

WOMEN IN MINISTRY

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INTRODUCTION

All of us bring into theology our experience, whether we like it or not. Thus, it is only fair at the outset to expose my own background and biases regarding the place of women in ministry. I have had the privilege of worshipping and ministering in a variety of denominations and parachurch settings. In North America, the list includes Young Life, InterVarsity, Presbyterian, Bible Church, and Plymouth Brethren. In Costa Rica I have worked with various Charismatic groups. I have had the privilege of working alongside women in ministry. I have been blessed by the teaching and gifts of women with whom I have worked. Yet, in our church, there was a range of interpretations by the board of elders regarding the women's issue. There were no women elders or pastors, although we did have the wife of one of the pastors on salary as a functional pastor without the title. Very occasionally we could persuade the more conservative brothers to let a woman in the pulpit on a Sunday (we managed to do it regularly in the High School and Young Adult ministries). My particular position has been to hold in tension the New Testament principles that women are fully gifted and active in leadership with the understanding that there is to be some kind of expression of male authority in the church. Thus, those women with pastor/teacher gifts should have the freedom to function in their gifts, including pastoral gifts, but should not be the highest human authority in the church. This position separates gifts from office, at least the highest office. In this view, women may be a part of a pastoral team, but not be the head pastor.¹ I have been undecided as to the possibility of a woman being an elder (ours is an elder run church).

This is my wife's and my third stint at Regent College. In our previous studies here (1978-79 and 1982), the position on women in ministry and male/female roles was fairly well defined: the principle of hierarchy--submission/headship should be reflected in marriage and church. Sure, there were some who expounded a non-traditionalist approach, but they were considered radicals who questioned Biblical authority.² Returning here last summer (1994), I found that the traditional view was no longer the dominant view at Regent. I was surprised to find committed, solid evangelicals steering away from the traditional approach, calling for full participation of women in church leadership and "equalitarian" views on marriage. Competent Biblical scholars claiming Biblical authority thus line up on both sides of the women's ministry issue.³ The question is, what exegetical principle is being taught? This paper is an effort to come to grips with this new hermeneutic being taught and decide if I am willing to take the plunge myself. Is it exegetically sound, or is bending to cultural norms?

To undertake this study, I have attempted to consult sources expressing both views. Some of the issues that are important to the debate are as follows:

1. Is there hierarchy in the Adam/Eve relationship before the fall, or was the ruling of the man over the woman instituted after the Fall?
2. Does the cross reverse the "curse"?
3. What was Jesus attitude toward women?
4. How did women minister in the early church?

¹I have heard that this is the general view held by the Vineyard Movement.

²Though to be fair, it should be noted that a number of denominations have ordained women for many years.

³Stevens, R. Paul. "The Mystery of Male and Female" in *Readings in Lay Theology, 2nd Edition*, Regent College, 1991 p. 120

5. What is taught in the New Testament regarding headship, authority and leadership?
6. Are the restrictions placed on women in ministry in the New Testament culturally conditioned or applicable across time and culture? How do we deal with the difficult passages in Paul?

CREATION AND SUBORDINATION

We might as well start at the beginning. This is important because Paul refers to creation in dealing with women. If the creation story does not reflect subordination, then Paul is not implying subordination in referring to creation.. First of all, “both males and females bear his image and in personal dignity are equal in every way.”⁴ They are both created in his likeness. One is not better than the other (Gen. 1:26-27). There is clearly no subordination implied in the Genesis 1 account. In the Genesis 2:18-23 account, scholars differ on whether or not headship/subordination is implied. Packer and Longnecker, for instance say yes.⁵ Swartley,⁶ Snodgrass,⁷ and Bilezikian disagree. “The teaching of this text shows that the notions of hierarchical distinctions or differences in rank between man and woman were completely absent in God’s creation design.”⁸ The three things which are said to imply headship are 1) the word “helper”, 2) the fact that man was formed first, then woman from the man, and 3) the fact that the man named her. Bilezikian argues that the word “helper” does not imply authority/subjection. This Hebrew word for *helper* is not used in the Bible with reference to a subordinate person such as a servant or an underling. It is generally attributed to God (certainly not a subordinate) when He is engaged in activities of relief or rescue among his people. Consequently, the word *helper* may not be used to draw inferences about subordinate female roles. If anything, the word points to the inadequacy and the helplessness of man when he was bereft of the woman in Eden.⁹

As to the order of creation, Bilezikian points out that animals were created before man, but had no primacy over man. While naming the woman may point to some kind of importance, the name he gives to her “woman” dignifies Eve to the level of man. Thus the traditional view of hierarchy in creation is called into question by a reasonable alternative interpretation.

