

## 1 TIMOTHY 2:9-15

### WOMEN PREACHERS AND THE WORD OF GOD

“Women should adorn themselves in respectable apparel, with modesty and self-control, not with braided hair and gold or pearls or costly attire, but with what is proper for women who profess godliness—with good works. Let a woman learn quietly with all submissiveness. I do not permit a woman to teach or to exercise authority over a man; rather, she is to remain quiet. For Adam was formed first, then Eve; and Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and became a transgressor. Yet she will be saved through childbearing—if they continue in faith and love and holiness, with self-control.”<sup>1</sup>

Almost a year ago, I delivered a message bearing the identical title to the message this day.<sup>2</sup> I knew at the time that the message would be considered controversial, and it did prove to be so. The message was not well-received in some quarters; however, I have never preached to obtain the accolades and praise from those who listen to the message. Disapproval of women functioning as elders, or even filling the pulpit, is controversial in great measure, because of failure by the pulpit boldly to declare the Word of the Living God. Because this is true, the churches of this day have been feminised to a dismaying extent.

The adoption of attitudes that are antithetical and even hostile to the Word of God has ensured the elevation of women to the eldership and the diaconate among modern churches. Increasingly, evangelical churches view these ministries to the saints as positions of power. According to this thoroughly modern worldview, if women are proscribed from functioning in these roles, they are excluded from power. Exclusion from power for any identifiable group—excepting perhaps white, heterosexual males—is strictly verboten in contemporary culture. Thus, women were said to be discriminated against and kept from realising their full potential within God’s work if they could not serve as elders and/or deacons. In order to accommodate this inordinate desire for power within the churches it was necessary to discount two millennia of church practise and impose a radical reinterpretation of the Scriptures.

Novel concepts were advanced to support the new push to feminise the face of the Faith. Scholars “discovered” new evidence for a female apostle and dismissed much of the apostolic literature as misogynistic and bound by Jewish concepts that were no longer applicable to the churches of the Master. Perhaps the most vigorous push for reinterpretation has been mounted against Paul’s First Letter to Timothy. In this letter, the Apostle to the Gentiles has written: “Women again must dress in becoming manner, modestly and soberly, not with elaborate hair-styles, not decked out with gold or pearls or expensive clothes, but with good deeds, as befits women who claim to be religious. A woman must be a learner, listening quietly and with due submission. I do not permit a woman to be a teacher, nor must woman domineer over man; she should be quiet. For Adam was created first, and Eve afterwards; and it was not Adam who was deceived; it was the woman who, yielding to deception, fell into sin” [1 TIMOTHY 2:9-14].<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from **The Holy Bible: English Standard Version**. Crossway Bibles, a division of Good News Publishers, 2001. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

<sup>2</sup> Michael Stark, “Women Preachers and the Word of God,” <http://newbeginningsbaptist.ca/clientimages/42652/sermonarchie/1%20timothy%202.11-15%20women%20preachers%20and%20the%20word%20of%20god.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> **The New English Bible** (Oxford University Press, New York 1970)

What is apparent upon reflection and when considering the Apostle's statements preceding this portion of the Letter, is that there are some serious difficulties with these modern efforts to reinterpret the Word. If we allow that Paul's statement to the men leading in prayer is universal, then it follows of necessity that what is stated concerning the role of women among the churches must likewise be universal. This must be stated as it has become somewhat popular in recent days to argue that Paul was correcting a local problem in Ephesus. Some feminist theologians argue that the situation in Ephesus was an aberration; therefore, the instruction provided in this passage is not to be applied as the normal pattern for the churches.

**GENERAL CONSIDERATIONS CONCERNING WOMEN IN PASTORAL ROLES** — Was this portion of the Word the sole proscription against women functioning in the role of congregational teachers, it would still weigh heavily upon the people of God; however, there are other considerations in this matter. There are broad implications of the debate over setting women apart to pastoral leadership. Among the areas of concern that must be raised are questions touching such fields as bibliology, hermeneutics, Christology, trinitarianism and ecclesiology.

