

Session 15: Women and Silence During the Assembly. (Part 2)
(I Timothy 2:7 – 12)

“A woman should learn in quietness and full submission. I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man; she must be silent” I Timothy 2:11, 12

- I. The significance of I Timothy 2:7 – 12 for understanding the role of women in the church.
 - A. This passage is the key New Testament passage which has guided churches in the Restoration movement (and most of the evangelical world for that matter) as to the role of women in the church. It has been used as the guide to interpreting other passages (such as Galatians 3:28).
 - B. Paul most clearly refers to the created order to support his injunctions regarding women in the church in this passage than in any other passage. (2:13, 14).
 - C. The idea of salvation through childbearing is a radical departure from Paul’s central theme of salvation through faith (2:15).
 - D. The passage appears especially harsh and demeaning to women (2:11, 12).
- II. Questions regarding the context of Paul’s injunction to women in I Timothy 2:9 – 12.
 - A. Is Paul speaking of public assemblies or all situations? Almost all believe he focuses upon public assemblies in this passage.
 - 1. 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)
 - 2. Paul mentions the plural “prayers” along with other plurals (such as requests and intercessions) in 2:1, suggesting a public setting.
 - 3. Even on the most conservative view, a woman must be able to ask question somewhere (namely the home) and if she asks questions she cannot remain silent. Therefore the command to silence would only apply to a public assembly.
 - 4. 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.
 - B. 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.
 - C. Is Paul expounding a general theology or is he addressing a specific problem?

1. 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 dissention within the Ephesian church driven by heresy. (1:3 – 7).
 2. Even if one accepts that Paul is addressing a specific problem, one cannot assume the specific command does not provide general guidance. For example, we “generalize” regarding baptism from the specific command by Peter to the crowd on the day of Pentecost. (Acts 2:38)
 3. Nevertheless, the general theology Paul applies in I Timothy 2 is debated (male spiritual leadership or a mutual, complementary relationships between men and women).
- D. Is Paul speaking his own views “I do not permit...” in this passage or is he speaking of direct commands from God?
1. Most believe that Paul is not being ambiguous. When he says “I urge...” or “I want...”, he refers back to 2:7 where he writes, “I was appointed a herald and an apostle.”
 2. 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.
- E. To whom is Paul referring in this passage, husbands or men, wives or women?
1. The Greek words.
 - a. 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.
 - b. 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.
 - c. The context always sets the distinction between husband and man, wife and woman.
 2. It is debatable whether Paul refers to husbands and wives or men and women in I Timothy 2:8 - 15.
 - a. The context would tend to favor translation of men and women and this is the translation used most often by far.
 - b. 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.
- F. What is the meaning of the word we translate “modestly” (v. 9)?
1. The Greek word we translate modesty is *kosmios*, considered one of the cardinal virtues by the Greeks. It described the well-ordered, well-balanced person (as Plato may have described a virtuous person). *Kosmios* could also mean well-mannered or honorable.

2. *Kosmios* is used only twice in the New Testament (I Timothy 2:19 and 3:2). In other words, women are to adorn themselves in an honorable, well-mannered way and the elders were to be temperate (well-mannered or balanced).
- G. What is the meaning of the word we translate “quietness” and “silent” (vs. 11, 12)?
1. The Greek word we translate silence (and quietness) is *hesuchia*. Paul uses this word in 2:2 as he encourages the Ephesians to live peaceable and quiet lives. *Hesuchia* is translated quietness in v. 11 and silent in v. 12. (The word is different than the word used in I Corinthians 14:34 and translated “remain silent” in that passage.)
 2. This word refers to demeanor, that is, a quiet spirit. It probably does not mean total silence, but this is debated.
- H. What is the meaning of the word we translate “submission” (v. 11)?
1. The Greek word we translate “submission” is *hypotage* which can mean to obey, to submit oneself to, or to be under obedience. It can mean active subjection (I Corinthians 15:25) or voluntary subordination (James 4:7).
 2. In the form found in I Timothy 2:11, the word is best translated as voluntary subordination and in part means a renunciation of initiative.
- I. What is the meaning of the word we translate “authority” (v. 12)?
1. The Greek word we translate “authority” is *authenteo*. This is not the conventional New Testament term for authority (*exousia*).
 2. *Authenteo* is only found here in the New Testament and appears seldom in Greek outside the New Testament. It is related to *authentes* and means “to have full power or authority over someone,” “to domineer,” “to lord it over,” “to assume authority over,” or “to control in a domineering manner.”
 3. Kroeger and Kroeger suggested that the word may even have a sexual connotation, that is, women were not to “thrust themselves” upon men (as perhaps they did during some fertility practices).
 4. Given the authority of teachers in the New Testament, it may have been almost inherent that the role of teacher suggested some type of dominant authority (see I Peter 4:11). This does not appear to have been the case with Priscilla, however.
 5. More likely, the women (wives) in Ephesus were, through their activities in teaching during the public assembly, domineering or “laying the law down” to the men (husbands).

III. The traditional interpretation.

- A. Paul is speaking about public assemblies of the church.
- B. Public assemblies would include any mixed gender assembly of the congregation for the purpose of worship, study or devotional.
- C. These injunctions do not apply to women meeting only with women. There is, for example, no clear evidence that women may not baptize other women if

there are no men present. Women have considerable freedom when not in mixed assemblies.