THE CROSS AND THE “CURSE”

Earle Ellis, in an insightful chapter entitled *The Eschatological Woman*, sees the principle of the two ages as relevant to the discussion.¹⁰ A basic principle of Biblical theology (first expounded by Vos and Cullmann) is that as Christians, we live between two ages, this age and the age to come. The death and resurrection of our Lord sealed the fate of the enemy, though he is still free to wreak havoc until his final doom at the second coming. As Christians

⁴Packer, J.I. “*Stop Making Women Presbyters*” in *Christianity Today*. February 11, 1991. p. 20

⁵ed. Mickelsen, Alvera. *Women, Authority and the Bible*. InterVarsity Press. Downers Grove, Illinois. 1986. pp 67, 298-299

⁶ed. Mickelson p. 85

⁷Snodgrass, Klyne R. in ed. Mickelsen. p. 175

⁸Bilezikian, Gilbert. *Beyond Sex Roles, Second Edition*. Baker Book House, Grand Rapids, 1985. p. 30 Bilezikian, a pastor at Willow Creek Community Church, was given a year’s leave to study the women’s question, and thus establish church policy. His helpful book is the fruit of those labors.

⁹Bilezikian. p. 28

¹⁰Ellis, E. Earle. *Pauline Theology: Ministry and Society*. Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1989. pp. 53-86

we receive certain benefits of the new age, though we continue to live our life out in this present order. How does the in-between state affect the roles of the sexes? In heaven, there will be no marriage (Matt. 22:30). Sexuality will thus not play the same role as it does in this age. There will be complete unequivocal equality of the sexes. But in this age, according to Ellis, “Paul affirms both equality and subordination as complementary roles in several kinds of relationships ... “ [holding] together quite harmoniously an equality of value and diversity in rank.”¹¹ Difference, diversity, and rank are all held alongside unity and equality. Thus, though “there is neither Jew nor Gentile” (Gal. 3:28), there is a priority of the Jew in terms of salvation.

For those who hold to a subordination teaching on Genesis 2, redemption does not change the male/female hierarchy, “for grace restores nature, not abolishes it.”¹² Yet for those who see subordination coming after the Fall, Galatians 3:28 reflects a great reversal for here and now, and has become the key verse for those who encourage full participation of women in ministry.

Bilezikian points to a number of ways in which the curses were reversed in the New Testament.¹³

- Separation from God was replaced by reconciliation (Gal. 4:4-7)
- Death was swallowed up with eternal life (John 11:25-26)
- Work became a blessing (2 Thessalonians 3:12-13)
- Bread became a sign of God’s bounty (Acts 2:46)
- Husbands become lovers instead of rulers of their wives (Eph. 5:28)

Does the cross undue subordination? Paul Stevens may have the most accurate answer when he says the unity of the sexes is “substantially recovered through Christ.”¹⁴ Males and females still have different roles, the husband of servant leadership, and the wife as one who is to be supportive of and respond to his leadership. But more on that when we discuss headship.

JESUS AND WOMEN

Jesus elevated the position of women beyond the wildest expectations of his day. He was a full blown radical. He talked to them in public, he taught them, he instructed them how to serve and worship God, and he encouraged them to share the gospel. He ministered to prostitutes and a Samaritan immoral woman. He healed many women and raised a girl from the dead. He exalted their faith as examples. Women were the first to witness the resurrection. Women were among his followers, though not a part of the twelve.

The priesthood was the one Old Testament office reserved for men. Women were prophets and judges and even queens. The continuing priesthood came to an end in Jesus. He is the great High Priest. Now, all believers have become priests, male and female (the priesthood of all believers). A whole paper could be written on Jesus and women, but lack of space spurs us to move on. If we could stop with Jesus, and did not have to deal with a few sticky passages from the pen of Paul, there would be more agreement as to the freedom of women to minister.

¹¹Ellis. p. 57-58.

¹²Packer in Mickelson. p. 299

¹³Bilezikian. p. 80

¹⁴Stevens. Stevens, R. Paul. “The Mystery of Male and Female” in *Readings in Lay Theology*, 2nd Edition, Regent College, 1991. p. 125

WOMEN IN MINISTRY IN THE EARLY CHURCH

Women are given spiritual gifts just as are men. Women can and should use their gifts in the church. At Pentecost, the Spirit was poured out on men and women (Acts 2:17-18). Philip the evangelist had four daughters who were prophetesses (Acts 21:9-10). Even in the controversial passage of 1 Corinthians 11, Paul mentions that women pray and prophesy in the context of worship. Priscilla, whose name usually appears before her husband's (Aquila), taught Apollos (Acts 18:24-26).