Though admittedly speaking broadly, I do wish to touch briefly on these several areas. For those wishing to elevate women to congregational oversight, the Scriptures as translated must be jettisoned in favour of gender-neutral versions. Otherwise, advocates of women pastors will be continually frustrated by the language employed throughout the New Testament. I admit that this is not a strong argument for rejecting feminist theology, but this consideration must not be neglected. Supporters of female eldership will feel increasing pressure to transform liturgical language, seeking to ensure that it is inclusive. Shortly, churches will be praying to "Our Father-Mother who art in heaven," preaching that God gave "His only Child" and reciting creeds affirming, "We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Sovereign, the giver of life, who proceeds from the Father-Mother and from the child."<sup>4</sup>

Traditional hermeneutics advocates understanding the historical-cultural context of the passage one is reading; feminist theology introduces a theology of victimhood. Scriptures will be reinterpreted from the standpoint of woman as victim. Where this leads is anyone's guess. Once this concession is made, it will be impossible to exclude black theology, gay theology, ecological theology, liberation theology and so forth. In fact, it is a sorrowful observation that one of the strongest arguments presented for the ordination of practising homosexuals is that the churches are already ordaining women to ministry.

Feminist theology challenges Christology. In particular, recent arguments are presented for a "non-violent atonement."<sup>5</sup> The concept is driven by the feminist attempts to rescue the atonement from its harsh punishment angle. Women are said to recoil from the idea that God would punish anyone, much less punish His Son because of man's sinful condition. The argument presented quite often today is that males shaped the various theories of atonement.<sup>6</sup> Thus, modern feminist theologians tend to repudiate the cross as an instrument of violence against the powerless and powerless. The cross, they argue, justifies violence against the weak.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> See Mike Stallard, "The Theological Implications Of A Woman's Role In Church Leadership," *Journal of Ministry and Theology*, Volume 12, No. 1, 2008, pp. 7-8; Telford Work, "J. Denny Weaver, The Nonviolent Atonement," *Theology Today*, <http://www.westmont.edu/~work/articles/nonviolent.html>, accessed 25 July 2013

<sup>5</sup> E.g. J. Denny Weaver, **The Nonviolent Atonement** (Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, MI 2001)

<sup>6</sup> Irenaeus and recapitulation theory; Cappadocian fathers and ransom theory; Anselm and satisfaction theory; Abelard and moral influence theory; Reformers and penal substitution theory; Hugo Grotius and government theory.

<sup>7</sup> See Scot McKnight, "Feminism and Atonement," <http://blog.beliefnet.com/jesuscreed/2006/02/feminism-and-atonement.html>, accessed 25 July 2013

Trinitarian theology is challenged as feminist leaders reject the idea that subordination and equality can be simultaneously true. According to these leaders, accepting a submissive role automatically means that a woman does not have equal status with a man. However, Scripture teaches that the Son submits to the Father and the Spirit submits to the Son. Therefore, egalitarians and feminist theologians are on the horns of a dilemma. Anyone reading the Gospel of John will see the subordination of the Son to the Father. To be certain, **JOHN 1:1** teaches that Jesus is God: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.” However, in **JOHN 14:28**, Jesus asserts that the Father is greater than the Son when he says, “You heard me say to you, ‘I am going away, and I will come to you.’ If you loved me, you would have rejoiced, because I am going to the Father, for the Father is greater than I.” Jesus’ high priestly prayer in **JOHN 17** demonstrates the tension in God who has become flesh.

These concerns must be addressed; neither can other issues of Scripture be ignored. For instance, it is significant that *Jesus named no women to serve as Apostles*. While feminist theologians have argued that Jesus could not offend Jewish tradition, the argument falls flat. There is no question but that Jesus treated women with respect; nevertheless, when appointing those who would serve as Apostles, Jesus chose no women. If, as feminist theologians argue, Jesus came to abolish role distinctions, wouldn’t the appointment of Apostles be the time? Nevertheless, Jesus was the only person with authority to appoint Apostles. If He did not do so when He was walking the Judean hills, when would be the right time? When would society, much less the churches which He loves, be ready for female apostles? According to many contemporary theologians, this act would require waiting until the Twentieth Century. Until then, God would be required to adapt His Word to the prevailing patriarchal culture of the Old Testament to gain a hearing. According to this view, not even Jesus Christ could break free from **GENESIS 3** and the curse pronounced by the LORD God!

