

Role Of Women In The Church

For I am quite convinced that truth does not die in the church, even though it be oppressed by one council, but is wonderfully preserved by the Lord so that it may rise up and triumph again in its own time. But I deny it to be always the case that an interpretation of Scripture adopted by vote of a council is true and certain.

John Calvin,
Institutes of the Christian
Religion, Vol. 2, p. 1177.

John Calahan

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Part of our problem is the disdain for theology that abounds in Christian circles. Although theology is taken from two words that, together, mean ‘the study of God,’ many brothers and sisters prefer shortcuts to ‘relevance.’ To say that theology is boring is really to say that God is boring.¹

R. C. Sproul

We are often confronted with the line that, since good Christians arise under every form of faith on practically every point of doctrine, it cannot be of much importance what people believe. So why argue over such things. It is certain that many in our midst take such a stance. They fear controversy more than error. We agree that there are limits to be set for the controversial spirit, but these limits are not to be sought in motives of convenience or prudence. An anemic Christianity that is not virile enough to strive for the truth can never possess the nerve to die for it. A truth not worth defending very soon comes to be seen as a truth not worth professing.

We do well to be concerned over doctrinal apathy within evangelicalism . . . Why make over what appears to be minor points of difference among those who serve the one Christ? . . . ‘Creeds’ they shout, ‘are divisive things ; away with them!’ If there must be such things, at least let us prune all their distinctive features away . . .²

Gary L. Johnson

“ . . . Protestant churches have melded too much with the secular culture so that their members see less reason to attend . . . Protestant churches have conformed their standards to those of the secular culture, on the theory, which has proved mistaken again and again, that to remain ‘relevant’ and keep members, a church must change with the times.³

Robert H. Bork

1. Horton, Michael S. *Power Religion*, Moody, Chicago, 1992., p. 319..

2. Armstrong, John H. *The Coming Evangelical Crisis*, Moody Press, Chicago, 1996., p. 65.

3. Bork, Robert H. *Slouching Towards Gomorrah*, Regan Books, 1996, p. 286.

Role Of Women In The Church

What can women do in ministry in the local church?" This is a familiar question that has been posed in many churches all across the United States in the last forty years. The real issue embedded in this question is "Can women teach adult men?" The corollary to this question is "Can women be elders?" Over the last forty years, there has been an avalanche of new literature arguing that women should be allowed to teach men and to serve as pastors. Over the last 2,000 years, the historic position of the church has been that women cannot teach men nor can they serve as elders. This was the biblical understanding of such men as Origen, Jerome, Chrysostom, Thomas Aquinas, Martin Luther, John Calvin, John Wesley, Jonathan Edwards, Charles Hodge, to name a few.¹ The biblical opinions of such men are important to us since Francis Shaeffer has correctly observed,

"Tell me what the world is saying today, and I'll tell you what the church will be saying in seven years."

It is our desire to steer our ship straight and true through the constantly changing, shifting, tossing waves of cultural perspectives, opinions and attitudes. Yet, we must be careful not to automatically adopt a doctrinal position because the ancients have agreed as Craig Keener has observed,

What is ultimately at issue for those who regard the apostolic tradition as normative is not what subsequent traditions teach, but what the writers of the Bible teach.²

Simply put, there is tension as we attempt to carefully interpret the Word of God. It may be difficult to balance

the opinions of others from the past with those of the present. Our interpretation of scripture should not completely ignore the historical voyage of past theologians nor should we ignore the fact that our historic ship may be headed into dangerously shallow waters.

The task before us is to evaluate three major New Testament passages which deal with God's view on the role of women in the church. These passages are 1 Cor. 11:4-5,14-15; 1 Cor. 14:33-36 and 1 Timothy 2:12-15. There are some general observations that can be made about these passages of scripture:

- 1) Each passage deals with the role of men and women.
- 2) It is not clear that 1 Cor. 11:2-16 deals with the role of women in the context of the local church (v.16). Many good men are split on the issue.³
- 3) 1 Cor. 11:2-16 is not about women praying and prophesying in the church. It is about the role of a wife to her husband and a wife's submission.
- 4) 1 Cor. 14:33-36 and 1 Tim. 2:12-15 both address the role of women in the context of the church.
- 5) 1 Cor. 14:33-36 and 1 Tim. 2:12-15 both seem to indicate that women are to be silent in the church.

Several key principles must be remembered as we attempt to interpret scripture. The starting point is that the Holy Spirit is the key author of the Bible; otherwise, it is not the Word of God. Second, a parallel principle is that any error in our interpretation comes short of the truth since the Holy Spirit is the author of truth. The third major principle is that our comfort zone and our desire to be "gracious to others," "to honor others" or "not offend others" cannot be the arbi-

1. Kostenberger, Andreas J. *Women In The Church*, Baker Books, Grand Rapids, MI, 1995, p. 213-267.

2. Keener, Craig S. *Paul, Women & Wives*, Hendrickson, Peabody, MA, 1992, p. 3.

3. This includes A. Barnes, C. K. Barrett, Calvin, H. Conzelmann, Gordon D. Fee, Matthew Henry, J. B. Hurley, C. S. Keener, Lenski, W. H. Mare, MacArthur, W. Robertson Nicoll, A. T. Robertson, Robertson-Plummer.

trator of truth. If we do, we are no different than those to whom God said, “you are not keeping My ways, but are showing partiality in the instruction (Mal. 2:9).” And again, “they have made no distinction between the holy and the profane, and they have not taught the difference between the unclean and the clean (Ezek. 22:26).” The final key principle is that God’s truth transcends culture and does not vary with the culture of our times. We must objectively evaluate biblical truth.⁴ Therefore, it is our purpose to investigate these passages as objectively as possible. It is hoped this document is a contribution to a significantly important and ongoing dialogue within the church of God regarding His truth about the roles of men and women in the church of God.

With this as a backdrop, the only critical question of importance before us is “What does scripture truly say?” This question will be addressed in a question and answer format.

1 CORINTHIANS 11:2-16

The first passage we will examine is concerned with God’s design for men and women

Now I praise you because you remember me in everything, and hold firmly to the traditions, just as I delivered them to you. But I want you to understand that Christ is the head of every man, and the man is the head of a woman, and God is the head of Christ. Every man who has {something} on his head while praying or prophesying, disgraces his head. But every woman who has her head uncovered while praying or prophesying, disgraces her head; for she is one and the same with her whose head is shaved. For if a woman does not cover her head, let her also have her hair cut off; but if it is disgraceful for a woman to have her hair cut off or her head shaved, let her cover her head. For a man ought not to have his head covered, since he is the image and glory of God; but the woman is the glory of man. For man does not originate from woman, but woman from man; for

indeed man was not created for the woman’s sake, but woman for the man’s sake. Therefore the woman ought to have {a symbol of} authority on her head, because of the angels. However, in the Lord, neither is woman independent of man, nor is man independent of woman. For as the woman originates from the man, so also the man {has his birth} through the woman; and all things originate from God. Judge for yourselves: is it proper for a woman to pray to God {with head} uncovered. Does not even nature itself teach you that if a man has long hair, it is a dishonor to him, but if a woman has long hair, it is a glory to her? For her hair is given to her for a covering. But if one is inclined to be contentious, we have no other practice, nor have the churches of God. 1 Corinthians 11:2-16 (NASB)

QUESTION #1. Do men and women have different roles? (v. 2-10)

The first evidence that the answer is yes occurs in verse 3 when the Holy Spirit specifically states that “God is the head of Christ,” “Christ is the head of every man” and “the man is the head of the woman (v. 3).” That is, there is an order of accountability in God’s creation. The Holy Spirit then proceeds to demonstrate that this principle transcends culture (i.e. it is transcultural) by showing that the leader-follower principle existed at the time of creation and before the fall of man (v. 8-9). Verse 10 concludes by stating “therefore the woman ought to have a symbol of authority on her head . . .” The Holy Spirit is simply saying the head covering (“head, ruler of society” or “one who stands over another”⁵)

