

MINISTRY WOMEN

I Timothy 2:8-15 (NASB)

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INTRODUCTION

- A. Some years ago the Christian and Missionary Alliance made a transition of our form of church government to elder rule. Over a period of years we have done many hours of study and spent hundreds of thousands of dollars to determine this question. We conclude that elders are to be in charge of the local church and that they must be men. Since pastors are elders, this means pastors must also be men.
- B. This is not an easy position to take in the modern world where opportunities for women have increased dramatically. Some have questioned our motives, saying that this is the mean-spirited attempt of men to control women, or that we are following a dead tradition, or that we are simply out of touch with the Holy Spirit. I have become convinced that after many years of working with the Alliance on this subject, the reason we have taken this position is that we believe the Bible teaches it. I will also say that we are far from one hundred percent agreement on this matter, but the concepts in this paper reasonably represent our working position.
- C. This study will focus on one key passage which, if we understand (while avoiding errors in several directions) we will understand God's mind on the matter. Unfortunately, there is a hornets' nest of arguments surrounding these issues. In order for us to hear what God is saying, we must work from the same assumptions He does about the basic relationship of men and women. There are three ways that we might view their interrelationship based on a reading of the total context of Scripture:
- 1) One view is that men and women exist in an essential hierarchy with a functional mutuality. This view states that God created men and women primarily with a ranking in mind. Men direct everything and any mutuality with women is secondary. This sort of model would be seen in any military chain of command, with men as sergeants and women as privates. If you wish to hold this view, you must show that our perfect example, Christ, exercised the prerogatives of command and control in a military sense. There is no such evidence. In Matthew 20:25-28, Jesus prohibited such command: "It is not so among you, but whoever wishes to be great among you shall be Your servant."
 - 2) A second view is that men and women exist in a pure mutuality. This view states that God created male and female as absolutely interchangeable. If you wish to hold this view, you must show that our perfect example, Jesus Christ, himself eliminated all distinctions in the roles of men and women. If he did not, then you must say that he treated women wrongly, or inadequately, or incompletely, and that he never sent a prophet to correct His personal error in the church which was to come.
 - 3) A third view is that men and women exist in an essential mutuality with a functional hierarchy. This view states that men and women are created equal in worth and ability, but are also created to live out an orderly pattern which places us in different roles. In this view

there is a ranking for the sake of order, but it does not imply anything about worth or ability. It reflects the realities of our differing natures and callings as created by God. In this view, mutuality is primary and essential, while ranking is secondary and purely functional. The Holy Trinity has this structure.

If this is true, then we would see Jesus Christ treating women as fellow-heirs of the grace of eternal life, as of equal worth in God's sight as any man. We would see him empowering their gifts and blessing their ministries. We also would see him respecting divinely-created roles, that is, no women functioning in the specific roles of apostle, pastor, or elder, even in partnership with their husbands. This is clearly the evidence of Scripture.

- D. This last view determines the Scriptural context of the interpretation of our text in 1 Timothy 2:9-15, which is one of the most emotionally-charged theological battlegrounds of our day. I invite you to set aside your emotional reactions and preconceived conclusions in order to give God's truth a fresh hearing. The underlying spiritual principle in each of the following points applies also to men, but in this particular passage the Lord Jesus calls every woman to be godly in good works, in discipleship, in relation to elder authority, and in embracing her God-created identity. First, she is to be

I. GODLY IN GOOD WORKS -- 1 Timothy 2:9-10

Likewise, I want women to adorn themselves with proper clothing, modestly and discreetly, not with braided hair and gold or pearls or costly garments; but rather by means of good works, as befits women making a claim to godliness.

- A. These words are not a standard we are given by which we are to judge a woman. They are a spiritual challenge made to women to cultivate the inner beauty of godliness.
- B. It is easy for any woman to exercise fleshly influence over men by a sensual presentation of her person. This illegitimate form of personal influence can become a false source of self-worth.
- C. Instead, each woman is to let her inward beauty grow by cultivating it with the performance of good works. This pleases God, and it makes it possible for all the brethren, both men and women, to concentrate on God instead of thinking about what others are wearing.

