

Men and Women in the Church



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We are living in days of great change and crisis in our nation, home, and church. A great shift has taken place in all of these institutions as the Christian world-view and the Biblical-Law ethic have been undermined. As a result there is great confusion in our culture and that confusion has manifested itself most pointedly in the roles of men and women in the home and in the church. With the advent of feminism our culture is running toward egalitarianism. Not only are we unable to make any distinctions between men and women, but we are increasingly unable to make any distinctions between that which is moral and immoral in the realm of sexuality in general. The reason for this little booklet is to try and sort out some of the pertinent texts of Scripture that have a bearing upon the roles of men and women in the church. In the final analysis the only hope against the cultural drift of our age is faithful adherence to the Word of God.

I will confine myself mostly to the first letter of the Apostle Paul to Timothy, the young pastor of the church located in the city of Ephesus. Paul gives Timothy instructions concerning these matters; instructions which we would do well to follow. I will begin with his general instructions concerning prayer in chapter 2 and then proceed to the texts which directly address the issue at hand.

1 Timothy 2:11-15

¹¹Let a woman quietly receive instruction with entire submissiveness. ¹²But I do not allow a woman to teach or exercise authority over a man, but to remain quiet. ¹³For it was Adam who was first created, and then Eve. ¹⁴And it was not Adam who was deceived, but the woman being quite deceived, fell into

transgression. ¹⁵But women shall be preserved through the bearing of children if they continue in faith and love and sanctity with self-restraint."

Here the Apostle Paul continues his instructions concerning the duties of men and women in the context of the Church. Paul is giving Timothy instructions as a young pastor in the church at Ephesus concerning the specific duties of men as men, and of women as women. Paul addresses the men specifically in verse 8 when he says, "*I want the men in every place to pray lifting up holy hands, without wrath and dissension.*" It is especially the duty of men to lead the church in its spiritual life. Although men will not be the only ones praying, it is especially incumbent upon the men to lead the church in its prayers when gathered together for worship.

In verses 9-15 Paul shifts the focus of his instruction from the *men* of the congregation to the *women* of the congregation. In verse 9 he begins by saying, "*Likewise, I want women...*" and in verse 11 he says, "*Let a woman...*", and in verse 12 "*I do not allow a woman...*," and in verse 14 "*but the woman...*," and in verse 15 "*But women shall be....*"

In verses 9-10 he addresses the matter of dress or clothing with respect to women in particular. They must dress themselves with modesty and discretion. Then in verses 11-15 Paul moves on to some further instruction that is specifically directed to women as women. Here he introduces a *restriction* with respect to the ministry in which a woman may engage. This restriction is found in verse 12 where the Apostle Paul states, "*...I do not allow a woman to teach or exercise authority over a man. . .*"

Now of course this restriction is a matter of great controversy in the life of the Church today. We live in a day when any restriction of any sort whatsoever is automatically suspect. We do not like the idea of restriction in any arena

much less with respect to the relationship between men and women. And considering the *feminist movement* of the last fifty years or so, the idea that women should in any way be restricted with respect to what they may or may not pursue in any area of life is abhorrent to many if not most in our secular culture. So how do we view this restriction that is so clearly and unapologetically set forth by the Apostle Paul? How are we to understand this instruction set forth in this letter to Timothy?

In order to answer these questions, we need to consider some general principles of Biblical interpretation. First, we must let the Scripture speak for itself. Initially, you may not “like” what the Scripture teaches on a particular topic, but you must not try to press the Scripture into the mold of your peculiar likes and dislikes. If the Scripture is the Word of God, then your thoughts and ideas must be molded and shaped by it. (Isaiah 55:8; 2 Cor. 10:5) Scripture alone determines our belief. Jesus says in Matthew 4:4 ⁴“It is written, *‘Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God.’*” The question is not, “*What do you think or what do I think?*” but “*What does God think and what has He declared in His Word?*” Scripture alone is the inspired Word of God! Paul writes in 2 Timothy 3:16 ¹⁶“*All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness.*” Scripture is inclusive of the writings of the Apostle Paul. Second Peter 3:14-16 states, ¹⁴“*Therefore, beloved, since you look for these things, be diligent to be found by Him in peace, spotless and blameless,* ¹⁵*and regard the patience of our Lord to be salvation; just as also our beloved brother Paul, according to the wisdom given him, wrote to you,* ¹⁶*as also in all his letters, speaking in them of these things, in which are some things hard to understand, which the untaught and unstable distort, as they do also the rest of the Scriptures, to their*