Saul of Tarsus, a male, was divinely appointed to serve as an Apostle after Judas had fallen [see **ACTS 9:1-19**]. *When the Twelve took it upon themselves to choose someone to replace Judas, why did they not consider a woman?* They were familiar with Jesus’ teaching and certainly understood His will in these matters; however, they chose between Justus and Matthias [see **ACTS 1:21-26**].

Much has been made of Paul’s greeting to one particular woman in his Letter to Roman Christians. In **ROMANS 16:7**, Paul writes, “Greet Andronicus and Junia, my kinsmen and my fellow prisoners. They are well known to the apostles, and they were in Christ before me.” Junia is a feminine name; thus, a growing number of contemporary theologians are prepared to argue that this was a “female apostle.” What is uncontroverted is that this woman was known to Paul. She is associated with Andronicus, who was likely her husband. This couple were early converts to the Faith, having trusted Christ before the Gentile mission. This couple appears to have been imprisoned at some point, possibly sharing time in gaol with him, and he calls them his kinsmen. Either they were part of his family or they are possibly identified as belonging to the tribe of Benjamin, as was Paul.

It is his statement that they “are well known to the apostles” that generates controversy. Does this mean they were honoured in the eyes of the apostles, or does it mean that they were honoured among the apostles? The text does not say. However, you should know that the term “apostle” was used of messengers (itinerating teachers or missionaries) sent out by the churches [see **PHILIPPIANS 2:24**; **2 CORINTHIANS 8:23**]. Allowing that Paul did identify Junia as an “apostle” does not mean that she bore official status. Since she is the sole individual thus identified in the New Testament, it is not likely that she had official status.

*No women ever served as a priest under the Old Covenant. None of the Old Testament writers were female.* No woman had an ongoing prophetic (speaking before people) ministry like that of Elijah, Elisha or any of the other prophets named in the Old Testament. With respect to *women identified as prophetesses*, it is significant that Deborah declined to lead the military campaign against the Canaanites, deferring instead to a man, Barak. It is true that Miriam [see **EXODUS 15:20**], Deborah [see **JUDGES 4:4**], Huldah [see **2 KINGS 22:14**] and Isaiah's wife [see **ISAIAH 8:3**] are called prophetesses; yet, none had a permanent calling to that office. Miriam, Deborah and Huldah each gave only one recorded prophecy and Isaiah's wife none; she is called a prophetess because she gave birth to a child whose name had prophetic meaning. A fifth woman mentioned as a prophetess, Noadiah, was a false prophetess [see **NEHEMIAH 6:14**]. God did speak through women on a few limited occasions, but no woman had such an ongoing ministry.<sup>8</sup>

Again, there is *no recognition of a woman serving as an elder* either in the writings of Paul or in the General Epistles. Nothing can be said to alter this observation. Again, advocates of women preachers have argued at various times that Paul and the other Apostles were misogynists or that they were enmeshed in the patriarchy of that ancient culture; but such arguments are reactionary, at best. Paul commended women for participating in numerous ministries of the churches; however, he never even hinted that they were to function as elders. One cannot read the statements of the writers of Scripture when admonishing husbands to esteem their wives without drawing the conclusion that consideration and recognition of the worth of a woman is of utmost importance in the godly home.

However, *several statements in Scripture speak pointedly against permitting women to serve in the role of leading a congregational meeting.* One such proscription found in the Word is **1 CORINTHIANS 14:33-35**. There, the Apostle to the Gentiles has written, "As in all the churches of the saints, the women should keep silent in the churches. For they are not permitted to speak, but should be in submission, as the Law also says. If there is anything they desire to learn, let them ask their husbands at home. For it is shameful for a woman to speak in church."