In fact, Paul was more liberating of women than we give him credit for. Even Ellis recognizes that, "in one sense Paul may be the father of some aspects of women's liberation."¹⁵ Paul repeatedly mentions women by name who had positions of importance and influence in the early church. Women participated in worship services through prayer and prophecy. Priscilla, Euodia and Syntyche are all referred to as co-workers (*sunergos*), a term "used of persons exercising various kinds of unspecified ministries, including teaching, preaching, and prophecy" (Rom. 16:3, Phil. 4:2-3).¹⁶ Phoebe is called a deaconess (*diakonos* -- Rom. 16:1), a term used elsewhere to include ministries of teaching and preaching. Andronicus and Junias may have been a husband/wife team of veteran missionaries. They are referred to as "outstanding among the apostles" (Rom. 16:7) A woman is called "apostle", not in the sense of the twelve, but as one sent out as a missionary. These relatives of Paul were, like him, imprisoned, so were likely engaged in evangelism and preaching.

The following chart reflects the truly liberating view that Paul had of women and marriage compared to many prevailing Greek and Jewish attitudes of the first century.¹⁷

¹⁵Ellis. p. 55

¹⁶Ellis. p. 65

¹⁷This chart is my own idea, though much of the information was gleaned from Bristow. predominantly from p. 111

ATTITUDES TOWARD WOMEN AND MARRIAGE IN THE FIRST CENTURY

GREEK	JEWISH	PAUL
Aristotle: A female is a deformed male. The male seed implanted in the female will produce male offspring, unless this seed is defective or affected negatively by an external influence, such as a south wind which is moist. ¹⁸	Jewish daily prayer: “Thank you Lord, that I am not a Gentile or a woman.”	Male and female are one in Christ. (Gal. 3:28)
	Only men count in worship, women are to be quiet and out of sight (behind a curtain or in a balcony).	Women and men are together in worship. Women pray and prophesy in worship. (1 Cor. 11:4)
Aristotle: Women are inferior to men in their ability to reason.	Some Jewish fathers would teach their daughters, but they would not be educated like their sons.	Women are encouraged to learn (1 Tim. 2:11). Priscilla taught Apollos (Acts 18:24-26).
Stoics: Sexual intercourse is harmful, and marriage distracts from the study of philosophy.		Marriage and intimacy are a gift from God (1 Cor. 11:12; Ephesus. 5:31).
	Mishnah: A man who is not married is not even a man.	It is better to remain single to serve the Lord (1 Cor. 7:7, 25-35).
Aristotle: A man’s courage is in commanding, a woman’s in obeying		Husbands and wives are to be responsive to the needs of each other (1 Cor. 7:3-5; Eph. 5:22-35).
Greek Culture: Prostitution is an ancient and hallowed institution.	“You shall not commit adultery (Exodus 20:14).	Sexual intimacy must be confined to marriage (1 Cor. 6:15-20; 7:1-2, 36-38; et al.).
	Since Eve, women have been morally weak and are a temptation to men.	“Woman is the glory of the man” (1 Cor. 11:7).
	Mishnah: A man may abstain from sexual intimacy against his wife’s wishes, but a man may impose a monetary fine against his wife if she refuses him.	A husband and wife are each to have authority over the body of the other, and they are not to refrain from sexual intimacy except for a brief time, and then only when both agree. (1 Cor. 7:3-5)
	If the woman fails to bear sons, rabbi’s taught that divorce was in order.	Married couples should remain so (1 Cor. 7:10-23; Matt. 5:32).

It should be noted that no woman elder is clearly mentioned in the New Testament, though one passage may refer to that position. “In Titus 2:3 women may possibly be given a designation as ‘elders’ (πρεσβυτιδας) that is equivalent to ‘bishop’ or ‘overseer’ in Tit 2:5,7.”¹⁹

¹⁸Bristow, John Temple. *What Paul Really Said About Women*. Harper, San Francisco. 1988. p. 115

¹⁹Ellis. p. 77

Her function, though, is to teach younger women. 1 Timothy 3:11 may also refer to women deacons, though it has traditionally been interpreted as “wives of deacons.” The Pastorals include “the husband of but one wife” as a qualification for eldership (1 Tim. 3:2 and Titus 1:6), which may seem to exclude women. But it should be noted that deacons were to fulfill the same qualifications (1 Tim. 3:12), which would disqualify Phoebe from her position of deaconess (Rom. 16:1). “The husband of but one wife” cannot disqualify single men from eldership for two reasons. Both Paul and Jesus were single and Paul encouraged singleness to better serve the Lord. By extension, “the husband of but one wife” does not ipso facto disqualify women from eldership. The phrase “the husband of but one wife” was referring to the great majority of the elders--married men.²⁰

