
Subject: A Woman's Place in the Church

Posted by [william](#) on Thu, 19 Oct 2006 00:41:36 GMT

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Okay, we need a hot topic to stir things up a bit (not to mention a little fodder for our lovely critics!)

I welcome differing opinions concerning the following, especially since some of my conclusions are different now than in the 80's.

First, my premise is that God has an established order in His creation and that includes His order for the family (Christ, husband, wife, children), and His Church (Jesus is of course the Head, then His ordained leadership, and we His people).

If the family is in divine order, then this order will prevail in the church -- thus we see Jesus, then the ordained leadership, followed by husbands, wives, children. There are those situations when the family order is not apparent, e.g. individual believers, unmarried individuals, divorced individuals, widows, youngsters, etc.. In these cases, I see no distinction between men and women within the church, but for obvious reasons, the children should not be utilized in any leadership or elder capacity. Within the family, there are certain God-ordained roles familiar to us and blessings follow when these roles are fulfilled in our lives.

Since divine order is so entwined with these issues, I will need to go into a little detail concerning the "rule" of the church, before specifically commenting on women ministering to the church.

My premise also assumes that the gifts are for all, both within the context of the church, and even without--in some cases.

1Cr 12.7:... the manifestation of the Spirit is given to every man to profit withal.

The list of gifts(charisma) given by the Spirit include: The word of wisdom, word of knowledge, faith, the gifts of healing, the working of miracles, prophecy, the discerning of spirits, divers kinds of tongues, and the interpretation of tongues, the selfsame Spirit, dividing to every man severally as he will.

1Cr 12:13 For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether [we be] Jews or Gentiles, whether [we be] bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit.

More listed in Romans: Rom 12:6f Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, whether prophecy, [let us prophesy] according to the proportion of faith; Or ministry, [let us wait] on [our] ministering: or he that teacheth, on teaching; Or he that exhorteth, on exhortation: he that giveth, [let him do it] with simplicity; he that ruleth, with diligence; he that sheweth mercy, with cheerfulness.

And lastly those listed in Eph 4:11f (the diakonos gifts) And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ:

It is my understanding that all of these gifts are given to the Body of Christ (including women) for ministry in the kingdom of God.

To set the stage for understanding the "order" for the NT church, and the distinction I see in the *rule of* the church (discussed below) verses *ministry to* the church via the gifts (listed above), let me give some terms:

Ministers: Those who serve! All of us are called to minister/serve with the gifts God has provided for the edification of the church.

Deacons: There are two types of (grk)"diakonos" mentioned in the NT. The word means "those who serve." In our time the word is used mostly as a designation for those who serve the physical needs of the church (table-servers--taken from the example given in Acts 6:2.) But in the NT the word is also used as a designation for those who serve the spiritual food to the church, i.e. Word ministers. (see Acts 6:4 where the same term is used to describe the Word-servers!)

Elders: There are two types, those who are the spiritually mature "pillars" of the church and those who are among the leadership of the church. The classic OT example is the 70 elders that Moses chose to help lead the children of Israel. These would be the elders with the anointing to rule, but there were many more elders in the nation of Israel, in fact these 70 were chosen from a much larger group of elders (or the spiritually mature within the assembly).

In the church there are usually many who are considered elders because of their spiritual maturity, but only a few of these would be placed in overseer type positions. This latter group would be considered the (grk)"episkopos" or overseeing elders, in the NT.

Shepherds: Could describe those with the pastoral gift (one who feeds the flock), as well as those who have been given the oversight (episkopos). The term is loaded with imagery and meaning from both the OT and New.

Overseer: Sometimes referred to as a "bishop," and falls into the category of the "episkopos." 1 Pet2:25 refers to God as the "Shepherd" and "Overseer" of our souls. One translation uses the term "guardian" which accurately describes the "episkopos."

In summary, there are basically two groups in the NT Church that God uses to protect and mature His saints. The diakonos (specifically the "Word" servers) and the episkopos. Both of these groups would naturally have gifts (1Cor12 "charisma") that would correspond to their areas of

ministry.

The diakonos can be summed up quite nicely by the list given in Eph 4:11f, apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers. Each of these gifts are given by *God* to the individual, and no one else has a say as to who gets what gift. These gifts are not dependent on other's approval or disapproval since they are given by God to an individual (man or woman, in my view) and it is the recipient alone who will answer to God for what they have or have not done with the gift.