"They are not permitted to speak." In light of **1 CORINTHIANS 11:2-16**, which gives permission for women to pray or prophesy in the church meetings, the silence commanded here seems not to involve the absolute prohibition of a woman addressing the assembly. Therefore (1) some take "keep silent" to mean not taking an authoritative teaching role as **1 TIMOTHY 2:8-15** indicates; but (2) the better suggestion is to relate it to the preceding regulations about evaluating the prophets. Recall what Paul wrote in an earlier verse: "Let two or three prophets speak, and let the others weigh what is said" [**1 CORINTHIANS 14:29**]. In this instance, Paul would be indicating that the women should not speak up during such an evaluation, since such questioning would be in violation of the submission to male leadership as expected through appeal to the Old Testament ("the Law," e.g., **GENESIS 2:18**).<sup>9</sup>

**THE PRONOUNCEMENT** — It is important to note what is not said in these verses. Nowhere does the Apostle speak of ability; rather, he focuses on attitude. The passage says nothing concerning worth or merit, either for males or for females. No one should infer from what is written in the text that women are inferior in intellect, in spiritual perspicuity or in capability. Before God, both males and females in Christ have received the full rights of sons [see **GALATIANS 3:26**]. Each alike has now received divine adoption permitting access to the Father and ensuring each a place in God's family.

<sup>8</sup> John F. MacArthur, Jr., **MacArthur New Testament Commentary: 1 Timothy** (Moody Press, Chicago, IL 1995) 83

<sup>9</sup> Cf. Footnote, **The NET Bible First Edition** (Biblical Studies Press, 2006)

Focusing as it does on women at worship, the common thread in the text is the relationship to public behaviour. Paul links this behavior with living “a peaceful and quiet life, godly and dignified” [1 TIMOTHY 2:2]. The lifestyle of Christians impacts the church’s outreach to non-Christians [1 TIMOTHY 2:3-7]. A saying that has found its way into contemporary church life states, “People from church keep people from church.” Christians either draw people to Christ, or they repel people from Christ. Paul urges Titus to lead the people to “adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour” [TITUS 2:10]. Peter anticipates that Christians will so live that people will “ask ... for a reason for the hope that is in you” [1 PETER 3:15].

There is an apparent interrelationship of belief and behaviour that is emphasised in this particular letter; and the present passage is an important example of that. Chapter one informed us of the need not only for faith but also for a good conscience on the part of a Christian leader. Readers will observe in chapter three the importance of public reputation on the part of elders. There is a private side to worship; however, here in chapter two the open side of the church at worship is under consideration. Paul is far more concerned about church behavior than he is about church order. That concern ultimately affects missionary strategy.<sup>10</sup>

This is a vital point that is neglected in a day in which “casual” is sometimes carried to an extreme. How one dresses can have an impact on the mission of the congregation. If we take the chapter in context, men will recognise that they are to come to worship with prepared hearts and women will give evidence of the spirit of holiness through modesty in dress and deportment. Paul is not saying that women must be dowdy; rather he insists that their dress is to reflect modesty and self-control—an outward reflection of what lies within because they are Christians.

I have learned a few things concerning people in my years of service before the Master. Whenever we are given either proscription or permission, our tendency is to test the parameters. Young girls given the command to wear clothing no shorter than their fingertips when their hands are relaxed at their sides will complain that their fingers are too long! Told to cut their hair, young men will ask, “How short?” It is human nature to test the limits. Wisely, when the Apostle commends modesty and self-control, he is not dictating style, but rather he is urging a godly response that will not dishonour the Lord. In short, ladies, your dress should match your profession. If you profess Christ, dress in such a manner that you do not detract from His Name.

A subtle shift in emphasis has occurred for saints gathered in assembly in this day. Christians have transitioned from seeing the church gathered as a time for equipping one another for service to a time for personal worship. If we are brutally honest, the average professing Christian today could do very well without ever participating in the services of the congregation. That Christian can watch a YouTube video of a sermon, hum a chorus while thinking of the words or read a page from a devotional booklet and claim to have worshipped. Since the average professing Christian does not intend to expose himself or herself to ridicule through witnessing or ministering in the community, he or she will feel self-fulfilled. However, the New Testament concept of the church is a gathered community that builds one another, encourages one another and comforts one another. The church can never function as the church without uniting.

