

Women in the Church

Introduction

The Biblical and Theological issue of the role of women in church has been a modern-day quagmire. The feminist revolution has opened the door for new dialogue. The concept of trajectory hermeneutics has opened discussions as to the flexibility of the Bible. (Much like the debate concerning the constitution and if it is to be seen from an original or dynamic perspective.) Bible churches and seminaries have endured tremendous and tumultuous disagreement over this issue. GBC HAS NOT...yet!

As always, we are to be governed by sacred scripture as we move from biblical exposition to theological correlation and finally ethical articulation and application. We must go as far as scripture but no farther. SO, WHAT SAY THE SCRIPTURES?

I. Theological Foundations:

A. The Creation and Fall of Mankind – Gen. 1-3.

1. Creation and function of mankind

- a. God uniquely creates Adam from the ground. (Priority of order?) Adam is created first and then Eve, yet Gen. 1:27 reaffirms equality in personhood and importance through equality in the image of God.

“So God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them” 1:27 NASB. See also: Gen. 5:1-2.

Note: See the sequence of order in Gen. 2:7 and 2:18-23. Paul uses the creation sequence and order as foundational basis for his argument for different roles in the assembled N.T. church on the fact that Adam was created prior to Eve (1 Tim. 2:12-13), though both are equal in the expression of God’s image.

To be in the image of God is an incredible privilege. It means to be like God and to represent God.

As a reminder, in the N.T. church, the Holy Spirit is poured out in new fullness on both men and women:

Acts 2:17-18
1 Cor. 12:7, 11 (See Acts 18:26)
1 Pet. 4:10
Acts 2:41

Gal. 3:28

- b. God uniquely creates Eve from Adam - 2:21 (Priority / subordination of origin?). Note: both of them are created in the Image of God – 1:27. This first account of creation functions as the overview. The second account adds detail (*a common writing device*).
- c. God gives to Adam the role of naming both animals and Eve – 2:23. (Priority from role?)

Note: In the context of Gen. 1-2, the original readers would have recognized that the person doing the “naming” of created things is always the person who has authority over those things. We see then a priority of role in that Eve did not name Adam, rather Adam named Eve.

It is noteworthy how the Hebrew verb *qara* ‘“to call” is used in contexts of naming in Gen. 1-2 where God *called* the light Day ... 1:5; And God *called* the firmament Heaven 1:8; God called the dry land Earth ... 1:10; ... and whatever the man *called* every living creature, that was its name ... 2:19; the man *gave names* to all ... 2:20; “This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be *called* Woman, because she was taken out of Man” 2:23.

“Danvers Statement” in 1987 affirms the following in regard to roles:

- i. Both Adam and Eve were created in God’s image, equal before God as persons and distinct in their manhood and womanhood.
- ii. Distinctions in masculine and feminine roles are ordained by God as part of the created order and should find an echo in every human heart.
- iii. Adam’s headship in marriage was established by God before the Fall and was not a result of sin.

Note: Egalitarians hold that a proper interpretation would find that the idea of the role of headship being derived as distinctively male is the result of the sin.

- d. God calls Eve a helpmate for Adam. The term is often used of God as a helpmate to Israel (Ps. 33:20, 70:5, 115:9). It in no way implies inferiority (2:18, 1 Sam. 7:12. Ps. 22:11, 19, 46:1).

Note: The Hebrew text literally is translated as, “I will make *for him* (Hebrew *lo*) a helper fit for him.” In addition, the Hebrew word *kenegdo* (see BDB, *A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the O.T.*, 617) translated “fit for him” carries the meaning “a help corresponding to him” that is “equal and adequate to himself.”

The Apostle Paul continues this sense in 1 Cor. 11:9 NASB as he writes, “for indeed man was not created for the woman’s sake, but woman for the man’s sake.” The emphasis is that Eve is not to help him as one who is inferior but rather, she is to be as a helper “fit for him” as his equal.

- e. The Lord’s creation is to function as a worshiping unity as seen also in a physical unity “One flesh” – 2:24. The man and the woman are made in the image of God and have a cultural mandate upon them to fill the earth and rule it. The concept of an “Image” in the ancient near east was used by kings as they place little statues of themselves in a city to act as a representative of the king. The statue demonstrated that the king, although absent, was in fact ruling over the city. Hence Adam and Eve were to function as rulers of the earth for Yahweh – 1:29-31.