5 Kittel, Gerhard. Theological Dictionary of the New Testament, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, MI, 1993, Vol. 3, pp. 673-681. The Greek word for head, κεφαλη, has been in much debate. Fee and Keener believe the word means “source” (Keener, Ibid., p. 32-34; Fee, Gordon D. The Epistle to the Corinthians, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, MI, 1987, p. 503). However, H. Wayne House states “Bedale, along with others, research by Wayne Grudem of over 2,000 instances of kefalh in all the major writings of the classical and Hellenistic Greek periods reveals no clear instances of such usage. . . . In reference to kefalh, the common or unmarked meaning is the physical head. From that meaning come other meanings such as capital punishment (losing one’s head), the prominent part of something (as the head is to the body), or the ruler of something or someone (as the head is of the body). The idea of source or origin simply has no clear example in the time of the New Testament, even though feminists have gone to great pains to seek to find such usage.” (House, H. Wayne. “Should a Woman Prophesy or Preach before Men?” Bibliotheca Sacra., April-June 1988). In the context of

4 Armstrong, John H. The Coming Evangelical Crisis, Moody Press, Chicago, 1996, pp.66.

is a symbol of the man's authority⁶ over the woman. That is, wives are to show they are in submission to their husband.⁷
⁸ This biblical principle of submission is also implied in the curse announced after the Fall (Gen. 3:16) and is repeated in Eph. 5:22-33, Col. 3:18 and 1 Pet. 3:1-7. 1 Corinthians 11:3-16 repeats the same message - a wife is to be in submission to her husband. The question is does she show that she is in submission?

Some claim that Paul is addressing a cultural situation in the Greek city of Corinth where some Christian women did not want to follow the custom of the day by wearing a sign of submission. That is why Paul urges women to wear a covering on their head (v. 6,10-15). An inscription providing rules for those being initiated into a Greek mystery cult reads, "Women are not to have their hair bound up, and men must enter with bared heads."⁹ Yet, Conzelman states,

1 Corinthians this word is used as the head on a body (1 Cor. 12:21). This conclusion is further supported by the larger context of the New Testament. As early as Matthew (Matt. 5:36; 6:17; 14:11) and occurring as late as Revelation (Rev. 1:14), the word is used of a physical head and/or a figurative power. The word is similarly used by Luke and Paul (Acts 18:6; Eph. 4:15-16; Col. 2:10). In the context of 1 Cor. 11:3, term "head" defines the relationship between God and Christ. To say that God is the source of Christ is not true. Fee says God is the source of Christ in His incarnation (p. 504). This reasoning suggests the man is the source of the woman. If Fee is correct, then why does Paul repeat this thought with a more appropriate set of words in verse 12, that is, "the woman is from the man, so also the man through the woman and all things are from God." Consequently, the best sense of kefalh is "head or authority."

6 The Greek word for "authority" in this verse is εξουσια which means "power, power of choice or liberty of doing as one pleases (Thayer, J. H. The New Thayer's Greek-English Lexicon, Christian Copyrights, Inc., 1981; Arndt, W. F. A Greek-English Lexicon, University of Chicago Press, 1973; Brown, Colin. Dictionary of New Testament Theology, Regency, Grand Rapids, MI, 1971, Vol. 2 p. 606; Balz, Horst, Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, MI, 1991, Vol. 2, p. 9)." Kittel adds that εξουσια has the "possibility of granted by a higher honor, norm, or court, and therefore 'the right to do something or the right over something, (Kittel, Gerhard. Ibid., p. 562)." A. T. Robertson indicates he believes the head covering is the symbol of authority by, "It is the sign of authority of the man over the woman" (Robertson, A. T., Word Pictures in the New Testament, Baker Books, Grand Rapids, MI., 1931, Vol. IV, p. 161). W. Robertson Nicoll adds, "The exousia . . . she 'has (wears),' is that to which she submits" (Nicoll, W. Robertson, The Expositor's Greek Testament, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, MI., 1990 Vol 2, p. 874). Fee suggests that exousia means the power is in the woman's control (Fee, Ibid., p.518-522). His conclusion is wrong since the meaning of the word has different meanings depending on the context. For example, in the New Testament an individual can possess the "power" (Matt. 7:29; 21:23) or one can be under the "control of another's authority" (Matt. 8:9; Rom. 13:1). To translate 1 Cor. 11:10 as "the woman ought to have a symbol of her authority on her head" does not fit the context as well as "the woman ought to have a symbol of another's authority (her husband) on her head," that is, be in submission.

7 Conzelmann, H. 1 Corinthians, Fortress, Philadelphia, 1975, pp. 184.

8 Barrett, C. K. The First Epistle of the Corinthians, Hendrickson, Peabody, MA. 1968, p. 256.

9 Keener, Ibid., p. 28.

The ancient material leads to no uncertain answers . . . the Greek practice in regard to headgear and hairstyle cannot be unequivocally stated for the simple reason that the fashion varies.¹⁰

Therefore, it appears that Paul may not be referring to a cultural situation. There is no solid historical data. What is clear in this passage is that Paul is urging woman to wear their hair long. The Greek word for "long hair" is *komao*, which refers to hair that is long as opposed to short. That is a woman can wear her hair up or down. Her hair completely surrounds her head. It is her glory. Paul's reference to uncovered heads appears to refer to short hair or a shaved head. Paul was encouraging the Greek women to show submission by covering their heads either with long hair or a veil, and concludes that her long hair is her real covering.^{11,12,13,14,}

In verse 16 the apostle states, "But if one is inclined to be contentious, we have no other practice, nor have the churches of God.." Paul says, "if" someone is contentious. The Greek grammar reveals that some individuals were contentious and that is why Paul says that is not our custom. The Greek word for custom means "habit, or practice."¹⁵ It was not his custom or the custom of any other church to allow women to have their heads uncovered. Christian women were to cover their heads with their long hair. They were not to cut their hair short.

In conclusion, men and women do have different roles. This passage along with Eph. 5:22-33, Col. 3:18 and 1 Pet. 3:1-7 says that 1) women should be in submission to men, 2) it is fitting for a woman to show her submission to her husband and 3) her long hair is the covering demonstrating her submission in the Corinthian culture and elsewhere.

10 Conzelmann, Ibid. p. 185.

11 Lenski, R. C. H. I and II Corinthians, Augsburg Publishing House, Minneapolis, MI, 1963, p. 440.

12 Fee, Gordon D. The Epistle to the Corinthians, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, MI., 1987, p. 528.

13 Barrett, C. K. The First Epistle of the Corinthians, Hendrickson, Peabody, MA., 1968, p. 256.

14 MacArthur, J. The MacArthur New Testament Commentary 1 Corinthians, Moody Press, Chicago, 1984, pp. 262-263.

15 The word for "practice [NASB]" is the Greek word συνθησια or "habit or custom." Arndt, W. F. A Greek-English Lexicon, University of Chicago Press, 1973.

QUESTION #2. Are men and women mutually dependent on one another?

This passage (v. 11-12) also affirms the mutual dependence of husbands and wives on one another. This is a transcultural principle rooted in God's biological design of procreation. This principle is supported elsewhere in scripture such as 1 Pet. 3:7 where Paul reminds the husband that his wife is "a fellow heir of the grace of life." While Gal. 3:28 does not support this point it does tell us that men and women are equal before God with respect to salvation; that is, there are no advantages before God regarding our eternal destiny. Therefore, we conclude that husbands and wives have different roles and are also mutually dependent on each other.