Secondly, the Lord Jesus also calls each woman to be:

II. GODLY IN DISCIPLESHIP -- 1 Timothy 2:11

Let a woman quietly receive instruction with entire submissiveness.

- A. The word for disciple means "a learner." The learner who pleases God is a respectful person who pays careful attention and submits to the God-given authority of the teacher who exercises care of his or her soul. This trait of godliness is true for both women and men.
- B. It is absolutely no use for a person to sit in church without a quiet and submissive spirit.

That person will get nowhere with God, because he or she is not really prepared to listen and respond. Often people come to church but actually have another philosophy of life which controls their behavior more than Christianity. This will eventually reveal itself.

- C. It had apparently revealed itself in Ephesus, where some women seem to have been disruptive. They had goals other than God's goals and were pursuing them in the church. No one with a genuine personal testimony of salvation in Christ gets to say: "I don't have to listen, and I don't have to follow."

Thirdly, Christ calls each woman to be:

III. GODLY IN RELATION TO ELDER AUTHORITY -- 1 Timothy 2:12-14

But I do not allow a woman to teach or exercise authority over a man, but to remain quiet. 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.

- A. As we read these verses, we all get a jolt from the superficial appearance. It looks on the surface as if women are to be silent and passive in any church environment which contains men. This has been a popular interpretation in some churches, and we must test this reading by comparing it to Scripture. What does the rest of the Bible say about what we might call the "no teach, no lead" view?

- 1) First of all the "no teach" rule must be modified by 1 Corinthians 11:5: "But every woman who has her head uncovered while praying or prophesying disgraces her head..." All that we need to see to modify the superficial reading of 1 Timothy 2:12 is that women are given guidelines on how to pray and prophesy in an orderly way during public worship.

The word "praying" refutes the superficial reading of the word "silent" (or "quiet") as does the word "prophesying." A woman who is praying and prophesying in the context of public worship at which there would inevitably be men is participating in edifying speech. At its most basic level, prophecy is the act of verbally connecting the eternal truth of God with specific people, places, times, and things. It is not exactly the same as teaching or preaching. Otherwise, there would not be a distinction between these in the New Testament.

Please mark the significance of this: Women in the early church had opportunities to speak in public worship so that the entire body of Christ could be edified, both men and women.

- 2) Secondly, the "no lead" rule must be modified by reference to Romans 16:1-2, where two things are said of Phoebe:

*I commend to you our sister Phoebe, who is **a servant** of the church which is at Cenchrea; that you receive her in the Lord in a manner worthy of the saints, and that you help her in whatever matter she may have need of you; for she herself has also been **a helper** of many, and of myself as well.*

- a) Where Phoebe is called a "servant" in the NASB and NIV in the English, she is actually identified as a "deacon" using the same Greek word, *diakonos*, as the word for male deacons in 1 Timothy 3:8. There is no secret form of the word "deacon" which reveals that Phoebe would have had some other office or function than the male deacons. We believe that there are natural differences between the specific ministries of male and female deacons, but they are not differences of stature.

Some commentators have argued that there is no office of deacon in the New Testament. Acts 6:3, 6 shows how the first known deacons were established: "But **select from among you**, brethren, seven men of good reputation, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we may put in charge of this task. And these they brought before the apostles; and after praying, **they laid their hands on them.**" When the apostles themselves laid hands upon someone to set him (or her) apart for service, he was being placed in an office with both responsibility and authority appropriate to the office. There is no other definition of "office" in the New Testament other than the laying on of hands by those of elder authority.

It is not stated that Phoebe was set apart by the laying on of hands; it is not stated that she was not so set apart. All we have are the gravity of Paul's words, which should read: "I commend to you our sister Phoebe, who is a deacon of the church which is at Cenchrea..."

