

“MEN AND WOMEN IN THE CHURCH”

**I. Introduction**

- A. In recent decades, the debate about women’s roles in the church has resulted in the formation of two camps: egalitarianism and complementarianism.
1. Egalitarianism embraces the basic tenets of feminism, contending that women should be allowed to do anything that men are allowed to do in the church.
  2. Complementarianism affirms the full equality of men and women as divine image-bearers while also upholding the biblical exhortations for wives to submit to their own husbands in the Lord and for women not to serve in the church’s ordained offices.
  3. The problem with egalitarianism is that it is impossible to get around those two biblical exhortations without introducing a hermeneutic that can undermine anything that the Bible has to say.
  4. The problem with complementarianism is that some of its proponents have gone beyond the teaching of Scripture in defending and applying it.
  5. This is not without historical precedent.
  6. Back in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, the Scottish Reformer John Knox wrote a treatise entitled *The First Blast of the Trumpet Against the Monstrous Regiment of Women*, in which he argued that rule by female monarchs is contrary to the Bible.
  7. Knox’s friend John Calvin responded to this by pointing out that while Scripture does prohibit women from serving as pastors in the church, it says nothing that would prohibit them from serving as rulers in the state.

- B. The excesses and errors of contemporary complementarianism stand in need of similar correction.
  - 1. One of the most serious of these is the contention that male-female differences are rooted in an eternal relationship of authority and submission between God the Father and God the Son, a claim that amounts to a rejection of orthodox Trinitarianism.
  - 2. Other unbiblical ideas espoused by some complementarians include saying that a wife should never disagree with or confront her husband, that all women are to submit to all men, that women should not enter the workforce, and that women cannot be in positions of authority in society.
  - 3. This has created a considerable amount of confusion in Christ's church.
  - 4. That being the case, it is important for us to listen carefully to the teaching set forth in the verses that we are considering today.
  - 5. This is one of the key texts pertaining to these matters.

## II. Men of Prayer

- A. Our passage begins with Paul speaking about the men in the church, saying, "I desire then that in every place the men should pray, lifting holy hands without anger or quarreling."
  - 1. Now, when Paul says that he *desires* this, he is not merely expressing his personal preference.
  - 2. This is something that he is ordering by apostolic authority.
  - 3. The word "then" indicates that this command is based upon the things that were said in the preceding paragraph, where the emphasis was upon the fact that the church is called to seek the salvation of all the peoples of the world.

4. The same point is made by the allusion that Paul makes to Malachi 1:11, where the Lord says, "For from the rising of the sun to its setting my name will be great among the nations, and in every place incense will be offered to my name, and a pure offering. For my name will be great among the nations, says the LORD of hosts."
  5. As a teacher of the Gentiles, Paul desires to see God being worshipped in every place throughout the world.
- B. The Greek term that Paul uses for "men" in verse 8 is not the general term that can also mean "people."
1. Instead, it is the word that is specifically used to refer to male human beings.
  2. Now, this does not mean that Paul only wants men to participate in public prayer.
  3. We know that he cannot mean this because he explicitly refers to women participating in the church's public prayers in 1 Corinthians 11.
  4. Instead, he is referring to the men who lead in prayer in the church's local gatherings for public worship, which in those days took place in house churches.
  5. In other words, Paul is speaking of the church's pastors and elders.
- C. The lifting up of the hands is one of many biblical prayer postures.
1. The fact that Paul refers to "holy hands" points back to the requirement for Israel's priests to wash their hands before entering the tent of meeting to perform their duties. (see Ex. 30:20-21)
  2. That washing was not a matter of hygiene but was symbolic of spiritual cleansing.
  3. This tells us that the point that Paul is making by speaking of lifting up holy hands is that those who lead in public prayer need to be

cultivating inward holiness.

4. A lack of holiness is a barrier to prayer.
  5. The specific sin that Paul focuses upon here is being of an angry and quarrelsome disposition.
  6. This does not mean that church officers should not oppose sin and error.
  7. The entire first chapter of 1 Timothy makes it clear that it is of the utmost important for false teaching to be confronted.
  8. At the same time, church leaders are called to handle such things with patience and gentleness.
- D. The fact that Paul focuses on male leadership in prayer here is worth pondering.
1. Men are not always as faithful in prayer as we should be.
  2. To our shame, it is often the case that Christian women are more diligent in prayer than we are.
  3. I do not say this in order to dissuade women from prayer.
  4. On the contrary, I encourage you women to be even more fervent in your prayers.
  5. But I also want to exhort us men to be better leaders and examples in prayer.

