation. <http://www.visionforumministries.org/projects/ncfic/> For a telling critique of the destructive influence of Youth Ministries in churches, read *Critique of Modern Youth Ministry*, by Chris Schlect. Fathers appear to have very little influence in most modern churches. They certainly have no way of representing their families.

¹² The Presbyterian Church in America's Book of Church Order (the author's denomination) begins by saying, "Christ, as King, has given to His Church officers, oracles and ordinances; and especially has He ordained therein His system of doctrine, government, discipline and worship, all of which are either expressly set down in Scripture, or by good and necessary inference may be deduced therefrom; and to which things He commands that nothing be added, and that from them naught be taken away." (BCO preface). Morton Smith comments on this section saying, "With Christ as the only Lawgiver, we recognize that *the Church is not a legislative body, but merely a declarative body*. That is, Christ is the one who has given the laws by which the Church is to live. The Church's task is to seek to understand and to set forth the meaning of these laws... He is the author of the system of doctrine for the Church, of her government, of her discipline, and of her worship. It is stated that *all of this is either expressly set down in Scripture or by good and necessary inference may be deduced therefrom*. A result of this is that men are not to add or subtract from what HE has given. In this, the *Presbyterian Church in America declares that she believes in what is sometimes called the jus divinum principle of church government*. We believe that both the doctrines of faith, and also the basic principles of church government, discipline, and worship have been given to us in the Word. Other forms of church government may be able to say that they are not forbidden in so many words, but *it is explicitly the Presbyterian form of government that claims to be jus divinum*. As already noted the Book here affirms that the 'regulative principle' applies to doctrine, government, discipline and worship. Christ as King has given His Word concerning each of these areas to the Church, and nothing is to be added or taken from His Word. The Church should always be most careful as to how it

“The Church’s motto is, ‘Whatsoever is not commanded is unlawful.’”¹³
Nowhere is universal suffrage commanded or seen in the Bible. On the contrary, the only examples of voting given in the Bible are examples of men voting. The implications of one’s stand on voting are enormous.

frames its rules and guidelines for each of these areas, that they are in accord with the inspired Word of God at every point.” (pp. 17-18, emphasis added)

¹³ James Henley Thornwell, *the Collected Writings*, vol 4, p. 292.

The Old Testament Position

For Civil Affairs

The Bible is clear that voting was always by heads of households in both the Old and the New Testaments. When it came to civil polity, Scripture is clear that “the men of Israel choose” their rulers (2 Samuel 16:18; see also Deut. 1:13, masculine). When “the people ... said [to Samuel], “No, but we will have a king over us..., Samuel said to the men of Israel, ‘Every man go to his city’” (1 Sam. 8:19-22). When the actual vote took place to make Saul king, it was done by the men (1 Sam. 11:11-15 – “all the men”). In Judges 8:22 it is “the men of Israel [who] said to Gideon, ‘Rule over us.’” This has always been the pattern. Thus, when Abimelech candidate for king, he candidate before “the men of Shechem” (Judges 9:2), and “all the men of Shechem gathered together ... and they went and made Abimelech king” (Judges 9:6). When a city made a covenant with another country, it was the men who entered into covenant. For example, “all the men of Jabesh said to Nahash, ‘Make a covenant with us, and we will serve you’” (1 Sam. 11:1).

Whether the rulers were legitimate or ungodly, no one dreamed of universal suffrage. For example, Nehemiah describes the rebellion under Moses, and says “our fathers acted ... and... they appointed a leader” (Neh. 9:16-17). The same was true under Adonijah’s self-proclaimed kingship. He knew that without the vote of the heads of families, his kingship was not legitimate. So “he also invited all his brothers, the king’s sons, and all the men of Judah” to the king-making ceremony (1 Kings 1:9). The same was true under Absalom’s revolt against David. It was “all the men of Israel” who decided to revolt (2 Sam. 17:14).