own destruction.” Thus these words of instruction written to Timothy by the Apostle Paul cannot be summarily dismissed as some may wish to do simply by declaring, “*Well, these are the thoughts of Paul, they are simply the expression of his opinions, and they are not authoritative for us!*” According to Peter, these verses are included as part of God’s instruction to His Church.

Secondly we must interpret the unclear passages in the light of the clear. When you read in 1 Corinthians 15 about “*baptism for the dead,*” you should not stop then and there and develop a whole practice based on that one phrase alone. The Bible gives us a great body of clear teaching on the subject of Baptism and whatever one concludes about the passage in 1 Corinthians 15, that conclusion must be drawn in the light of the clear teaching of the whole Bible.

Third, we must interpret the part in the light of the whole. One cannot understand the purpose of the Old Testament sacrificial and ceremonial laws unless you study them in the light of the whole of God’s Word, including the Gospels and the Epistles. It is in these books of the New Testament that you come to a complete and full understanding of the function of these ceremonies and sacrifices in the practice of Israel.

Fourth, if all else fails consider the context. Since I am going to give quite a bit of consideration to the context in which First Timothy 2:11-15 are found I will not say much about this principle of interpretation at this point. Let me simply repeat this often used phrase: “*A text without a context is a pretext!*”

Now with these cautions and reminders we are ready to dive into the text before us. Here we see that the ministry of women in the church is restricted with respect to men. Let us note first the context in which this restriction is found.

What is the subject at hand in these verses? What is the broader context to be considered which defines the boundaries of this restriction? Or we might put it this way: *“Is this restriction absolute in nature? Does this restriction apply indiscriminately to all areas of life? Is there a particular realm in which this principle of restriction is applicable?”*

Now these questions have been answered in all kind of ways; perhaps in too many ways to recount in this brief study. I will mention just a few of them. Some have sought to restrict the application of these verses to the first century Church in Ephesus. In other words, it is contended that this restriction does not have universal application to all women in the church at all times and in all ages. It is surmised that in Ephesus women ruled in the pagan cult of Artemis or Diana and now Paul needs to correct these women. It is then concluded that there is no universal restriction concerning women with respect to the teaching of men.

Some have taught that the issue here is only applicable to worship services. In other words Paul’s prohibition here applies only to what may take place in a formal service of worship. Therefore, a woman may teach men in the church as long as she does not do so within the context of a worship service.

Some have taught that the issue here is one of rule and authority. That Paul’s prohibition has only to do with women holding the office of elder. In other words, Paul is forbidding a woman to be an elder and in that office exercising authority over a man. It is contended, from this perspective, that a woman may teach a man as long as she is not holding office and exercising authority over him.

Some may seek to extend this prohibition to all areas of life, asserting that Paul is prohibiting women from

teaching men, not only in the church, but in all areas of society or culture.

These are some of the ways in which these verses have been interpreted. However, I disagree with every one of these proposed interpretations. Why? Because I do not believe that the context in which these verses are found will allow these interpretations to stand.

There is nothing in the context of these verses that would lead one to conclude that Paul’s prohibition is to be restricted to the first century church in Ephesus which was supposedly struggling with the cult of Artemis or Diana. This is extra-biblical information which is imported to the text and forced upon it. If this is the proper interpretation of this text then for centuries this text has been unintelligible to the masses of Christians who have sought to understand it. If this is the proper interpretation then we have had to wait until this new extra-biblical information was made available to us so we could be enlightened.

