

WOMEN ARE PROHIBITED FROM TEACHING MEN IN CHRISTIAN ASSEMBLIES

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There are voices today insisting that women are permitted by God to teach men in Christian assemblies. Thus we see women now being trained to preach and actually preaching on occasion in some congregations. I am convinced this is contrary to God's will. This paper is my attempt to explain why. It involves a brief explanation of 1 Tim. 2:8-15, 1 Cor. 11:2-16, and 1 Cor. 14:33b-36. Much more could be said, but I hope this is sufficient to make the point.

1 Timothy 2:8-15

⁸*I want, therefore, the men in every place to pray, lifting holy hands, without anger or argument.*
⁹*Likewise, [I want] women [to pray] in appropriate attire, to adorn themselves with modesty and decency, not with elaborate hairstyles and gold or pearls or expensive garments ¹⁰but [with] what is fitting for women who profess reverence for God by good works.* ¹¹*Let a woman learn in quietness with full submission.* ¹²*I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man; rather, she is to be quiet.* ¹³*For Adam was formed first, then Eve.* ¹⁴*And Adam was not deceived, but the woman, by being deceived, came to be in transgression.* ¹⁵*But the woman will be saved through child-bearing, if they continue in faith and love and sanctification, with decency.*

In **1 Tim. 1:18-20** Paul tells Timothy that his entrusting to him the command to silence the false teachers is in keeping with the prophecies that had earlier been made about Timothy. Paul is referring to that time, probably very early in their relationship, when Timothy received a spiritual gift for ministry, the giving of which was accompanied by the laying on of hands (by the elders and Paul) and by a prophetic recognition of the gift (1 Tim. 4:14; 2 Tim. 1:5). By recalling these prophecies, what God had said about the gift and about Timothy's use of it in ministry, Timothy may be encouraged to wage this noble war against the false teachers.

In light of this charge to oppose the false teachers (2:1 begins with "*Therefore*"), Paul says in **1 Tim. 2:1-7** that Timothy's first order of business was to see that prayers were offered for *all* people, to see that no group or class of people, including rulers and authorities, was excluded from the loving concern of the church. Apparently the false teachers had a sectarian theology that emphasized God's love for *some* people, probably the Jews, at the expense of his love for all mankind, perhaps especially or most notably at the expense of his love for pagan rulers. Note how Paul emphasizes that his own sinfulness and persecution of the church did not put him beyond God's mercy.

This elitism or exclusivity, which possibly was related to the false teachers' misuse of genealogies (1 Tim. 1:4), could cast the church as an enemy of (disloyal to) the society. This could needlessly disrupt the normal practice of their religion, which is living *within the society* lives of true devotion and moral earnestness (1 Thess. 4:11-12). This, in turn, could hinder the church's influence.

Praying for *all people* is good and welcomed in God's sight, as he wants *all people* to be saved, meaning to come to a knowledge of the truth. For he is the God of all people, there being

only one God; and Christ, who is the one mediator between God and mankind, gave himself a ransom for all people. The universality of the gospel is evident in Paul's divine commission as apostle to the Gentiles.

Given that God's concern for the salvation of all people is to be expressed in the prayers of the church, Paul says in **1 Tim. 2:8** that the men are to pray with hands not stained by anger and argument. This instruction is probably related to the false teaching in that the false teaching produced controversy and disputes (1 Tim. 6:4-5; 2 Tim. 2:23-24). As Everett Ferguson notes in *The Church of Christ* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 234, "The phrase 'in every place' (in Christian usage based on Mal. 1:11) seems to have had a special reference 'to every place of meeting,' and not the general adverbial sense of 'everywhere' (cf. 1 Thess. 1:8; 1 Tim. 2:8; less obviously 2 Cor. 2:14)." In other words, Paul is talking about public prayers when the church is gathered for worship.

He says in **1 Tim. 2:9-10**, as I understand it, that the women likewise are to pray adorned with the virtues of modesty and decency – not with excessive external ornamentation but with a character that is fitting for women committed to revering God through good deeds. The first clause in v. 9 literally reads, "Likewise [also]¹ women in appropriate attire with modesty and decency to adorn themselves." The translator's choice is to supply "I want" from v. 8, thereby having "women" serve as the subject of only one infinitive ("to adorn"), or to supply "I want" and "to pray" from v. 8, thereby having "women" serve as the subject of both "to pray" and "to adorn."