When David sought to come back into power, he had to convince the men of Israel before he could be successful. Scripture says, “So he swayed the hearts of all the men of Judah, just as the heart of one man, so that they sent this word to the king: ‘Return, you and all your servants!’” (2 Sam. 19:14).

Voting was always seen as an issue of leadership, authority and representation. When a quarrel came between some of the tribes over David’s regaining power, it speaks of “the men of Israel.. the men of Judah... the men of Israel... the men of Judah” (2 Sam. 19:41-43). This led to a subsequent revolt in which Sheba encouraged the men to vote against David. He said, “every man to his tents, O Israel!’ So every man of Israel deserted David...” (2 Sam. 20:1-2).

The same was true of the secession under Rehoboam's reign. It was the men of Israel who made the vote to secede, saying, "every man to your tents, O Israel" (2 Chron. 10:16). The reason for this is that society was not seen as being made up of individuals. Rather, it was composed of families. For example, God instructs Israel, "Take a census of all the congregation of the children of Israel, by their families..." (Numb. 1:2; etc), and later speaks of "those who were numbered by their families" (Numb. 4:40; etc). Likewise, God gives an "inheritance... according to their families" (Josh 15:20), and says, "these mentioned by name were leaders in their families" (1 Chron. 4:38). The most fundamental unit of Israel was the family. Israel was a republic made up of states and families. It was not a democracy made up of individuals.

For Places of Worship

The same was true of the places of worship. A minimum of ten men formed a synagogue, and it was the men who chose their teacher (Zech. 8:23; on the minimum number of ten see Ex. 18:21). The worship services were not composed of individuals in God's eyes, but of "families" (Zech. 12:12-14; Psalm 22:27) or "households" (Deut. 12:7; 14:26; etc). Unlike modern democratic and individualistic churches, the pervasive evidence throughout the Old Testament is that communion was taken by families ("a lamb for a household" – Ex. 12:3; see also Deut. 12:6-7, 17-18; 14:22-29; etc).¹⁴ The father was responsible to bring his family to worship ("you and your households" – Deut. 12:7; 14:26), for ensuring that his children understood the significance of the sacrament (Ex. 13:14) and that they came properly to eat before the Lord (Deut. 12:1-19; 14:22-29; 16:9-12 – notice "all your males" in verse 16; 26:1-15 have the primary responsibility). After the priests served communion to the men, the men served communion to their families (1 Sam. 1:5-7) since they were the pastors of their families within the church. The church of the Old Testament was clearly a republic that had governments (family) within the overall government (the church system laid down in Exodus 18). It was the men who were admonished to bring the offerings (Deut. 16:16-17; Ezra 1:4) because it was recognized that the men represented their families before the altar. The family centered structure of all society in the Old Testament is so overwhelmingly evident that very few seek to deny it. Instead, they seek to make the New Testament more individualistic.

¹⁴ For hundreds of Scriptures on this subject, see the author's paper, *The Lord's Supper*. Contact via website, info on back cover.

The New Testament Position

However, the New Testament follows the same pattern for both voting and family representation. As the New Testament church first deliberates in Acts 1, it is the 120 brethren who meet to form the new Israel (Acts 1:15).¹⁵ It was the “men and brethren” who “proposed two” leaders (Acts 1:15-16). The ones who vote for the deacons in Acts 6 are “brethren” (v. 3). When the church in Acts 15 chooses delegates, the delegates are described as “leading men among the brethren” (v. 22) because they led the men (“the brethren”), who in turn led their own families. Again, this is a republican form of government that is composed of subordinate governments (families). It is not a democracy that is composed of subordinate individuals. There is an immense difference between these two frameworks of thinking.

The voted decisions of the “whole church” (Acts 15:22) were not made by men, women and children. They were made by “the apostles, the elders, and the brethren” (v. 23). It was these brethren who did the choosing (verse 5 - “it seemed good to us, being assembled with one accord, to send chosen men...”). When the church did this, it was simply following the Old Testament pattern of having the grown men represent their families since the fathers are the shepherds of their families. Indeed, the Old Testament prophesied that the New Covenant period would follow exactly the same pattern of having salvation by families (Gen. 12:3¹⁶; Zech. 12:10-14), worship by families (Psalm 22:27; 96:7; Zech. 14:17), representation by the men of the household (Zech. 8:23) and accountability of those men for the state of their families (Mal. 3:3; 4:6).