There is nothing in this text that strictly restricts these instructions to worship services. This is an extrapolation from the fact that Paul introduces the subject of prayer in verses 1 and following. I do believe that Paul has in mind the life of the church in its public life but I don’t think that is the same thing as narrowly restricting these verses to worship services. And in fact, Paul explicitly states later on in this book that all of these instructions are to be applied generally to the corporate life of the body of Christ. Paul writes in **1 Timothy 3:14-15** ¹⁴*“I am writing these things to you, hoping to come to you before long; ¹⁵but in case I am delayed, I write so that you may know how one ought to conduct himself in the household of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and support of the truth.”*

Similarly I do not think that this prohibition can be reduced to a matter of the exercise of authority only. Paul is not here writing Timothy to prevent women from being ordained to the office of elder; that is understood. Rather he writes, *"I do not allow a woman to teach or exercise authority over a man."* He does not say *"I do not allow a woman to be an elder."* In God's economy it is not just that a woman is not allowed to hold the office of elder, but it is clear that Paul is also stating that a woman is not allowed to assume the *functions* of that office either with respect to men; that is, *teaching or exercising authority over men in the Church.* Some have tried to separate these two concepts, office and function, from one another. They propose that it is acceptable for a woman to teach men as long as she is not exercising authority over them. However, I think that such a thing is not possible. These two functions are inseparably connected. To teach someone is, at least to some extent, an exercise of authority over them. The Biblical concept of teaching includes the exercise of authority and oversight. To exercise authority apart from the teaching of the Word of God is despotism. The only right that anyone has to exercise authority over any one in the church of the Lord Jesus Christ is that right which is established by the teaching of God's Word. The authority of the elder is founded upon the teaching of the Word of God and the application of that Word to life. Paul is explicitly forbidding women *to teach or exercise authority over men* in the life of the Church, or it could be translated, *"to teach, that is, exercise authority over men."* There are some who have promoted the idea that a woman may teach men in the church if she is authorized to do so by the elders or Session of the church. In other words, they would make Paul to say, *"I do not allow a woman to teach or exercise authority over a man, unless she is authorized to do so*

by the Session." This seems to me to turn this verse on its head and make it to say the very opposite of what a plain and straightforward reading of it would require. What Paul is saying is that in the life of the church an order is to be observed. It is an order that has been established by God Himself. Men are to lead and oversee the life of the Church, and women are to follow and remain under the teaching and oversight of those men who are set apart and ordained to the offices of the church.

To interpret this text as only restricting women from holding the office of elder is missing the point. Women who teach men are exercising authority over them whether they hold office or not. To stand before men and teach the Word of God is an exercise of authority. This is the very thing that is forbidden by the Apostle Paul.

It is argued that no one can teach except that he does so under the authority of the elders. This is certainly true. If this is the import of Paul's prohibition then why does he single out women in this instance? Would this not be equally true of men? Those who argue that Paul is only prohibiting women from assuming an office of authority render Paul's prohibition a tautology. They make Paul to say, *"I do not allow a woman to teach or exercise authority over a man because no one can exercise authority in the church unless authorized to do so."* Or, *"I do not allow a woman to teach or exercise authority over a man, unless the Session allows it, in which case a woman can teach and exercise authority over a man."* In other words it would be permissible if the Session would allow it. This makes the statement meaningless. The statement is made to say no more than is true of any one who teaches in the church. All the teaching in the church is to be under the authority of the elders. Well enough, then why does Paul specifically address the women if this prohibition is equally

applicable to men and women alike? The answer is that Paul is giving a specific prohibition that is applicable to women in a particular manner that is different from the general prohibition that would apply to any one.

Now on the other hand, I mentioned that there are those who have tried to apply this restriction to all areas of life; that is, including all areas of life outside the bounds of the life of the church. I will again simply refer to the context. **First Timothy 3:14-15** answers this question for us by explicitly stating that this principle is to be applied within the household of God. ¹⁴*"I am writing these things to you, hoping to come to you before long; ¹⁵but in case I am delayed, I write so that you may know how one ought to conduct himself in the household of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and support of the truth."*

This then is the first and most crucial observation to be made about this **restriction**. We need to pay close attention to the **context of the restriction**. Paul is writing about the life of the church as the *"household of God."* As in the home the husband is the leader and head and his wife is to be under his leadership and care, so in the church, the *"household of God,"* women are to be under the leadership and care of men, not teaching, instructing, and exercising authority over them.

