

WOMEN IN MINISTRY

By Denver Cheddie

There is much difference in opinion and interpretation concerning this issue. In this article I give my two cents on the issue of women in ministry. Can women teach men? Why does Paul require that women be silent in the church? What does he mean that women shall be saved in childbearing? I'll attempt to address these issues.

Those who know me know that I care for political correctness as much as I care for a bug on a windshield. For this reason, I hate when people disregard the bible altogether for political correctness; or when their interpretations of the bible are skewed by cultural pressure. I will attempt to address the issue of women in ministry relying solely on the bible. I must say though, that this is one issue where I am not very authoritative, because it involves the interpretation of some very difficult passages of scripture. But it is better to try to interpret the difficult scriptures than to just pretend they don't exist because they are inconvenient to one's predetermined beliefs.

Here are some of the pertinent scriptures to our discussion.

Galatians 3:28

There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus.

1 Corinthians 14:34-35

Let your women keep silent in the churches, for they are not permitted to speak; but they are to be submissive, as the law also says. And if they want to learn something, let them ask their own husbands at home; for it is shameful for women to speak in church.

1 Timothy 2:11-15

Let a woman learn in silence with all submission. And I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man, but to be in silence. For Adam was formed first, then Eve. And Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived, fell into transgression. Nevertheless she will be saved in childbearing if they continue in faith, love, and holiness, with self-control.

Really and truly, the Galatians passages has absolutely nothing to do with women in ministry, but I included it only because some people use it to support the argument that women should be allowed to perform any ministry that men perform. The context of that scripture is clearly salvation. We are equally saved through Jesus Christ regardless of our gender, race, nationality or status in society. You simply cannot take that scripture outside of its proper context. If you apply that verse to women in ministry, why not also apply it to homosexuality? Why not say that since in Christ there is no longer any gender distinction, men could marry men? Besides, in the early church, women were not allowed to perform public ministry. That's a historical fact. They didn't seem to think that the Galatians passage allowed women to teach publicly.

Any valid view on the subject must arrive at an interpretation for the latter two passages of scripture. Those are the important ones. Some churches adopt a hard line interpretation of these scriptures and permit women only to teach other women and children. Again you have to be careful that you don't miss the point of the scripture by focusing on the "what" while ignoring the "why". These passages clearly state that women were not to teach in public. But why? That is very important to properly understand the passage and its extended meaning to us, nearly 2000 years later.

Reason #1 – Submission to Authority

Paul seems to equate silence with submission. It is possible that the women in those churches had a tendency to speak in a way that seriously undermined the authority of the person in charge. In so doing, they may have been hindering the gospel. And maybe Paul was saying that when they asked their husbands any questions at home, that would be more in keeping with the submission that the gospel required. I don't know. I could only speculate.

The fact that Paul required that women ask their husbands at home suggests that speaking, in and of itself, does not constitute rebellion. It is the way you speak and the forum you use to express your ideas. This is why I tend to believe that the women in those churches were speaking out of a rebellious attitude. Maybe they wanted to dominate the services. Perhaps it was that issue Paul was addressing.

Is it possible for a woman to teach without usurping authority? If it is then there is no problem. It is clear that from scriptures like Hebrews 13:17 and 1 Peter 5:1-5 that pastors carry a huge amount of spiritual authority. It is impossible to be a pastor without being in spiritual authority over the members of your congregation. Of course, that authority is not to lord over the people, but to serve them. But Paul clearly had a problem with women occupying such positions. But could women be teachers without being pastors, such that they carry less authority?

Reason #2 – The Law

Paul made a reference to the Law in the 1 Corinthians passage. It is difficult to say for sure which scripture precisely he was referring to. It may have been Genesis 3:16 where it said that the man would rule over the woman. It is difficult to say. But whatever scripture it was, Paul used that as a reason why women should not have authority over men.

Reason #3 – Culture

Paul did not directly say culture was a reason, but it is a fact that the more ancient cultures were less influenced by feminism than ours. It is a fact that a woman in ministry was frowned upon back in the time of Paul. It is possible that Paul was trying to not deviate from the social norms of his time. There are other scriptures, e.g. 1 Corinthians 8-11, where Paul urges that believers not deviate from cultural norms so as to avoid creating unnecessary offenses. In our day and age, the cultural norms are a little different. So women in ministry today certainly would not create an offense, as it would have back in the first century.

Reason #4 – God’s Design

Adam was formed first then Eve. It was Eve who was deceived, not Adam. Interesting isn't it, that 1 Timothy passage? Paul used this as a reason why women should not have authority over men. The fact that Paul alluded to the initial design of God suggests that his instructions transcend culture. Perhaps Paul was saying that he doesn't want women to have authority over men because that was not the way God designed it. If that is the case, women should be angry with Paul and God, not me. Or maybe they should just delight in being who God made them to be rather than who the feminist movement says they should be.

Now if Paul was not outrageous enough to say that God did not make women to have authority over men, now he is saying that women shall be saved in childbearing. This is indeed a very difficult passage of scripture to understand, but in it lies the true purpose for which God created women. Before you send any hate mails, read on.

Some say that this is a reference to Mary bearing the Christ child – women shall be saved through the birth, life, death and resurrection of Christ. If that is the case, men are also saved that way. What is the point of saying that? It's like someone asking me whether he should get a dog or a cat as a pet, and I say that all men are dogs. We were obviously having two different conversations. We are trying to determine whether women can be in ministry, and Paul is saying that women are saved through Christ? That has

nothing to do with the discussion. That is certainly not what Paul was trying to say.

Clearly the word, "saved" is not used in a salvation sense. Paul is not saying that women are saved to go to heaven through childbearing. He is obviously using that word in a different sense. He said that "she will be saved in childbearing if they continue in faith, love, and holiness, with self-control." Clearly "she" and "they" cannot be referring to the same person(s), assuming Paul did not mix his pronouns. I think the "they" is not referring to the woman, but to her children.

I interpret this scripture to mean that a woman's primary ministry is not in the church, but in the home. I am not talking about secular work, but Christian ministry. This scripture does not say whether a woman should work or not. But I think it is saying that her primary ministry is in raising godly children. This is a ministry that is scorned by the world today, only because of the influence of the feminist movement.

Earlier I asked if it were possible for someone to teach in a non-pastoral role, such that they did not carry the same authority as a pastor. In Acts 18, we find a teacher called Apollos who was teaching very boldly and accurately. Then Aquila and Priscilla (a woman) took him aside and explained to him the way of the Lord more fully. I get the impression from this, that Apollos, the teacher did not carry the same authority as say an apostle or a pastor. The apostles had direct revelations from God concerning the mystery of the New Testament faith. Their message became doctrine.

Pastors had to look over the souls of their congregation (Hebrews 13:17). Teachers did not carry that same authority.

I would conclude that it is permissible for women to teach without being pastors. Modern culture would allow for it. Even if there are men in the crowd, the women who are teaching do not carry any authority over them. However, this should not distract from a woman's primary ministry, which is to her family. In the same way, a man's church ministry should not distract from his primary responsibility to his family, otherwise he is worse than an infidel (1 Timothy 5:8). Why should it be any different for women?

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