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"I Do Not Permit a Woman To Teach"

- 1 Ti 2:12

What does Scripture reveal about God's design for female teachers within the body of Christ? Based on Tit 2:3b-5 it is clear that older women are called upon to "teach what is good. Then they can train the younger women to love their husbands and children, to be self-controlled and pure, to be busy at home, to be kind, and to be subject to their husbands, so that no one will malign the word of God." Thus, older Christian women are to be teaching and training younger Christian women, and the curriculum described could be categorized as home economics or domestic engineering. The objective of this "course" taught by mature sisters is to produce a future harvest of women who embody the qualifications for a widow in 1 Ti 5:9-10 ("the wife of one man, having a reputation for good works, having raised children, having shown hospitality, having assisted those in distress, being devoted to good works").

Interestingly, nothing is stated in Tit 2 about the older women teaching as their curriculum either theology proper or Scripture, nor about men being among their pupils. In fact, there is not a single example in the entire NT of women teaching men. Neither is there an example of a woman recognized as a teacher of Scripture. Some have pointed to Ac 18:24-26 (Priscilla teaching Apollos) as such an example, but is it really? Luke informs us that Apollos was already "mighty in the Scriptures" (18:24), "instructed in the way of the Lord" (19:25), and he himself "teaching accurately the things concerning Jesus" (18:25). Apollos did, however, have a gap in his knowledge of baptism. Accordingly, both Aquila and his wife Priscilla took him "aside" and "explained" to him the way of God more adequately. It was a private discussion ("aside") and nowhere does Luke state that Priscilla did most of the explaining.

In any event, "explained" (18:26) is from *ektithemi*, which is different from "teaching" (18:25, *didasko*); notice how *ektithemi* is used in 11:4 and 28:23. While this does serve to illustrate that there is nothing wrong with men learning from women, it is not an example of a woman who has been recognized by the church as a teacher of the church. Actually, there is one undisputed example of a woman teacher in the NT, and that is of Jezebel in Re 2:20-25. Not many would hold her up in justification of women teachers!

Why is it then that there are no examples of women Bible teachers in the NT? To begin with, it must be noted that not many men should presume to be teachers either (Jas 3:1). Concerning women in particular, such a ministry was specifically denied to them in 1 Ti 2:11-15: "Let a woman learn in quietness, in all submission. Now I do not permit a woman to teach, nor to exercise authority over a man, but to be in silence. For Adam was formed first, then Eve. And Adam was not deceived, but the woman being completely deceived fell into transgression. But she will be saved through the bearing of children, if they continue in faith and love and holiness with sobriety."

First, notice the parallel between 2:11 and 2:12. "Learn in quietness" corresponds with "I do not permit a woman to teach." Likewise, "full submission" corresponds with "to have authority over a man." The same Greek word (*hesuchia*) is behind both "quietness" (2:11) and "silence" (2:12), and

means "stillness" (the root means "tranquil"). *Hesuchia* does not necessarily mean mute: notice its usage in 2:2 ("quiet lives") and 2 Th 3:12 ("settle down"). Thus, instead of teaching, women are to be learning; instead of exercising authority over men, they are to be in a settled down state of tranquil submission.

When Paul wrote, "I do not permit" (2:12), he used the present tense, which, in this case, carries the weight of a "gnomic" present, that is, a customary action or general truth ("I never permit"). That this is so is obvious from 2:13-14, where Paul appealed to the order of creation ("Adam was created first, then Eve"), as well as to the particulars of the fall ("Adam was not deceived, but Eve was") to support the prohibition.

Hence, though men and women are equal in Christ, they have differing spheres of ministry. Submission does not mean inferiority. Christ himself exemplified this in his earthly existence (he submitted himself to his mother and father [Lk 2:51]) and in his eternal existence (though equal to God the Father in substance Christ subjected himself to Him).

That Adam was created first indicates headship, priority, and order in the relationship between men and women. God easily could have created Adam and Eve simultaneously, but He did not. Also, it was Eve who was "deceived" about the transgression, not Adam. Paul simply recited the facts as they occurred. Woman took the leadership, man submitted, and disaster resulted. God created the sexes with differing spheres of ministry, and confusing the two invites trouble.