Family Jurisdiction, Not Chauvinism

Some people have thought that the Bible is chauvinistic because in both Testaments God almost always addressed the men. But this is not chauvinism. It is a protection of the integrity of the covenantal family

¹⁵ On the significance of the 120 for the formation of a new Israel, see my sermons on Acts 1 and 2. The minimum number of men to form a synagogue was 10, and the minimum number of synagogues to form a separate national entity was twelve. $12 \times 10 = 120$. The early church had twelve princes ruling over the twelve tribes of Israel (Luke 22:30). They also had 70 elders (see Luke 10) that correspond to the twelve princes and 70 elders when Moses constituted Israel as a nation. $12 + 70 = 82$. The remainder of the 120 were prophets who would help to form the foundation of the church (Eph. 2:20).

¹⁶ Acts 3:25 quotes Genesis 12:3 (“And in your seed all the *families* of the earth will be blessed”) as being a prophecy of the New Covenant period.

unit. You see, the church is a republic with a form of government (the church) that is made up of subordinate governments (families). This republic has separation of powers, enumerated powers, limited powers and delegated powers. It may not overstep the jurisdictional rights of the family.

The family continues to be its own unique government even when it joins the church. Thus, the preachers of the New Testament address the heads of households because the church is made up of subordinate governments, and it makes sense to address the federal heads of those governments. Thus, in the book of Acts we find the apostles addressing “men and brethren” (Acts 1:16), “men of Judea” (Acts 2:14), “men of Israel” (Acts 2:22), “men and brethren” (Acts 2:29), “men of Israel” (Acts 3:12), etc despite the fact that women were present. It is an issue of federal representation. Thus, the church counted membership by heads of households: “However, many of those who heard the word believed; and the number of the men came to be about five thousand” (Acts 4:4). This was true despite the fact that both men and women were being saved and were being baptized.

Why count only the men? Because the church is not made up of individuals. It is made up of subordinate governmental units— families. And these family governments are represented by one unified voice: the voice of the father/husband. 1 Corinthians 14:35 has nothing to do with chauvinism and has everything to do with the fact that the man is the family’s representative in church.

Other Biblical Issues at Stake

Voting is a function of leadership authority.

Voting signifies leadership direction that affects the whole congregation. It also carries the authority to elect or remove an officer. Since the Bible does not permit women to lead men or to exercise authority over men, they should not vote in any elections that pertain to men. Scripture is quite clear that God does not “permit a woman... to have authority over a man” (1 Tim. 2:12), and rebukes those who allow women to rule (Is. 3:12). The same is true of those who allow children to rule (Is. 3:4). Since congregational voting is a form of governing over men, then automatically a woman or a child should be excluded from voting. (See 1 Tim. 2:11-14; 1 Cor. 11:2-16; 14:34ff.). The definition of a man is a person who is “twenty years old and above - all who are able to go to war in Israel” (Num. 1:3; see also Ex. 30:14; 38:26; 27:3,5; Numb. 1:18, 20, 22, 24, 26, 28, 30, 32, 34, 38, 40, 42, 43; 14:29; 26:2, 4; 32:11; etc.).

Voting is representational.

When the “men of Israel” choose a king, the “people” are said to choose the king (1 Sam. 16:18). The voted decisions of the “whole church” (Acts 15:22) were not made by men, women and children. They were made by “the apostles, the elders, and the brethren” (v. 23). In other words, they represented the people with their votes. Their actions are treated as the actions of those whom they represent. Just as “representatives of the congregation” (Numb. 16:2) must represent the congregation when they vote, and just as “leaders of the tribes” (Numb. 7:2) must represent their tribe’s interests, so too the “heads of their father’s houses” (1 Chron. 7:2,7,9,11; etc) must represent their families. This would ordinarily be done by men.