Now we must note that there is a restriction to the restriction. Verses 11-12 state, ¹¹*Let a woman quietly receive instruction with entire submissiveness. ¹²But I do not allow a woman to teach or exercise authority over a man, but to remain quiet."* Now here I want you to note with me what this restriction is not. It is not an absolute restriction forbidding women from having any ministry whatsoever in the body of Christ. As we have already seen this restriction is restricted to the realm of the *"household of faith."* And second this

restriction is restricted to the relationship of women to men in the *"household of faith."*

Paul is not prohibiting women from teaching altogether. Paul is not forbidding women from exercising authority. He is prohibiting them from teaching or exercising authority **over men** in the household of faith. That Paul is not prohibiting women from teaching altogether is clear from what he writes Titus, instructing him to exhort the older women to teach and train the younger women. **Titus 2:3-5** ³*"Older women likewise are to be reverent in their behavior, not malicious gossips, nor enslaved to much wine, **teaching** what is good, ⁴that they may encourage the young women to love their husbands, to love their children, ⁵to be sensible, pure, workers at home, kind, being subject to their own husbands, that the word of God may not be dishonored."*

Women are to teach and instruct their children. Older, more mature, women are to disciple and train the younger women. Women are to use their spiritual gifts to build up the body of Christ. In addition to all kinds of teaching and discipleship ministries there are diaconal ministries of service, helps, mercy, prayer, missions, etc. There is much work to be done and many avenues of service available to the women of the church. This is not some horrible all encompassing straight-jacket restriction that prevents half of the body of Christ from engaging in ministry. It is rather a recognition of the wisdom of God in ordering the Church in general, and in particular, the relationship between men and women.

With respect to their relationship to the men of the church the women are to *"...quietly receive instruction with entire submissiveness."* There is to be a recognition of the order established by God Himself. We demonstrate our dependence upon the Lord and our willingness to live under

His authority as we humbly follow the order that He has established for us in the church.

Therefore, with respect to the leadership and teaching of the church, the women are to *"quietly receive instruction."* By the way, I believe this is the proper context for understanding all of the passages of Scripture that address the duty of women to be *"silent"* or *"not to speak"* in the Church. This is not a blanket prohibition of all forms of speech. It is restricted to that authoritative and instructive speech that is found in teaching, and it is restricted to the relationship of women to men only. Silence was not to be understood in an absolutist sense. The word "speak" (λαλεω) is sometimes used to refer to some very specific communication which is inclusive of teaching and exhorting (See: Titus 2:1, 15). So there is a proper context for this restriction, there is a proper restriction to this restriction.

Now what might be the rationale for this restriction? In other words "Why does God so restrict the ministry of women so as to prohibit them from teaching and exercising authority over men? What is the reason for this restriction?" Paul writes in verses 13-15, ¹³*For it was Adam who was first created, and then Eve. ¹⁴And it was not Adam who was deceived, but the woman being quite deceived, fell into transgression. ¹⁵But women shall be preserved through the bearing of children if they continue in faith and love and sanctity with self-restraint."*

First, I want you to note what this rationale is not. This has nothing to do with the "being" or "worth" of a woman as over against a man. Paul does not in any way or in any place infer that women are of less value in the sight of God than men. Submission does not *de facto* infer that one is of less value than the one to whom he is submitting. Men and women are both created in the image of God. The Scriptures declare, *"And God created man in His own image, in*

the image of God He created him; male and female He created them..." Both man and woman are created in the image of God. Both are human beings created with the capacity to reflect the image and glory of God. They are of equal value and worth before God and one is not superior to the other. That one is to be in submission to the other does not imply inferiority. The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are *"...the same in substance, equal in power and glory,"* yet there is an order in the God-Head. There is an economy within the Trinity. Paul writes in **1 Corinthians 11:3** ³*"But I want you to understand that Christ is the head of every man, and the man is the head of a woman, and God is the head of Christ."* The Father is the head of Christ, but Christ is not of less value than the Father, He is the eternal Son of God and is of the same substance or being as the Father. Yet Jesus said, *"My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me."* He was always subject to the will of the Father. Women are to be subject to the oversight and authority of their husbands or the male leadership of the Church not because they are of less value than these men. In this regard Paul declares in **Galatians 3:28** ²⁸*"There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus."*

Also, this has nothing to do with the "intelligence" of women as over against men. Paul does not indicate that this order is due to any supposed intellectual deficiency on the part of women. In fact, we know that many women are more intelligent than many men. This is not a matter of intelligence. It is rather a matter of the order which has been established by God Himself.

