

Fellowship Hall SS Class  
Role of Women in Church  
Robert C. Newman Response 5/5/91

### **Authority and Personhood**

Common claim in feminist literature that if women do not have equal authority with men, then they are really second-class citizens, not fully human, etc.

This is not biblical outlook on authority and personhood:

- 1) Lay Israelites were no less God's people tho they could not be king, priest or prophet.
- (2) Jesus no less God for submitting himself to his heavenly Father, to his earthly mother and adoptive father, and to government authorities.
- (3) God humbles himself to help us; Jesus humbled himself to save us; foot-washing incident.
- 4) Christian exercise of authority is to be loving, serving, self-sacrificing, even if one under our authority is not what he/she should be.
- 5) Christian obedience is to be voluntary, enthusiastic, as though rendering obedience unto the Lord, even tho one over us is not what he/she should be.

If male/female equality of personhood requires that females be elders, what does this do to the personhood of those (male or female) who lack the gifts to be elders? Feminist argumentation carries us into the sinful attitudes rebuked by Paul in his treatment of gifts in 1 Cor 12:14-30.

### **New Creation (2 Cor 5:17) Has Begun**

Example of "already but not yet"

New creation has begun with regeneration

but not completed until glorification

Still have "marrying and giving in marriage" until resurrection, so still family authority structure; the church is a sort of family.

Jew/Gentile distinction continued re/ temple access as long as temple stood; slave/free distinction as long as slavery continued; male/female distinction as long as marriage continues?

Context of Gal 3:8 is not church office, but rather inheritance (sons of God, seed of Abraham); though Gentile, slave and woman previously excluded from inheritance, now included.

## Original Creation (Gen 1-3) Continues to New Heaven & Earth

Paul argues a male/female authority structure in church and home from the order of creation: 1 Tim 2:12-13; 1 Cor 11:8-9; probably also in 1 Cor 14:34, "Law says"

This fits Gen 2:

with Eve created *after* commission given to Adam

with Adam *naming* Eve "woman"

this is indeed a generic rather than personal name, but so (presumably) he gave animals generic names (dog and cat, rather than Fido and Garfield)

This authority structure in creation carried on by Paul into church as well as into family "Man leaves father and mother" probably indicates who takes initiative to establish new family; in biblical examples, it is not emphasis that man joins woman's family.

## Diminutive Names Longer?

Some are, some aren't

Nicknames shorter for

Silvanus --> Silas, Epaphroditus --> Epaphras,

so why not Junianus --> Junias?

## Some New Testament Titles Not Given to Women

Note these basic terms for public authority:

### **Elder** (*presbuteros*)

no evidence of women elders

only feminine occurrence of word is in 1 Tim 5:2,

where context is older/younger men/women

*Presbutis* (old woman) is used in Titus 2:3 in a way that might indicate an authority position, but it involves teaching/authority over younger women, which fits our view of 1 Tim 2:11-12.

### **Overseer, Bishop** (*episkopos*)

no evidence for women overseers

both passages on requirements (1 Tim 3:1-7 and Tit 1:5-9) indicate overseer is a male; this is especially significant given that requirements for deacon in 1 Tim 3:8-13 explicitly include a place for women.

### **Shepherd, Pastor** (*poimen*)

no indication of women shepherding God's flock

### **Teacher** (*didaskalos*)

term not used for women

verb "to teach" (*didasko*) used twice:

1 Tim 2:12: don't allow women to teach (men)  
Rev 2:20 Jezebel teaches and leads astray  
similar word Tit 2:3-5: older women teaching younger

**Herald, Preacher** (*kerux*)

not used of women

verb "to preach/proclaim" (*kerusso*) has no examples of women doing so

**Surrounding Culture**

Although Greco-Roman cultural somewhat patriarchal by current (late 20<sup>th</sup> cen) standards, not so one-sided as often pictured:

- Some religions at that time had women priests.
- Gnostic gospels have much more outspoken, authoritative women than do canonical Gospels.

**Biblical Imagery**

The husband/wife relation is used frequently as a picture of the relation between God/humans, with God represented by husband, mankind by wife; it is never used with God represented by the wife and mankind by the husband. This may be the picture Paul has in mind in 1 Cor 11:7 (man as image and glory of God, woman as glory of man). It does not favor the idea of equal authority in the marriage relationship.

