

Appendix 2

WOMEN IN THE CHURCH: BIBLICAL DATA REPORT

An Ad Hoc Faculty Committee on the Admission of Women to Dallas Theological Seminary prepared this survey of the biblical data pertaining to the participation of women in the worship and service of God between 1984 and 1987. The committee based this report on the premise that the faculty and administration should design and administer the curricular offerings and degree programs at Dallas Seminary in a manner consistent with a valid understanding and application of Scripture.

I. Woman at Creation

- A. Woman has personal equality with man as an image-bearer of God (Gen. 1:27-28; 5:1).

Allowing for biological distinctives, a woman has the same human nature, qualities, and abilities as a man. Maleness and femaleness, though distinct, are fully harmonized (Gen. 1:28; Ps. 8:4-8; 1 Cor. 11—12).

- B. Woman has a distinctive role function within this equality (Gen. 2:18).

The priority of the male in creation reflects God's appointed *order* for His creation, not male superiority. Man has the responsibility of headship (cf. 1 Cor. 11:3; Eph. 5:21), and woman has the responsibility of being a "fitting helper" (Gen. 2:18). Each supplies what is lacking in the other. They are complementary because they are distinct.

II. Woman at the Fall

The superiority of male over female is first mentioned in Scripture as an inevitable consequence of sin—not as an inherent quality or right. In the post-Fall order of things, God said man would exploit woman's natural "helpmate desire" toward him, or more probably, he would retaliate in the face of her "desire" (cf. Gen. 4:7) to dominate and lead him, in order to dominate and subjugate her (Gen. 3:16b). The subjugation of either women or men is a symptom of mankind's fallen nature (cf. e.g., pagan religions).

III. Women in Old Testament Times Until the Time of Jesus

- A. Women served in the doorway of the Tabernacle (Exod. 38:8; 1 Sam. 2:22).

The same word (*saba*) is used of their work as that of the Levites. These women were probably widows who devoted themselves to the service of God.

- B. Miriam, a prophetess, and all the women with her gave public praise to God (Exod. 15:20-21).

Apparently, she also had some leadership role along with Moses and Aaron (Mic. 6:4).
- C. Deborah was a prophetess and also a judge in Israel (Judg. 4—5).

Deborah and Barak sang a song of praise for God's deliverance, which is recorded for both men and women to read (Judg. 5).
- D. Hannah prayed in the house of the Lord, and her prayer of thanksgiving was recorded for both men and women to read (1 Sam. 1:9—2:10).
- E. Huldah was a prophetess who prophesied before the high priest and the men of King Josiah (2 Kings 22:8-20; cf. 2 Kings 22:3 with Jer. 1:2).
- F. Many women sang in the temple choirs (1 Chron. 25:5-7; Neh. 7:66-67).
- G. Many women had an important part to play in proclaiming the Lord's Word (Ps. 68:11).
- H. Though a few women served as civil rulers in Israel (e.g., Deborah), there is no record of a female priest or a female high priest.
- I. The prophet Joel predicted that one day "your sons and daughters will prophesy" (Joel 2:28-32; cf. Acts 2:16-18).
- J. The Virgin Mary's praise to God is recorded for both men and women to read (Luke 1:46-55).
- K. Anna was a prophetess who served in the temple "night and day with fastings and prayers" (Luke 2:36-38).

IV. Women in the Ministry and Teaching of Jesus

- A. A loyal group of women accompanied Jesus and served Him on His ministry tours (Luke 8:1-3; Matt. 27:55; Mark 15:41).
- B. In contrast to normal custom and rabbinic standards, Jesus spoke with a Samaritan woman and revealed to her the nature of true worship (John 4:7-26).
- C. Jesus cared equally for the physical infirmities of women (Mark 1:29-31; 5:25-34), and He drew attention to the devotion of an unnamed poor widow to teach a lesson in discipleship (Mark 12:41-44).