### **III. Women Adorned with Good Works**

- A. After expressing his desire for men to lead in prayer, Paul turns his attention to the church's women.
1. He begins by calling women to be modest in their attire.

2. There is evidence that immodest and extravagant female apparel was a significant problem in Ephesus.
  3. There were many wealthy women there, and they showed off their wealth by the clothing and jewelry that they wore.
  4. Apparently, some of those who converted to Christianity were still doing this.
  5. Paul confronts such worldliness by telling Christian women to focus on the cultivation of inward spiritual beauty rather than costly and seductive outward adornment.
  6. The true measure of a Christian woman's beauty is in her good works, works which are brought forth as the fruit of her faith.
- B. Now, we do need to be careful about how we handle Paul's teaching on this subject.
1. The things that Paul is condemning are ostentation and immodesty.
  2. Though he mentions braided hair, gold, and pearls, he only does this in order to point to some concrete examples of what was going on in Ephesus.
  3. We know from other ancient writings that wealthy women in that culture would spend hours elaborately braiding their hair with jewels.
  4. This text should not be taken as an absolute prohibition against hair-braiding, or wearing jewelry and nice-looking clothing.
  5. Christianity allows women a significant measure of liberty in this area.
  6. Unlike Islam, which requires its women to wear burkas, Christianity does not say that women have to hide their physical beauty.

7. Of course, we do need to be aware of the fact that we are living in a highly sensuous and immodest culture.
8. This makes it all the more important for Christian women to exercise discretion in how they dress.
9. At the same time, it also means that Christian men need to exercise self-control in how we look at women.

#### IV. Women and Ecclesiastical Office

- A. As we come to verse 11 and following, we arrive at the most controversial part of the teaching set forth in this passage.
  1. Paul says that a woman should learn in quietness and submissiveness, and that a woman is not permitted to teach or have authority over a man.
  2. Some people read this and conclude that the Bible is misogynistic and oppressive towards women.
  3. (By the way, *misogyny* means having a contemptuous attitude toward women.)
  4. Others argue that this teaching was set forth in response to circumstances in that particular cultural context and does not apply in contexts where those circumstances are not present.
  5. The claim that the Bible is oppressive towards women simply cannot withstand scrutiny.
  6. Jesus and the apostles welcomed women into their circles.
  7. As Jesus was dying on the cross, he made arrangements to ensure that his mother would be taken care of after he was gone.
  8. In Paul's letters, he makes mention of numerous women who played integral roles in the life of the church.

9. In his letter to the Galatians he explicitly states that males and females are spiritual equals in Christ.
  10. And then there is the fact that right in this passage Paul says that women should learn, which was a fairly revolutionary concept in that culture.
  11. There is simply no getting around the fact that the Bible expects women to be treated with dignity and respect.
- B. As for the contention that the teaching of this passage does not apply universally, we will see how that argument falls apart when we look at what Paul says in verses 13 and 14.
1. Before we do that, though, we should note that it is reasonable to assume that Paul was addressing a problem that had arisen in the church in Ephesus.
  2. We know from the book of Acts that some female converts to Christianity were prominent members of society.
  3. It may very well be that some of these women thought that they should be in positions of prominence in the church, especially if they were opening their home for the church's public worship services.
  4. But Paul makes it clear that this is not permitted.
  5. Once again, when he says, "I do not permit," he is not merely stating his opinion.
  6. This is an apostolic prohibition.
  7. It is expressing instruction that applies universally.
  8. Women are not to teach or exercise authority over men.
- C. What does Paul mean by this?

