

Session 5 – Paul, the Created Order and the Role of Women in the Church (Part 1) (I Timothy 2: 13 – 15)

“For Adam was formed first, then Eve. And Adam was not the one deceived; it was the woman who was deceived and became a sinner.” I Timothy 2:13, 14

I. The context.

- A. We will return later to the teachings of I Timothy 2:8 – 12 (teachings about propriety in worship as it relates to the role of women). In this session we will concentrate on Paul’s reference to the created order so that he may back his argument.
- B. Many believe these are the key verses in the scriptures regarding the role of women in the church. In other words, many look through the lens of I Timothy 2:8 – 15 to interpret all other passages regarding the role of women in the church. The reason is *because* Paul refers to the created order to make his argument and the wording he uses in the passage.
- C. This passage is the most difficult passage in the New Testament regarding the role of women in the church for at least two reasons.
 1. First, considerable debate has arisen regarding Paul’s reference to the created order. (We will discuss this issue in today’s session.)
 2. Second, considerable debate has arisen regarding the meaning of the Greek word *authenteo* which we translate authority (2:12). (We will discuss this word during a later session.)

II. What is the focus of Paul’s discussion of the created order in I Timothy?

- A. We must ask some questions about the context of I Timothy 2:8 – 15.
 1. Is Paul speaking of public worship or all situations? Almost all believe he focuses upon public worship in this passage.
 - a. Paul notes that he is writing instructions so that “you will know how people ought to conduct themselves in God’s household, which is the church of the living God...”. (3:15)
 - b. Nevertheless, the boundaries between the worship service and other assemblies of the church during New Testament times were not as clearly drawn as they are today. In other words, they did not make a clear distinction between Bible study and worship.
 2. Is Paul concerned that men are teaching false doctrine or that both men and women are teaching false doctrine in 1:3 – 7? Though in 1:3 the NIV translates the Greek word *tis* as men, it actually is indefinite and better translated persons or “some” (as in the RSV and KJV). Women could have been false teachers as well as men.
 3. Is Paul expounding a general theology or is he addressing a specific problem?
 - a. Most believe that Paul, especially in this personal letter, would not set out a general theology but would apply that theology to a specific problem, in this case the disruption of public worship in Ephesus.

- b. Even if one accepts that Paul is addressing a specific problem, one cannot assume the teaching does not provide general guidance. For example, we “generalize” regarding immersion during baptism from the specific example of Philip and the Ethiopian eunuch. (Acts 8:36 – 39)
 - c. Nevertheless, the general theology Paul applies in I Timothy 2 is debated (male spiritual leadership or a mutual, complementary relationship between men and women, for example).
 - 4. Is Paul speaking his own views “I do not permit...” in this passage or is he speaking of direct commands from God?
 - a. Most believe that Paul is not being ambiguous. When he says “I urge...” or “I want...”, he refers back to 2:7 (I was appointed a herald and an apostle).
 - b. Yet there is room for debate. I Timothy is a personal letter (though it is inspired by the Holy Spirit) and Paul may distinguish between “I urge...”, “Here is a trustworthy saying...” (3:1) as well as “The Spirit clearly says...” (4:1) For example, most accept that 5:23 (use a little wine for your stomach) is a personal instruction to Timothy, not a direct command from God.
 - 5. To whom is Paul referring in this passage, husbands or men, wives or women?
 - a. The Greek words.
 - (i) The Greek word *aner* can be used for either husband (Mark 10:2, 12) or man (Luke 5:8). In common usage *aner* could distinguish husband from wife, man from animal and adult male from boy.
 - (ii) The Greek word *gyne* (or *gune*) likewise can be used for either wife (I Corinthians 7:27) or woman (John 4:15). In common Greek usage *gyne* meant both the female as distinct from the male and wife as distinct from husband.
 - b. It is debatable whether Paul refers to husbands and wives or men and women.
 - (i) The context would tend to favor translation of men and women and this is the translation used most often by far.
 - (ii) An argument that Paul refers to husbands and wives is that he mentions a husband and wife, namely Adam and Eve and the possibility of childbearing to support his argument.
- B. Is Paul using an established biblical fact in this passage to support his argument or is he using the narrative of creation as an analogy?
 - 1. The established biblical fact approach is based upon the interpretation that Adam was given priority in creation because he was formed first and because he was not deceived. On this view,
 - a. Paul provides as his reason the second creation account (Genesis Chapter 2), not the relationship between Adam and Eve after the fall. He introduces the section (2:13 – 15) by using the Greek word

gap (for), that is “for this reason”. Adam was created first and was not deceived. *For this reason* women are prohibited from teaching men. Genesis 2 establishes the role distinctions between men and women.

