

Gospel Gleanings, "...especially the parchments"

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Women Teachers

Let the woman learn in silence with all subjection. But I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man, but to be in silence. For Adam was first formed, then Eve. And Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived was in the transgression. Notwithstanding she shall be saved in childbearing, if they continue in faith and charity and holiness with sobriety. (1 Timothy 2:11-15)

In recent years the question of women preachers has prompted heated debates among various Christian groups, some of them historical and reasonably conservative. What was Paul's intent with this lesson? In the matter of prayer he makes no difference. Both men and women are to pray for civil leaders and for each other. It seems clear from the whole context that Paul has moved from the more general issues on his mind toward a very specific problem. Immediately following these verses he provides a comprehensive list of qualifications for both the office of minister/preacher and deacon. Most churches that find themselves in problems among the membership also have problems with their leadership. Typically a church will reflect the attitude and personality of its leaders. For this reason its leaders must work to maintain a consistent and faithful pattern of leadership and of personal discipleship. There may well have been a problem in the church at Ephesus with women who claimed a position as teachers or preachers. Paul typically doesn't set up straw men and tear them down. He confronts real issues.

The leading argument of those who advocate allowing women to serve in the office of minister/preacher is that Paul's objection in this passage, as well as his similar objection to women assuming a similar role in the Corinthian church (1 Corinthians 14:34-35), related to a local cultural problem. They suggest that neither passage specifically imposes a perpetual rule against women in the role of preacher. I do not approve of woman bashing in any role, particularly in the Lord's church, so I will not make this point primary to this chapter. However, it is important that we deal with the question in a Biblical and reasonable manner. Many years ago I visited on occasion with a pastor of another denomination who advocated

strongly the acceptance of women in any office or role in the church, especially that of pastor/preacher. He served as a good spokesperson for the feminist movement. He almost never raised the question of Biblical rule on this question. When pressed for a defense of his view in light of these two Scriptures, he offered the typical "local culture, not perpetual rule" argument. Finally in one of our visits I asked him this question, "If Paul intended this rule as nothing more than a correction of a local cultural problem, why did he use Adam and Eve as his example for the rule that he affirmed?" Adam and Eve predate distinct human cultures. By appealing to a relational issue between Adam and Eve, Paul seems to have established a general rule for the church for all time. My friend thought a few seconds and responded, "Joe, that is the strongest point I've heard against my position." He understood the weight of Paul's argument; he simply didn't want to agree with it. On the basis of Paul's using Adam and Eve as the foundation for his rule against women in leadership roles of preacher/pastor/teacher, we cannot rightly limit the rule to these two local churches and their first century culture. I believe Paul intended this rule to apply to the Lord's church for all time to come. As specific as he was inclined to be when dealing with problems (example, the marital problem in 1 Corinthians 5), had Paul intended to confront a local problem with a local solution, he would have introduced the specifics of the local problem and dealt with them. By introducing Adam and Eve as the examples for his rule against women preachers/teachers, Paul established a general principle to be followed by the church, regardless of age or culture.

What is the intent of women learning "in silence with all subjection"? The Greek word translated "silence" means "quietness;

description of the life of one who stays at home doing his own work, and does not officiously meddle with the affairs of others; silence.”¹ The point is broader than merely not permitting a woman preacher in the church. Paul establishes a specific attitude of godly business for the women in the church that prohibits “officiously meddling with the affairs of others.” A woman may never consider stepping into the pulpit and still grievously violate the spirit of this lesson by being an “officious meddler” in the lives of other church members. She pretends to have special “authority” in their lives. She acts “officious,” as if on an official and authoritative mission for the church. She readily volunteers her opinion whether needed or requested. She pretends to act with authority that she does not actually have.

Rather than imposing a carnal motive onto Paul, we must accept this lesson no less than we accept Ephesians 2:8-10 as inspired Scripture from God. Whether we know it or not, He has good reason for the rules that He imposes on His church. Whether we understand them or not, we are directed to obey His commandments. Sometimes understanding grows out of obedience, not out of intellect. Both men and women in the church should respect Paul’s inspired intent in this lesson no less than we accept the truth of Ephesians 2:8-10. More than once I have known of preachers’ or deacons’ wives who quietly operate so that their husbands think they are submissive in their roles, but who openly boast to other women of their ability to control their husbands without the husband even knowing that he is controlled. This rebellious spirit is a disgrace to the Biblical offices involved, and to the Biblical qualifications for those offices. Such a wife disqualifies her husband from the office that he fills.

“Notwithstanding she shall be saved in childbearing, if they continue in faith and charity and holiness with sobriety.” What does Paul intend with this sentence? First of all he is not dealing with how men or women go to heaven when they die. “Saved” must be interpreted in terms of this context. Paul has just rejected the idea of women in roles of teaching or preaching leadership in the Lord’s church. The obvious question that follows, but remains unstated in the

¹Strong, J. (1996). *The exhaustive concordance of the Bible: Showing every word of the test of the common English version of the canonical books, and every occurrence of each word in regular order.* (electronic ed.) (G2271). Ontario: Woodside Bible Fellowship.

text is “Then of what value is a woman in the teaching ministry of the church?” Paul responds with this sentence. The woman shall be “saved” to a role of value, an altogether positive role of teaching, in the church. What is this role? How can he forbid her from teaching and immediately praise her for a positive role in teaching? She is to be a primary teacher in the home. She brings children into the world and into the home. God assigns her the role of primary teacher of her children. Consider how God always qualifies people for the role that He assigns to them. With few exceptions indeed, women have far more intuitive awareness of their children than men. Through this incredible insight God gives godly women the knowledge to teach their children in the home long before the child can profitably grasp the teaching in church from the pulpit.

What is the outcome of this divinely assigned role for women teaching in their families? If the woman teaches well, earns her “saving” badge as a profitable teacher, her children will “continue in faith and charity and holiness with sobriety.” By the life that they live they will prove every day of their adulthood that they learned life’s most important lessons from a master teacher, divinely called and assigned to teach them.

When we review the whole of Biblical instructions to the Lord’s church on earth, we discover a healthy balance that places high value on every member within their divinely assigned role. Give a master engineer the assignment of designing a machine to accomplish a defined task. He studies the task, works on the various subsystems of an efficient machine. Finally he builds the prototype and tries it out. Eventually he completes a well-working machine that does precisely what he designed it to do. We should think of the Biblical roles for every member of the church in every office or function that they fill in just this way. This is the Lord’s church, not our social engineering experiment. He designed its offices and functions according to His perfect knowledge of what He expects from His church. We may deceive other humans by role-playing instead of thoroughgoing obedience to the divine rule, but we will not deceive God. His church will work like that well designed and well-oiled machine when we follow His teachings and fill the roles that He assigned to us willingly, joyfully, and fully. When we change the rules that He gave us, we confuse the divine machinery and should not be surprised when disaster follows. Are we all willing to follow the divine rule of faith, even when it requires change in our own lives?

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Worship service each Sunday 10:30 A. M.
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