- b) The second modification of the "no lead" rule for women is found in verse two where Phoebe is said to have the function of a manager. Although I usually do not recommend this, in this case we should probably take a pen, cross out the words "great help" or "helper", and write in the word "manager." For many years in my study of the original languages of the Bible I was convinced that the Greek verb "to manage," *proistemi*, was never used for anyone other than those of elder authority. Then I discovered the feminine noun form of the same verb, *prostatis*, in this passage. This unambiguous word is used here to describe the female deacon known as Phoebe.

Please observe that the Apostle Paul is identifying Phoebe as a deacon who manages some great unspecified ministry for him. He is using this letter to commend her to the Romans, that she might have a reception worthy of her stature and that she might have a covering from the elders to pursue her ministry. The conclusion for the "no lead" reading of 1 Timothy 2:12 is that some women functioned as managers at the deacon level.

B. Now that we have modified the shallow reading of this verse which has haunted the church for centuries, we must ask then what does the verse mean? To what does "I do not allow a woman to teach or have authority over a man" refer? Several preliminary observations:

- 1) As always, we go to the immediate context first. The general subject of this chapter is orderliness among God's people. Specifically, Paul addresses a situation where women were out of order, and he seeks to lead them into godly behavior.

- 2) Also in the immediate context, since there are no chapter divisions in the original, the subject of elder authority immediately follows. The topic beginning chapter three is the qualifications for elder-level authority. This relates directly to the general matter of orderliness.
- 3) Within verse twelve itself, the conjunction of the two concepts of teaching and authority point to the role of those holding elder authority. This was a point which would have been immediately apparent to first century readers who were familiar with the relationship of disciples and masters, which was marked by both teaching and authority. If a disciple of a human master were to abandon his masters' teaching or disregard his instructions, he would cease to be a disciple. The elders' role was marked by both teaching and authority. They are God's appointed means to bring order in the local church (cf. Titus 1).

C. We are now in a position to explain what verse twelve means. At the least, women are not to teach or lead from the office of elder authority. The body of elders, which includes what we call pastors, is responsible for the regular ministry of the word and prayer, and the oversight of the flock of God. Women are not to teach or lead from this position. They may teach and lead in a manner appropriate to the office of deacon, but not elder. Furthermore, they should not teach men in official church functions where the teaching should come from elders.

- 1) 3:2 confirms this by reference to the requirement that overseers be "husband of one wife." If this is a cultural accident, then we have no correction of it in the canonical Bible.
- 2) The more distant context tells us the important facts that there is neither a command to install women elders found anywhere in the New Testament, nor is there any incontrovertible evidence of a woman functioning as an elder. Since elders are all responsible as shepherds, this rules out the office of pastor for a woman, for she is not to "teach or have authority over a man."
- 3) Paul immediately sought to refute objections that this orderly arrangement was merely cultural or temporary in verses thirteen and fourteen. His point is that this orderliness in the kingdom of God is built into creation itself, as illustrated by the prefall lives of Adam and Eve. First, the order of creation of man and woman illustrates the orderliness of male elder authority, and second, the deception of Eve illustrates the orderliness of male elder teaching responsibility. These references are merely corroborating illustrations of the simple point that the instructions in verse twelve are not arbitrary or temporary.

D. We must see also that maleness in itself is never the test of fitness for the office of elder. The vast majority of men will never hold this office. God has also commanded them to submit to the elders. The calling and gifting of God with recognition by the body are the bases for installing someone as elder. These hard verses teach us that God is not calling women to be elders. He is calling some to serve him as deacons, which can include teaching and leading which is appropriate to that office. This has a number of immediate applications:

- 1) There is nothing wrong with women teaching and leading on the mission field, so long as they make no claim to elder authority or undertake the primary discipleship of men. God has and will use women on foreign fields to build up newborn churches. Some women will

have teaching gifts that far exceed those of the indigenous elders with whom they serve. This is no spiritual contradiction.