**Women's Issue and Slavery/Polygamy**

Is male/female role distinction in family and church just an aberration caused by the fall or by patriarchal society, which is to disappear in the church age, just like slavery and polygamy have (almost) disappeared?

Hopefully the abuses often associated with male/female relations will find "substantial healing" in the church, but Bible makes some important distinctions between slavery, polygamy and marriage:

True, polygamy was not forbidden in the OT as incest and adultery were, but it was not part of the original creation (i.e., there were no multiple Eves); see comments of Jesus on divorce, which point to one man/one woman intention for marriage; NT revelation forbids leaders to be polygamists.

Slavery also is not forbidden in the Bible, but is seen to be a curse (Dt 28:36,41,48,64,66), and Israelites were not to enslave one another. Paul encourages slaves to obtain their freedom if possible, but not to get hung up over it.

Marriage, on the contrary is seen as a great blessing; here, equality of persons does not cancel diversity of roles. There is more openness to a single lifestyle in NT than in OT, but marriage never downgraded.

### **Submitting to One Another (Eph 5:21)**

Does this really mean there is to be no authority structure in marriage or child rearing?

"One another" does not always mean "everyone to everyone" so that (as feminists regularly suppose) this passage must be translated "Everyone submit to everyone else."

It frequently means "some to others" so that this passage may be translated "Those under authority should submit to those in authority." Note the following:

Rev 6:4 "some men slay others," not "everyone killed everyone else"

Gal 6:2 "those more able bear burdens of less able," not "trade burdens"

1 Cor 11:33 "those who are early wait for those who are late," not "everyone wait for everyone."

Wives are several times told to submit to their husbands, but never vice versa.

Children are more than once told to submit to their parents, but never vice versa.

Eph 5:21 is thus the introductory sentence for the series of teachings on authority relations which follow.

### **Feminist Argumentation and OT Rebellions**

Note attitudes and argumentation in:

Ps 2:1-3: people find God's commands too restrictive

Num 12:2: Miriam and Aaron vs. Moses: "Has the LORD only spoken through Moses? Hasn't he spoken thru us as well?"

Num 16:3: Korah, Dathan & Abiram vs Moses & Aaron: "All the congregation is holy, every one of them, and the LORD is in their midst; so why do you exalt yourselves above the assembly?"

Num 16:41: "All the congregation grumbled against Moses and Aaron, saying, 'You are the ones who have caused the death of the LORD's people.'"

### **Further Comments on 1 Tim 2:11-15 and Context:**

The word translated "have authority" (*authenteo*) does not literally mean "domineer"; it has two ranges of meaning at NT times, "commit murder/perpetrate a crime" and "have/exercise authority"; the latter is often used in a positive or neutral sense, and that best fits the

context here, where we have the paired opposites "learn/teach" and submission/authority" in vv 11-12 (see Knight, NTS 30:143-57; Wilshire, NTS 34:120-34).

There is no reason to believe Paul is here limiting his remarks to unlearned women, since he grounds his argument in creation and the fall, and says nothing about excepting "learned women."

Likewise nothing is said in the immediate context that would suggest that it is only *false* doctrine that he will not allow women to teach. The natural emphasis of the passage in its context is the problem of women teaching men.

There is no reason to assume that Paul's use of the present tense in "I do not permit" (v 12) indicates the temporary nature of his command. The present tense is often used for axiomatic statements; for instance, Paul intends no temporary command when he says "I urge you, brothers" in Rom 12:1.

There is no need to relativize 1 Tim 2:9-10. Paul did not originally intend his remarks to be understood to forbid braids, gold, expensive clothes, but to remind all Xns everywhere that good deeds are the adornment that matters. Exactly what Paul speaks of here has been a frequent problem throughout church history and still is today.

If the clear teaching of vv 11-14 is to be evaporated by the uncertainty of what Paul meant in v 15, we can probably get rid of most NT teaching that displeases us (cp. arguments of those who deny eternal punishment or sinfulness of homosexuality).

There is no need to treat 1 Cor 11 re/ women's head covering as completely relativized. Some Xns still practice this today (Mennonites and Plymouth Brethren), and others see it as a *cultural expression* of a continuing responsibility for wives to be submissive to their husbands.