This has nothing to do with the "emotional nature" of women as over against men. Paul does not say that women cannot make sound decisions because they are too emotional or anything remotely like that. He does not address the

nature of woman in a psychological manner. Again, this is not a matter of psychology. It is rather a matter of the order which has been established by God Himself. Well then, if it is not a matter of "worth," "being," or "intellect," or "emotion," what is the **rationale** for this restriction?

We note two things which Paul mentions as the rationale for this restriction; the order of creation and the fall of man into sin, both of which are not bound up in the culture. First, we note that the rationale is anchored in the order of creation. Verse 13 states, ¹³*"For it was Adam who was first created, and then Eve."* The Apostle Paul states that this restriction finds its rationale in the very order of creation itself. The record is found in Genesis 2:18ff where it is stated that God created man and then God created woman to be his companion and co-laborer in the duties of dominion. The order in the family between husband and wife and the order in the church between women and men is patterned after the very order of creation itself. This order then is not subject to the cultural factors of any age or condition. This order is clearly a-cultural. The manner in which we relate to one another as men and women in the church is to reflect the very order of creation itself. It is an acknowledgment of the sovereign will of God in creating man first and then woman. When we follow the instructions of Scripture we affirm this order and God's sovereign rule over us. When we do not follow these instructions in home and church we reverse God's order and seek to overthrow His rule.

Secondly, we note that the rationale is also anchored in the order of the Fall of man. Verse 14 states, ¹⁴*"And it was not Adam who was deceived, but the woman being quite deceived, fell into transgression."* The roles of men and women in the Church are also governed by what we observe in the Fall of mankind. The Fall of mankind was effected by a reversal of

the creation order. It was Woman leading Man, and Man following Woman with respect to the eating of the forbidden fruit that was, in part, the cause of the Fall. Paul refers to the deception involved. He states that Adam was not ". . .deceived, but the woman being quite deceived fell into transgression." Eve was led astray by deception and then Adam knowingly disobeyed the command of God. Adam followed Eve and did not offer her protection and spiritual leadership at the moment of her weakness.

When we do not follow the instructions of God's Word, when we do not observe this restriction as set forth in our text, we reverse the order of spiritual leadership that God has ordained. We follow the pattern of the Fall and I am afraid the results are equally calamitous for home and church.

By the way this restriction is upheld in First Timothy 3:1f as well. Paul writes, ¹*"It is a trustworthy statement: if any man aspires to the office of overseer, it is a fine work he desires to do."* Here again Paul is continuing to address *man as man*, as over against woman; following the **creation order** of man being created first, and then woman being created as a **helper** for man in the accomplishment of the "**cultural mandate**". The Lord God has also placed the responsibility of caring for His people in His church upon the shoulders of gifted men. This had already been established by Paul in the previous chapter. **I Timothy 2:12-13**, ¹²*"But I do not allow a woman to teach or exercise authority over a man, but to remain quiet,* ¹³*For it was Adam who was first created, and then Eve."* Thus, the **biblical principle** is that the leadership and care of the church has been entrusted into the hands of God-gifted/God-ordained men. It is worthy of note then that not only does God exclude women from positions of rule and authority in the church but also a **great host of men** are excluded as well.

Not all men are gifted by God to rule or called by God to rule, and not all men are qualified to rule.

The rationale for this restriction of office to men is not founded in some supposed intellectual, emotional, or ontological deficiency in women as over against men. It is the order established by God in the very act of creation. This is the order that He has established. It is suited to our nature as men and women. It is designed by our God for our benefit and blessing. It is in following this order in humility and meekness that we find the blessing of our God. In verse 15 we find the great hope of the Gospel. Verse 15 states, *¹⁵But women shall be preserved through the bearing of children if they continue in faith and love and sanctity with self-restraint.*

Hendriksen states in his commentary, *“Not by way of preaching to adults but by way of bearing children does a woman attain to real happiness, to salvation, with stress on its positive aspect. The path that leads to salvation is ever that of obedience to God’s ordinances.”*

“Again, not by way of exercising dominion over men but by way of submission does a woman reach the state of true freedom and blessedness.”