In other words, v. 9a can be translated either: "Likewise, [I want] women to adorn themselves in appropriate attire, with modesty and decency" or "Likewise, [I want] women [to pray] in appropriate attire, to adorn themselves with modesty and decency." Either translation is grammatically acceptable. Those favoring the latter (in meaning if not in actual translation) include Donald Guthrie, *The Pastoral Epistles*, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 84; Walter L. Liefeld, *1 & 2 Timothy/Titus*, NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1999), 93-95; I. Howard Marshall, *The Pastoral Epistles*, International Critical Commentary (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1999), 446-447; Jerome D. Quinn and William C. Wacker, *The First and Second Letters to Timothy*, Eerdmans Critical Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 215-216.

The choice is governed by the context of the passage and by the view one has from other texts of the propriety of women praying in the assembly. Given the focus on prayer throughout this section of Scripture, my understanding of 1 Cor. 14:33b-36 and 11:2-16 given below, and the example of Acts 1:14 and 4:23-24, I am convinced that Paul here assumes the women will be praying, just as he assumes the men will be praying.

Some believe Paul's desire expressed in 2:8 for "the *men* in every place to pray" means that women are not to pray (thus eliminating the second option), but that does not follow. He does not say he wants the men to pray; he says he wants the men to pray *without anger and argument*. He assumes they will be praying and urges them to do so with the proper attitude so that their prayers will not be hindered (e.g., 1 Pet. 3:7). If on the brink of recess a teacher said, "I want the boys to play without fighting," no one would think the teacher was thereby excluding girls from playing.

¹ The presence of "also" in the text is disputed.

Rather, they would conclude that the boys had a problem with fighting that the teacher did not want carried over into recess.

Whether it is permissible for women to "lead" prayers in a worship assembly is complicated by the fact such terminology is foreign to the New Testament. It boils down, in my judgment, to whether female participation in that role would violate the biblical principle of male leadership. I'm inclined to think that it would because that role has a sense of leadership that is not present in some other contexts. The person who "leads" prayer in our assemblies is not merely praying personally; rather, that person is appointed to speak to God on behalf of the assembly. I don't believe that is the kind of public praying women did. However, in an atypical context like "open praying" (i.e., where all are invited to pray without any appointment or designation to speak for the assembly), which I suspect was more common in the house churches of the early church, that concern wouldn't seem to apply. Of course, even in a congregation today that utilized "open praying" in its assemblies, the potential impact on congregational unity would have to factor into any shift in practice from all men to both men and women.

Excessive external adornment is out of place for a child of God because it overemphasizes the external and reflects an inappropriate desire for attention. (When we say, "He or she has to be the center of attention," it is a criticism, a negative judgment about the person's character.) The primary concern of the saint is the inner person, the beauty of one's character. When the adornment is excessive by virtue of expense, it adds a sense of arrogance or elitism. When the excessive adornment carries (cultural) connotations of moral laxity, wearing it shows an even greater emphasis on the external (one considers wearing it more important than the impression of looseness it conveys).

It is not clear if the Christian women were actually adorning themselves this way or if this was just part of a stock criticism used to emphasize the importance of the inner person. It seems there were wealthy people in Ephesus (1 Tim. 6:17-19), so it certainly could be a real issue.²

Paul says in **1 Tim. 2:11-12** that the modest and decent character that is the true adornment of Christian women is reflected, in part, in their submission to male leadership in the church. 1 Peter 3:1-6 conveys a similar idea regarding submission to husbands. When the church is assembled, women are to learn in quietness with full submission. They are not to teach men or to exercise authority over them (dictate to them – BDAG).

In this context, I suspect the latter prohibition refers to correcting or challenging what was taught (what we might call "setting them straight" or "putting them in their place"). A similar concern is expressed in 1 Cor. 14:35 where women were apparently challenging the prophets by

² The issue with modesty today, as it relates to dress, is usually how much one reveals rather than how extravagantly one accessorizes, but in this day of tattoos and piercings the latter can also come into play. The principle, as I see it, is that a Christian is not to "overemphasize" the external or to draw "inordinate" attention to herself or himself. These judgments are sometimes difficult, but if what you are wearing raises eyebrows and turns heads, that's a pretty good sign you're over the line. We can be fashionable, but not daring. We should stay on the reserved or conservative side. I think this text also is relevant to other things, such as spending huge sums of money on things like plastic surgery or hair transplants. I think that reflects the kind of overemphasis on the external that Paul here condemns.

quizzing them under the pretext of wanting simply to learn (see below). Paul says that rather than act that way, the woman is to be quiet, that is, she is not to be outspoken, not to be challenging or correcting. This submission was probably threatened by the overrealized eschatology in the false teachers' doctrine (note that some were teaching the resurrection had already taken place – 2 Tim. 2:18; cf. 1 Tim. 1:19-20). One sees a coupling of overrealized eschatology and ignoring of sex distinctions in 1 Corinthians.