- D. He permitted Mary, Lazarus' sister, to sit at His feet and learn--a privilege granted only to men at that time (Luke 10:42).
- E. Women who had been healed by Jesus praised God publicly in the synagogue (Luke 13:13).
- F. In a male-dominated culture, Jesus redressed legal situations which were weighted against women (cf. Matt. 19:9-10; Mark 10:11-12).
- G. Though Jesus had both male and female disciples, all twelve original apostles were men (Matt. 10:1-4; Mark 3:13-19).
- H. Jesus entrusted women with the high privilege of carrying the news of His resurrection to His twelve disciples (Mark 16:6-8; Luke 24:11).
- I. Mary Magdalene was one of the first people to see Jesus as the risen Lord (John 20:11-18).
- J. Jesus' charge to evangelism and discipleship given to the apostles applies to the church at large: with reference to *all* believers, men and women (Matt. 28:19-20; Mark 16:15-16; Acts 1:8).

V. Women in the Life and Ministry of the Early Church

- A. The Holy Spirit fell on both men and women on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2:1-4).
- B. Women prayed with men (Acts 1:14; 12:12).
- C. Women had various ministries of hospitality, service, and good works (Dorcas, Acts 9:36; Mary, the mother of Mark, Acts 12:12; Lydia, Acts 16:14-15).
- D. Priscilla and Aquila took Apollos aside, and "explained to him the way of God more accurately" (Acts 18:26-28).
- E. The Holy Spirit used women as His prophetic mouthpiece (Philip's four daughters were prophetesses, Acts 21:8-9).

Overall, it appears that women took as active a part in the life and ministry of the church as men.

VI. Women in the Ministry and Teaching of Paul and Peter

- A. Paul affirms the personal *equality* of man and woman in the new creation, by stating that in Christ there is "neither male nor female" (Gal. 3:28).

A woman obtains salvation by faith exactly as a man does (Eph. 2:8-9; 1 Pet. 1:18-19), and both are co-heirs of "the grace of life," despite some physical limitations a woman has as the one with "the weaker [feminine] vessel [body]" (1 Pet. 3:7).

Like a man, she is indwelt by the Holy Spirit (Rom. 8:9b), and her body also serves as a sanctuary of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 6:19-20). In the new creation, she has equal standing before God (Rom. 5:1-2), and man and woman are interdependent (1 Cor. 11:11-12).

B. A woman has access to God in prayer as does a man (1 Cor. 11:4-5, 13); she is nurtured by His Word as is a man (1 Pet. 2:2); and she enjoys the privileges and responsibilities of the priesthood of all believers (1 Pet. 2:5, 9; 3:7; Rev. 1:6a).

C. In Christ, a woman is given the same spiritual gifts available to men today, including: pastoring, teaching, and evangelism (1 Cor. 12:7-11, 27-31; Rom. 12:3-8; 1 Pet. 4:10-11).

The Holy Spirit sovereignly distributes spiritual gifts (1 Cor. 12:11). They are given in order that all believers might use them to glorify God (1 Pet. 4:10-11), and to equip and build up the body of Christ (Eph. 4:12-16). They are to be exercised for the common good, and according to God's established order (1 Cor. 12:7; 14:26-40). A spiritual gift is not the same thing as a church office.

D. Paul recognized that the Holy Spirit used women as His prophetic mouthpiece (1 Cor. 11:5).

E. Paul instructed older women to teach younger women and children (cf. 2 Tim. 1:5 with 3:14-15; ch. Prov. 1:8; Titus 2:3-5).

F. Women had ministries of hospitality, good works, and service (1 Cor. 16:19; Col. 4:15; 1 Tim. 2:10; 5:9-10).

G. Paul encouraged both unmarried men and women to remain single, and to devote themselves to the Lord's service (1 Cor. 7:32-34).

H. Euodia and Syntyche were co-workers with Paul (Phil. 4:2-3).

I. In Romans 16, 10 out of the 29 people Paul commended for loyal service were women (Rom. 16; cf. 1 Cor. 9:5). No distinction in service or status is implied.