Remember that the whole of this chapter focuses on the church at worship. Restating the principle, *a woman is to exhibit a spirit of gentleness and submission—especially in worship*. When the Apostle writes of “a woman” [singular] he sets forth a principle embracing all women and not married women only. The principle is binding, then, on all Christian women—married, single, formerly married or never married.

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<sup>10</sup> See Walter L. Liefield, **The NIV Application Commentary: 1 and 2 Timothy, Titus** (Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI 1999) 105

The second point emphasised by this principle is that a woman *should learn* ... and not teach. Clearly the Apostle says nothing at this point about women as teachers, but he does say clearly that women are responsible to learn. All Christians are to grow, and especially would we expect growth “in grace and knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ” [2 PETER 3:18]. Paul’s words are not an excuse for men to cease growing, but his attention at this moment is focused on women at worship. Clearly, in the view of the Apostle, women are expected to learn.

The manner in which a woman should learn is “quietly with all submissiveness.” There is nothing in this statement that we haven’t already discovered in the manner of life expected of all Christian women. A wife is to be submissive to her own husband. Such an attitude of gracious, voluntary submission honours Christ and is considered a virtue before Him. In fact, to refuse to be subject to one’s husband is sinful. Just so, an unmarried woman is to reveal a submissive spirit toward the leadership God has appointed in the church.

**THE PROSCRIPTION** — “I do not permit a woman to teach or to exercise authority over a man; rather, she is to remain quiet.” Bear in mind that we are considering the church at worship. The instructions deal with the people of God in assembly. Simply stated, a woman is permitted neither to occupy the office of a teacher nor to wield authority in a pastoral capacity over men.

Almost half a century ago, J. B. Phillips produced a masterful translation of the New Testament; in that translation he renders the **TWELFTH VERSE** thusly, “I don’t allow women to teach, nor do I ever put them in positions of authority over men—I believe their role is to be receptive.”<sup>11</sup> The principle states that “a woman [should] learn quietly with all submissiveness.” We would thus infer that this divine command reflects her position in the home as well as her role in the church. A submissive spirit honours the Lord; this is especially true when exhibited in the life of a Christian woman.

Should someone contend that because women are excluded from eldership they are excluded from power and decision-making, I would remind you that each Christian is to aspire to serve, not to lead! That individual who would be a true leader of God’s people must be the servant of all. Jesus taught us, “If anyone would be first, he must be last of all and servant of all” [MARK 9:35]. Later, the Master makes the case for voluntary servanthood stronger still. “Whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be slave of all. For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many” [MARK 10:43-45]. Let the woman who thinks she is kept from power weigh this thought; let men, also, who may be prone to abuse the responsibility arising from occupying the position of a pastor/teacher confront this selfsame truth.

The issue before us is as simple as the pronouncement of the Word of God, which we must either embrace as His revealed will for us or reject as culturally bound and thus irrelevant. The challenge facing us as Christians is nothing less than submission to the revealed will of God; the issue is whether we will be holy and separated to the will of God, or whether we will be fleshly and surrendered to our own febrile imaginations.

It would be a dreadful error should anyone infer from these words that women are incapable of teaching. It must be stressed that the passage says nothing concerning ability or intelligence or even the capacity to speak of the grace of God. Likewise, no one should conclude that a woman can have no ministry within a congregation; such a contention is folly wide the mark. Paul does not absolutely prohibit women from teaching. Multiple verses of Scripture inform believers that women can and should teach as even brief reflection will indicate.