The restriction on women teaching is not because women are intellectually or morally inferior to men, nor is it because women at that time were less educated than men. The reason, according to Paul in **1 Tim. 2:13**, is simply that "Adam was formed first, then Eve;" it was established at creation. We would like for Paul to have explained *how* Adam's being created first translates into male leadership, but unfortunately for us, the notion of the "firstborn" being the leader required no explanation in the first century. It was considered obvious.

This answer raises the deeper question of *why* God made man first instead of making woman first or making them at the same time from the dust of the ground. Ultimately the answer is that God is sovereign (Ps. 103:19; 1 Tim. 6:15) and that he chose to do it that way. One could just as well ask why God gave the tribe of Levi the exclusive responsibility to care for the Tabernacle, or why he gave the family of Aaron the exclusive responsibility of serving as priests. Why limit these roles to people who happen to be born in a certain lineage rather than allowing everyone equal access to the roles based upon ability?

And that is precisely what led to Korah's rebellion in Numbers 16. Korah, a Levite, and 250 community leaders opposed Moses and Aaron on the basis that they should have equal access to God. All Israel was holy, so no one family line should be exalted to the priestly function. It was a challenge to God's right to choose select groups for specific roles. And, as you know, Korah, Dathan, and Abiram were swallowed by the earth, and the 250 community leaders were incinerated by God.

The fact men and women have different roles or functions does not mean that women are inferior to or less worthy than men. Men and women are created equally in the image of God and together comprise mankind (Gen. 1:26-27, 5:1-2). In 1 Cor. 11:11-12 Paul points out that men and women are dependent on each other. In 1 Cor. 12:12-27, he makes clear that all who are in Christ are part of Christ's body and are equally precious; there are no second-class citizens in the kingdom. Peter describes husbands and wives as "co-heirs of the gracious gift of life" (1 Pet. 3:7). In terms of one's standing before God, Paul says in Gal. 3:28 that there is neither male nor female in Christ Jesus.

The feminist charge that any difference in role or function between men and women means that women are inferior to or less worthy than men is refuted in the example of God the Father and God the Son. Jesus is God; he is one in nature, being, and essence with God the Father. So the Son is not inferior to or less worthy than the Father, yet he is functionally subordinate to the Father; he willingly submits to the Father's authority. This is made explicit in 1 Cor. 11:3, 15:27-28 (see also, Jn. 14:28). It is also demonstrated by the fact he was sent by the Father (Mat. 10:40, 15:24, 21:37; Mk. 9:37, 12:6; Lk. 4:43, 9:48, 10:16, 20:13; Jn. 3:34, 4:34, 5:23, 5:30, 5:36-38, 6:29, 6:38-39, 6:44, 6:57, 7:16, 7:28-29, 7:33, 8:16, 8:18, 8:26, 8:29, 8:42, 9:4, 10:36, 11:42, 12:44-45, 12:49, 13:20,

14:24, 15:21, 16:5, 17:3, 17:8, 17:18, 17:21, 17:23, 17:25, 20:21; Gal. 4:4; Heb. 3:2; 1 Jn. 4:9-10, 4:14); he spoke the words of the Father (Jn. 7:16, 8:26-28, 8:38-40, 12:49-50, 14:24, 15:15); he came to do the Father's will (Jn. 4:34; 5:19, 6:38; 14:30; Heb. 10:5-9); he revealed the Father (Jn. 1:18, 12:45, 14:7-9, 17:6, 17:26; Heb. 1:1-4); he seeks to please, glorify, and honor the Father (Jn. 5:30, 8:29, 14:13, 17:1-5); and he judges only as he hears from the Father (Jn. 5:30).

If Jesus, being in very nature God, can submit to the Father's authority, then certainly women can submit to male leadership in the church (and to the leadership of their husbands at home) without denying their equal dignity or value. They are acting like Christ! That parallel is specifically drawn in 1 Cor. 11:3.