The episkopos, on the other hand, are placed into the context of a group or groups of people and only have relevance with respect to that group or groups. In short, the episkopos is dependent upon the need or needs of an assembly of believers. If there is no need for an overseer, there is no gift of overseer. The episkopos combines the ideas of overseer, (episkopos Heb.12:15--looking diligently), rulership,(heigeomai Acts15:22 Heb.13:7,17,24) and those who "stand before"(proisteimi Rm 12:8, 1Thess.5:12 1Tim.3:4; 5:12.)

Obviously, those with the diakonos gifts (Eph4:11f Pastors, Teachers, Apostles, Prophets, Evangelists) need a group of people to be able to discharge their gifts effectively, but their gift is *independent* of these groups. They are given their gifts apart from the hand of man and must answer to God for the use or misuse of their gifts. This is an important distinction from the episkopos who are placed into the position of overseer.. Now saying the diakonos gifts are *independent* doesn't mean a person can arbitrarily use the gift in the church apart from being under submission to those in leadership (the episkopos). The diakonos gifts do not have any inherent authority over the church. Authority within the church is welded by the ruling elders (the episkopos).

Those with the diakonos gifts may also be included in the episkopos or ruling group, but not necessarily.

For example, a person with a pastoral gift (diakonos) might travel to another assembly and if given an opportunity to speak, his message will be pastoral in nature. He would not become their pastor, or have any ruling authority in their church, but his gift would be in evidence by the "feeding the flock" nature of his message. In other words, his gift travels with him! The same thing could be said for the prophet, teacher, evangelist, etc..

The episkopos (ruling) position, on the other hand, is based solely upon the need for the position within a particular church. A person might become an elder and begin to function in that capacity, but if he travels to another city, his "episkopos" authority doesn't travel with him. He would exercise no authority in any other assembly. His episkopos position would not have meaning apart from his "sphere of authority."

Sometimes the two different giftings overlap and this makes it hard to distinguish between the diakonos and the episkopos. A person with the pastoral (one who feeds/teaches the sheep) gift

may also be a part of the episkopos to oversee and rule in the local assembly. Paul was both apostle (diakonos) and elder/overseer (episkopos) to those churches he had established, but he had no ruling authority, for instance, in the Jerusalem church. He still was an apostle (he was given that calling by God), but he did not, by virtue of his apostolic gift, have a ruling gift that he could use outside of the sphere influence that God had granted him, namely the churches he started. By the same token, no one would suggest that Paul, an apostle, a master/teacher, had any sort of ruling authority when he would teach in the Synagogues. Since he didn't occupy "Moses' seat" therefore he had no authority over the members of the Synagogue. This simply was not his sphere of authority.

His ministry gift was given to him personally by the Lord Jesus and he was an apostle before he functioned as ruling elder or as he puts it the apostle *to the Gentiles*. See 2Cor10:14-15 concerning the limits of his sphere of authority.

I know that there are some who consider teaching of any sort to be the equivalent to ruling over the assembly, but I don't see that as the case for a number of reasons. Let's say that a ruling elder (usually what we consider the pastor) invites an outside teacher or evangelist (those with the diakonos gifts) into the church to preach/teach for a week or so. In no way would this teacher or preacher hold any authority over the church. They might be great teachers, or even prophets, but they have no authority over the church... that authority belongs only to the ruling elders within that church. Those who have been given the rule of the church are the ones who will be held accountable for the things that go on within their sphere of influence. Rev 2-3

This is not to say that the teaching or prophetic utterance doesn't carry weight or authority, it does, but ecclesiastical authority or governing authority within the sphere of the church comes only from the divine order the Lord has established through His episkopos. A false teacher might try, through his teaching, to bring in a false doctrine, but a vigilant episkopos would be expected to deal with this situation in a prompt manner. Rev 2:14f, and:

Quote:Hbr 13:17 Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves: for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account, that they may do it with joy, and not with grief: for that [is] unprofitable for you.

Next, we move more specifically into the area of women in ministry (the diakonos).

What is God's view? Many, when dealing with the issue of women in ministry, assume that God's view has been clearly set forth in 1Tim2:11-12, 1Cor 14:34, and go no further in examining the issue. This would be proper if there were no other passages where God's revelation concerning women could be seen..

In the beginning God created Adam and Eve and affirms that they are equal and complimentary. Gen 1-2 This is a foundational theological statement that shows God's design and intention for men and women. They both were created in God's image. Gen 1:26-27.

