

The Role of Women in the Church

1 Tim. 2:8-10

Intro: Walking and struck up conversation with a lady who attends a new congregation in Mt. Juliet. She mentioned that the services were so far poorly attended. As she thought of possible reasons she wondered out loud if one of them might be that the “pastor” is woman. That would indeed be a problem for those who want to follow the teaching of the NT.

The changes of our society has resulted in women occupying positions of leadership in churches, not heretofore given to them. Feminists have long regarded Christianity as a barrier to woman's progress because of its traditional emphasis on the woman's subjection. It was only a matter of time until women would insist that they have a right to exercise rule and leadership in the churches. And many churches have allowed that for some time.

It is important to understand the key Biblical texts so that we know what exactly it is that women may not do and what they can do in God's service in their relationship to men. I want to look together with you and a couple of key texts on this issue.

Let's read together 1 Tim. 2:8-10.

The context suggests that Paul is discussing the proper role of men and women in situations or circumstances that involve leadership or the exercise of dominion.

First note the contrast between "men" in v. 8 and "women" in v. 9. That contrast suggests that Paul is assigning roles.

Second note that these passages concern situations where both women and men are present together. That should be evident not only from v. 9 in the appeal to modesty but also v. 12. This text given to Timothy to deliver to the congregation in Ephesus and was intended to regulate the conduct of men and women, not only in the assembly but in other settings where men and women were gathered together.

Third, note that the exhortations are built upon the order of headship and submissiveness that was enjoined upon man and women from the creation itself. It is important that we see that these arguments are derived from the relationship of men and women in the home! The church itself is an extension of the home in the sense that it brings husbands and wives together into a larger circle where the principles of headship would also apply. It is interesting to notice that all NT texts on the role of men and women in the church derives from the teaching of Genesis 1-3 given to men and women in their homes. Those reasons are:

The order of creation (man was made first, therefore, he was given authority over the women);

Paul adds a point not made elsewhere. The woman took the lead in the garden in the first sin against God.

So Paul is discussing the proper way for women and men to behave in gatherings of men and women in order to show respect for the order of headship established by God from the beginning.

The men are to pray, v. 8.

Men is "aner" (males) , not anthropos (mankind). This lends itself to the suggestion that Paul is using the word "pray" in a special sense. This is born out by the context. He is speaking of the leading of prayer! That role is reserved for the men, not the women.

The expression "in every place" may very well point specifically to Christian gatherings such as the assembly where disciples came together. It would indeed be strange exegesis that regarded this text as if it applied only to gatherings other than the assembly (which we do not know that the church at Ephesus had) and not apply it to gatherings which we know they had! Again the point is that this teaching includes the assembly! Lifting up holy hands (unpolluted); without wrath (anger toward others) and dissension (dialogismos), wrong thoughts.

The women are to dress modestly, v. 9.

This command immediately sets forth the unobstrusive role they manifest in gatherings with men. It is fitting to mention a woman's clothing in this context, for by it she may call undo attention to herself in gathers for worship and teaching. Paul's concern is not that women are not wearing enough clothes, but that they may be ostentatious in their clothing. Thus a woman's clothing should be well-arranged (a play on words)--kosmio, kosmein, something like adorning herself with adorning dress, arranged herself with well-arranged or proper clothing.

The kind of clothing Paul has in mind in mixed gatherings involves display of wealth and the undue attention to physical beauty. Hence he mentions in particular "braided hair, gold jewelry, costly garments.

Aidos means shamefastness, moral sensibility that shrinks back from transgressing the limits of propriety.

Sobriety--sophrosune (self-control).

The point is a women should dress in mixed gatherings in a way that shows careful thought about the purposes of our gatherings, to focus on God and His word and not to become a focal point.

The women are to learn in quietness, v. 11.

Already the implication is clear that the men are to be the teachers in mixed gatherings. That is, she gives place to man's leadership as the teacher. She does not try in any way to occupy that role! And that becomes evident in her speech and actions.

The woman is urged to manifest "entire submissiveness" in her learning. "Hupotage" means to arrange oneself under another, respect the divinely assigned roles of leadership.

With quietness (hesuchia).

Tranquility arising from within causing no disturbance to others. Notice that this is not a prohibition to the women to speak in mixed gatherings for the purpose of learning.

Notice the consistent use of the word "hesuchia" for quiet and not absolute silence. This verse gives women permission to speak in mixed gatherings, but in a way that honors the leadership of the teacher. If she seeks to take control of a learning situation, then she has crossed the line and taken a leadership role. Hence Paul is now ready to present the contrasting idea:

The woman is not to teach or exercise dominion over man but remain quiet.