In **1 Tim. 2:14** Paul says, alluding to Gen. 3, that the woman, not Adam, was the one deceived in the Garden. In other words, the serpent approached her rather than Adam, and in so doing sought to subvert the divinely ordained pattern of leadership. Thomas Schreiner expresses the point well in "An Interpretation of 1 Timothy 2:9-15: A Dialogue with Scholarship" in Andreas J. Köstenberger et al., eds., *Women in the Church* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1995), 145:

[Paul] wants to focus on the fact that the serpent approached and deceived Eve, not Adam. The significance of the serpent targeting Eve is magnified, for apparently Adam was with Eve (Gen. 3:6) during the temptation. In approaching Eve, then, the serpent subverted the pattern of male leadership and interacted only with Eve during the temptation. Adam was present throughout and did not intervene. The Genesis temptation, therefore, is a parable of what happens when male leadership is abrogated. Eve took the initiative in responding to the serpent, and Adam let her do so. Thus, the appeal to Genesis 3 serves as a reminder of what happens when God's ordained pattern is undermined.

The point of **1 Tim. 2:15** seems to be that, contrary to what the false teachers were claiming, women remain faithful, and thus are saved, by accepting their God-given role, which role is symbolized by the distinctly female ability of childbearing. In other words, they are not to define their faithfulness, to define their Christian calling, in terms of the male role. Their salvation is to be "worked out" (Phil. 2:12) in a somewhat different way or on a somewhat different path than the salvation of men. Schreiner has this to say about the verse (*Women in the Church*, p. 151-152):

This does not mean that all women must have children in order to be saved. Paul is hardly attempting to be comprehensive here. He has elsewhere commended the single state (1 Cor. 7). He selects childbearing because it is the most notable example of the divinely intended difference in role between men and women, and most women throughout history have had children. Thus, Paul generalizes from the experience of most women in using a representative example of women maintaining their proper role. . . .

When Paul says that a woman will be saved by childbearing, he means, therefore, that they will be saved by adhering to their ordained role. Such a statement is apt to be misunderstood (and often has been), and thus a further comment is added for explanation. Women will be saved "if they remain in faith and love and

sanctification along with discretion." Thereby Paul shows that it is not sufficient for salvation for Christian women merely to bear children; they must also persevere in faith, love, holiness, and presumably other virtues. The reference to "discretion" (*sophrosunes*) hearkens back to the same word in verse 9 and also functions to tie the entire text together. Paul does not imply that all women must bear children to be saved. His purpose is to say that women will not be saved if they do not practice good works. One indication that women are in their proper role is if they do not reject bearing children as evil, but bear children in accord with their proper role.

1 Corinthians 11:2-16

²Now I praise you because you have remembered me in all things and hold fast the traditions, just as I delivered [them] to you. ³And I want you to know that the head of every man is Christ, and the head of woman is the man, and the head of Christ is God. ⁴Every man who prays or prophesies having [a covering] upon the head disgraces his head, ⁵and every woman who prays or prophesies uncovered as to the head disgraces her head, for she is one and the same thing with the woman who has been shaved. ⁶For if a woman does not cover herself, let her also have her hair cut short; and if it is shameful for a woman to have her hair cut short or to be shaved, let her cover herself.

⁷For a man ought not to cover [his] head, being the image and glory of God; the woman, on the other hand, is the glory of man. ⁸For man is not from woman but woman from man; ⁹for neither was the man created on account of the woman but the woman on account of the man. ¹⁰For this reason, the woman ought to have authority on [her] head, on account of the angels. ¹¹Nevertheless, neither is woman apart from man nor man apart from woman, in the Lord. ¹²For just as the woman is from the man, so also the man is by the woman, and all things are from God.

¹³Judge among yourselves: Is it proper that a woman pray to God uncovered? ¹⁴Does not nature itself teach you that if a man wears long hair it is a dishonor to him ¹⁵but if a woman wears long hair it is a glory to her? For long hair has been given [to her] as a covering. ¹⁶But if anyone is disposed to be contentious, we have no such custom, nor [do] the churches of God.

Preliminary remarks

1. The impropriety involved in 11:2-16 is not women praying and prophesying but their doing so uncovered. Paul doesn't suggest that they should not pray or prophesy; he says only that they must be covered when they engage in those activities. So it is clear to me and to virtually all commentators that Christian women were indeed authorized to pray and prophesy publicly in some setting.