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<sup>11</sup> J. B. Phillips, **The New Testament in Modern English** (The Macmillan Co., © 1958, 1960) p. 437

***Priscilla assumed the lead in instructing Apollos concerning the Faith.*** “Now a Jew named Apollos, a native of Alexandria, came to Ephesus. He was an eloquent man, competent in the Scriptures. He had been instructed in the way of the Lord. And being fervent in spirit, he spoke and taught accurately the things concerning Jesus, though he knew only the baptism of John. He began to speak boldly in the synagogue, but when Priscilla and Aquila heard him, they took him aside and explained to him the way of God more accurately” [ACTS 18:24-26]. To be sure, Priscilla and Aquila were respectful toward Apollos, instructing him in private. Neither took it upon themselves to accost him publicly.

***Older women are expected to teach the younger women*** in practical conduct within the Faith—a ministry which no conscientious pastor dare undertake without exposing himself to serious jeopardy. Paul writes, “Older women likewise are to be reverent in behavior, not slanderers or slaves to much wine. They are to teach what is good, and so train the young women to love their husbands and children, to be self-controlled, pure, working at home, kind, and submissive to their own husbands, that the word of God may not be reviled” [TITUS 2:3-5]. An elder has no business attending in the home of single women by himself; he is to respect women enough not to expose them, or himself, to the threat of gossip. Surely, the Apostle’s admonition to Timothy applies in this matter. “Let no one despise you for your youth, but set the believers an example in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith, in purity” [1 TIMOTHY 4:12].

Assuredly, ***women are encouraged to teach their own children***, and by extension children reached through the outreach ministries of the congregation. “I am reminded of your sincere faith, a faith that dwelt first in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice and now, I am sure, dwells in you as well” [2 TIMOTHY 1:5]. Paul followed these words of commendation by writing, “Continue in what you have learned and have firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it and how from childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus” [2 TIMOTHY 3:14, 15].

***Women are encouraged to glorify God through sharing*** in the teaching of “psalms and hymns and spiritual songs” [COLOSSIANS 3:16]. Among the early churches, women even baptised other women—a practise that has fallen into disuse in this day. Admittedly, this practise arose because candidates for baptism were not robed when baptised; thus, for the sake of propriety, men were not present at the baptism of women, and *vice versa*. In society, women are encouraged to witness to the grace of God, endeavouring to turn family, friends and neighbours to faith in the Risen Lord.

In a sermon delivered near the mid-point of his years of service, Charles Spurgeon said, “To encourage all here who know the Lord to bear testimony for him, let us notice the case before us. It was that of a woman. Paul’s preaching is very plain upon the subject of female preaching. He does not suffer a woman to preach, but this by no means bars her from bearing testimony in her own way, and she can so bear it as to do God’s work quite as effectually as if she usurped the pulpit. A woman was the foundress of the church in Samaria, which was afterwards multiplied by Christ’s teaching, which continued till the time of Philip, and was then in a state of gracious revival. The first person baptised in Europe was a woman, therefore let none of our sisters exempt themselves from bearing witness for Jesus Christ; neither let them think that their witness is unimportant. God will put high honor upon it if it be rendered in simple faith in him, and, perhaps, where public ministry may have failed, their private testimony may yet succeed.”<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Charles H. Spurgeon, “Testimony and Experience,” **The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit Sermons: Volume XVIII** (Passmore & Alabaster, London, UK 1872) 302-3

In the text we witness two actions are forbidden to a woman by this text—*teaching* and *exercising authority over a man*. Although women can, and should, learn, they are not permitted to teach. The teaching which is in view entails the authoritative and public transmission of tradition about Christ and the Scriptures. This teaching is what we would commonly recognise as preaching. That this is the case becomes evident from consideration of a variety of verses in the New Testament. Among such verses are **1 CORINTHIANS 12:28, 29**. “God has appointed in the church first apostles, second prophets, third teachers...” **EPHESIANS 4:11** presents the same information concerning the fact that Paul is speaking of public office and public duties. “[The ascended Christ] gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, he shepherds and teachers.” In addition to the passages just cited, **2 TIMOTHY 3:16** and **JAMES 3:1** also support the position that church office is in view.