“Because of the prospect of child-bearing Adam’s wife was named ‘Eve,’ that is ‘life.’ Paul takes up this thought and develops it. Child-bearing will mean salvation for the Christian mother, for what Christian mother does not experience inner delight, joy, blessing, and glory in seeing the image of her Savior reflected in little ones who belong to Him? In bearing children the Christian mother by faith in God’s covenant promise looks forward to all the joys of Christian motherhood unto the glory of God. This to her is salvation.”

“I reject the following explanations: 1) she will be saved by means of “The Child-birth.” 2) she will come

safely through child-birth. 3) By means of bearing children and meriting salvation.

“Not child-bearing as such procures salvation. The love of God shed abroad in the heart, the peace which passes all understanding, the delight which is experienced when one submits to God’s ordinances, the joys of truly Christian motherhood, all these are experienced only if women ‘continue in the faith,’ etc. Faith comes first.”

“. . .if the women members of the church will abide in faith and love and sanctification, meanwhile exercising proper self-control and reserve, they will find their joy and salvation in bearing children to God’s glory, yes, in all the duties and delights of Christian motherhood.”

Calvin also remarks, *“Accordingly, Paul, in order to comfort them and render their condition tolerable, informs them that they continue to enjoy the hope of salvation, though they suffer a temporal punishment.”*

“First, by the hope of salvation held out to them, they are prevented from falling into despair through alarm at the mention of their guilt. Secondly, they become accustomed to endure calmly and patiently the necessity of servitude, so as to submit willingly to their husbands, when they are informed that this kind of obedience is both profitable to themselves and acceptable to God.”

“The apostle does not argue here about the cause of salvation, and therefore we cannot and must not infer from these words what works deserve...”

“Even ‘child-bearing’ is obedience acceptable to God, only so far as it proceeds from faith and love. To these two he adds sanctification, which includes all that purity of life which becomes Christian women.”

And so we conclude that this restriction is not **Time Bound, Worship Bound, Office Bound, or without Bounds!**

There is nothing in the context of these verses that would lead one to conclude that Paul's prohibition is to be restricted to the first century church in Ephesus. There is nothing in this text that strictly restricts these instructions to worship services. Similarly we concluded that this prohibition cannot be reduced to a matter of the exercise of authority only. It is clear that Paul is stating that a woman is not allowed to assume the *functions* of the office with respect to men; that is, *teaching or exercising authority over men in the Church*. And lastly we concluded that we cannot apply this restriction to all areas of life; that is, including all areas of life outside the bounds of the life of the Church.

Thus we stated that as in the home the father is the leader and head and his wife is to be under his leadership and care, so in the Church, the "household of God," women are to be under the leadership and care of those men gifted and called by God, not teaching, instructing, and exercising authority over them.

OBJECTIONS:

Throughout the history of the church there have always been those who have offered objections to any restrictions placed on the ministry of women. The following are some which are most often presented by those who regard the teaching of the Scriptures as important in settling these questions.

1) Women have been used by God in the history of Israel and the history of the church.

At various times in the history of the church women have been raised up by God to bless and benefit his people. Deborah was raised up during the time of the judges and at times various women prophets were raised up as well. John Calvin's comments are helpful as we consider the teaching of

the whole of Scripture on this matter. He writes, "Extraordinary acts done by God do not overturn the ordinary rules of government, by which He intended that we should be bound. Accordingly, if women at one time held the office of prophets and teachers, and that too when they were supernaturally called to it by the Spirit of God, He who is above all law might do this; but, being a peculiar case, this is not opposed to the constant and ordinary system of government." [Calvin's Commentaries, Vol. XXI, Commentary on First Timothy, pg. 67]

It is the clear teaching of Scripture that the ordinary principle of government in the church is that of male leadership. It has already been shown that this governing principle is anchored in the very order of creation itself and is not subject to the changing whims of culture.

2) Phoebe was a "minister" or a "deacon" in the church mentioned in Romans 16:1.