QUESTION #3. If a woman can pray and prophesy in church, can she teach a man? (v. 4-5)

In answering this question, we need to discover what it means to prophesy. What is prophesying? There are two ways to answer this question. The first approach is to determine what it does not mean by observing how it is used in specific passages, and the second approach is by defining it. The first approach observes that apostle, prophet and teacher, for example, occur as a list of gifted individuals in 1 Cor. 12:28-29,

“. . . God has appointed in the church, first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then miracles, then gifts of healings, administrations, various kinds of tongues? All are not apostles, are they? All are not prophets, are they? All are not teachers, are they? All are not workers of miracles, are they? (NASB) 1 Cor. 12:28-29

This passage clearly shows that apostles are not prophets, who are not teachers. Each is listed separately. Prophesying is not teaching. Likewise 1 Cor. 14:6 provides the same conclusion but with a stronger statement showing that teaching and prophesying are not the same,

“. . . if I come to you speaking in tongues, what shall I profit you, unless I speak to you either by way of revelation or knowledge or of prophecy or of teaching.” (NASB) 1 Cor. 14:6

Clearly a prophet is not a teacher. And the function of prophesying is not the ministry of teaching. So is there a spiritual gift of prophecy today?

Second, what was the nature of the ministry of prophecy in Corinth? 1 Cor. 14:29-31 suggests the prophets in Corinth had short spontaneous speeches since he says 1) "And let two or three prophets speak" (v. 29), 2) "if a revelation is made" (v. 30), and 3) "For you can all prophesy one by one . . ." (v. 31). Apparently, multiple messages were given back-to-back. This ministry of prophecy according to 1 Cor. 14:3 was for "edification and exhortation and consolation."¹⁶ R. L. Saucy agrees when he says, "The primary function of the prophets was to bring God's message to the early church for the purpose of edification."¹⁷ The gift of prophecy is clearly not the gift of teaching.

This passage does not support the concept that a woman can teach men or prophesy as long as their head is covered. To make such a claim would be to contradict 1 Corinthians 14:33b-36 which teaches that women are to be quiet when the church worships corporately and 1 Timothy 2:12 commands women to not be in a leadership role over men and to be quiet when the church worships corporately.

1 CORINTHIANS 14:33B-36

In this passage the apostle Paul states that it is improper for women to speak in the church.

“. . . as in all the churches of the saints. Let the women keep silent in the churches; for they are not permitted to speak, but let them subject themselves, just as the Law also says. And if they desire to learn anything, let them ask their own husbands at home; for it is improper for a woman to speak in church.” 1

¹⁶ Calvin, John. The Epistles of Paul The Apostle To The Corinthians, Baker Book House, 1996, p. 355.

¹⁷ Saucy, R. L. The Church In God's Program. Moody Press, Chicago, IL., 1972, p. 138.

QUESTION #4. Is 1 Cor. 14:33-35 in the context of the church?

Yes, this admonition is to the Corinthian church and is in the context of “all the churches.” The Holy Spirit is speaking about the conduct of women in the assembly of the church (1 Cor. 14:23, 26).

QUESTION #5. Are women to be silent in the church?

The troublesome part of this passage is verses 33b-35 where Paul instructs the women to not speak in the church and to not ask questions in the church. This passage is difficult for everyone to understand, and the conclusions can be even more difficult to accept.¹⁸ Hurley and Grudem believe the passage is an injunction prohibiting women from judging the prophets mentioned in verses 29-32.¹⁹ Keener believes the women were uneducated and asking questions which offended “the cultural sensitivities of those whom the church wanted to reach with the gospel.”²⁰ Others believe the passage teaches that women were being unruly in the congregation.^{21,22} However, H. Wayne House points out

18 Conzelmann believes this 1 Cor. 14:34-35 is a contradiction to 1 Cor. 11:2. Consequently he believes this is a scribe’s addition . . .” (Conzelmann, *Ibid.*, 246). Barrett agrees with Conzelmann (Barrett, *Ibid.*, p. 332).

19 Hurley believes this injunction prohibits women from judging the prophets (Hurley, *Ibid.*, p. 186). Grudem agrees with “ . . . it is best to understand this passage as referring to speech that is on the category being discussed in the immediate context, namely, the spoken evaluation and judging of prophets . . .”

20 Keener references ancient secular records to show that ancient women were less educated than men. However, this information does not support the conclusion that Paul is addressing this problem at Corinth. He shows no ancient evidence to show the problem was uneducated women in the Corinthian church (Keener, *Ibid.*, pp. 80-86).

21 Chrysostom believes the women of Corinth were being unruly in the congregation. He says, “Having abated the disturbance both from the tongues and from the prophesying; and having made a law to prevent confusion, that they who speak with tongues should do this in turn, and that they who prophesy should be silent when another begins; he next in course proceeds to the disorder which arose from the women, cutting off their unreasonable boldness of speech . . .” (Schaff, Philip. *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, Hendrickson, Publishers, Peabody, MA., Vol. 12, p.222). He agrees the text flows from tongues interpretation to prophecy and then to another topic.

22 Robertson says, “For some reason some of the women were creating disturbance in the public worship by their dress (11:2-16) and now by their speech. There is no doubt at all as to Paul’s meaning here. In church women are not allowed to speak (λαλειν) nor even to ask questions . . .” (Robertson, A. T., *Ibid.*, p. 185).

that,

“Both Grosheide and Bruce say that LALEWV [“to speak”] . . . means more than simply speaking during a service. Yet these interpretations put the emphasis on prohibition of disorder in the Corinthian assembly by loud talking, tongues-speaking, or asking questions of or arguing with husbands. Paul, rather, puts the emphasis on God’s intention for women in general, namely, subordination to men.

This instruction is intended by Paul for all churches and apparently was practiced by them; the Corinthians were commanded to get in line with the other people of God. The transcultural nature of the apostolic teaching is that it is based on the Old Testament’s view of female subordination . . .

. . . as Godet says, “The term speaking in the church . . . can only designate a public speaking, which has for its end to teach and edify.”²³

It is important to note that the entire chapter of 1 Corinthians 14 deals with tongues and prophecy in the assembly of the church (1 Cor. 14:23, 26). In verses 1-25 the Holy Spirit addressed the disorder in the Corinthian church. In verse 26, he said, “When you assemble, each one has a psalm, has a teaching, has a revelation, has a tongue, has an interpretation.” Also note that once again we are reminded that teaching is not prophesying. What follows in v. 27-34 is a discussion of the items mentioned in v. 26 in reverse order. Tongues and interpretation are last in verse 26, but are first in the discussion in (v. 27-28) and revelation is second (v. 29-32). This suggests that teaching is next (v. 23-35) in the discussion. This implies the command for women to be silent (v.34) is in regard to teaching. We should also note the discussion of each issue in verses 27-34 is centered around an admonition to an appropriate pattern of conduct. So verses 33b-35 are consistent with this flow. The encouragement to ask questions at home and to not speak in the church is in the context of teaching. It is in this

23 House, H. Wayne. “The Speaking of Women and the Prohibition of the Law,” *Bibliotheca Sacra*, July-Sept. 1988, Dallas Theological Seminary.

sphere where women are to be quiet.

W. Robertson Nicoll says the rule for “not to speak” is synonymous to the prohibition not to teach in 1 Tim. 2:12,²⁴ John Calvin,²⁵ Matthew Henry,²⁶ A. Barnes,²⁷ Robertson-Plummer,²⁸ Harold Mare,²⁹ and John MacArthur³⁰ all agree the Holy Spirit is prohibiting women from teaching men. This collective conclusion is consistent with scripture and implies the role of women in the church is at odds with the trends in our society. The principle is binding across the cultural barriers as MacArthur states,

“Paul was emphasizing the fact that the principle of women (sic) not speaking in church services was not local, geographical, or cultural, but universal . . .”³¹

Lenski states,

“Paul informs the Corinthians that what is recorded concerning

24 Nicoll, w. Robertson. *The Expositor’s Greek Testament*, Eerdmans Publishing Co., Grand Rapids, MI, 1990, Vol. 2, p. 914.