As to the gift of teaching, are Paul’s prohibitions on the women in the areas of teaching and having authority over a man in 1 Corinthians 11 and 1 Timothy 2 applicable today? Interestingly, J.I. Packer, who is against making women presbyters²¹, believes that they are not pertinent. He reasons that today, our authority is the written New Testament which was not available at the time the epistles were being written, when the question of authority was acute. Today, authority for a man or a woman is based in the Scriptures.²² Liefeld puts it this way: “The question should not be, ‘What *authority* does Scripture permit to women?’ but ‘What *ministry* does Scripture permit to women?’ ”²³ There seems to be no reason why women with the gift of teaching should not teach. Even for those who maintain the principle that male authority must be exercised, the woman who teaches could do so under the ‘covering’ of male leadership.²⁴ Women in the New Testament are described as co-workers, deacons, prophets, teachers and apostles all playing an important part in the early church. The fact that they are not specifically referred to as elders should not overly concern us.

In the New Testament texts one finds that ministers are called by various names, including apostles, prophets, teachers, bishops, deacons or elders. Also, the exact description of their duties is not explained. Margaret Howe states, ‘There was no standard practice of leadership in the early church and ... initially title and function varied from place to place.’²⁵

As far as post New Testament times in the life of the early church, Clement of Alexandria insisted that men and women alike may “philosophize”.²⁶ Tertullian, observing men and women in the church, said,

[They] perform their fasts, mutually teaching, mutually exhorting, mutually sustaining. Equally are they both found in the church of God; equally in straits, in persecutions, in refreshments. Neither hides from the other; neither shuns the other; neither is troublesome to the other.²⁷

²⁰For a discussion of seven different interpretations of the phrase “a husband of but one wife,” see my paper, Taylor, Richard M., *Should a Divorced Person be Allowed in Church Leadership?* written for Ethics 560, November, 1994. Regent College. pp. 8-12

²¹Packer in *Christianity Today*... pp. 18-21

²²Packer, J.I. class notes from Systematic Theology IV at Regent College. March, 1995

²³Liefeld, Walter in ed. Clouse, Robert G. *Women in Ministry: Four Views*. InterVarsity Press. Downers Grove, Ill. 1989. p. 145. see also p. 151 “We stand, not under the authority of some teacher, but under the authority of the *written Word of God*.”

²⁴This seems to be Packer’s view, Packer, in *Christianity Today*, p. 21

²⁵Clouse, Robert. G. in ed. Clouse. p. 10

²⁶Bristow. p. 112

²⁷Bristow. p. 112

HEADSHIP, AUTHORITY AND LEADERSHIP IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

One of the principle issues in the women's question is the question of authority. Should the church (and marriage) reflect a hierarchical pattern of authority, or should women be free to exercise the same authority as men in the church? Paul Stevens points to three different analogies to the male/female relationship, 1) Christ and the church 2) Jew and Gentile in a new humanity, and 3) the Holy Trinity.²⁸ In each of the analogies there is a person or people with a priority. Jesus has priority in relation to this church. Salvation comes first to the Jews. The Father has priority with the Son. So we have three biblical analogies of male--female unity in which differentiation and priority contribute to unity rather than prevent it.²⁹

What is the meaning of the word headship (*kephale*)? Does it imply authority over or does it only refer to a physical head, reflecting the idea of source? In English, the word *head* conjures up a figurative connotation of chief, boss, authority, ruler, etc. An English-speaking person reads that the husband is to be head of his wife will probably conclude that the husband is to rule over his wife. And that is exactly how the term has generally been understood historically. Grudem's massive computerized study of the word *kephale*, where he concludes that head signifies authority in the New Testament does not sit well with some scholars. Bilezekian, for one, disagrees with Grudem.