(A contemporary example of this custom was illustrated during the fall of Iraq in 2003, where the statues and pictures of Saddam Hussein, the Iraq dictator, were placed throughout the country).

The Genesis account seems to imply that Adam was the leader by right of “firstborn” and that Eve was to be seen as a partner to serve with Adam on the earth. The concept of inferiority is not seen.

The issue of headship is not explicitly stated but seems to be implicitly described by the creation order and function of Adam. These observations are appealed to by Paul in I Cor. 11 and I Tim. 2.

Is the Genesis pre-fall account conveying absolute truth or is there the need to filter out the accommodation to cultural limitations?

2. The Fall

The Fall reveals declarations of how life will now function on earth until the new heaven.

a. Three effects of the Fall on both men and women manifested in creation:

- i. The danger of exploitation rather than integrity, shame instead of innocence, and fear replaced fellowship.
- ii. Painful toil upon a sin-cursed earth-creation (Rom. 8).
- iii. Death will reign over the race. From dust to dust.

(Note: Even with the coming of Jesus, the curse is not fully lifted. There is still death even after the resurrection of Jesus and in the kingdom.)

b. Three effects for the woman in terms of the Fall:

- i. Warfare between the woman's seed and the serpent's seed.
 - Life will be a struggle on earth. The creation has fallen (Rom. 8).
 - Good and evil will always be with us until the end or the new beginning.
 - Even in the Church and kingdom age we will see this.
 - The creation has been barred and banished from the place of blessing.
 - NB. The serpent was *more crafty* than other animals 3:1. The result was that its punishment is that it will be on its belly. This is perhaps an illustration of talionic justice (An Eye for an Eye.)
 - Notice also that the seed of the woman will crush the seed of the serpent. This is usually taken to be Christ that will ultimately destroy the serpent/Satan as well as lift the curse in eternity.

- However, the immediate seed of the woman is Cain who stands for all humanity. The seed of the serpent came to be seen as anything that was evil. John 8:44 mentions the religious leaders as coming from their father the devil.
- In Gen. 4 we see an immediate local expression of the universal curse in Cain and his struggle with sin. Sin was at his door and its “desire” was to have Cain.

NB. The term for “desire” is the same as when Eve had a desire for her husband!!

- ii. The woman will endure painful agony in rearing children. There is no pain in conception but is a figure of speech. There is emotional pain. Notice the use of the literary device -- *Metonymy* of subject, whereby a substitution of a word or idea for one closely associated with it is featured.
- iii. The relational change and challenge in marriage. The statement in Gen. 3:16 finishes with an important and difficult sentence, “Your *desire* shall be for your husband, but he will rule over you.” The word translated “desire” is an unusual Hebrew word, *teshuqah*. It implies an aggressive desire, perhaps a “desire to conquer”, or a “desire to rule over” and is used in 4:7 in parallel to the 3:16 sense.

NB. Is the idea of “roles” simply a result of the Fall and hence it is not the norm and therefore it is not to be seen as applied today since we are in Christ? Or is there some constitutional aspect of human existence? How does resurrection fit into this?

The curse brought a distortion of previous roles, not the introduction of new ones

B. The Coming of Christ and the Christian

This is the *magna carta* of Christian egalitarianism. The issue that needs to be answered is: what is the scope and implication of the text? Is this an all-inclusive

statement that dissolves all differences, distinctions and divisions between men and women as well as all the other categories? Is this restricted to a limited theological statement and area of discussion, i.e., the results of salvation and the connection to Christ?

Complementarian is a label commonly used for those who believe that the Scripture teaches that men and women are equal in Christ but have different, complementary roles in marriage and the church.

Egalitarian is a label commonly used for those who believe that the Scripture teaches the equality of men and women in a way that minimizes or denies gender-specific roles in marriage or the church.

1. Content of Gal. 3:28:

- a. The law leads as a tutor to Christ and Justification 3:24-4:1-5.
- b. The promise to Abraham results in our sonship based on faith 3:29, 4:1-5.
- c. The justification is by faith 3:24 (not by works of the law 2:16).
- d. The result: we are ALL in Christ, baptized in Christ and have put on Christ – 3:26-27. The word “one” in 3:28 is used to express unity in distinction to a plurality; Jews/Greeks, slaves/free, males/females, by virtue of each sharing in one Christ, and are thus *one*.
- e. The diversity results in unity and commonality in Christ, not necessarily equality – 3:28.