25 “For what is there,” some one will say, “to hinder their being in subjection, and yet at the same time teaching?” I answer that the office of teaching is a superiority in the Church, and is, consequently, inconsistent with subjection . . . It is therefore an argument from things inconsistent - If the woman is under subjection, she is, consequently prohibited from authority to teach in public.” (Calvin, *Ibid.*, p. 468).

26 Matthew Henry concludes his discourse with, “For this reason women must be silent in the churches, not set up for teachers . . .” (Henry, *Matthew Henry’s Commentary*, Hendrickson Publishers, 1996. Vol.6 , p. 470).

27 Barnes, A. *Barnes Notes. I Corinthians*, Baker Books, Grand Rapids, MI., 1996, p. 275.

28 “The women are to keep silent in the public services. They would join in the Amen (v. 16), but otherwise not be heard. They had been claiming equality with men in the matter of the veil, by discarding this mark of subjection in Church, and apparently they had also been attempting to preach, or at any rate had been asking questions during service. We are not sure whether St. Paul contemplated the possibility of women prophesying in exceptional cases. What is said in [11:5] may be hypothetical. Teaching he forbids them to attempt . . .” (Robertson-Plummer. *The International Critical Commentary*, T&T Clark, Edinburgh, 1994, p. 324).

29 “The command seems absolute: Women are not to do any public speaking in the church. This restriction is not to be construed as demoting women . . .” (Mare, W. Harold. *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, Zondervan Publishing House, Regency, Grand Rapids, MI, Vol.10., p. 276).

30 “Women may be highly gifted teachers and leaders, but those gifts are not to be exercised over men in the services of the church. God has ordained in His creation, an order that reflects His own nature and that therefore should be reflected in His church . . . It is improper [aischors, “shameful, disgraceful”] for a woman to speak in church. That statement leaves no question as to its meaning . . . The Corinthians put themselves above Scripture, either ignoring it or interpreting it in ways that fit their predisposed notions.” (MacArthur, John. *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary*, 1 Corinthians, Moody Press, Chicago, IL, 1984, pp. 392-393).

31 MacArthur, John. *Ibid.*, 392-393.

woman in Genesis is not a temporary arrangement but a permanent one that endures as such for the Christian Church. Any act on the part of a woman which sets aside her subjection to man is in violation of “the Law,” the will of God . . . Just how far this prohibition extends is shown in 1 Tim. 2:12 . . .”³²

Paul’s prohibition against women speaking in the congregation crosses all cultures. As Gordon Fee adds,

“Despite protests to the contrary, the ‘rule’ itself is expressed absolutely. That is, it is given without any form of qualification . . . women are not permitted to speak . . .”³³

We should note the Greek word for “silent” in verse 35 is σιωπᾶ which literally means “keep still, say nothing, keep secret, conceal.”³⁴ The idea is to be so silent as to be hidden. This word is used in verses 28, 30 and here in v. 34. It is used 1) to tell those speaking in tongues to be still if no interpreter is present, 2) to tell one of the prophets to say nothing while another speaks and then in verse 34 for women to be quiet. The meaning is clear. Women are to be quiet. Each of us must then decide when. The conclusion appears to be during the teaching of God’s Word.

The question that remains is “Can women ask questions of a teacher in church?” If Fee is correct, the answer is no. This implies that the injunction against women teaching is even stronger. Clearly, verse 35 makes it impossible to conclude that a woman can teach in the church.

1 TIMOTHY 2:11-14

This passage is also about the role of women during the corporate worship of the church. 1 Timothy was written to a pastor, named Timothy. The entire book is about the church.

“Let a woman quietly receive instruction with entire submissiveness. But I do not allow a woman to teach or exercise authority over a man, but to remain quiet.”

32 Lenski, *Ibid.*, p. 616.

33 Fee, *Ibid.*, p. 706.

34 Bauer, W. *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, University of Chicago Press, 1957, p. 757

For it was Adam who was first created, {and} then Eve. And {it was} not Adam {who} was deceived, but the woman being quite deceived, fell into transgression.” (NASB)

QUESTION #6. Can women teach men in the church?

The purpose of 1 Timothy is stated in 1 Tim. 3:15 with “. . . I write so that you may know how one ought to conduct himself in the household of God, which is the church of the living God . . . “ That is, 1 Timothy was written to teach us how to conduct ourselves in the church. This passage along with 1 Cor. 11:2-16 and 1 Cor. 14:33-35 will provide a complete understanding of the role of women in the church. So we must understand this passage and then see if our interpretation is consistent with the other passages.

Unacceptable interpretations

This passage of scripture has been interpreted many ways. One of the more popular interpretations is summarized by Keener,

There is a universal principle in this text, but it is broader than that the unlearned should not teach. If Paul does not want the women to teach in some sense, it is not because they are women, but because they are unlearned. His principle here is that those who do not understand the Scriptures and are not able to teach them accurately should not be permitted to teach others.³⁵

Keener’s statement that the women in the church at Ephesus were uneducated³⁶ ignores other information that shows there were both educated women and uneducated women in Ephesus.³⁷ It seems reasonable to con-

clude that some of the women in the Ephesian church were educated. Keener seems to suggest that no uneducated men existed since he says Paul only prohibits uneducated women from teaching. Yet, the historical records say there were both uneducated women and men as well as educated women and men - just like today. The historical records do not support Keener’s conclusions. If we assume he is correct, we must ask, “Is it okay for uneducated men to teach?” It would appear that the apostle would want every teacher to be educated (2 Tim. 2:15). It appears that Paul is addressing a different issue and not an issue of uneducated women.

This Passage Is Transcultural

Another popular approach is to understand the passage culturally³⁸ One typical example is to quote 1 Tim. 2:8 and say that men “lifting up holy hands” is a cultural statement and was a common practice in those days.³⁹ We should note that holy hands are raised in some churches even today in our culture. It has also been suggested the admonition for women to adorn themselves properly in 1 Tim. 2: 9 is cultural. The goal of this approach is to conclude that v. 11-15 are cultural and that Paul was addressing a specific situation of abuse at Ephesus and it is therefore not necessarily applicable to us today.⁴⁰ The problem with this approach is that 1 Timothy 2:12-15 is not cultural in focus, but applies to all cultures. The Holy Spirit demonstrates this by v. 13-14, namely, that “Adam was created first, and then Eve” and “it was not

ever-streaming light’) in particular are said to have been written by the first-century prytanis Claudia herself (1Eph. 1062 [both epigrams]). These show that some upper-class Ephesian girls and women were among the known female devotees of literature in the Greek world. We can assume then, from the foregoing that some female members of the Pauline church were at least literate and possibly had a modicum of formal teaching or informal learning. The elaborate coiffures, jewelry, and clothing mentioned in 1 Timothy 2:9 and the warning to the rich in 1 Timothy 6:17-18 show clearly that there were wealthy women in the Ephesian congregation. At least some of the women were educated . . .” (Kostenberger, *Ibid.*, pp. 45-52).

38 Keener, *Ibid.*, pp. 109-113.

39 This is a figure of speech referring to a cleansed conscience and not literally to holy hands. The contrast of the verse is to “lifting up holy hands, without wrath and dissension.” Clearly, the act of raising hands is probably cultural; however, it is not unique to that culture since many believers do this today.

40 Barclay, William., *The Letters to Timothy, Titus, and Philemon*, The Westminster Press, Philadelphia, 1975, p. 68.

35 Keener, *Ibid.*, p. 120.

36 The letter to 1 Timothy was sent to the church at Ephesus (1 Tim. 1:3).

37 “. . . to say that Ephesian women were uneducated because they did not appear in “graduates” of philosophy, rhetoric, and medicine is misleading. Few people in antiquity advanced in their formal education beyond today’s elementary school levels, including men like Socrates, Sophocles, and Herodotus. And there were other forms of education in which upper-class women participated at Ephesus, particularly private lectures in salons. For instance, false teachers mentioned in the Pastorals taught women in this venue: ‘They are the kind who worm their way into homes and gain control over weak-willed women’ (2 Tim. 3:6; NIV; emphasis added) . . . we have several extant tributes to Hestia from female prytaneis. Two poetic epigrams from Hestia (‘sweetest of gods . . .