In addition to Romans 16:1 there is also a reference to women in First Timothy 3:11. As is always the case the broader context must be taken into account. In verse 8 of the third chapter of First Timothy the Apostle Paul begins his instruction concerning the qualifications for the office of deacon by saying, ⁸"Deacons likewise must be men. . ." He sets forth the character qualifications for the office and then in verse 11 he inserts some instructions to women.

Some have deduced from this one verse that women are permitted to hold the office of deacon along with men. Phoebe (Romans 16:1) is often referenced since Paul states that she is a "servant (Greek: $\sigma\lambda\delta\upsilon\tau\eta$ & $\sigma\lambda\delta\upsilon\tau\eta$) of the church which is at Cenchrea." It is proposed that Phoebe held the office of deacon as a *deaconess*. However, the evidence supporting this proposal is weak. The reference to Phoebe as a servant can mean no more than that she was just that, a servant. There is no requirement that she hold the office of

deacon in order to be of service in the body of Christ or to be called a servant by Paul. This is why the Greek word (διακονον) has been translated by the word "servant" and not "minister" or "deacon" throughout the history of the church. The word has both a general meaning, that is, *servant*, and a technical meaning, that is, *deacon*, when referring to an office in the church. With the advent of feminism in the broader culture, some within the church have suggested that the word should be translated "deaconess" or "minister" with respect to Phoebe.

With respect to the explicit instruction concerning deacons found in First Timothy it is clear that Paul is affirming the principle of male leadership within the church. The reference to women in verse 11 should be interpreted in the light of the whole of Scripture on this subject. Besides, the context of First Timothy 3 is clear in this respect. Throughout Chapter 3 of 1 Timothy the list of qualifications assumes the office holder is male.

So what should we make of this reference to women in 1 Timothy 3:11 where the Apostle writes, "*Women must likewise be dignified, not malicious gossips, but temperate, faithful in all things?*" The answer is more easily discovered in the whole context of First Timothy. In First Timothy 5:9-16 there is extensive discussion about women who, as widows, are employed by the church as assistants to the church in performing certain duties. Notice, that a woman is "*put on the list*" only if she meets certain qualifications. Among these qualifications are such things as: 1) a reputation for good works, 2) a hospitable spirit towards strangers, and 3) a servants' heart manifested in assistance to those in distress. Only such women as these are to be put on the list, that is, placed in a position of service to the deacons and elders in the care of the body of Christ.

An excellent explanation of First Timothy 3:11 is found in William Hendriksen's commentary (page 133). "*The simplest explanation of the manner in which Paul, not yet finished with the requirements for the office of deacon, interjects a few remarks about women, is that he regards these women as deacon's assistants in helping the poor and needy, etc. These are women who render auxiliary service, performing ministries for which women are better adapted.*" An additional passage from Hendriksen's commentary is also worth quoting. Concerning First Timothy 5:9 he writes, "*There is sufficient evidence to show that in the early church such a body of widows, with definite functions actually existed.*" (page 173)

Thus we would conclude that there is really no substantial reason for believing that there ever was an ordained office in the church for women deacons. Most likely there was a group of women who assisted the elders and deacons with certain tasks which men would not be able to perform with women. They would also help in carrying out ministries of compassionate care. These women then must also meet certain qualifications. Verse 11 states, ¹¹*Women must likewise be dignified, not malicious gossips, but temperate, faithful in all things.*"

3) Priscilla taught Apollos in Ephesus.

Here the reference is to Acts 18:26. ²⁶*...But when Priscilla and Aquila heard him, they took him aside and explained to him the way of God more accurately.*"

This text is often presented as proof that women can teach men with the approval of God. John Calvin's remarks on this text are very helpful, "*...we must remember that Priscilla did execute this function of teaching at home in her house, that she might not overthrow the order prescribed by God and nature.*"

Note that this text does not present Priscilla as a teacher or officer in the church. Rather it conveys that she,

along with her husband, most likely in their home, helped Apollos to understand the word of God more accurately. The text says, "they took him aside and explained to him the way of God more accurately." Priscilla knew the Word of God and along with her husband helped Apollos grow in his understanding of God's truth. What a powerful combination; husband and wife as a team, using their home for the sake of promoting the cause of Christ.