Are There Exceptions to Male Representation?

Three evidences that do not allow an exception

But this raises an interesting question: When the man of the house is absent or dead, may another representative from the family vote? May single mothers vote? After all, does not her family deserve to be

represented? This argument seems logical. And if representation were the only issue involved in voting, this would be a strong argument in favor of allowing any head of household to vote and/or any representative child chosen by the family to vote. However, there are three problems with this line of reasoning:

Voting also involves leadership and authority.

First, voting is not simply a representational issue. It is also a leadership and authority issue within the church. God has vested some authority in the officers and some authority in the congregation. But if women or children wield the authority of the vote, they are still violating 1 Timothy 2:12; 1 Cor14:34-35; etc., by exercising authority and leadership over men. The death of a husband does not automatically give a woman authority over other men in the church.

The Bible shows no examples of women voting.

Second, we do not find any examples of women voting to represent their homes in the Bible. In light of the fact that there are so many Scriptures which speak of “all the men” voting, this is a significant silence.

Ideally, widows are given the protection of men.

It is significant that ordinarily, single women remain under the authority of their fathers or some other male relative until they were given in marriage (Gen. 24:41, 29:19; 34:8; Ex. 22:17; 1 Cor. 7:38; etc). This was true of even divorced or widowed women who either come under the protective covering of their father (Gen. 38:11; Lev. 22:13), a son (John 19:25-27), a grandson (1 Tim. 5:4), a member of the family (1 Tim. 5:16), a friend of the family (John 19:25-27)¹⁷ or—in cases where the woman is truly “left alone” (1 Tim. 5:5)—she could come under the protective care of an elder (2 John; 1 Tim. 5:1-19). These verses show that the ideal is for a widowed or divorced woman to be cared for and protected by a male. (However, see the objections in the next point for a caution on how far to take this principle.)

The Biblical evidence indicates that the issues of leadership, authority, the total absence of any Biblical examples of women voting, and pervasive responsibilities of men for women would seem to rule out an

¹⁷ It is interesting that Jesus gives His responsibility to care for his mother to his best friend, John, rather than to his brothers or sisters. The reason is that his brothers were not believers until after the resurrection (John 7:5; Mark 3:21). On Christ’s close friendship with John, see John 13:23; 20:2; 21:7; 20:24.

exception. However, there are three more arguments that need to be dealt with in the next section.

Objection One – Numbers 30

The most persuasive arguments to allow a widowed woman to vote would come from three passages: The first passage is Numbers 30, which gives a husband or father authority to annul the vows a woman makes while she lives in his house. However, the text also says, “any vow of a widow or a divorced woman, by which she has bound herself, shall stand against her” (v. 9). This implies that a previously married woman does not always have to be under the authority of a man. A similar conclusion could be derived from the case of Lydia (Acts 16:14-40), though it is difficult to derive moral reasoning from a narrative passage.

In response it can be said that if this argument is true, it would simply mean that single women do not always have to be connected to a male leader (whether brother, father or elder). However, it is questionable as to whether the Scripture considers such a situation as a privilege. The pervasive evidence seems to treat the plight of widowhood as a curse (Ex. 22:24) that needs the protection of law (Ex. 22:22; Deut. 10:18; 14:29; 16:11,14; 24:17,19,20,21; 26:12,13; 27:19), and which should be remedied as soon as possible by marriage (Deut. 25:5; Ruth; 1 Tim. 5:14), or (if meeting the Biblical qualifications) being employed by and under the authority of the church (1 Tim. 5:9-10).

The Scriptures given in the previous section assume that being under the care of a male is the ideal. However, we will grant that this is not always possible. Does such an exception allow the woman to vote? The simple answer is that coming out from the authority of a husband (or in the case of an orphan – a father) does not convey any additional authority or leadership over men. If anything, Numbers 30 strongly reinforces the position of this paper that the Bible assumes male authority. Leviticus 22:13 implies that a widow will come under the protection of her father. There is no reason why a widow who cannot find familial representation cannot convey her concerns to an elder in the church. The purpose of this paper is to determine if there is any positive evidence for female voting. To this point we have found none.