It is popular today to dismiss 2:11-12 as something relevant only to Paul's day, but the fact that 2:13-14 appeals to Adam and Eve shows that this is a timeless truth, transcending all cultures. Whatever was true in Ephesus because of Adam and Eve must also be true universally.

Some have thought 2:11-12 relevant only to Ephesus because of the large number of women priests who served the female Roman deity worshipped there. Since there was evidently much false teaching being carried on by the pagan women, Paul, supposedly to avoid all appearance of evil, prohibited the Christian women of Ephesus (and only Ephesus) from teaching the church. Strangely, others who ignore 2:11-12 do so on the presumption that the women in Ephesus were ignorant, unlearned, and not accepted in society as religious leaders or teachers! Whatever the local situation, Paul's reasoning in 2:13-14 makes 2:11-12 transcend all cultures.

Yet another way to understand 1 Ti 2:11-12 is that a woman may indeed teach the Bible, as long as she does so under the authority of the elders or does so in a non-authoritative manner. Is this a valid interpretation? An examination of the actual Greek wording in 2:12 yields some interesting observations. It reads, "But to be teaching, a woman, I am not permitting, neither to be having authority over a man, but to be in quietness." There are two distinct and separate things a woman cannot do. First, she cannot teach. Second, she cannot have authority over a man. It is a neither/nor situation. Notice how the verbs "teaching" and "having authority" are at opposite ends of the sentence. A woman who teaches the Bible (especially to men) is violating the very Scriptures that she seeks to teach.

One final argument used to dilute 1 Ti 2:11-12 stems from the reference to women who prophesied in 1 Co 11:3-10. Treating teaching and prophesying as synonymous gifts, some use 1 Co 11 (along with Lk 2:36 and Ac 21:9) to overturn the seeming absoluteness of 1 Ti 2:12. The problem with this view is that teaching and prophecy are listed in Ro 12:6-7 as two distinct, gifts. Notice further that in 1 Co 12:28-30, Paul states that "in the church God has appointed first of all apostles, second prophets, third teachers . . . Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers?" Though there is

some similarity between the two gifts (1 Co 14:3), they clearly are not identical.

Paul's whole purpose in writing to Timothy was so that he would "know how people ought to conduct themselves in God's household, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and foundation of the truth" (3:15). Thus, Paul's statement to the effect that women are not to teach or have authority over men is, in a sense, cultural; but it is Christian culture!

But how can 1 Ti 2:11-12 be a universal truth, transcending all cultures and times, considering the cultural nature of the preceding paragraph (1 Ti 2:9-10)? It states that women are "to dress modestly, with decency and propriety, not with braided hair or gold or pearls or expensive clothes, but with good deeds, appropriate for women who profess to worship God." Does this mean that it is wrong (indeed, sinful) for today's Christian woman to braid her hair, or wear gold, or don a pearl necklace? And if 2:9-10 does not apply today, then how can 2:11-15?

It must be remembered that every NT epistle is an "occasional" document, written in response to some specific first century occasion (usually a problem situation). Only the context surrounding various injunctions can tell us whether they were intended to be temporary and limited (as with 2 Ti 4:13), or applied to every church in every age.

Feminism was almost as rampant in Roman society as it is in ours today. One way that Roman women expressed either their independence from their husbands or sexual promiscuity was with elaborately braided hair (intertwined with gold and costly jewels) and ostentatious clothing. Accordingly, Paul directed Christian women to avoid all such appearances of evil and to concentrate on that which is true adornment—good deeds appropriate for women who profess to worship God. Thus, even if the particulars were in a sense "cultural," the principal behind it obviously still holds true. Believing women are still to concentrate on modest dress and emphasize inner beauty over external adornment.

Paragraph 2:11-15 thus logically follows paragraph 2:9-10 as further examples of activities that do not constitute "good deeds" (2:10) for women. The context of Paul's reasoning for prohibiting a Christian woman from either teaching or exercising authority over a man is clearly weighted toward something intended to be applied to every church in every age. Why else would Paul mention Adam's priority in creation (2:13)? By citing creation as the basis for the prohibitions rather than some local cultural problem, it is obvious that although the local situation prompted the letter, that local situation was not the ultimate basis for the injunctions. These prohibitions are applicable as long as the reasoning of 2:13 remains true.