Adam who was deceived, but Eve.” (v. 13)⁴¹ The Holy Spirit says the principle was established before Adam and Eve sinned. The principle is the order of God’s creation of man and woman. This occurred before any culture existed. It happened before culture existed. The Holy Spirit goes back in history to a different time, to a time before the Fall, and a time after the Fall to help us understand the principle in v. 11-12 is a divine principle and not a cultural one. This passage does in fact deal with problems. Apparently these wealthy Christian Ephesian women were flaunting their jewelry and attempting to teach men. They may have been “biblical feminists.”

Meaning of “exercise authority”

Hurley is correct when he says the meaning of the passage pivots on the translation of “to exercise authority.”⁴² It also hinges on the Greek word “silent” and the Greek usage of “or.” Due to the change in our culture, there has been an attempt to change the long historically accepted meaning of the Greek word “authority,” αυθεντεω to “lord it over,” “to dictate to,”⁴³ “to have mastery over,”⁴⁴ and “rule.”⁴⁵ But the ancient meaning of the word is not “to usurp authority” but “to have authority”⁴⁶ or “to do a thing one’s self.”⁴⁷ This Greek word had a range of meanings from “to compel,” “to influence,” “to grant authorization,” “to act independently,” “to assume authority,” “to be primarily responsible for” on one end to “to control,” “rule” on the other end.^{48,49} The meaning of the

41 Kelly says, “In other words, what is chronologically prior is taken to be in some sense superior (Kelly, J. N. D., *The Pastoral Epistles*, Hendrickson Publishing, Peabody, MA, 1960, p. 68).”

42 Hurley, *Ibid.*, p. 202.

43 Lock, Rev. Walter. *The Pastoral Epistles*, T & T Clark, Edinburgh, 1989, p. 32.

44 Guthrie, Donald. *The Pastoral Epistles*, Eerdmans Publishing, Grand Rapids, MI, 1992, p.87. Also Robertson concurs (Robertson, A. T. *Ibid.*, 570).

45 Balz, *Ibid.*, Vol. 1, p. 178.

46 Arndt, *Ibid.*, p. 120.

47 Vincent, Marvin R., *Vincent’s Word Studies of the New Testament*, MacDonald Publishing Co., McLean, VA, p. 225.

48 Further and more significantly, Kostenberger has written an exhaustive appendix (37 pages) documenting the extra biblical occurrences (110 times) of αυθεντεω. The word can mean “to have authority over.” Kostenberger, *Ibid.*, pp. 78-81, 269-306.

49 Keener appears to reluctantly state that αυθεντεω does not necessarily mean “domineer” when he says, “Probably it only forbids them to teach in a way that usurps authority, and so seeks to domineer, although this is not

word is “one who acts on his own authority”⁵⁰

MacArthur adds,

Some have attempted to evade the force of Paul’s prohibition by arbitrarily supposing that AUTHENTEIN should properly be translated “abusive authority.” Women according to that view, can exercise authority over men as long as it is not abusive authority. A study of extra biblical uses of AUTHENTEIN, however, makes clear that the word means simply authority.”⁵¹

Dibelius-Conzelmann says the meaning of the word is “self-assured, firm conduct,”⁵² that is, the word means “to have authority.”⁵³ This implies she cannot be an elder in a church since scripture says elders have the responsibility to be the leaders - to oversee (1 Tim. 5:17; 1 Pet. 5:1-13). Women can be leaders in women’s ministries and function in other roles as leaders under the oversight of elders, but not as leaders over men.

Can She Teach Under Someone?

Since the Greek word for “to teach” denotes not a single act of teaching but a “process,”⁵⁴ the text simply says that a woman cannot have a position as a teacher over men, nor is she to have a position of authority over men. Some have interpreted the passage to mean that a woman cannot have an authoritative position as a teacher of men. The Word of God is considered to be authoritative and thus the teacher of the Word of God who says, “Here is what the Lord says” is in a position of authority. The prophets, the writers of scripture, and the apostles spoke

absolutely clear.” (Keener, *Ibid.*, p. 108).

50 Nicoll, W. Robertson. *The Expositor’s Greek Testament*, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, MI., 1990, Vol. 4, p. 109. Thayer supports Nicoll’s conclusion observing the word means “one who does a thing himself” or “one who acts on his own authority” (Thayer, *Ibid.*, p. 84).

51 MacArthur, John. *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary*, 1 Timothy, Moody Press, Chicago, 1995, p. 87.

52 Dibelius, Martin. *The Pastoral Epistles*, Hermenia, Fortress Press, Philadelphia, 1972, p. 47.

53 Knight, George W, *New International Greek Testament Commentary, Commentary on the Pastoral Epistles*, Eerdmans Publishing, Grand Rapids, MI, 1992, pp. 141-142.

54 Heibert, D. Edmond. *First Timothy*, Moody Press. Chicago, IL, 1957, p. 60.

with authority.

Both verse 11 and 12 have the situation in mind, where women are not to teach authoritatively, but are to learn quietly. The closing remark of verse 12 makes this conclusion clear by summing up both verses with a single short statement: “she must be silent.” We conclude, therefore, that Paul intended that women should not be authoritative teachers in the church.⁵⁵

This position is sometimes expressed positively saying a woman can teach as long as she is teaching under the pastor’s authority or the authority of the church board. If one says that a woman can teach as long as she is under the authority of a pastor or the board, is it suggested that male teachers are not under the authority of the elders for what they teach? Is it not true that all who teach should already be under the authority of the elders? It appears that this passage is not talking about women teaching under someone or with authority.⁵⁶ The issue is that she cannot teach in the church.⁵⁷

Is She Prohibited From Teaching Authoritatively?

Some have erroneously suggested that 1 Tim. 2:12 is referring to “authoritative teaching.” Consequently, they say it is not possible for a woman to teach men authoritatively in our culture since the teaching of God’s Word is not as authoritative in our culture as it was in the New Testament period. They say authoritative teaching means the listener blindly obeys the teacher. It is reasoned the teachings of the apostles were absolutely binding on the listener. In short, the listener must blindly follow what

55 Hurley, *Ibid.*, p. 201.

56 Kostenberger has demonstrated using approximately 100 references to biblical and extra-biblical data that the word for “or” in 1 Tim. 2:12 means woman is to not have a position as a teacher over men nor is she to have authority over men. “It should be noted that the effort to make *αυθεντω* subordinate to *διδασκειν* so that it in effect functions as an adverb and to give it a negative connotation, as in “to teach in a domineering way,” is contradicted by the fact that *ουδε* does not function as a subordinating but as a coordinating conjunction.” (Kostenberger, *Ibid.*, p. 81-103).

57 1 Cor. 14:33-35 is either a prohibition that women cannot speak in church or it is a prohibition against women teaching. The passage has no qualifiers such as “authoritative teaching,” the text simply prohibits speaking, i.e. all teaching. See the preceding discussion.

was taught. This perspective ignores the fact that the New Testament Bereans were “more noble-minded than those in Thessalonica, for they received the word with great eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily, {to see} whether these things were so (Act 17:11).” Notice that Paul had apostolic authority and yet they reviewed and evaluated what Paul taught. The conclusion is that the listeners in Paul’s day were not blindly obedient, and people are not blindly obedient today. That is, teaching is no more and no less authoritative today than it was in Paul’s time.

Must Women Be Silent?