Objection Two – 2 John

The second objection is that it would be inappropriate for an elder of the church to act on family matters contrary to a family’s desires. Even the single mother in 2 John is treated as having an intact family (as opposed to a merged family). The “elder” (v. 1) does not go beyond his

authority to exhort, to “plead” (v. 5) and to instruct. Though 2 John shows a protective concern for her and her children, the elder respects her authority over the home. Indeed, the admonitions are much the same as those given to the male head of house in 3 John. This implies that the church (as represented by John “the elder”) is relating to the woman’s family in much the same way that the church relates to any other family. All would acknowledge that the family has not dissolved just because the husband has died.

While all of the preceding is true, there is a difference between a widowed (or divorced) woman having authority over her own children, and the same woman having authority over other men and families through the use of the vote. This objection is helpful in showing the integrity of a family even when there is only a single mother, but it fails to show how this would warrant voting.

Objection Three – Numbers 27

Third, the situation of the daughters of Zelophehad in Numbers 27 implies that legal transactions ordinarily left to the authority of a man are allowed to be made by women if there is no father or husband to represent them. The issue at stake was clearly an issue that belonged to the authority of men, yet God allowed an exception to take place (vv. 7-11).

In response it may be said first that there are many other examples of women having authority over property (Gen. 31:15; Numb. 36:8; Josh 17:6; Job. 42:15; Luke 15:18), but those situations did not allow for a vote. Why would this case be different? Secondly, the daughters of Zelophehad did not exercise authority over other men. Thirdly, a clarification was given in Numbers 36 for the situation in Numbers 27. This clarification made it clear that God did not want this exception abused. He wanted the legal rights of the tribe and family to be maintained through the male line. So the case of the daughters of Zelophehad actually proves the opposite of what women’s suffrage advocates intend.

Objection Four – Communion ushers us into all the privileges of membership

A fourth objection that is frequently heard in PCA circles is that admittance to the Lord’s Table ushers us into all the privileges of

membership including the right to vote. However, no Scriptural evidence has ever been given, despite an overture to the General Assembly to erect a study committee to show the Biblical evidence.¹⁸ In light of the PCA's insistence that nothing may be law in the church that does not have the explicit warrant of Scripture¹⁹, this refusal to give Scripture is ironic. Furthermore, this denomination, which claims to be the heirs of Thornwell and Dabney, is clearly out of agreement with these authors on the issue of voting. They are heirs to a recent innovation of feminism that Dabney stood against.

¹⁸ Note that in 1994 the General Assembly declined an overture from Heartland Presbytery to erect a study committee to address this issue and report back either 1) the Biblical basis for our present practice or 2) the Biblical basis for an alternative position. The costs for the study were already covered by a local church. However, the General Assembly declined to erect the study committee.

¹⁹ This doctrine is known as the Regulative Principle of Government. The PCA's Book of Church Order states, "Jesus, the Mediator... [is] the only Lawgiver in Zion... mediately exercising His own authority and enforcing His own laws... Christ, as King, has given to His Church officers, oracles and ordinances; and especially has He ordained therein His system of doctrine, government, discipline and worship, all of which are either expressly set down in Scripture or by good and necessary inference may be deduced therefrom; and to which things He commands that nothing be added, and that from them naught be taken away." (BCO Preface) Morton Smith comments, "With Christ as the only Lawgiver, we recognize that *the Church is not a legislative body, but merely a declarative body*. That is, Christ is the one who has given the laws by which the Church is to live. The Church's task is to seek to understand and to set forth the meaning of these laws... He is the author of the system of doctrine for the Church, of her government, of her discipline, and of her worship. It is stated that *all of this is either expressly set down in Scripture or by good and necessary inference may be deduced therefrom*. A result of this is that men are not to add or subtract from what HE has given. In this, the *Presbyterian Church in America declares that she believes in what is sometimes called the jus divinum principle of church government*. We believe that both the doctrines of faith, and also the basic principles of church government, discipline, and worship have been given to us in the Word. Other forms of church government may be able to say that they are not forbidden in so many words, but *it is explicitly the Presbyterian form of government that claims to be jus divinum*. As already noted the Book here affirms that the '*regulative principle*' applies to doctrine, government, discipline and worship. Christ as King has given His Word concerning each of these areas to the Church, and nothing is to be added or taken from His Word. The Church should always be most careful as to how it frames its rules and guidelines for each of these areas, that they are in accord with the inspired Word of God at every point." (pp. 17-18)