2. That makes it easier to understand how removing the head covering, which I take to be a culturally expected piece of female attire, had become an issue. Public speaking in that day and age was a male activity. If women in Christ were authorized to pray and prophesy publicly, you can see how that authorization would feed the notion present in Corinth that sex distinctions were no longer relevant to Christians (1 Cor. 7:1-7). They had entered the new age of the Spirit and were now "like the angels." They easily could interpret the fact that as Christians they were authorized to engage in the male activity of public speaking as supporting their view that sex distinctions were obsolete.

3. For those women who believed that male-female differences were indeed irrelevant in the church, it would make sense to discard cultural symbols of sex distinction. Since sex distinctions were no longer relevant, neither were items of apparel that marked those differences. In Christ they were free to pray and prophesy *as men*, which meant without the covering that distinguished them.

4. A question we wish Paul had answered clearly is *where* the women were authorized to pray and prophesy. More specifically, we want to know whether either or both of those activities were authorized in the worship assembly. But Paul is not concerned here with the issue of what public forums were appropriate for women to pray and prophesy. His point is that wherever such speech is appropriate, something he previously would have passed on to them, it is appropriate only if done with the covering, that cultural mark of femaleness. So we are left to do some detective work, and people come to different conclusions in that process.

5. Rather than go through all the possibilities, I will just tell you how I see things. It seems to me that at least some of the female speech Paul is addressing in 11:2-16 took place in the worship assembly. This is suggested by several lines of evidence.

- 11:17-34 deals with an assembly in which the Lord's Supper is shared, so that is clearly a reference to the gathering of the church for worship on the Lord's Day. Not only is there no hint of a change in setting between 11:2-16 and 11:17-34, but the parallel language in 11:2 and 11:17 ("Now I praise you"; "But in giving this instruction, I do not praise you") is a rhetorical clue that there is some connection between the two discussions.
- The phrase "on account of the angels" in 11:10 is best understood as a reference to angelic oversight of the worship assembly of the people of God. Angels were said to be present at the community gatherings at Qumran, and certain people (those with a bodily defect) were excluded from the assembly "out of reverence for the angels."
- When Paul appeals to the practice of "the churches" in 14:33b, he clearly does so with reference to the gathering of the whole church for worship. He makes a similar appeal in 11:16.

7. So I am convinced that at least some of the female speech Paul is addressing in 11:2-16 took place in the worship assembly. You say, now wait a minute, 1 Cor. 14:33b-36 forbids any kind of female speaking in the assembly. Paul there commands the women to be silent. So neither female praying nor prophesying could have taken place in the worship assembly.

8. But as I will explain below, I don't believe 1 Cor. 14:33b-36 is a blanket prohibition of female speech in the assembly. In context, I believe Paul there says that women are forbidden from participating in the prophetic process in the assembly, meaning they can neither prophesy nor challenge (weigh) the prophecies delivered by others. The rationale for the prohibition is the same as in 1 Tim. 2:11-14: women in the assembly are to express their divinely ordered submissiveness to men by refraining from *authoritative* speech. In other words, in the assembly women are not to direct the men, not to set them straight, by delivering God's authoritative

message to them. Women are forbidden from doing that either directly by prophesying or teaching or indirectly by challenging the prophecies or teaching of others.

9. Now, if I am correct in thinking that at least some of the female speech addressed in 11:2-16 took place in the worship assembly and if I also am correct in thinking that 14:33b-36 precludes female prophesying in the assembly, then the female speech that took place in the worship assembly was prayer. In other words, my understanding is that women in Christ were authorized to pray publicly both in and out of the worship assembly but were authorized to prophesy publicly only outside the assembly.

10. Prayer, being a noninstructive expression of devotion to God, is not a way of directing men, and therefore, in my understanding, it is not inconsistent with the submission a woman is required to manifest in the assembly. I think Acts 1:14 and 4:23-24 probably are examples of women praying publicly with the gathered church. I am aware that some believe that 1 Tim. 2:8, where Paul says he wants "the *men* in every place to pray," means that women are not to pray in the assembly, but as explained above, I don't think that follows.

11. I think the issue Paul is addressing arose with regard to women in the assembly who were seeking to pray without the covering. *Paul in 11:13 identifies the specific focus of his concern: "Judge for yourselves: Is it proper that a woman pray to God uncovered?"* Though the immediate issue is covering during prayer in the assembly, Paul mentions women prophesying because the argument being made to justify women praying in the assembly uncovered also would justify women prophesying outside the assembly uncovered. If the right to engage in the traditionally male activity of public speech justifies doing so "as men," meaning without the culture's distinctive mark of femaleness, then it would justify doing so whether that public speech was in or out of the assembly. Any ruling on the assembly situation would by logic also be a ruling on the non-assembly situation, so for this purpose, Paul treats the two situations as indistinguishable.