But didn't Christ's death on the cross redeem us from the curse and reverse the effects of the transgression in Eden? Certainly redemption will eventually phase out all the effects of the fall. However, Adam's priority in creation preceded the fall. It is independent of the fall. As has been pointed out, God easily could have created Adam and Eve simultaneously, but He did not choose to do so. This shows that "the head of the woman is man . . . for man did not come from woman, but woman from man; neither was man created for woman, but woman for man" (1 Co 11:3-9). This inherent position of submission, according to 1 Ti 2:11-15, is violated when a woman teaches Scripture or exercises authority over a man.

In regard to Eve's deception (2:14), are we to conclude that all women are at all times similarly deceived? Absolutely not; to conclude such would be to read into the text something that is not there. Women certainly do not have a corner on the market of spiritual deception. An examination of the world's false religions will reveal as many (if not more) male founders as female!

So, what does Eve's deception have to do with the prohibitions of 2:12? Eve's deception (2:14) is the second reason cited as to why women are neither to teach nor to have authority over a men. What may be implied is that all women, like Eve, are more liable to deception than are men (though obviously men are liable to deception as well). Notice that Eve's deception occurred prior to the fall while Eve was still in a state of perfection. Thus, this weakness to deception may be an inherent characteristic of the sex; it is not a result of the curse but rather a design of creation. Men and women were created to be different not only physically but also in the roles they assume in the church.

An alternative explanation is that Paul is here stating the judicial consequences placed upon womankind because of Eve's actions. Just as men were sentenced to "toil all the days of [their] life" because of Adam's sin (Ge 3:17), so also women must refrain from teaching because of Eve's deception.

It is important to point out that the reasoning behind not permitting women either to teach or to have authority over men has nothing to do with a woman's intelligence, spirituality, or public speaking ability. The female mind is equal to the male intellect. Scripture is full of examples of wise, godly women (some of whom were married to ungodly husbands). As in Pilate's case (Mt 27:19), many men would do well to accept the wise counsel of their wives! Both male and female are equal in Christ (Ga 3:28), but this equality does not obliterate God-created gender distinctions. Each has different divinely assigned roles to fulfill in the family and in the church.

Finally, what are we to make of Paul's statement that "women will be saved through childbearing-if they continue in faith, love and holiness with propriety"? Taken in its immediate context, it simply refers to the sphere in which women can find their greatest ministry potential-the home.

The word "saved" here confuses many evangelicals who are used to seeing it only in the context of eternal salvation from damnation. Eternal salvation is by grace through faith (and not by works, Eph 2:8-9), so the salvation in 2:15 must be from something other than damnation (since it is accomplished by works). Specifically, Christian women will be "saved" (2:15) from violating God's order in creation (2:13) by concentrating on being godly mothers (cp. Tit 2:3-5). Having stated which "deeds" (2:10) are not appropriate for Christian women (2:12), Paul ends by stating which deeds are appropriate (2:15). Just as Paul told the Philippians to "work out your salvation," he here directs the women to that area in which they are to work out their salvation.

So how is all of this to be applied in the house church? Obviously, women should not take on the role of authoritative instructors of doctrine, nor should they take on roles that would put them in positions of authority over men in the church (e.g., the position of elder).

On the other hand, that a woman is not to teach a man does not mean that men have nothing to learn from women. The prophecies given by God to women illustrate this (Ac 2:17; 1 Co 11:3-16). Many times my wife has shared with me her insights into Scripture-insights I had never before seen and which helped me in my understanding of a text. Although people do "learn" from prophecy (1 Co 14:31), "prophets" are not fundamentally "teachers" (1 Co 12:28-29). Even singing can be a form of teaching (Col 3:16) if we learn from the lyrics, but a singer is not fundamentally a teacher. However, the informal sharing of insights and thoughts does not place either person in the official role of "teacher." While not permitting women to teach or have authority over a man, we must be careful not to limit other ministries that are completely open to women. The church would be severely crippled without their input!

I hope this will be taken as truth written in love. While we respect the views of those who differ and accept them as brothers and sisters in Christ, it is disturbing to see Scripture so quickly dismissed as irrelevant for today. In our zeal to jettison the institutional trappings of modern Christendom, we must be cautious not also to toss out practices that are firmly rooted in God's Word.

- S.A.

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