There seems to be no instance in profane Greek literature where a ruler or a hierarch is referred to as head, such as "Alexander was the head of the Greek armies." In ancient Greek literature, there are thousands upon thousands of references to rulers and to persons in positions of authority and leadership. A great variety of words is used to describe such functions, but not *kephale*.³⁰

The word for physical head/ruler is *arche* in Greek and *rosh* in Hebrew. The LXX consistently translated *rosh* with *arche*, not *kephale* when the concept of ruler was meant. Bristow gives possible translations of *kephale* as: physical head, foremost (in position, as a capstone or cornerstone), and one who leads (but never "general" or "captain"), as one who leads into battle.³¹ The Mickelsens translate *kephale* as source of life, top or crown (extremity), source--base--derivation, exalted originator and completer, and one who brings to completion.³² Also, it should be remembered that the Greeks and Hebrews in the ancient world commonly held that, "the heart, not the head, was the center of emotions and spirit."³³ Thus the modern understanding of the head as the brain control center of the body was not held. More work may reveal new insights to our understanding of *kephale*, but one thing is sure, it is not a one-to-one equivalent to the English word "head", which clearly implies authority over.

Similarly, the word for *be subject to* in Eph. 5:22 is *hupotasso*, used in the passive middle voice, meaning something like "give allegiance to," "tend to the needs of," "be supportive of," "be responsive to," or "to place oneself at the disposition of." *Hupotassomai* is not a ranking of persons as ruler and ruled. The word for obedience to authority is *peitharchoo*.³⁴ The relationship between husband and wife is thus couched in a new light for English speakers. The husband is to lead his wife, but not rule over her. In fact, he is to love her as Christ loved the

²⁸Stevens. pp. 126-131

²⁹Stevens. p. 130

³⁰Bilezikian. p. 233.

³¹Bristow. pp. 35-38.

³² Mickelsen, Berkely and Alvera in ed. Mickelson pp. 97-110

³³Payne, Philip Barton. in ed. Mickelsen. p. 119

³⁴Bristow. p.p. 38-41

church (Eph. 5:25). The wife is to place herself at her husband's disposition, supporting him and meeting his needs. They are to be mutually submissive to one another (Eph. 5:21). Many centuries of damage has been done by a misunderstanding of these terms. Leadership in the New Testament is characterized by servanthood. Our example is Christ, who washed his disciples feet (John 13:1-17). He did not come to lord it over his disciples, but to serve them. The greatest must become the servant (Matt. 25:25-28). He is our model for headship. Church leadership is also to be patterned after Christ. A giving, loving leader is not afraid to empower his followers. He is not afraid to share his leadership.

PAUL: THE DIFFICULT PASSAGES

How can the same Paul who says that there is neither male nor female (Gal. 3:28) say "wives, submit to your husbands" (Eph. 5:22), "women should remain silent in the churches" (1 Cor. 14:34) and "I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man; she must be silent." (1 Tim. 2:12) These passages are interpreted in a variety of ways. We will give preference to the two most important passages, 1 Cor. 14 and 1 Tim. 2 after briefly looking at 1 Cor. 11. In so doing, we will look at the cultural context. As we look at the context, we should keep the following in mind: "The situation is not that Paul's teaching is culturally determined, but that his evangelism is culturally directed."³⁵ "While the Bible is not to be thought of as culturally *relative*, it is culturally *relevant*."³⁶

- **1 Corinthians 11:2-16**

Scholars differ as to the meaning of the headship and headcovering in this passage. The work *kephale* has already been discussed. The full cultural context may never be clear. Having her head "uncovered" likely reflected loose morals and sexual promiscuity, whether it reflected the wearing of veils, or the tying up of hair. Paul accepts as a given that the women will be praying and prophesying, but they should do so in a way that will not bring them shame or shame to their husbands. Today, we might ask women to wear what is appropriate when involved in ministry, so they might not bring shame to their husbands (or to the church).

One important factor in this passage is the disclaimer in verses 11-12 that neither man nor woman is independent of each other because although woman came from man, man is now born of woman. This puts in perspective the headship. It is not a 'more important than' or 'priority' headship.

- **1 Corinthians 14:33b-35**

As in all the congregations of the saints,³⁴ women should remain silent in the churches. They are not allowed to speak, but must be in submission, as the Law says.³⁵ If they want to inquire about something, they should ask their own husbands at home; for it is disgraceful for a woman to speak in the church

Any interpretation of this passage must come to grips with its apparent contradiction with 1 Cor 11:5, where Paul recognizes a woman who prays and prophesies in the assembly. The prohibition here is a strong one. Moreover, it is uncertain what Paul is referring to by "as the Law says." Many diverse interpretations are postulated. Gordon Fee gets around this passage nicely by proposing that it was a later interpolation, because 14:34f is found after 14:40 in some

³⁵Liefeld, Walter L. in ed. Clouse. p. 133

³⁶Liefeld in ed. Clouse. p. 151

manuscripts.³⁷ However, since it is found in all extant manuscripts, it seems best to treat it as part of the original letter. Bilezikian (noting seven supporting scholars) takes another tactic to sidestep the passage. He posits that the passage is non-Pauline, Judaic in origin, and that Paul is “quoting derisively the words of his Judeo-Christian opponents. ... In this prohibition statement Paul is giving them back one of their own slogans.”³⁸ Both Fee and Bilezikian make Paul appear more consistent by claiming that the passage did not originate with Paul.