- 2) There is nothing wrong with women teaching and leading here at home so long as it is from the role of deacon. As non-elders, they are not to be the main source of teaching or shepherding for either men or women, which is the elders' responsibility. The specifics of such service are overseen in local churches by the elders.
- 3) Public speech by women in church should be in the general categories of praying and prophesying. The prophesying woman of 1 Corinthians 11:5 would have been given the floor. When a woman has the opportunity to speak, she should do so freely with a mind to making the greatest impact for God. She should not, however, use the opportunity to challenge elder authority or teaching, or to seek to direct the church. This would be true for any non-elder who has the opportunity to speak in a church gathering.

E. In the final analysis, the godly woman is free to develop and express her spiritual gifts within the purposes of God. There is no restriction in her becoming precisely what God wants her to be. I want to make a public apology to all women who have had their spiritual gifts unfairly restrained by the wrong interpretation of these verses. If the words of the Bible have any meaning, the Lord has given women the freedom to exercise their gifts.

Finally, Christ calls every woman to be:

IV. GODLY IN HER CREATED IDENTITY -- 1 Timothy 2:15

But women shall be preserved through the bearing of children if they continue in faith and love and sanctity with self-restraint.

- A. I will not dignify with a refutation the red-herring that this verse teaches that women must give birth in order to be saved. And although there is truth to the idea, I also do not see the relevance here of the view that this means that faith and love give deliverance through the painful process of child-bearing. The passage is about orderliness for God's people, not deliverance from pain and sorrow. The problem for interpretation is why child-bearing is included along with faith and love in a list of things related to salvation.
- B. There is a good explanation. Child-bearing is one part of the created identity of women. The use of child-bearing to indicate the entire created identity of women is a figure of speech called synecdoche. It is the use of a part of something to indicate the whole. If a woman comes to Christ, learns all that God has designed her to be and do, and rejects key parts of it at will, then her salvation is indeed in question. This is a spiritual matter, and does not turn on whether a woman actually bears children or not. The question is: Does she reject God's design? Such rejection is incompatible with belief.
- C. The remainder of this verse also reveals a behavior pattern that confirms the godliness of any woman, consisting of four elements. If any of these are lacking in a woman, one would have good reason to question her salvation:

- 1) Faith -- "Without faith, it is impossible to please God."
- 2) Love -- Paul wrote that no matter what else he might say or do, if he did not have love, he was nothing. The loveless woman is still dead in her trespasses and sins.
- 3) Sanctity (or holiness) -- Hebrews 12:14 states: "Pursue peace with all men, and the sanctification without which no one will see the Lord."
- 4) Self-restraint (propriety) -- In writing Timothy, Paul included a lack of self-control in a list of traits marking the lost:

*For men [and women] will be lovers of self, lovers of money, boastful, arrogant, revilers, disobedient to parents, ungrateful, unholy, unloving, irreconcilable, malicious gossips, **without self-control**, brutal, haters of good, treacherous, reckless, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God; holding to a form of godliness, although they have denied its power; and avoid such men [and women] as these (I Tim. 3:2-5).*

D. So good behavior can never save, but it is a reliable indicator of whether a woman has received Christ. God has not left us in the dark as to what he requires of us. The woman who rebels against her created nature, or does not trust God, or who does not live a holy life, or who does not control her fleshly desires does not know God.

CONCLUSION

What does God require of the godly woman? This passage delivers four basic spiritual challenges:

- A. The godly woman concentrates on developing her inner spiritual beauty by doing good works.
- B. The godly woman is a humble disciple, sitting at the feet of Jesus to learn from him.
- C. The godly woman joyfully expresses the fullness of her gifts within the structure which God has created for the church.
- D. The godly woman seeks to affirm her created identity as a woman in the kingdom of God, pursuing a life of faith, love, holiness, and self-control.

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