The Holy Spirit concludes by saying that a woman is to be silent. The Greek word for silent is SIGAW meaning “silence, tranquility or rest.” Hurley agrees saying, “Its use in 1 Timothy 2 shows that Paul is not just calling for ‘buttoned lips,’ but for a quiet receptivity and a submission to authority . . .”⁵⁸ The noted Greek scholar Ceslas Spicq says the word was used for “inaction, times of peace, as opposed to combat.”⁵⁹ This suggests the possibility some of the women were “fighting a battle” to teach as well as to have leadership positions over the entire church. The rule is absolute - women cannot teach men and they cannot have a position of authority in the church.

Conclusion

The following conclusions can be reached: 1) women cannot teach men, 2) women cannot have positions of authority over men and 3) women must be tranquil in the congregation - at peace in their spirit with their role of submission to male spiritual leaders in the church. This is a biblical principle that is independent of culture. This is God’s principle and not a biased opinion of Paul the Apostle against women.

QUESTION #7. What was the historic position of the church?

58 Hurley, *Ibid.*, p. 200.

59 Spicq, Ceslas. *Theological Lexicon of the New Testament*, Hendrickson Publishers, Peabody, MA., 1994, p. 178-180.

We have seen that scripture says a woman should not teach a man. The church's most profound and influential theologians over the past 2,000 years have consistently agreed with the conclusion that a woman should not teach men (Table 1). The notable historical exceptions allowing women to teach men were the cults⁶⁰ until recent times. In today's culture, there are many who disagree with the conclusions of this document and the historic positions of the church over the last 2,000 years on the role of women.

"Until recently, the role of women in the church has been a "settled" matter. Except for a few outbreaks such as in Montanism and Gnosticism and among certain Christian groups given to ecstatic activities, generally the accepted position has been that women are not to occupy positions of leadership in the church, such as pastors, teachers of men, or elders, but that many other places of service are available."⁶¹

From the time of Christ, the church has consistently affirmed the role of women to include a broad variety of ministries with the exception of pastor, elder and the teaching of adult men. Now old and familiar biblical passages are being given new meanings and these new meanings declare the historic position of the church to be in error. The long accepted meanings of Greek words are being changed and new meanings are being given to once non-controversial passages. Our culture has changed. So the question before the church today is: what is God's role for men and women. This is a difficult question to answer since an objective and unbiased interpretation of scripture is difficult due to our culture. Jack Deere observes,

The idea that fallen humanity, even redeemed fallen humanity, can arrive at pure biblical objectivity in determining all their practices and beliefs is an illusion. We are all significantly influenced by our circumstances: the culture in which we live, the family in which we grew up, the church we attend, our teachers, our desires, our disappointments, our tragedies and traumas.

60 House, H. Wayne. "The Ministry of Women in the Apostolic and Postapostolic Periods," *Bibliotheca Sacra*, Dallas Seminary, Oct.- Dec. 1988.

61 House, H. Wayne. "Neither . . . Male nor Female . . . in Christ Jesus," *Bib. Sacra*, Dallas Seminary, Jan-Mar. 1988.

Our experience determines much of what we believe and do, and often it determines much more than we are aware of and would admit.⁶²

The claim that all of the Christian theologians over 2,000 years were biased and self serving is a strong and judgmental statement. These theologians include such men as Origen, Jerome, Chrysostom, Thomas Aquinas, Luther, Calvin, Wesley, Jonathan Edwards, Charles Hodge, to name a few.⁶³ Unfortunately, an objective and unbiased answer for us today is difficult since we live in a progressive, egalitarian and pluralistic society which is influencing and challenging the mind set of the church.

How can we recover God's vision for manhood and womanhood? For evangelical Christians, the answer lies in searching the Scriptures. But who among us is truly open to the biblical message.? Who can claim to be free of trappings of culture and tradition?⁶⁴

Biblical feminists typically argue their position by 1) casting doubts about Pauline authorship, 2) stating that Paul really believed something different than what he wrote⁶⁵, 3) that Paul modified biblical guidelines to accommodate the cultural sensitivities of his time⁶⁶ or 4) that women were uneducated in Paul's day.⁶⁷ Unfortunately, this displays one of a number of prevalent problems in the search for

62 Deere, Jack. *Surprised By The Power of the Spirit*, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI, 1993, pp. 46-47.

63 Kostenberger, Andreas J. *Women In The Church*, Baker Books, Grand Rapids, MI, 1995, p. 213-267.

64 *Ibid.*, p.9.

65 Keener states that Paul presents an argument that is not his real conviction, but it is an argument that will convince his readers they should take a particular course of action when he says, "Paul develops his argument to persuade women members of the congregation to cover up. In ancient debate, one might give arguments for a position that were different from the reasons one held to the position oneself" (Keener, *Ibid*, p 31). The problem with the statement is that the Holy Spirit wrote this passage. Did the Holy Spirit misrepresent His position?

66 Keener states that Paul was less than truthful in his letters when he says, "Given Jesus' activism in Jewish Palestine, this apparent reticence of Paul to challenge many of the structures of his day is disappointing to some modern readers; but the rest of the Roman world required a different strategy for change than Jewish Palestine had" (Keener, *Ibid*, p 147). His words really mean the Holy Spirit was less than truthful when He wrote."

67 Keener, *Ibid*, p 112.

truth, the *denial of divine inspiration by suggesting the truth was not really presented.*

QUESTION #8. What can women do in the church?

Women may be deaconesses (1 Tim. 3:11), teach other women (Titus 2:3-5) and be involved in ministry (1 Cor. 16:15). As Kenneth Wuest (circa 1952) simply says,

This prohibition of a woman to be a teacher does not include the teaching of classes of women, girls, or children in a Sunday School, for instance, but does prohibit the woman from being a pastor, or a doctrine teacher in a school. It would not be seemly, either, for a woman to teach a mixed class of adults.⁶⁸

Women possess all of the gifts of the Spirit. Teaching men in public is prohibited by God. However, women did instruct in private as indicated in Acts 18:26 which says, "Priscilla and Aquila heard him [Apollos], they took him aside and explained to him the way of God more accurately (emphasis added)." The fact that Old Testament and New Testament women were prophetesses does not mean they teach since a prophet is not a teacher in the context of Paul's writings (1 Cor. 12:28-30; 14:6, 26).⁶⁹ We have seen that prophetic speaking is not teaching in the church (see Question #3). Sometimes it is mentioned that Junias (Rom. 16:7) was a woman and an apostle. This is speculation and cannot be supported definitely since there is ambiguity in the gender of the name and in the word "apostle" since

68 Wuest, Kenneth S. *The Pastoral Epistles in the New Testament*, Eerdmans Publishing, Grand Rapids, MI., pp. 48-49.

69 There are nine (9) references in the Word of God to "prophetess." In every case, it appears their ministry was one of quoting God's message to another. They spoke for God. This was not a teaching ministry. The first one was Miriam in Ex. 15:20. This passage suggests her ministry was among women when it says, "... all the women went out after her with timbrels and with dancing." The second passage, Judges 4:4-10 indicates that Deborah, the prophetess, "was judging Israel" and giving guidance. The term prophetess has more of a prophet connotation, that is, speaking for God and not the idea of teaching God's Word. The third and fourth passages (2 Kings 22:14-20; 2 Chron. 34:22-28) refer to the same event, Huldah the prophetess, and have the same sense of a prophet as that with Deborah. In Neh. 6:14, the prophetess Noadiah was one who was frightening God's true prophet, Nehemiah. In Isa. 8:3, little is known of the prophetess, except that she gave birth to a son. In Luke 2:36, the prophetess Anna had been waiting for the birth of Jesus. This clearly implies supernatural communication occurred between God and her. Acts 21:9 refers to "four virgin daughters who were prophetesses." Otherwise, nothing is known about them or their ministry. In Rev. 2:20, the reference to the prophetess Jezebel is a negative one referring to a false prophetess.

this word is sometimes translated in the New Testament as "messenger."⁷⁰

QUESTION #9. When is a man an adult?