Stephen Clark is on the other extreme. “Thus the issue in 1 Cor. 14:33-36 is probably due respect and good order, not cultural accommodation or doubts about the intellectual abilities of the women. Indeed, the only reason Paul offers for the limitation on women’s speech is their subordination.”³⁹ Ellis feels the instruction is given to the “gifted wives of the prophets whose participation in the service has been the subject of Paul’s teaching in the preceding verses.”⁴⁰ Hurley applies the prohibition to the examination of prophecy by women, which is incompatible with their subordinate role.⁴¹ Others feel that 1 Cor. 11 refers to private worship, while 1 Cor. 14 refers to public worship. The most commonly held view, and possibly the best, is that problem was some form of disruptive speech. Women, who were not used to being in public meetings, in their newfound freedom in Christ, were disrupting the meetings. The word used to remain silent, *sigao*, is a kind of voluntary silence. “*Sigao* is the kind of silence asked for in the midst of disorder and clamor.”⁴² If this last view is right, application today would be to limit disruptive behavior in worship, whether men or women, not to prohibit qualified women from participating.

- **1 Timothy 2:11-14**

¹¹ *A woman should learn in quietness and full submission.* ¹² *I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man; she must be silent.* ¹³ *For Adam was formed first, then Eve.* ¹⁴ *And Adam was not the one deceived; it was the woman who was deceived and became a sinner* ¹⁵ *But women will be saved through childbearing -- if they continue in faith, love and holiness with propriety.*

Bilezikian understands a situation at Ephesus where women were gossiping from house to house and some had even turned away to follow Satan (1 Tim 5:13,15). “Paul brings a decisive solution to this problem: while they are still in the learning stage, women should not attempt to become teachers or aspire to teach their own male teachers.”⁴³ The exclusion of women in Ephesus from teaching is not seen as final, but only a temporary disqualification. Once training has brought out mature faith, love, sanctification, and sound judgment, the sanction would be lifted.⁴⁴

Fee understands the translation to be faulty. A better translation of verse 12 would read, she must be ‘in a quiet demeanor.’ “Most likely in this context, it is against her being ‘up front,’ talking foolishness, or being a ‘busybody’ (5:13).”⁴⁵

³⁷Fee, Gordon, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*. Eerdman. Grand Rapids, 1987. 699-702

³⁸Bilezikian p. 150

³⁹Clark, S.B. *Man and Woman in Christ*. Servant Books, Ann Arbor, Michigan. 1980. p. 187

⁴⁰Ellis. p. 68

⁴¹Hurley, James B. *Man and Woman in Biblical Perspective*. Zondervan. Grand Rapids. 1981. p. 193. Liefeld, Walter in ed. Mickelsen, holds a similar view.

⁴²Bristow. p. 63

⁴³Bilezikian. p. 180

⁴⁴Bilezikian. p. 123

⁴⁵Fee, *New International Biblical Commentary: 1 and 2 Timothy, Titus*. Hendrickson Publishers. Peabody, Massachusetts. 1984, 1988. p. 72

How is 1 Timothy 2:11-12 to be seen in the context of vs. 9-12? Verses 9 and 10 clearly teach a culturally relative application regarding women's adornment. How many women are kicked out of church today because of wearing braided hair or a gold wedding ring? If we so easily get around those verses, why is it so hard to see the next two verses as culturally specific as well?⁴⁶ Neither do we practice "greet one another with a holy kiss" (Rom 16:16; 1 Cor. 16:20; 2 Cor. 13:12; 1 Thess. 5:26) in North America.