Phoebe was called a "deacon (servant) of the church" (Rom. 16:1). Andronicus and Junia (feminine), Paul's kinsmen and fellow-prisoners, were said to be "outstanding among the apostles who also were in Christ before me" (Rom. 16:7).

- J. Within the framework of the personal equality of man and woman, God has established a functional order in which *man* has the responsibility of headship (leadership) in both the home and church (1 Cor. 11:3, 8-9; 14:34-36; Eph. 5:23; Col. 3:18; 1 Tim. 2:11-12; 1 Pet. 3:1-7), and *woman* has the responsibility of willing submission in recognition of God's order (Eph. 5:22-24; Col. 3:18; 1 Pet. 3:1).

Functional submission in these spheres is not inconsistent or incompatible with personal (ontological) equality in Christ. The two must exist side by side, just as God instituted them originally.

One primary means by which woman glorifies God is through being the "glory of man" (1 Cor. 11:7), that is, by fulfilling her responsibility—given at creation—of voluntarily submitting herself to the headship of man.

In the New Testament, the headship-submission relationship relates to the home and the church. Not all women are subject to all men.

- K. Paul's list of elder qualifications indicates that the office of elder/pastor is limited to men, and this office, with its commensurate authority, is conferred by the local church (1 Tim. 3:1-7; Titus 1:5-9; 1 Pet. 5:1-4).

Consequently, the directing/ruling function of the local church is reserved for men. There are no examples of "ordained" women elders in the Scriptures, nor are they encouraged to seek such an office. Nevertheless, elders may delegate certain responsibilities to various church members, both men and women.

- L. Whether the office of deacon is open to women is debated. The primary passage which raises this issue is 1 Timothy 3:11. There are three major interpretations of this verse:

1. The women mentioned are unmarried assistants to male deacons.³⁷³
2. The women mentioned are the wives of male deacons.³⁷⁴
3. The women mentioned are a select group of female deacons within the church.³⁷⁵

³⁷³Robert M. Lewis, "The 'Women' of 1 Timothy 3:11," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 136:542 (April-June 1979):167-75.

³⁷⁴Charles C. Ryrie, *The Place of Women in the Church*, p. 91; C. K. Barrett, *The Pastoral Epistles in the New English Bible*, p. 61.

³⁷⁵James B. Hurley, *Man and Woman in Biblical Perspective*, pp. 229-31, and the majority of commentators.

The second and third views seem more probable, and both handle the data adequately. Whether or not they held the office of deacon in New Testament times, it is clear that women fulfilled many of its functions (cf. 1 Tim. 2:10; 5:9-10; Acts 9:36).

Phoebe may have been a recognized "deacon" (deaconess) of the church in Cenchrea (Rom. 16:1-2). If so, this would indicate that both men and women served in this office. However, since she was probably a wealthy social leader in the city, she may have been simply an unofficial patroness of the church.

- M. Since the function of "teaching" is a spiritual gift, and not an office of the church, it is available to both men and women (Rom. 12:7; 1 Cor. 12:28-29).

The question, however, is not *whether* a woman may teach, but *whom* she may teach, and in *what setting*. Three Pauline passages speak to this issue: 1 Corinthians 11:2-16; 14:26, 34-36; and 1 Timothy 2:9-12. The interpretation and application of these passages continue to evoke considerable debate in evangelical circles. It is generally agreed that these verses primarily refer to activities within the context of corporate worship.

1. 1 Corinthians 11:2-16; 14:26

On two occasions, Paul mentioned specific situations in which a woman may speak in corporate worship (1 Cor. 11:5 and 14:26).

In 1 Corinthians 11, Paul instructs a woman to have a sign of authority on her head (1 Cor. 11:10), when she prays and prophesies, in order to demonstrate her submission to God's established order in the church. Some argue that "authority on her head" refers to a woman's own authority to exercise her spiritual gifts, within the divinely ordained order, and not to a sign of another's authority over her.³⁷⁶

The nature of this sign of authority in Paul's day is difficult to determine, but it is usually interpreted in one of two ways:

- a. It may refer to the practice of wearing veils in corporate worship, since some sort of head covering seems to be indicated in the passage, even though the term "veil" does not occur in the Greek text.³⁷⁷

³⁷⁶Morna Hooker, "Authority on Her Head: An Examination of 1 Corinthians 11:10," *New Testament Studies* 10 (1963-64):410-16.