The scriptures do not explicitly tell us when a boy is a man. In the New Testament period a boy was considered a man when he was 13 years old. In the Old Testament period it appears the age of accountability was twenty years of age (compare Numbers 14:3, 28-33 with Deut. 9:39). When is male considered a man? Scripture is not clear. If we assume age 13, then women would not be able to teach males in the church from seventh grade and up.

70 It is not clear that Junias is an apostle or a woman. A. T. Robertson says, "The . . . name can be either masculine or feminine" (Robertson, A. T., *Ibid.*, p. 427.). Nicoll agrees with Robertson (Nicoll, *Ibid.*, p. 719.). Plummer concurs with Robertson (Plummer, *Commentary on Romans*, Kregel Publications, Grand Rapids, MI, 1971, p. 639). Cranfield disagrees, "... it is surely right to assume that the person referred to was a woman . . ." (Cranfield, C. E. B., *The International Critical Commentary, Romans*, T & T Clark, Edinburgh, 1979, p. 788). Balz says, "It may be that the feminine name Junia is meant, in which case Paul would be referring to a Jewish Christian couple . . ." Leon agrees with this statement (Morris, Leon, *The Epistle to the Romans*, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, MI, 1994, p. 533). Keener impugns others with "Those who favor the view that Junia was not a female apostle do so because of their prior assumption that women could not be apostles, not because of any evidence . . ." (Keener, *Ibid.*, p. 242). Keener ignores the fact that "apostle" (Greek = *αποστολος*) primarily means "delegate or messenger" and does not always refer to our Lord's apostles (John 13:16; 2 Cor. 8:23; Phil 2:25). Calvin summarizes the issue well with "In the third place, he calls them Apostles: he uses not this word in its proper and common meaning, but extends it wider, even to all those who . . . promulgating the gospel everywhere" (Calvin, John. *The Epistles of Paul The Apostle To The Romans*, Baker Book House, Vol 19, 1996, p. 546). In conclusion, it may be feminine but this is not clear and the reference to apostle may simply mean "messenger." We cannot draw any definite conclusions.

Early Church Fathers On A Woman's Role

Date	Church Fathers	Church Fathers
225 A.D.	Tertullian	"But the woman of pertness, who has usurped the power to teach . . ."
185-250	Origen	"Even if it is granted to a woman to . . . prophesy, she is . . . not permitted to speak in the assembly."
331-420	Jerome	"He permitted a woman to teach with "she gave her opinion not as her own but as from me or someone else, thus admitting that what she taught she had learned from others."
345-407	Chrysostom	"In what sense then does he [Paul] say, 'I suffer not a woman to teach?' He means to hinder her from publicly coming forward . . ."
1225-1274	Aquinas	"Public speech is not conceded to women" because they "must be subject to man . . ."
1483-1546	Luther	"She should refrain from teaching, from praying in public. She has the command to speak at home."
1509-1564	Calvin	"Not that he takes from them the charge of instructing their family, but only excludes them from the office of teaching, which God has committed to men only."
1560-1645	Wesley	Women should not teach in public, except to say a few words, or "exhort" audiences of both men and women."
1838-1912	P. Fairbairn	Women may teach informally, but they may not "act the part of a teacher in the meetings of the faithful."
1797-1878	C. Hodge	For a woman to be a "public teacher" would be "contrary to the relation of subordination."

Summary

What conclusions can be reached about the role of women in the church? Can a woman teach adult men in the church? The following is a very brief summary of the series of questions presented. It is our desire to honor God in how these questions have been addressed.

QUESTION #1. Do men and women have different roles?

The answer is yes. 1 Cor. 11:2-16 is the primary passage of interest in this study. This passage demonstrates the biblical principle of a woman's submission to her husband is rooted in a transcultural (i.e. it does not change with culture) fact starting back in Genesis. That is, 1) a woman should be in submission to her husband, and 2) it is fitting for a woman to demonstrate her submission to her husband since this is a biblical principle. Other passages which support the principle of submission are 1 Cor. 14:33-35; Eph. 5:22-25; Col. 3:18; and 1 Pet. 3:1-17.

QUESTION #2. Are men and women mutually dependent on one another?

The answer is yes. There is equality between men and women as evidenced in 1 Cor. 11:11-12. This passage also indicates that husbands and wives are mutually dependent on one another. This is a transcultural principle rooted in God's biological design of procreation. This principle is supported elsewhere in scripture from 1 Pet. 3:7 where Paul reminds the husband that his wife is a "fellow heir of the grace of life." Gal. 3:28 provides a similar concept, but does not make the same point. It states that men and women are equal before God with respect to salvation; that is, there are no advantages at the throne of grace. This is consistent with the context of Galatians.

QUESTION #3. Can a woman teach the church which

is identical to asking can she teach men, if men are present?

The answer is no. The gift of prophecy is not the gift of teaching. 1 Cor. 12:28-29 clearly shows that prophets are not teachers. Likewise 1 Cor. 14:6 provides the identical conclusion but with a stronger statement showing that teaching and prophesying are not the same,

"... if I come to you speaking in tongues, what shall I profit you, unless I speak to you either by way of revelation or knowledge or of prophecy or of teaching." [NASB]

The function of prophesying is not the ministry of teaching. 1 Cor. 14:29-31 suggests the prophets in Corinth had short spontaneous speeches since he says 1) and "let two or three prophets speak" (v. 29), 2) "if a revelation is made" (v. 30), and 3) "for you can all prophesy one by one . . ." (v. 31). This ministry of prophecy according to 1 Cor. 14:3 was for "edification and exhortation and consolation." God gave the spiritual gift of pastor-teacher for pastors - not the gift of prophecy. John Calvin adds that prophecy was "declaring the mysteries of God for the edification of the hearers."¹ *The ministry of teaching was not prophesying.*

QUESTION #4. Is 1 Corinthians 14:33-35 in the context of the church?

Yes, this admonition is to the Corinthian church and in the context of "all the churches." The Holy Spirit is speaking about the conduct of women in the assembly of the church (1 Corinthians 14:23, 26).

QUESTION #5. Are women to be silent in the church?

¹ Calvin, John. The Epistles of Paul The Apostle To The Corinthians, Baker Book House, 1996, p. 355.

1 Cor. 14:33-35 is in harmony with 1 Cor. 11:5. We can conclude that women were allowed to pray (while the spiritual gift of prophecy existed), but they were not permitted to teach in the church. The question that remains is can women ask questions of a teacher in church? The answer appears to be no. The injunction against women teaching is even stronger. Verse 35 makes it impossible for a woman to teach in the church.

QUESTION #6. Can women teach men in the church?

The answer is no. Several alternate positions were discussed. Paul was not prohibiting uneducated women from teaching. Historical records show there were both uneducated men and uneducated women. Was Paul only prohibiting uneducated women from teaching? Is it okay for uneducated men to teach?

Another inaccurate view says Paul is dealing only with a cultural issue of his time and 1 Tim. 2:12-15 does not apply to us today. The problem with this approach is that 1 Timothy 2:12-15 is not culturally bound, but is transcultural applying to all cultures. The Holy Spirit demonstrates this in v. 13-14, when He says “Adam was created first, and then Eve” and “it was not Adam who was deceived, but Eve (v. 13).” The Holy Spirit goes back in history before culture, existed to a different time, to a time before the Fall and a time after the Fall to help us understand the principle in v.11-12 is a divine principle and not a cultural one.

Since the Greek word in 1 Tim. 2:12 for “teach” denotes not a single act of teaching but a process,” scripture is simply saying that a woman is to *not have a position as a teacher over men* **nor** *is she to have authority over men*. Some suggest a woman can teach as long as she is teaching under the pastor’s authority or the authority of the church board. If we say that a woman can teach if she is under the authority of a pastor or the board, we are implying the New Testament assumes that male teachers are not required to be under the authority or accountable to the elders for what they teach. The implication demonstrates this position is wrong since it is not authoritative teaching that is prohibited - the issue is that she cannot teach men, period. This position also

ignores 1 Cor. 11:2-16 where prophesying is not teaching and 1 Cor. 14:33-35 where it appears she is prohibited from speaking.