Egalitarian Equal View: This position argues that the use of Gal. 3:28 in a discussion of gender roles is a *misuse* of Paul’s writings.

The context of the book and the connection to Gal. 3:28 as well as the clear content of the verse seems to indicate that Paul’s intent as well as his direct statement focuses on the position and personhood of all people in Christ.

The use of this text to imply that all distinctions are dissolved seems to be an unwarranted leap from the text. The text does plainly teach an egalitarianism of *privilege* in the covenantal union of believers in Christ. The Abrahamic promises, in their flowering by the Redeemer’s saving work, belong universally

to the family of God. The fact that God saves sinners with no respect for gender, ethnic heritage or national origin should be the focus.

II. Ecclesiastical Formulations

A. Speaking 1 Cor. 11:2-16, 14:33-36

1. 1 Cor. 11

The Context:

The Apostle Paul uses the rhetorical mechanism of *enclusio* in regard to the issue of freedom in Christ. The “bookends” are seen in his comments to women in worship (11:1-16,14:34-5).

The immediate context seems to be life in the church and the official meeting of the body at Corinth. The issue is not if women could pray or prophecy but how they were to do it (11:4). This will have implication for our understanding of 1 Tim. 2.

The Concept: I Cor. 11

Paul begins with the concept of *headship* - κεφαλη. The word appears 58 times in NT. 45 of these refer to a literal or physical *head*. 13 are figurative. Christ is seen as the head of the Church – Eph. 1:22, 4:15, Col. 1:18, 2:10, 19. The issue at hand is the use in 1 Cor. 11 and the use in Eph. 5:22-24. The term can mean origin/source or it can mean subordination. In the Eph. passage, the issue is perhaps clarified by the use of υποτασσω *submit*. (This term is often used in a military setting to convey the submission to a superior in rank.)

The Concern:

The attitude and action of the woman at Corinth seemed to reflect a lack of respect in the church. This was seen in the unwillingness to wear head coverings. The coverings was either a piece of cloth, perhaps a hood, or it was the length of the hair. Paul explains why he demands, and the woman should display, an attitude and actions that manifest subordination.

- a. First – Divine order: 1 Cor. 11:1-3.
- b. Second – Creation: 11:7-9.

c. Third – Angels: 11:10.

Angels were spectators of church – Eph. 3:10, 1 Peter 2, 1 Tim. 5:21, Ps. 103:20-21. A lack of respect to the principle of subordination would bring the wisdom of God into disrepute.

Other options include:

- i. Evil angels lust after women.
 - ii. The angel is the messenger or the pastor.
 - iii. Good angels are to learn from women.
 - iv. The model of the insubordination of the women would tempt good angels.
- d. Fourth – Natural revelation: 11:13-15. If the natural order is for women to have long hair, then the veil or hood is the spiritual counterpart. The principle is this: that a woman should not remove the covering since it would show an unnatural and willful attitude and action against God's plan.

The Conclusion/Contention:

Paul describes a situation in which he reveals the attitude of insubordination that goes against God's plan and order as seen in creation, nature, and the overall good of the body. He proscribes this attitude and prescribes actions that manifest the divine design. The issue for the church today is: Does Paul simply describe a local situation, or does he also intend to prescribe a universal injunction for the body of Christ in all generations? (11:16)

2. 1 Cor. 14:33-36:

The Context:

The problems at the Corinthian Church are numerous as seen throughout the letter. Paul now comes to the issue of spiritual gifts and the confusion and selfishness that was manifesting itself in the church.

The Concept:

- a. Paul clarifies some basic guidelines in 14:33.

- i. Women were to be silent at church meetings
 - ii. Women were not to speak
 - iii. Women were to submit themselves
- b. Paul's basis for this is not personal opinion as in 7:6.
- i. "as in all the churches of the saints" – v.33
 - ii. Based on the law – v.34. (Implied creation order law to all the Torah).
 - iii. Command from the Lord in v.37

The Command:

What is the nature of the "silence" in light of the fact that in 1 Cor. 11:4 women seemed to be able to participate in church by prayer and prophecy?

a. Textual Options

- i. The text: vv.33-34 is a gloss and either not original or is out of place and should be relocated after v.40 (or in other places).
- ii. The text in chapter 14 is referring to a church setting but the text in chapter 11 is referring to a public setting. Actually, it would seem that the text in chapter 11 is more naturally understood as occurring in the Church.