This verse has been torturously wrested by brethren through the years. Most of this could have been prevented by some careful study of the Greek text and by comparing Scripture with Scripture.

There are a few brethren around the country that hold the "no Bible class, no women teachers" position. They limit the passage to the time when the church assembles and contend that no other arrangement for teaching is allowable. Consequently women cannot be teachers in Bible classes. It is not "I suffer not a woman to teach (period)" but "to teach nor exercise dominion over the man."

Well-intentioned brethren used to diagram the sentence in English like this (chart) and came up with the distinction between "teaching the man" and "teaching over the man".

It is right for a woman to teach a man (Ac. 18:26) but not to "teach over the man". Thus, they created a special phrase to describe unlawful teaching.

But, that can be easily shown to be an artificial construction by looking at the Greek text and recognizing that there is no preposition for "over" relating to both infinitives (teach and exercise dominion) such that we might read, "I do not allow a woman to teach over a man" or "I do not allow a woman to exercise dominion over a man". The word "over" in our translations goes with the second infinitive and is the translators way of translating the second verb with means to "exercise dominion over". I'm not saying the conclusion is wrong. I'm saying, its incorrect exegesis and misuse of Biblical terminology!

So what is Paul saying? The key is the word "nor". The Greek word "oude" is an explicative particle and has the force of something like this: **I suffer not a woman to teach (nor in any other way) exercise dominion over the man.**

Paul is not talking about any and all teaching; Paul is not talking about a particular kind of teaching! It is teaching that by its very nature involves

the exercise of dominion over men. That's why Paul says here she must instead be silent.

What kind of teaching is this?

It is not ordinary personal conversation between a man and a woman.

If everytime a man and woman talked to each other, the woman was exercising dominion, then a woman could never discuss with a man God's word or she would be sinning!

Furthermore a woman could never teach the word of God to any male individual (Mt. 28:20). She could not fulfill the great commission!

She could not encourage with Scripture any Christian brother who has fallen from the faith (Gal. 6:1). This position would nullify a great deal of the woman's responsibility as taught by the Bible. I assume we would all agree that teaching a man in conversation and exercising dominion over him are two different matters.

It is not group conversation or discussion.

If every time men and women got together and a woman spoke in the group, she would be exercising dominion, then a woman could never speak in any group of people where the truth was being discussed.

Yet Priscilla did that very thing in a group of three (Ac. 18:26). I suggest that if she could do that in a group of three, it can be done in a group of thirty, such as we have in our Bible class.

A woman is not exercising dominion just because she speaks in a group in response to one in authority. In fact, Paul's choice of words shows that a woman may speak where men are present and where men are leading as long as she learns "quietly" and with a submissive attitude (not the word for "silence" or "speechlessness".)

It is teaching where one has authority over all others. It is that situation where leadership or dominion is inherent in the arrangement itself.

It would certainly include exercising a leadership role in the proclamation of the word in the assembly. This does not mean that a woman cannot speak at all in an assembly. We have already seen that in mixed gatherings

Moreover, woman may not teach in any other teaching arrangement other than the assembly where the arrangement is of the same nature. (Here we should avoid arbitrary distinctions between "the church assembled" and "the church not assembled". Does the fact that the ladies may take a few children out of the room change the relationship of a women to the men in the audience?) Any mixed assembly where the

purpose is for one to teach and all others are to listen, a woman may not properly address the assembly.

A woman may not be the teacher in a mixed Bible class, for the same reason that she cannot speak in the assembly—because the teacher controls, leads, and directs the class. This a woman could not do without leading.

However, she may speak in such an arrangement, if her intention is to learn or teach in quietness. In so doing, she is not leading the class; the male teacher is! She is submitting to leadership. Priscilla taught in a class of three, but with a spirit of submissiveness to her husband.

We may summarize by saying a woman may never teach where she occupies a position of leadership over men, where they are obligated to silence while she instructs. She may teach in personal conversation or in group discussion as long as her intention is to instruct or learn without exercising dominion over the men in her presence.

A woman may not exercise dominion over men in other ways.

Note that in addition a woman may not exercise dominion in other ways besides in teaching.

A woman could not Scripturally occupy a leadership role like an elder or someone who leads in a mixed gathering to discuss church work like our congregational meeting.

The woman may not lead a church meeting to discuss church business, but she may certainly express herself concerning church work in just the same way she might speak in a teaching situation (with quietness and submissiveness).

A woman could not Scripturally lead a mixed group of men and women in worship, since leading in worship is a male role.

A woman may not lead the church in prayer, but she may certainly bring before the congregation prayer requests.

Conclusion: As disciples we should respect God's teaching and not bow down to cultural demands that women have roles God has not given. On the other hand, we must not be oppressive in our application of these texts.