Both were given dominion over creation. Gen 1:28. The woman was given to complement the man. Gen 2:18. The word "help mate" in no way implies an inferior or subordinate status. The Hebrew word is used 16 more times in the Hebrew Bible and in those cases it is used to designate God as the one who saves, upholds and sustains His people. (See Ps 46:1)

The woman was literally of the same material as the man. Gen 2:23 "Bone of my bone and flesh of my flesh". It should be seen that the woman isn't restricted in any sense, not in the home, or society. She is truly an equal.

The basis for restricting her role (in a negative sense) came as a result of the fall. It is clear that the male dominance over the female came about as a result of human sin and cannot be cited as resulting from God's created design. Gen 3:16. I don't intend to imply that there were not differing roles for Adam and Eve; only that the curse brought about a change for the worst in the relationship.

After the fall, we see God placing Deborah (a wife and mother) in a leadership position, judging His own nation. Views about 1Tim2:11-12, and 1Cor14, must take into account God's viewpoint, both from the beginning and after the fall. Equal in the beginning, and after the curse He still had confidence enough in women to allow one to lead His people. He blessed Deborah's leadership.

In the New Testament, even a quick reading will affirm that one of the central teachings of Paul, is the fact of redemption. Redemption from the curse. Redemption from the effects of the fall of man. He clearly sets forth the concept of being a new creation in Christ. Paul shows that neither gender, race, or social status, has a bearing on the Christian with relation to God. Gal 3:26-28.

Someone pointed out that Christians have been delivered from just the curse of the law and not the curse of the fall (which included a relational change between husband and wife). We have been redeemed from the curse of sin and while creation still is suffering from the effects of the fall, no one should think that we as God's people should continue to live in a sinful manner because all of the effects of the curse are still plaguing mankind. Neither should we live in a manner that would continue to keep women in a cursed position. We, as God's people, are a part of His kingdom and should live and move under the laws of His kingdom and not attempt to "keep alive" the aspects of the curse that still plague the earth. I think Paul re-affirms this concept in 1Cor12:

Quote:1Cr 12:13 For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether [we be] Jews or Gentiles, whether [we be] bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit.

So, whatever one believes concerning 1Cor 14:34 and 1Tim2:11-12, it is essential that there be no contradiction between God's original design, His continued confidence in women after the fall, and Paul's clear assertions that we are no longer under the curse. (We have been redeemed!)

Paul's other writings show that women were active in the diakonos type ministries.. See Phoebe, Lydia, Euodia, Syntyche, Priscilla, Junia. Women were designated as ministers/deacons, fellow workers, and colaborers in the gospel. Both men and women were empowered by the Holy Spirit to proclaim God's redemptive message. Acts 2:14-18. Women were praying and prophesying even in the assembly where Paul commands for the women to be silent.

Views on 1Cor14 and 1Tim2, to be biblically correct, should conform to these basic premises:

1. God's original design didn't restrict women in any way.
2. Deborah's leadership over men wasn't restricted in any way.
3. The norm for the redeemed Christian woman wasn't restricted.
4. Paul's own writings show that he considered both male and female to be free in Christ and baptized into the Body of Christ with no distinction between slave or free, male or female, Jew or gentile. 1Cor12:13
5. Paul's allowance for women to pray and prophesy in 1Cor11.
6. Paul's approval of women ministering outside of the context of 1Cor14:34 and 1Tim2:11-12.

With all of the above in mind, it seems clear, (to me at least!) that the only possible reasons for the prohibitions in 1Cor14 and 1Tim2 must be found in looking at the context of the local situation that prevailed both in Corinth and Ephesus. Both situations seem to have at the base a crisis and/or culturally significant reasons which might explain what *seems* a deviation from the norm for a higher purpose to prevail, the spread of the Gospel.

Looking at Timothy's situation, it is obvious that the integrity of the Christian faith was at stake in the church at Ephesus. There were those teaching false doctrines and propagating myths. Sound doctrine was being ignored; vain debates, and novice teachers were the order of the day. The Truth was at stake.

It is not hard to assume (and this is my own opinion--you'll need to consider the facts and come to your own conclusion) that some, if not much, of the crisis can be linked to the female population.

Ephesians rioted violently over the issue of their female goddess Diana(Acts 19:24-41). Women were the primary functionaries of this idol worship. Presumably these were not the sequestered women of most households, but temple prostitutes and the hetaera (women who made their living entertaining men).

One can speculate that these women were attempting to dominate the Church. If left unchecked, this influence could quickly destroy a congregation and, by extension, hinder Paul's major emphasis on the spread of the gospel.