Also, since this is a form that all the churches are to be regulated by, it would seem that this is perhaps in reference to the local church worship service.

b. Theological Options

- i. The silence has to do with tongues (J. Dillow).

Although the issue of tongues is in the context, the closest context has to do with evaluating prophecy and self-control (vv.31-33).
- ii. Disruptive Talk (Ken Baille)

It is suggested that to not speak **λαλῶειν** has a lexical idea of not *lalla ling*. Also the inf. carries the continued action – chattering. The command to husbands to instruct the wife at home is the backside of not allowing women to talk in church, hence the idea of being disruptive.

Much has been made by Dr. Ken Baille of the ancient manner of women based on his experience. He sites the problem today of women “chattering” in church and the market. Both cause chaos.

These arguments are not totally convincing. Lexical and grammatical evidence is not overpowering. Paul instructed the women to be quiet because they were women not because they were disorderly. They were breaking the practice of the churches and the law. It was improper or shameful for them to talk in church v.35.

iii. Exerting Authority over Men

Barrett (p. 332) believes that at the Church of Corinth there were a gathering of women who were trying to exert power over the men and the leadership. This requires in some sense special understanding of the scene. The problem was a local one and the instruction is not a universal command for all local churches.

However, Paul links the solution through his instruction to the universal instruction of the church and all the saints – vv. 33, 34, 37

iv. Judging the Prophets

The women were asking special questions to the prophets to gain additional information.

This is a possible option. The prophets would speak and then evaluate the message. If the women then wished to find out more or judge the message, this would put them over the male prophets.

v. Women are not to speak

Paul instructs women not to speak in the church service in terms of teaching. If one were to use 1 Cor.11 to validate the ability of women to speak in prophecy or tongues, this is countered by the fact that these two forms of speech are inspired and under divine control.

The situation in 1 Cor.14 has to do not with speaking as a prophet or speaking with divine authority or control, but with simply trying to teach in church. This may fit with 1 Tim. 2.

It might also be argued that Paul was not giving approval to the speaking in 1 Cor.11 in light of the fact that he commands women not to speak in 1 Cor. 14. His silence is not praise but a tactful and patient strategy as he attempts to fix one of the many problems at this church.

Conclusion:

It seems that #4 and #5 could fit well with the details of the passage, but you must choose your own interpretation.

B. Teaching / Authority 1 Tim. 2:8-15

1. Contextual Considerations

Is Paul referring to the worship meeting of the church or some other event? Paul seems to have some guidelines for men and women in the church (vv.8-10).

2. Lexical Considerations

- a. What is the meaning of “teach” διδασκειν v.11?
- b. What is the meaning of “usurp authority” αυθεντειν v.11?

3. Syntactical Considerations

- a. Are there two issues or one in v.11?
- b. What is the force of “either/or” ουδε?
- c. Is there a stylistic arrangement seen in vv.10-11?

Quietly receive instruction-----entire submissiveness v.10.

Not to teach-----not exercise authority v.11.

4. Hermeneutical / Historical Considerations:

Is this a description or a prescription for the church? Is it trans-cultural or culturally laden? Much has been made of the “Amazon” woman in Ephesus. However, this argument has been shattered recently. Is Paul dealing with a local or cultural reality in that? House churches might have a husband and wife and Paul wants to make sure that in that type of situation, the wife is not to teach or exercise authority since it would be in opposition of what Paul taught in Eph 5:22.

5. Theological Considerations:

What is the meaning of 1 Tim. 2:15, “Women will be saved through childbearing”?

Conclusions / Options:

1. This is a situational cultural problem. No longer relevant. House church and husband and wife interaction.
2. This is a cultural issue based upon Corinthian women issue.
3. This is a principle for today: women are not to be the pastors or elder of the church.

Summary

1. Equality of persons- Distinction of performance Gen 1-3
2. Justification: Means and Method are Identical Gal 3:28
3. Gifting is Universal- Function is Limited I Cor 11&14