³⁷⁷Bruce K. Waltke, "1 Corinthians 11:2-16: An Interpretation," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 135:537 (January-March 1978):46-57.

- b. It may refer to a woman's long hair which, when properly fastened, would serve in place of a head covering (11:15), reflecting her submission to God's established order in the church.³⁷⁸

This raises the hermeneutical problem of "cultural relativity," with its corresponding adaptations. Unchanging truths about God and His will are applied in a variety of cultural and situational contexts within Scripture itself. It is generally recognized, especially by dispensationalists, that not all biblical teaching about conduct is normative for behavior today. Some applications of biblical principles are restricted to a limited audience. Scripture itself must specify the nature and extent of this restriction, in some way, and biblical theology must confirm it.

One task of exegesis, that is widely practiced but lacks widely accepted definitive criteria, is to distinguish universal, unchanging, normative truths from recorded applications—which are local, temporary, and subject to changing situations. To fail to see how a particular application of a normative principle has been culturally conditioned, or to treat a normative principle as culturally relative, would both be mistakes. How to make this distinction, and do it accurately, needs further thought and discussion

Many interpreters agree that the normative principle in 1 Corinthians 11 is that a woman, while praying and prophesying, is to show her acceptance of and submission to God's ordering of His creation (11:7-13). Accordingly, the application of this principle here is culturally conditioned. In Paul's day, it was expressed by the head covering, which was necessitated by first-century culture (11:16). Our culture has no consistent, corresponding custom. However, a woman's hair naturally serves in the place of a head covering, and the normative principle of a submissive spirit remains constant.

Some, however, would argue that the head covering is not simply a particular application of a normative principle, and therefore *culturally determined*; but is, in fact, part of the normative principle itself, and thus *normative practice*—since Paul appeals to creation order in his argument. But one must consider whether Paul used the creation account to substantiate male headship or a female head-covering.

2. 1 Corinthians 14:34-35

In light of 1 Corinthians 11:5 and 14:26, it is reasonable to suggest that 1 Corinthians 14:34-35 does not mean that women are to be

³⁷⁸Hurley, pp.184-86.

absolutely silent at all times during corporate worship. Of several interrelations of this passage, two of the most common are also the most probable:

- a. Paul's prohibition is against women speaking out to teach men in corporate worship (cf. 1 Tim. 2:11-12).³⁷⁹
- b. Paul's prohibition is against women *evaluating the utterances* of the prophets in corporate worship, since this evaluation would involve an "exercise of authority" which would go against the requirement of submission to male headship (1 Cor. 11:2-6; 1 Tim. 2:11-15).³⁸⁰

Both interpretations have merit, but the latter one fits the context of 1 Corinthians 14:26-35 better. As shown above, the Law did not prohibit prayer and praise by women in public worship. Consequently, Paul's reference to the Law (14:34) is probably a reference to the creation account, and God's established creation order, as it is now to be exhibited in the local church.

3. 1 Timothy 2:9-15

In verses 9 and 10, Paul directed that a woman's dress and behavior should be appropriate, when she engages in corporate worship, so that—in attitude, appearance, or conduct—she does not give the impression that she rejects God's established order of male headship in this sphere.

In verse 11, Paul asserted that women are to receive instruction in corporate worship with a *quiet* and *submissive* spirit. If they do this, they will have less difficulty obeying Paul's command, in verse 12, to neither teach nor have authority over a man in public worship. This is not Paul's narrow opinion or an overreaction to a local church problem at Ephesus.³⁸¹

The reason for Paul's prohibition is twofold:

- a. Adam was formed *before* Eve (2:13)—a reference to God's established order in creation and the principle of headship (Gen. 2:21-22).