Precisely at Ephesus, where Gnostic heresy was being taught, it was important that the gossipers be kept from spreading the errors by teaching others. The appeal to creation and childbearing becomes much more clear by understanding the teaching of many Gnostic groups. Classicist Catherine Kroeger points out some insightful facts about Gnosticism in the first few centuries that may shed light on this passage (admittedly from later than the first century, but may have been present in incipient Gnosticism at Ephesus).⁴⁷ The word *authenteo* (found only here in the New Testament) could mean "to represent oneself as the author, originator, or source of something."⁴⁸ In Gnostic mythology, Eve was created before Adam, was responsible for the creation of the material universe. An alternative translation is offered:

I do not permit woman to teach nor to represent herself as originator of man but she is to be in conformity [with the Scriptures] [or that she keeps it a secret.] For Adam was created first, then Eve.⁴⁹

The phrase, "a woman should learn in quietness and full submission" is an attitude required for any Rabbinic scholar. "Silence was a wall around wisdom. ... The phrase *silence and submission* is a Near Eastern formula implying willingness to heed and obey instruction--in this case that contained in the Word of God."⁵⁰ Other Gnostic's taught that only by ceasing from childbearing could the final consummation take place, and that Jesus came to do away with childbearing, which would explain verse 15. Those who hold to a universal application of this passage usually stress the allusions to creation found in vs. 13-14. But Paul may be refuting false teaching regarding creation, not appealing to creation to make his point universally applicable.

"The statements of 2:11-12 are thus ad hoc instructions intended for a particular situation in Ephesus of false teaching focused on women."⁵¹ Gasque proposes,

It is hermeneutically illegitimate to set up as theologically normative passages such as 1 Corinthians 14:34-35 and 1 Timothy 2:11-12, where Paul is dealing with concrete local situations. ... Galatians 3:28 is the necessary theological starting place for any discussion on the role of women in the church.⁵²

⁴⁶Scholer, David. in ed. Mickelsen, p. 202

⁴⁷Kroeger, Catherine, in ed. Mickelsen. pp. 225-244 see also Bristow, p. 74

⁴⁸Kroeger in ed. Mickelsen. p. 231

⁴⁹Clark Kroeger, Richard and Catherine. *I Suffer Not a Woman: Rethinking 1 Timothy 2:11-15 in Light of Ancient Evidence* Baker Book House, Grand Rapids. 1992. p. 103

⁵⁰Clark Kroeger. pp. 75-76

⁵¹Scholer, David M. in ed. Mickelsen p. 203

⁵²Gasque, W. Ward in ed. Mickelsen, p. 189

CONCLUSIONS

• **3 New Insights**

Through researching this paper, a few new areas were brought to my understanding of the Biblical view on women's ministries.

1. There are Godly, Biblically sound men and women who have wrestled with God's Word and come to a number of different positions on this issue. As with other areas where the body of Christ is not in agreement (e.g. pedabaptism vs. credobaptism, charismatic vs. liturgical worship, Presbyterian vs. Baptist styles of Church government), I must first of all recognize, accept, and love those who are my fellow brothers and sisters in Christ, whether or not they agree with me on every doctrinal point. In the Body, we must work together with others who do not totally agree with us, be they more liberal or more conservative. The forum held at Regent College last fall was exemplary in that four godly men with differing views were able to present their stances in an atmosphere of respect, humility, and mutual commitment. That, after all, is one of the strengths of Regent.
2. The traditional understanding of headship/submission as meaning primarily "authority over and subject to" is highly questionable. Both in secular Greek and Septuagint usage, the word *kephale* is seldom used to connote "authority". The Greek language has another word, *arche*, which means both physical head and authority. Men throughout history have abused their authority in marriage and in the church. Leadership should be modeled after Jesus--the great servant leader.
3. In regard to Paul's difficult passages, it seems as if Paul is best understood as writing to specific cultural situations at Corinth and Ephesus. Previously uneducated women were given new freedoms in the church, through Christ. In Corinth, Paul instructed them regarding proper dress (1 Cor. 11) and warned them about being disruptive in the worship service (1 Cor. 14). In Ephesus, where Gnostic teaching was rampant and women were drawn to heresy, Paul instructed the women not to teach, but to quietly learn (1 Tim. 2). Appealing to creation in the text does not legitimize the passages for all time. The Gnostics also appealed to creation, some even claiming that Eve was created before Adam. Proper application for today would not be to keep women silent and wear headcoverings. A more apt application would be to keep people from being disruptive in the church, to prohibit uninformed, heretical men and women from teaching God's people today, and to not let dress get in the way of proclaiming God's message. All teaching is to be judged by the Word, which was not available in Paul's time (at least not the New Testament). Ward Gasque, in comparing the apparent limitation of women's freedom in the Pauline passages, states,

The danger for the church in Paul's day lay in the exact opposite direction from the church in our day; that is, there was the danger that it might press the principle of Christian freedom too far. Rather than defending the status quo (as often the case with the church in our day) the first-century church called into question many of the fundamental structures of contemporary society.