1. The first thing that we need to understand is that these words are spoken in a context in which life in the church is being discussed.
  2. Paul has just spoken about public worship in verse 8.
  3. In chapter 3 he will discuss the offices of elder and deacon.
  4. And near the end of chapter 3 he says, "I am writing these things to you so that, if I delay, you may know how one ought to behave in the household of God, which is the church of the living God."
  5. When we put all of these things together, it is clear that verse 12 means that women are not permitted to serve in the church's special offices.
  6. The reason for this prohibition has nothing to do with female ability or intelligence.
  7. It is a matter of submitting to the order that God established at creation, as Paul makes clear in verses 13 and 14.
- D. Before we turn to those verses, we should also note a couple other things.
1. First, it is important for the church to have integrity in how it follows the command that is given in verse 12.
  2. Some churches in our day *say* that they do not permit women to serve in the offices of pastor, elder, and deacon, but then they let women perform the authoritative functions that are unique to those offices.
  3. While there are many ways that female and male church members can assist the church's officers as they carry out their duties, care should be taken lest they end up serving as *de facto* officers.
  4. Paul is not merely prohibiting women from having the titles of church's special offices but is prohibiting women from carrying out the functions of those offices.



- E. A second thing to note about the prohibition in verse 12 is that we need to be careful that we do not go beyond its intended meaning.
1. The statement “she is to remain quiet” is not meant to be taken in an absolute sense.
  2. It has to do with authoritative teaching and governance in the church, specifically in relation to men.
  3. This means women are free to teach Sunday School classes to children and lead small group studies for other women.
  4. They can participate in discussions in Sunday School classes, small groups, and congregational meetings.
  5. They can pray out loud in prayer meetings.
  6. All of these things are carried out under the oversight of church officers.
  7. They are matters of mutual dialogue and encouragement, as when Priscilla and her husband Aquila helped Apollos come to a more complete understanding of the way of God.
- F. We turn now to verses 13 and 14, where Paul sets forth the grounds for the prohibition given in verse 12.
1. The reason why women are not permitted to teach or to exercise authority over men in the church is grounded in creation.
  2. The prohibition is given because Adam was formed first, then Eve.
  3. The order in which the first man and the first woman were created points to the order that God established in the marital relationship.
  4. Paul expresses this in his letter to the Ephesians by saying, “Wives, submit to your own husband, as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife even as Christ is the head of the church.”

5. In the Bible, when the term “head” is used to describe the relationship of one person to another, it always means that the head has authority over the other person.
  6. In the marital relationship, the husband is head over the wife.
  7. Of course, it is important to note that the Bible always calls those in a position of authority to use that position to seek the well-being of others, not in a self-serving manner.
- G. Paul emphasizes the importance of submitting to the order that God established at creation by reminding us of the tragedy that took place when Adam and Eve failed to submit to that order.
1. The fall took place because Eve was deceived by the serpent.
  2. And while Adam was right there with her, he let her do the talking.
  3. He failed in his office as spiritual leader.
  4. Instead of guarding the sanctity of the garden-sanctuary by casting out the serpent, he stood idly by and took the fruit when Eve gave it to him.
  5. This does not mean that there was some intellectual defect on Eve’s part that made her more susceptible to Satan’s deceptions.
  6. It simply means that our first parents failed to submit to the order that had been established by God.
  7. Whenever people do that, the result is never good.
  8. This is why it is so important for the church to abide by what this passage tells us about the exercise of authority in Christ’s church.
  9. We must not think that we are wiser than God.

- H. We turn now briefly to verse 15, which is admittedly a difficult verse to interpret.
1. Listen to it again: “Yet she will be saved through childbearing—if they continue in faith and love and holiness, with self-control.”
  2. What does this mean?
  3. One thing that we can say with certainty is that Paul is not setting forth a second way of salvation here.
  4. He makes it abundantly clear throughout his letters that the only way of salvation is faith in Christ.
  5. The thing that I want to bring to your attention about this verse is that it begins with “she” but ends with “they.”
  6. This is not a grammatical error on Paul’s part.
  7. It helps us understand what he is saying.
  8. The preceding context makes it clear that the “she” points back to Eve.
  9. Now, what comes to mind when you think about Eve and childbearing?
  10. It is the promise that God gave when he was cursing the serpent in Genesis 3:15: “I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel.”
  11. Salvation will come through the woman’s offspring, through Christ.
  12. The meaning becomes a bit more clear if we translate the first part of the verse this way: “Yet she will be saved through *the childbirth.*”

13. Here is George Knight's summary of what Paul is getting at here:  
"Paul reminds women of God's great promise to the woman (Gen. 3:15) that she would be saved by means of her seed if she responds to that seed in faith, love, and sanctity, with submission to God's creation order, i.e., with self-restraint." [131]
14. This is also the way of salvation for men, but the apostle's special concern here is to encourage *women* to continue in the faith.
15. So much for Paul being a misogynist.