Let me say again, the passage makes no pronouncement on women’s ability to teach or lead. It is a given that women can be excellent teachers—my first teachers in university and later in medical school, were women. A Christian woman may be a scientist, a physician or a surgeon or even a business leader (like Lydia); nevertheless, when the church assembles, men are responsible to take the lead in teaching and in governing the congregation. By this means, the assembly displays God’s design for the sexes and the concept of headship and submission within the relationship of Christ and His church.

**THE PURPOSE** — “Adam was formed first, then Eve, and Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and became a transgressor.” Why would God make what appears superficially to be an arbitrary ruling based on sex? Why should He seem to give freedom with one hand and appear to take away freedom with the other? Paul appeals first to the created order. Referring to the account of the creation of man and woman in **GENESIS 2**, Paul concluded that the order in which Adam and Eve were created signalled an important difference in the respective roles expected of men and of women.

This distinction looms large in the thinking of the Apostle; this is not the only time he has appealed to this priority in created order. You may remember a reference in the First Corinthian Letter: “Man was not made from woman, but woman from man. Neither was man created for woman, but woman for man” [**1 CORINTHIANS 11:8, 9**]. It is a modern, democratic, Western notion that diverse functions suggest distinctions in worth between men and women. Paul presents the case that men and women are equal in person, equal in dignity and equal in value; but he also taught that women have a role that is distinct from the role expected of men. Those who argue otherwise are attempting to impose a foreign view on the revealed Word of God. Before God, differences in role and function do not preclude equality of persons.

In order to strengthen the prohibition against women occupying an authoritative teaching position within the church by appealing to the created order, the Apostle additionally includes the fact that Eve was deceived. He appeals to the account of the Fall which is recorded in **GENESIS 3**. When the LORD God confronted Eve He asked her, “What is this you have done?” She replied, “The serpent deceived me” [**GENESIS 3:13**]. Both in the Genesis text and in the text before us this day, the emphasis is on what transpired in Eve’s heart—deception! Neither can anyone deduce that Eve was at a disadvantage because she was uninstructed. Again, the emphasis is on the fact that she was deceived. Her deception is not attributed to her lack of education. Eve was deceived, not because of intellectual deficiency, but because of moral failing. Let that thought sink in—Eve was deceived, and the root of her deception was not intellectual deficiency; rather, the root of her deception was moral failing.



Paul's emphasis of the Genesis account is not upon Eve as a sinner, however. She was a sinner, but Adam's sin of rebellion (choosing to follow the woman instead of leading her) plunged the race into sin. The serpent subverted the pattern of male leadership and interacted only with Eve during the temptation. Though Adam clearly appears to have been present throughout the exchange, he did not intervene. The Genesis temptation, then, is a parable of what happens when male leadership is abrogated. Eve took the initiative in responding to the serpent—and Adam permitted her to do so! The appeal to **GENESIS 3** serves to remind us what happens when God's ordained pattern is ignored or undermined.

One scholar has written, "Generally speaking, women are more relational and nurturing and men are more given to rational analysis and objectivity. Women are less prone than men to see the importance of doctrinal formulation, especially when it comes to the issue of identifying heresy and making a stand for the truth. Appointing women to the teaching office is prohibited because they are less likely to draw a line on doctrinal non-negotiables, and thus deception and false teaching will more easily enter the church."<sup>13</sup>

Women are not intellectually inferior; otherwise, Paul would not have permitted women to teach other women and children. Neither do women have less worth in the sight of God—Christ gave His life for women as well as for men. What *does* appear to concern the Apostle are the consequences of allowing women to occupy the authoritative teaching office because their kinder, gentler nature inhibits them from excluding people for doctrinal error. Women are prohibited from the teaching office, then, not only because of the order of creation but also because they are less likely to preserve the apostolic tradition if permitted to inhabit the office.

Our problem with this text is not primarily exegetical—it is rather practical; what Paul says is contrary to modern ideals. We are confronted with what is in our culture an alien and a shocking teaching from Scripture that causes us to recoil. The Word should modify and correct both our thinking and our behaviour. Instead, many of us have determined to rationalise how we can make the Word conform to our thinking and behaviour. Thus, we witness the push among the churches of this day to promote women to the pastoral role.

