

A Woman's Role in the Church 9-16-99

This is undoubtedly one of the touchiest topics in the Church today. First we should determine in our hearts that if we differ in our understanding of the Scripture it should not affect our unity. Our understanding of the heart of God on the issue should be from an understanding of the Scriptures that address the subject and not our personal belief, our culture's viewpoint, or a teaching of a denomination. It should be our desire to know the whole counsel of Scripture.

This morning I will share with you my understanding of the Word of God on the issue but each of you should have your own conviction. The Word is not subject to my private interpretation. Your conviction should not rest on mine. You have just as much a right to personally read and come to an understanding of the Word as anyone who has the Spirit of God to guide them.

We should begin looking at the issue from the beginning. In Genesis God created woman from the side of man. The reason for the creation was it was not good that man should be alone. "I will make a suitable helper for him." God's design of a woman then, was companionship and to be a helper. Right there we would have feminists screaming but we are looking at the truth of Scripture not the opinion of man.

Our next clue as to the relationship is how the curse of sin affected it. It is interesting how the man tried to make excuses and blame the fall on the woman and the women blamed the serpent. The woman from that time forward had to deal with painful childbirth and "your desire will be for your husband, and he will rule over you." For the husband's part, the ground was cursed so that it would require painful toil to get it to produce. They both were now mortal and would return to dust. It has been argued that the curse is lifted in Christ and so the woman no longer has her husband to 'rule over her'. If that is the case we should apply it to Adam and men should stop sweating when they work and find an easy means of income. What is applied to one should apply to the other. I have yet to meet a woman that says childbirth is an easy thing.

There is no doubt that the place of women in OT life was far below that of what Jesus saw it to rightfully be. Jesus was a real non-conformist when he allowed women to be disciples. He accepted financial support from women, taught women, and healed women – even Gentile women – and women of disrepute. For Christ, when it came to the Gospel – the message of God's love for mankind - there was no gender. This was a radical departure from his culture. When Paul writes in Gal 3:26-29 that 'there is neither male or female in Christ Jesus' the context is obviously salvation. Every living soul is precious to God and when that male or female soul is donning the robe of Christ Jesus they walk in the righteousness of Christ.

But where we really get into the heat of the issue is leadership in the Body of Christ. For there are women disciples, women that sat at his feet and were very important to the ministry of Jesus, yet there are no women apostles. There are women prophets but we never read of a woman elder. There is even a woman deacon and women in Phil 4 that Paul says 'contended at his side for the gospel'. There are churches in women's homes. Paul acknowledges this in his writings but then he makes those statements that are the catalyst of so much debate.

1 Cor 11:2-16 Verse 3 is not a statement that is simply in cultural context as many try to argue. It is a statement of order of authority in creation. If you would like to change a part of it you must change it all. The covering issue is completely lost by the culture of our time. They don't know that it means you are submitted to your husband when you wear a covering. But there is an important principle in verse 11. We are not independent but inter-dependant. Our culture is trying very hard to push independence. In verse 16 he says this is a local custom and if it causes problems don't worry about it – yet the principle is eternal truth.

1Cor 14:29-38 We have discussed how earlier Paul wrote that all could prophecy. Everyone has a word from the Lord – a revelation of what Christ is teaching them and who He is to them. But here Paul is concerned about women in particular not thinking carefully before they speak and disturbing the worship time. We discussed how they sat separately and the women may have tried to whisper across to their husbands a question about the Scripture ...or lunch??? It is hard to imagine Paul meant they were not to participate in anyway in the service when he just said all could prophecy.

1Tim 2:9-15 In the Greco/Roman culture women could own businesses and property and were afforded quite a prominent role in society. The word submission in verse 11 *hypotage* means to place in proper order. This order is not due to intelligence or worthiness but simply God's divine order. (v.13) Silence in verse 12 does not mean they never said a word. It is clear that both husbands and wives prayed and prophesied and taught in the early church. (1Cor 11:5, 14:26, Titus 2:3,4) The Greek word *hesychia* denotes tranquillity, a state of being undisturbed (Acts 22:2, 2Thes 3:12) and is translated quietness. The wife should display a tranquil submissive spirit in both the home and the church. Notice the reason Paul gives to Timothy in v.13, 14, (13) order of creation –(14) deception of Eve.

We have been studying the pictures of reality painted by God in the OT. There is another picture that transcends these time periods and that is found in Eph 5:21-33. Marriage is a picture of Christ and the church. Just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her so husbands are to love their wives. Wives

are to submit to their husbands as the church should submit to Christ. What do we do to the picture when we put the woman over the man in the assembling of ourselves together? Does that not paint the picture of the bride leading and instructing Christ?

So how does this work itself out in our gathering together? Well just as they allowed for women to share, to pray, so should we. When it comes to leading and deciding our direction – the discernment of the elders we should also follow their example as directed in Scripture and the elder should be the husband of one wife. Does this mean women cannot have input? Not in the least. For the elders should take into account what God is saying to the whole body. Are they in any way inferior? Not at all. Do we have differing roles according to God's order? That is how I understand Scripture.

While I am gone we will have women sharing on some of the Thurs. nights. I wish I could be here as they have a lot to share. I think women are often more perceptive to the love relationship with Christ. Men, we need to glean from that experience they share with us. Women, is scripture saying you need to be cautious in speaking out? I think so. But then so should all of us.

Remember church, the greatest of all is the servant. Whether it is the leader servant or the submitted, quiet spirit of the wives who serve in so many ways, the first shall be last and the last first. No part of the body is more important than any other and all are needed. If one suffers they all suffer. If one is handicapped they are all handicapped. Women are as important as men in the body of Christ but I do not believe they are the same body part as the men. Different roles – equally important – equally valued and loved.

You are welcome to disagree with what I have shared and still worship together. Any group of people will have differences, but I challenge you to base your differences on the Scripture and not personal or cultural opinion. One of my professors disagreed with my stand on this issue and I with his but we both could respect each other and our love for Jesus and his Word.