The Confession itself affirms that "God alone is Lord of the conscience, and hath left it free from the doctrines and commandments of men, which are, in any thing, contrary to His Word; or beside it, if matters of faith, or worship. So that, to believe such doctrines, or to obey such commands, out of conscience, is to betray true liberty of conscience: and the requiring of an implicit faith, and an absolute and blind obedience, is to destroy liberty of conscience, and reason also." (WCF 20:2)

The fact of the matter is that there are many rights that the Lord's Table does not confer. It does not confer the right to be nominated to office, to serve as a representative before the court on behalf of an accused or (in the PCA) to vote on corporate issues. Indeed, the PCA's policy of allowing state law on ages for voting on corporate matters shows that the PCA does not even consider voting to be a fundamental doctrine of the church since state law trumps church law when it comes to corporate matters. Many churches have communicants at much younger ages than law allows to vote for corporate issues. And many of these churches have bylaws that make the elders of the church to automatically be the trustees of the corporation. This means that those PCA churches that are incorporated automatically disenfranchise some communicant members. This is of necessity true since a vote for elder would at the same time automatically be a vote for trustee. Besides the unbiblical character of incorporated churches (=state churches), this shows an unwillingness to be consistent on the issue of voting.

Conclusion

Scripture is clear that "the men of Israel choose" their leaders (2 Samuel 16:18). This principle is stated over and over in both the Old and the New Testaments. Though we have left open the possibility that exceptions might be argued, we have not been able to find any Biblical examples of anyone other than a male head of household who voted in civil or ecclesiastical elections. Nor have we found any evidence whatsoever that people under the age of 20 were allowed to vote. The Biblical evidence appears to confirm that voting is an act of leadership, family representation and authority. We have found no Biblical evidence that voting is tied to the right to communion. Instead, all of the evidence militates against universal suffrage, and we have come into agreement with older writers (such as R. L. Dabney) who argue that universal suffrage militates against a strong family and against a Biblical form of church government. It is also contrary to the covenantal model of a family integrated church. It is a practice that arose out of the Arminian debates at Dordt and subsequently flourished in the radical individualism of the modern age.

Resources Available from the Publisher

- Cummings, Tim. *Ministerial Training: The Bible's Normative Pattern.*
- Davis, Andrew. *Written on Your Heart: An Approach to Extended Memorization of Scripture.*
- Elliot, Michael (Ed.). *Bible Acrostic: An Aid to Memorizing the Content of Every Chapter of the Bible.*
- Kayser, Phillip. *Biblical Romance: What Does the Bible Say About Courtship & Betrothal?*
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Universal Suffrage

A History and Analysis of Voting in the Church and Society

Phillip Kayser, Ph.D.

Universal suffrage (the belief that every member can vote) in a congregation or in a state is a fairly recent phenomenon. It was not until the 1900s that there was any significant movement in this direction. Is this an improvement? Is it Biblical? Scripture definitely shines light on one of the most significant developments of the 20th century.

Founder and President of Biblical Blueprints, **Phillip Kayser** has degrees in education, theology, and philosophy. Ordained in 1987, he currently serves as Senior Pastor of Dominion Covenant Church, a conservative Presbyterian (CPC) church in Omaha, NE. He also serves as Professor of Ethics at Whitefield Theological Seminary and President of the Providential History Festival. He and his wife Kathy have 5 children and 9 grandchildren.



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