There is a proper kind and order of leadership, in the new creation as well as in the old, prior to and following the Fall.

³⁷⁹Knight, *The New . . .*, pp. 36-37.

³⁸⁰Hurley, pp. 188-94.

³⁸¹See Douglas Moo, "1 Timothy 2:11-15: Meaning and Significance," *Trinity Journal* 1 NS:1 (Summer 1980):62-83.

- b. Eve was *genuinely deceived* by Satan; whereas Adam was *willfully disobedient* to God's command (2:14).

Eve acted on her own initiative and was deceived. Paul did not wish Eve's error to be repeated in the church. Thus, a woman—no matter how gifted or capable—is not "to have authority" (not just "to usurp authority," KJV) that properly belongs to a man in this sphere. This is simply God's established order. Paul did not mean that a woman is inherently less intelligent, or more easily deceived than a man—and so cannot teach or lead. Male headship itself has not preserved the church from heresy. Neither did Paul mean that sin in the human race is the fault of a woman (cf. Rom. 5:12-21).

Despite her equal standing in Christ, a woman should not despise the key role assigned to her—childbearing and childrearing—and should use it as an opportunity to glorify God. Her unique ability to bear and nurture life is evidence of God's favor upon her. In so doing, she will work out her salvation ("be preserved") in God's ordered plan, and will reap eternal reward (2:15).

Though women are forbidden to teach men in corporate worship, they can always teach women and children (Titus 2:3-5), and give instruction to men as well—at least privately—as Priscilla and Aquila did with Apollos (Acts 18:26).

Several questions remain:

- a. What constitutes teaching in the worship service of the church?—a testimony, a devotional, a missionary report, singing a solo, or reading a passage of Scripture?
- b. Does a woman violate Paul's injunction if the elders of her church, realizing she is a competent teacher, agree that she should teach the whole church, men included, in the area of her competence which may or may not involve the direct exposition of Scripture?
- c. Can a woman teach men in settings apart from local church worship or church-related meetings (e.g., home Bible studies), such as in a college classroom, in personal evangelism, in a writing ministry, or on the mission field where no male missionaries serve (cf. Acts 18:24-26)?

VII. Conclusions

- A. Scripture affirms that women are equal with men, both as image-bearers of God and in their personal standing before God and the church.
- B. Scripture affirms that women are distinct in their femaleness from men in their maleness—as created and ordered by God.
- C. Scripture affirms a basic pattern of functional order, applicable to the church, in which men are given headship—the task of leadership, and women are to be subject to this leadership (as are men who are not designated leaders).
- D. Scripture demonstrates that women have unique and significant ministries to fulfill—along with men—in the church, because they are gifted with the same spiritual gifts as men. There are no gender distinctions in the distribution of spiritual gifts.
- E. The office of *elder* is not open to a woman, but as with a man, she can exercise her gifts without holding this office.
- F. The office of *deacon* is probably open to a woman—at least women fulfilled many of its functions in the New Testament church.
- G. The Scriptures indicate that a woman may participate actively in corporate worship, but she is not to teach or engage in activities in which she has authority over a man or men in this sphere.

She may minister in church services, or church-related meetings, so long as her primary purpose is not to have (or exercise) authority that befits the office of elder/pastor. It is debated whether this prohibition regarding teaching the Scriptures or Bible doctrine extends beyond the confines of corporate worship or church-related meetings.

There are numerous spheres of leadership and ministry that are appropriate for women, limited only by situations where a woman would assume "headship" authority over a man or men. Such spheres include Christian education, outreach and evangelism, specialized pastoral ministries, church administration, a music ministry, a prayer ministry, a service ministry, and a writing ministry.

Perhaps two biblical guidelines would be helpful in evaluating particular situations:

- a. Does our interpretation or application of a biblical passage in a given situation affirm woman's personal equality with man?
- b. Does our interpretation or application of a biblical passage in a given situation affirm woman's responsibility of willing submission to man's headship responsibility in the home and church?