• **Some Observations Regarding Christian Marriage**

In our desire to elevate the role of women, we must be careful not to fall into egalitarian, radical feminist ideology. There is clearly a differentiation of the sexes. The Bible does not teach androgyny. The Scriptures are not unisex. As Packer puts it, "Viva la difference." The husband's role as head should be redefined, he is still somehow to be the leader--but a loving, giving leader. The woman is to follow, but not in a blind submission taught from some pulpits.

Christian marriage should be marked by mutuality, a characteristic that should also be carried over into the church. A better term might be “equalitarianism”. The curse has been substantially reversed. I think the most honest position that I can conclude on the role of men and women in marriage is that there is a sort of ambiguity, an ambiguity that Stevens refers to as “inspired”.⁵³ Clearly there is unity and equality between the sexes. Except for a few passages in Paul (and possibly 1 Peter 3), one would think that women were completely set free in the age inaugurated by the cross.

• **Application for Today**

If the New Hermeneutic is true, that headship/authority has traditionally been misunderstood, then a new application principle should emerge. Nothing should be done in our worship services that will socially or culturally endanger the gospel message from being presented which does not in itself contradict the Gospel. Paul became all things to all men (1 Cor. 9:22). In late 20th century North America, that means women should have the freedom to aspire to any position to which a man may aspire. What does the average woman feel, who is free to express herself in any level a leadership in the “world”, when she comes into a church and is told no women are allowed in the pulpit, nor to administer the sacraments, nor allowed to make the important decisions? Do we condition the gospel message in our traditional churches by turning off visitors who come to a male dominated setting?

Just as lack of submissiveness of wives to their husbands (expressed by proper social decorum in the first century) would cause offense to the gospel, so the opposite would occur today if an outsider came into one of the traditionally male-dominated services where women never speak or minister. It would surely be interpreted as demeaning to women and cause hindrance to the gospel.⁵⁴

In Latin America, a male dominated church is more in line with the culture, which does not make one culture right and another one wrong. There are women pastors in Latin America, but churches with a woman head pastor generally have many more women than men attending, and are eyed skeptically by many.

Of course, the traditional interpretation is favored by nineteen centuries of interpretation, and the most straightforward reading of the English text as it is now translated. Yet, history has not always proved itself right. Take the slavery issue. Not until the nineteenth or perhaps the twentieth century was slavery universally seen as evil by Christians. The Reformation overturned a millennium of misunderstanding over the term “justification by faith” and the priesthood of all believers. Is the Lord revealing by His Spirit in these days a fresh understanding of his Word for today? Or is the gospel being compromised to the culture around us?

Fortunately, there is some agreement from both sides. Both agree on the full dignity of women and on full equality before God. Both concur that women are given a full range of spiritual gifts, and should be encouraged to use them. Even most conservatives would have no problem with women teaching and leading in the sacraments. Not too many years ago, the question was whether women should even be allowed to speak in a public assembly.⁵⁵ Where the line is generally drawn today is over ordination--separating office and function.

⁵³Stevens, p. 130

⁵⁴Johnson, Alan. in ed. Mickelsen. p. 157

⁵⁵Snodgrass, Klyne. in Mickelson. p. 180

Interestingly, Paul would probably not recognize 20th century ordination anyway. Because the water is muddied on this issue, care should be taken to minister to all in the flock. As mature believers, we need to work together with true brothers and sisters who hold different interpretations.

My own personal opinion is that if I am to err, it is better to err on the side of grace. Although I do not feel 100 percent certain, this study has taken away my major reservations about women in ministry, and given me even greater reservations about restricting women in ministry. That means, where I can, I will encourage women to participate fully in ministry without restraints in regard to office or function. The church today needs women to complete the ministry that is only partly done by men. For one, pastoral counseling of women is better carried out by women. The pastoral ministry needs the gifts and abilities of women. Paul compares his ministry among the Thessalonians with that of a mother caring for her little children (1 Thess. 2:7). Walter Wright, in describing leaders, claims that training of the new generation of leaders today focuses on nurturing models, which are more characteristic of feminine traits. It is easier to train women than men for this leadership style because it comes more natural to them.⁵⁶ Women often make better pastors than men, especially in the area of pastoral care. Many are better preachers, teachers, etc. Women need to be encouraged to function with full freedom in the church.

I have taken a leap--undergone a paradigm shift if you wish. It is not the first time (nor probably the last time), that God has led me to a new and deeper understanding of His Word, an understanding that I must say has enabled me to breathe a new breath of freedom. If that brings freedom to me, think what it must do for women. May it lead to blessing in the Body of Christ.

⁵⁶Wright, Walter, class notes from course on Leadership as Servants, Regent College, March 15, 1995

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