The following conclusions can be reached: 1) women cannot teach men, 2) women cannot have positions of authority over men and 3) women must be tranquil in the congregation. This is a biblical principle that is independent of culture. This is God’s principle and not a biased opinion of Paul the Apostle against women.

QUESTION #7. What was the historic position of the church?

The historic position of the church over the last 2,000 years on the role of women has been challenged.

“Until recently, the role of women in the church has been a “settled” matter. Except for a few outbreaks such as in Montanism and Gnosticism and among certain Christian groups given to ecstatic activities, generally the accepted position has been that women are not to occupy positions of leadership in the church, such as pastors, teachers of men, or elders, but that many other places of service are available.”²

From the time of Christ, the church has consistently affirmed the role of women to include a broad variety of ministries with the exception of pastor, elder and the teaching of adult men. These theologians include such men as Origen, Jerome, Chrysostom, Thomas Aquinas, Luther, Calvin, Wesley, Jonathan Edwards, Charles Hodge, to name a few.

QUESTION #8. What can women do in the church?

Women can do everything but teach men and serve as elders in the church.

QUESTION #9. When is a man an adult?

² House, H. Wayne. “Neither . . . Male nor Female . . . in Christ Jesus,” Bibliotheca Sacra, Dallas Seminary, Jan-Mar. 1988.

In the New Testament period a boy was considered a man when he was 13 years old. Is this the criteria for today? The answer is probably closer to yes than no.

Personal Comments

God has established role differences among equals, men and women, both in the home and at church. Scripture is clear that women and men are both equal in salvation and in the gifts of ministry within the church. But there are role differences even in the church both in leadership and in the office of teaching and preaching. The very well known author Elisabeth Elliot summarizes it well with,

The modern cult of personality makes submission a degrading thing. We are told we cannot be “whole persons” if we submit. Obedience is thought of us as restrictive and therefore bad. “Freedom” is defined as the absence of restraint, quite the opposite from the scriptural principle embodied in Jesus’ words, “If you continue in my words, then are ye my disciples, and ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.” Freedom in God’s view always lies on the far side of discipline, which means obedience . . . To attempt to apply democratic ideals to the kingdom of God, which is clearly hierarchical, can result only in a loss of power and ultimately in destruction. Christ Himself, the Servant and Son, accepted limitation and restriction. He subjected Himself. He learned obedience.¹

God has ordained different functions for men and women. When we “operate” according to His plan, we are most at peace in our interpersonal relationships here on earth.² Role differences do exist both in the home as well as in the church.³ The Holy Spirit tells us that men as the elders of the church are the ones who rule and the ones who

1 Elliot, Elisabeth, “Why I Oppose the Ordination of Women,” *Christianity Today* 880 [1975]: p. 13

2 “Though these words and their parallel in 1 Cor. 14:33-35 may sound a trifle unfriendly, in reality they are the very opposite. In fact, they are expressive of a feeling of tender sympathy and basic understanding. They mean: let a woman not enter a sphere of activity for which by dint of her creation she is not suited” (Hendriksen, William. I-II Timothy and Titus, *New Testament Commentary*, Baker Book House, Grand Rapids, MI, 1974., pp. 108-109).

3 Some of the role differences in the home are found in Eph. 5:21-33; Col. 3:18-21; Titus 2:3-5 and 1 Pet. 3:1-7. Role differences in the church include 1 Cor. 11:5; 1 Cor. 14:33-35 and 1 Tim. 2:12-15.

should teach in the church (1 Tim. 5:17). 1 Cor. 11:33-35 and 1 Tim. 2:12-14 address problem situations and consequently further support the principle by indicating that women are not to teach men in the church. The vast majority of the church fathers down through history affirm that 1 Tim. 2:12 indicates that women are not to teach men in the church.

Today, Christians are seeking relevance and scripture is being marginalized or just outright rejected to accommodate the cultural setting.⁴ The historic positions of the church are being undermined by the onslaught of a new breed of evangelicals.⁵ Some of these men no longer believe in the authority of scripture, and long standing historical doctrines are being explained away. Some are the new evangelicals⁶ who are embracing modernistic doctrines “while defending their right to use the name evangelical.”⁷

But ever since the beginning of the last century, the democratizing influence has bred a suspicion and outright hostility towards creeds, confessions, and catechisms. “Don’t Fence Me In” is the

4 Armstrong, *Ibid.*, p. 40.

5 “ . . . nearly 40 percent of all Evangelical theologians have abandoned the belief in the inerrancy of scripture.’ Evangelicalism is ‘a theological tradition in disarray,’ and the movement’s identity crisis leads one to wonder, ‘What does it mean to be an Evangelical?’” (Armstrong, *Ibid.*, p. 258).

6 Like Keener, Groothuis says, “Because the New Testament church was intent on gaining as wide a hearing as possible for the gospel message, it was necessary for the church to put first things first, and for the principle of biblical equality to be exercised with some restraint. The apostle Paul’s emphasis was on the need for Jews and Gentiles to be reconciled into one body. Outside of this important social and religious change, believers were encouraged to conform to existing customs . . . As Klyne Snodgrass explains, ‘That Paul did not spell out the implications for slaves and women more than he did is not too surprising if one allows for his concern for missions. Other factors, no doubt, were his fear of social upheaval and the fear that the Christian movement would be . . . stamped out.’ In short, the strategy of the New Testament church was to tolerate the social subordination of slaves and women so as not to risk alienating non-Christians . . . Today, however, when non-Christians are not likely to be offended by an equalitarian gospel, but are likely to find a hierarchical gospel offensive, we have no reason to perpetuate the cultural practices that were initially intended for Christians . . . (Groothuis, Rebecca M. *Good News for Women.*, Baker Book House, Grand Rapids, MI, 1996, p. 3-4).

7 Armstrong, *Ibid.*, p. 258.

egalitarian spirit of Romantic individualism that so characterizes our age and our churches. We criticize the liberals of the sixties for overthrowing authority, but it is endemic to the American frontier and how disastrous to the cause of Christ when we are given permission to freely preach or teach our own whims and opinions even when they violate the consensus of the church . . . It is “freedom” and “no creed but Christ” emphasis that has contributed to the fragmentation of the body of Christ over the last two centuries. Far from bringing peace, unity, and freedom, it has invited discord, confusion, and bondage.⁸

context of the official gatherings of the church.

It is unfortunate that some discount the church fathers of the past. Christians have disdain for the opinions of the church fathers who lived in different cultures, lived in different times and in different places. Listen to Michael S. Horton,

Occasionally, I will hear the objection to creeds, confessions, and catechisms with the assertion “I just go directly to the Bible.”

The assumption here is that those who drafted these documents that have stood the test of time did not go directly to the Bible.⁹

But our forbearers did go directly to the Bible when they drafted the confessions of faith and catechisms. In fact, the Puritans carefully included scripture texts for every statement in the Westminster Larger and Shorter Catechisms. The minute one begins to explain what the Bible is saying in a particular place, he or she is doing precisely what these gifted pastors and teachers did: interpreting the Word of God. The only difference is that our own interpretations are limited by our own time, place, and circumstances, whereas these long-standing interpretations make available to us today the wisdom of centuries of biblical interpretation.

In conclusion, we have a vast number of church fathers who have gone before us, with the notable exception of the last 40 years, who agree with “Paul prohibits women from doing two things: (1) teaching [men], and (2) having authority over men in the family of God,”¹⁰ that is, in the

8 Ibid., p. 249.

9 Ibid., p. 249.

10 Strauch, Alexander. *Biblical Eldership*, Lewis & Roth, Littleton, CO, 1988, p.214.