- D. Paul is providing general guidelines for the proper conduct of public assemblies of the church. The women in Ephesus were speaking up and trying to teach during these assemblies and Paul states this is wrong.
- E. There is no clear evidence of a specific heresy against which Paul is addressing his injunction that women remain silent in the church.
- F. Paul means that the women must keep silent (that is, they are not to teach or take on a role of authority). He does not mean they are to “hold their peace.”
- G. Keeping silent refers to teaching and holding authority, not to singing or perhaps a group reading of a passage of scripture.
- H. Paul is speaking to men and women, not husbands and wives.
- I. Women may teach men, but not in a public assembly.
- J. Even if a man who is in authority in the public assembly decides to ask a woman to teach, that is not permitted. Even if she could do a better job than any man in the congregation Paul says “She must remain silent”. (Smith)
- K. As a learner, a submissive woman’s “peace” is held within an acknowledged framework of spiritual headship, even though she participates in the learning process. She may participate but is precluded from teaching or exercising spiritual authority. (Smith)
- L. Male spiritual leadership was established at creation. A woman must not try to domineer or to usurp that authority.
- M. The service of women is good deeds (I Timothy 2:9, 10; 5:10).
- N. There are no prophets today and women can pray in silence (I Corinthians 11:5). Therefore this passage is key to determining the role and activities of women during public assemblies of the church today.
- O. This passage is in harmony with I Corinthians 14:34.
- P. The church must not take its cue from the world but rather from scripture.
- Q. The traditional (and ancient) interpretation of scripture has almost universally banned women from teaching during the public worship (or making announcements and leading singing). Women may have held more prominent roles in heretical sects.

IV. The more modern interpretation.

- A. Paul is probably addressing a specific problem in Ephesus, perhaps a heresy involving the priority of women (a cult of Eve?). This problem may have lead wives in the public assemblies (perhaps primarily in house churches) to not only teach erroneous doctrine but also to teach in a domineering manner.
- B. Women were behaving in ways remarkably different during the assembly of the church from the ways they were behaving in society.
- C. Paul probably is speaking specifically to wives and husbands regarding their relationship given this problem, not to women and men in general.
- D. Husbands are called to pray, not to engage in controversy, in the Ephesian church. This does not preclude wives from public prayer (1:4, 2:8).

- E. Wives are called to modesty, in contrast to the behavior of women associated with the pagan temples who engaged in sexual promiscuity (v. 9, 10). The injunction to “silence” and to refrain from domineering must be considered within the context of modesty and orderly worship.
- F. The injunction is also in the service of reducing controversy which was ignited by wives in the congregation. The word translated “men” in 1:3 can refer to both men and women.
- G. Wives are called to be peaceable in the church.
- H. The world has changed radically since Paul’s time. A more socially appropriate role for women (in the spirit of Paul’s desire for a worship free of controversy) is a role in which women are free to speak publicly. Women may make announcements, teach, lead singing and perhaps preach during the public assembly as long as these activities do not disrupt the relation between men and women and do not lead women to a superior, domineering role over men.
- I. In contrast to Ephesus, the church today will draw disfavor from the community if we do not permit women equal opportunities to participate in the public assembly.

V. Summary

- A. The conclusions from our interpretations of I Timothy 2:8 – 15 will probably lay the foundation for determining the role of women in churches of Christ during the next few years.
- B. Our churches will undoubtedly come to various conclusions which derive from our various interpretations. These interpretations have the potential for creating significant conflict between churches and within churches. Many have suggested that the most contentious issue facing churches of Christ as we move into the 21st century is the issue of the role of women in the church.
- C. Virtually all passages regarding the proper role and activity of women in the church written by Paul, however, were written in an attempt to *avoid* conflict and to encourage harmony and peace within the body of Christ.
- D. In the view of this writer, there is room for honest differences in interpretation of I Timothy 2:8 – 15. That is, honest and studious Christians who believe the scriptures are the revealed word of God can come to different conclusions about the application of the passage to the 21st century church. An interpretation which differs from “your” interpretation cannot simply be ascribed to social conformity or tradition influencing the other person.
- E. In the spirit of Isaiah 1:18, those of us who hold different views should openly and lovingly discuss our views in hopes that we can learn from one another and reconcile our differences.
- F. Honest and studious Christians *cannot* abide open ongoing conflict and discord in the body regarding the role of women in the church.
- G. Therefore, each congregation of the Lord’s church must come to “operational” conclusions (that is, conclusions which shape the immediate operations of the

congregation) regarding this passage as it relates to the role and work of women in that congregation.

- H. These operational conclusions must ultimately derive from the spiritual leaders of the congregation and provide the framework for the Lord's work to continue and flourish in that congregation.
- I. The process to restore of the Lord's church continues to this day and whatever conclusions we reach today may change as we grow in the knowledge of the will of our Lord. God is infallible and His word is sufficient for us. His grace covers a multitude of our sins as long as we strive to do His will. We are fallible and we are sinners, so we will not always "get things right the first time" (or perhaps not even after seventy times seventy times).

References

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