One can also assume that Timothy's respect for the ministry of women -- his mother and grandmother had laid the foundation of his own faith -- may have hindered his own judgment

toward women who were teaching and usurping the authority structure of the church. Hence Paul's strong admonition.

The same type of situation may account for the Cor14:34 passage; Paul certainly had much to deal with concerning the order and practices of the Corinthian church. Another reason, perhaps the dominate one, is the relationship between the Greek society and their women.

The unique nature of the problems facing the Greek congregations is, to my mind, the key to understanding these issues.

There is an abundant amount of information available on the manners and customs of the ancient Greeks, and while there are varying opinions, and even contradictions in this material, I have attempted to make some basic assumptions concerning their lifestyle. These are only my conclusions and I would suggest that everyone study the issue and draw your own conclusions.

1. Greek women had no property rights. (Roman women had property rights).
2. Greek women either lived with their fathers or husbands, those who did not were prostitutes, and/or what is known as the hetaera, which as near as I can determine, were very good conversationalists and prostitutes. They were paid for their services which allowed them to live outside of the confines of marriage or their father's household.
3. Greek women lived in sectioned off portions of the household. In other words, their sphere of authority wasn't just limited to the home, it was limited to areas within the home.(Not so for the Roman Women).
4. The main purpose for women in the Greek society was reproduction.
5. When they ventured outside of the home, they were veiled.
6. Women outside of the home, and/or without a veil, were viewed as out of order. (Not referring here to the normal aspects of daily life which would include gathering food and water for the household.)

As far as I've been able to determine neither the Roman or Jewish women lived under such severe conditions. I'm not saying that the circumstances of the Roman and Jewish women were a fabulous example of the equality of the sexes, only that there was a huge difference in the way the different societies treated and related to their women.

If there were differences, and if those differences were more than marginal, I think that it would be safe to assume, that the manner of addressing issues affecting these groups, would be different.

I would expect that Paul, who certainly took this attitude with reference to other issues, would do just that. I'll not bore you with repeating examples that have already been addressed, but you can study them for yourself. See Paul on: slavery, circumcision, eating meat sacrificed to idols, and Jewish customs.

His overriding concern is the spread of the Gospel and this is so important that he says:

1Cr 9:22 To the weak became I as weak, that I might gain the weak: I am made all things to all [men], that I might by all means save some.

To conclude, I would like to quote the 1Cor14 passage and offer one more thought concerning the interpretation.

Quote:1Cr 14:29 Let the prophets speak two or three, and let the other judge.

1Cr 14:30 If [any thing] be revealed to another that sitteth by, let the first hold his peace.

1Cr 14:31 For ye may all prophesy one by one, that all may learn, and all may be comforted.

1Cr 14:32 And the spirits of the prophets are subject to the prophets.

1Cr 14:33 For God is not [the author] of confusion, but of peace, as in all churches of the saints.

1Cr 14:34 Let your women keep silence in the churches: for it is not permitted unto them to speak; but [they are commanded] to be under obedience, as also saith the law.

1Cr 14:35 And if they will learn any thing, let them ask their husbands at home: for it is a shame for women to speak in the church.

1Cr 14:36 What? came the word of God out from you? or came it unto you only?

1Cr 14:37 If any man think himself to be a prophet, or spiritual, let him acknowledge that the things that I write unto you are the commandments of the Lord.

1Cr 14:38 But if any man be ignorant, let him be ignorant.

1Cr 14:39 Wherefore, brethren, covet to prophesy, and forbid not to speak with tongues.

1Cr 14:40 Let all things be done decently and in order.

I've made much of the "order" and "rule" of the church, because I believe that it is crucial in understanding the situation, and Paul (who is representing God vs.37) concludes chapter 14 with an appeal, to doing things decently and in order. With this in mind, let's examine the closer context (instead of the wider context of God's created order and the broad context of Greek culture), to verse 34&35 and the preceding thought.

The immediate context is that of "judging the Prophets". It is not out of the question that Paul is

simply telling the women to leave the judging of the prophetic to the appropriate authority, those who have the "rule" in the church and if they have questions about the sometimes mysterious aspects of a prophetic utterance, they should wait and ask their husbands at home.

Some of the older commentators have said that the women and men were separated in the assembly and there was a lot of shouting going on between the groups, this coupled with all of the tongue speaking and prophecies, surely called for a little decency and order!

If the separation of the men and women in the Greek society extended further, even unto the church, this certainly would call for a command from the Lord to bring order out of chaos; He is never the Author of confusion, vs33!

William