4) Paul teaches that all men and women are equal in the church in Galatians 3:28 "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither *male nor female*; for you are all one in Christ Jesus." Some argue from this text that the Apostle Paul supersedes the previous instruction of Scripture concerning the role of women in the church. They promote the idea that the Apostle Paul pushes the church toward an egalitarian position in which the gender of persons is not to be considered when addressing the matter of service or office in the church. However, a closer look at this text will demonstrate that such is not the case.

The Apostle Paul is not addressing the issue of office in the church in this text. Rather he is addressing the way in which believers from various backgrounds view one another and relate to one another. Jews must not view their Greek brothers in Christ as inferior because they are not physical descendents of Abraham. Free men must not view their brothers in Christ who are slaves as inferior to them because of their civil status. Men are not to view themselves as spiritually superior to women because of their gender. In Christ we are all sons and daughters of God by the grace of adoption. Whatever roles we may have in the body of Christ, the possession of the particular role does not make us superior or inferior to any other believer. The service-role

that we assume in the body of Christ is not a matter of superiority or inferiority. It is a matter of God's appointed order in general and His calling in one's life in particular. The same is true with respect to the persons of the Trinity. The Father and the Son are of the same exact substance. They are equally divine. The Father is not a superior being to the Son. So it could be said with respect to "being" that there is neither Father nor Son in the Trinity, but all are one. However, this does not negate the fact that in terms of personhood and function the Son has a different role than that of the Father in the economy of the Trinity. So the Apostle Paul asserts that being female does not make one inferior to one's brothers in Christ, and being male does not make one superior to his sisters in Christ. In Christ, there is neither male nor female, "you are all one in Christ Jesus." This does not however, deny the clear differences in function between men and women in the body of Christ any more than the fact that some men are gifted and called to be elders and others are not. Those men who are called to be elders are not superior to those who are not called. Different callings and functions does not negate spiritual equality before the Lord.

CONCLUSION

As we address these issues we are forever challenged to be transformed by the renewing of our minds, and to resist the effort of the world to press us into its mold. Much of the church of our day is caught up in what I would call *cultural drift*. The church is drifting along with the secular and pagan culture to which it is called to bear testimony. The church is taking its cues from the culture instead of seeking to transform the culture by being salt and light. As the church

adopts the worldview of the culture by which it is surrounded it will become more and more “*feminized*” and “*egalitarian*” with respect to the roles of men and women. The liberal church has already jettisoned the role-boundaries of the church of the first nineteen or so centuries by dismissing the teaching of the Word of God as the flawed opinions of chauvinistic men. Of course, if this is your view much of what Jesus taught must be jettisoned along the way as Jesus Himself chose twelve men to lead His church. In the majority of the mainline denominations this battle has already been lost. However, the conservative church is not arising unscathed from this warfare. There are many who under the pressure of *political correctness* have adopted the *egalitarian* presuppositions of the world. They have adopted the world’s perspective and now have returned to the Scriptures for a fresh look and new interpretation of the principles of leadership and gender in the church. New hermeneutics are employed and novel interpretations are submitted that are foreign to the history of the interpretation of the Scriptures. Are we to believe that the church has gotten this matter wrong for the better part of the 2,000 years of its existence? Are we to believe that only in this century has the church been provided with the extra-biblical hermeneutical information it needs to come to the correct understanding of the roles of men and women in the church? Are we to believe that the vast majority of believers to whom this new information has not been and is not accessible have been left and are left in the dark on this subject? Are we now to acquiesce to a new priestly class of interpreters who alone have the special knowledge needed to interpret the Scripture aright? Do these scholar-interpreters alone possess the *gnosis* needed to understand why the plain straightforward prohibition of 1 Timothy 2:11-12 is not really a prohibition at

all? These are serious questions that should be addressed by those who are now trying to lead the church in a radically different direction with regard to gender and leadership in the church. As with all matters of faith and practice the Reformation principle of *sola scriptura* must prevail. It has been the purpose of this little booklet to wrestle with some of the pertinent texts by which this issue can be resolved. It is submitted with the sincere desire to provide some clarity of thought on this matter. May God be praised and His order maintained in His church.

[For a thorough study on the question of whether or not the church ought to ordain women to the office of deacon see: Report of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church at http://www.opc.org/ga_papers.html]