- b. As Paul is inspired, his interpretation of Genesis 2 must be the correct one.
 - c. Eve was created as Adam’s assistant/helper. Disaster came when Eve became the leader rather than the helper. Eve proved to be incapable of leadership. (So did Adam for that matter.) On this view, perhaps leadership is not as easy for women as for men. Nevertheless, this view would insist that, regardless of talent for leadership, God’s command is that women are not the spiritual leaders.
 - d. On this view, a preferred translation of *aner* and *gyne* is man and woman.
 - e. Paul appeals to the Genesis narrative to call men and women back to their created roles with man being the spiritual leader.
2. The analogical approach is based on the interpretation that Paul uses the Genesis passage to make a point about a specific problem in Ephesus. Analogical teaching is common in the New Testament. On this view,
- a. Paul is inspired by God, yet the Genesis narrative as we read it does not support Paul’s apparent interpretation. In other words, Paul uses Genesis in a different way than as established fact. What is this different way?
 - b. Genesis 2 does not indicate in the original reading male spiritual leadership or priority. Therefore we need to consider another reading of Paul. Analogy is an alternative reading.
 - c. For example, many believe the two references to Rahab (see Joshua 6:22 – 25) in the New Testament are analogies because the story of Rahab appears to be used to make two very different points. Was Rahab saved by faith or works? (Hebrews 11:31, James 2:25)
 - d. On this view, the preferred translation of *aner* and *gyne* would be husband and wife.
 - e. The problem in Ephesus was that the wives had fallen under the spell of heretical teaching. They, therefore, could not be controlled by their husbands during the assembly. (1:3)
 - f. Paul is using the creation narrative as analogy more extensively than most uses of analog yet the analogy follows a definite form.
 - (i) The analogy in this case is the “crossing” (or chiasm) of two parallel phrases. E.g. She (a) went to Paris (b); to New York (b’) went he (a’).
 - (ii) I do not permit a woman to teach (a) nor to have authority over a man (b); Adam was formed first (b’) and it was the woman who was deceived (a’).

- g. In other words, Paul does not speak of a natural hierarchy but rather a correspondence of events. These wives in Ephesus had been deceived as was Eve. They had disrupted the natural relationship between husbands and wives because they had become dominant during the assembly. The relationship had to be set straight.
 - h. Paul appeals to the Genesis narrative to call husbands and wives back to their complementary roles (rather than a role of wives dominating husbands).
- C. A somewhat more extreme interpretation of this passage is that Paul is using the Genesis account to refute a widespread heresy, specifically a heresy directed against a Gnostic mythology glorifying Eve. Eve represents, to the Gnostics, the experience of the individual arriving at true gnosis (knowledge), the example of spiritual awakening. (I Timothy 1:4) Such a teaching would have been anathema to Paul, who was horrified that these persons had so distorted the Genesis narrative. (I Timothy 4:7) Therefore he presents an extreme view of the ideas of Genesis 1 – 3 in order to correct these distortions.

III The lesson from I Timothy 2:13 – 15 regarding the role of women in the church.

- A. The most straightforward interpretation, if one considers this passage without reference to other scripture, is that woman, by her position in the created order and her natural inclinations, is more likely to be deceived and therefore should “learn in quietness and full submission”.
- B. If one considers other scripture, however, (especially Genesis 2) Paul’s reference to creation may not be a reference so much to the order of creation (who came first) but rather to the role of woman as a complement to man (man was incomplete without woman and visa versa). Perhaps Paul sees the complementary relationship being destroyed as the women became dominant in Ephesus. Given the context of the letter to Timothy, this interpretation has merit.
 - 1. In Asia Minor, where Ephesus was located, the primary deities were female. Ephesus was the site of the temple of Artemis (Acts 19: 20 – 41).
 - 2. False teachers (perhaps primarily women false teachers because the religion of the Ephesians was based on the mother goddess) were Paul’s major concern in the Ephesian church. (Acts 20: 25 – 35, I Timothy 1:3 – 7).
- C. In the creation story, there is very little evidence that woman was more at fault than man. Both sinned, both were punished, both were chastised. (See Romans 5:12-22)
- D. There is virtually no evidence today or through history that women by the nature are more likely to be deceived than men.
- E. Two views of “women being saved through childbirth” should be considered:

- a. Christian women are not saved through domineering but by attention to their traditional role in marriage, that is, bearing children.
- b. Despite Eve's transgression, Christian women are saved through the childbirth of the Messiah. In other words, women, like men, are saved through Jesus Christ.

References

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