In its views on the issue of women's roles, in recent years Christendom in the west has followed the world's lead instead of exercising godly leadership in this issue. For over 1,900 years evangelical churches were united in presenting the biblical view that God sets out so very clearly in the text—that men are appointed to lead in the church. One brilliant observer of the gender battles has written, "The feminisation of the church followed the first steps to feminise North American society in the 1960s and 1970s. Conservative evangelical Christians are not unaffected by feminism. Many of them view the philosophy of feminism as a valid adjunct to their faith. They believe that the basic tenets of feminism are supported by the Bible and that feminism can naturally, easily and homogeneously be combined with Christianity... They believe in the Bible, but also believe in feminism."<sup>14</sup>

The tragedy of this retrograde thinking is that we call into question the veracity of the Word; we no longer have a sure foundation on which to base our Faith. God's Word, for us, is neither inerrant nor infallible; it is instead liable to error. If the Bible errs on this point, then we cannot be certain that it has not erred on other points. If Paul wrote his opinion and that opinion was culture-bound, how do we know that anything he wrote is not similarly contaminated?

<sup>13</sup> Thomas R. Schreiner, "An Interpretation of 1 Timothy 2:9-15: A Dialogue with Scholarship," in Andreas J. Köstenberger, Thomas R. Schreiner, and H. Scott Baldwin (eds.), **Women in the Church: A Fresh Analysis of 1 Timothy 2:9-15** (Baker, © 1995) p. 145

<sup>14</sup> Mary A. Kassian, **The Feminist Gospel** (Crossway Books, © 1992) p. 205

If that which Paul has written is tainted by his cultural views, then the whole of the Word is potentially contaminated by the same deadly uncertainty. Paul has said in a similar context: “As in all the churches of the saints, the women should keep silent in the churches. For they are not permitted to speak, but should be in submission, as the Law also says. If there is anything they desire to learn, let them ask their husbands at home. For it is shameful for a woman to speak in church.” [1 CORINTHIANS 14:33b-35].

Some who have listened to me this day have had beliefs confirmed. Perhaps some have been confirmed in their prejudice. Should that be the case I apologise, for no Christian should ever fear confronting the truth. No doubt some of you have been challenged to rethink positions you hold and at this moment you may even be reeling in confusion. It is not my intention to injure any among us, though I am unapologetic that I am endeavouring to “destroy strongholds,” to “destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God” taking “every thought captive to obey Christ [cf. 2 CORINTHIANS 10:4, 5].

It is possible that some individual is angry because of the message I have delivered today. If you are angry I would only ask, “Have I then become your enemy by telling you the truth” [GALATIANS 4:16]? More than anything I want you to reflect the glory of God as a congregation and as individuals. I can assure you on the authority of God’s Word that we shall never do so until we are submitted to His will as revealed through the Word He has given. Though you may enjoy a measure of His grace and though you may know something of His great love, if you know what is right and yet refuse to act righteously, you cannot please God.

Some who are angered at the message must surely know that their sense of outrage flows from the fact that they are thoroughly identified with this dying world. Such individuals may be religious, or perhaps religion is unimportant to them; religious or irreligious, without Christ reigning over one’s life, that person is lost. Perhaps your case is such that you do not know Christ nor do you know what it is to be free of condemnation before Holy God; you are unsaved, without God and without hope in the world. To any such person who shares in this service this day my plea is that you would set aside all that I might have said to this point in order to recall this one great truth: Christ the Lord gave His life because of your sin.

The Word of God boldly promises all who will heed what is written, “If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come. All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation. Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God” [2 CORINTHIANS 5:17-21].

If you don’t know what these words mean but you find your heart strangely moved to discover more, won’t you speak with me or with any follower of the Master after this service. As you speak with that believer, consider the words of the Apostle. “If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved. For the Scripture says, ‘Everyone who believes in him will not be put to shame.’ For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; for the same Lord is Lord of all, bestowing his riches on all who call on him. For ‘everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved’” [ROMANS 10:9-13]. Amen.