12. Wherever the women were praying and prophesying, the problem here is that some women were pressing to do so without the customary female covering.

11:2-6: ²Now I praise you because you have remembered me in all things and hold fast the traditions, just as I delivered [them] to you. ³And I want you to know that the head of every man is Christ, and the head of woman is the man, and the head of Christ is God. ⁴Every man who prays or prophesies having [a covering] upon the head disgraces his head, ⁵and every woman who prays or prophesies uncovered as to the head disgraces her head, for she is one and the same thing with the woman who has been shaved. ⁶For if a woman does not cover herself, let her also have her hair cut short; and if it is shameful for a woman to have her hair cut short or to be shaved, let her cover herself.

After praising the leaders for following the practice he had passed on to them, Paul proceeds to give them reasons for the practice, something they could surely use in defending their position against those seeking to change the practice. He begins by denying the notion that sex is completely irrelevant in the church. He does so by asserting that the relationship between men and women in Christ is not reciprocal with regard to leadership. Men are given the leadership responsibility in the

church. Man is the head of woman but woman is not the head of man. He phrases the difference in these terms because "head" plays into the issue of head coverings.

Again, this in no way means that man is superior to woman in character, intellect, or capabilities. They simply have been given different roles or functions. The man is to lead and the woman is to be a helping partner in the joint enterprise of glorifying God. Nothing makes this clearer than the statement that "the head of Christ is God." A basic confession of the Christian faith is that the Son is one with the Father in nature; he is in no way inferior or less worthy. The difference between the Father and the Son is merely one of role or function. The Son embraces the leadership of the Father.

I think James Hurley has captured the spirit of male leadership in his book *Man and Woman in Biblical Perspective*. Though his comments deal with a husband and wife, I think they are applicable to male leadership in general (p. 151):

The manner in which such decisions are handled is crucial. The husband may not be high-handed and stubborn, knowing that she will finally have to give way. That is not the model of Christ's headship. Neither may the wife be grudging and resentful. That is not the manner of our response to Christ. In the last analysis, when the two can devote no more time to individual and joint seeking of the grace of God to permit them to come to one mind or to be willing to yield to the other, an exchange along the following lines is in order:

Husband: "Not because I am inherently wiser or more righteous, nor because I am right (although I do believe I am or I would not stand firm), but because it is finally my responsibility before God, we will take the course which I believe is right. If I am being sinfully stubborn, may God forgive me and give me the grace to yield to you."

Wife: "Not because I believe you are wiser in this matter (I don't) or more righteous, nor because I accept that you are right (because I don't or I would not oppose you), but because I am a servant of God who has called me to honour your headship, I willingly yield to your decision. If I am wrong, may God show me. If you are wrong, may he give you grace to acknowledge it and to change."

Given the continuing relevance of sex for those who are in Christ, it is inappropriate to reject cultural sex distinctions in attire, to engage in a kind of "cross dressing," when publicly speaking to or on behalf of God.³ Just as it would be disgraceful for any man to pray or prophesy with a female covering on his head,⁴ so it would be disgraceful for a woman to do so without it. It is disgraceful

³ A head covering was culturally expected attire for Jewish, Greek, and Roman women appearing in public. See, e.g., David E. Garland, *1 Corinthians*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003), 520-521.

⁴ Oster has shown that Roman men pulled a toga over their head in the context of prayer and prophecy, but that covering must be distinct from the covering under discussion, as the covering under discussion is *required* for women and *forbidden* for men. Men praying covered is not an actual problem Paul seeks to correct (Garland, 517) but something that would be recognized as inappropriate. Garland's suggestion that men pulling togas over their

because it is an act of rebellion against the created order and as such it brings shame both on the rebel and the rebel's leader/head.

The sexual nature of the shame is evident in vv. 5b-6. The woman who prays or prophesies without the cover disgraces her head, "*for she is one and the same thing as the woman who has been shaved.*" Verse 6 emphasizes the closeness of the parallel. The shame of the woman who had been shaved was the shame of appearing as a man, appearing contrary to her sex. A couple of passages in the writings of Lucian, a second-century Greek satirist, clearly show that short hair on a woman was considered mannish.⁵ There's no contemporary evidence for the view that short hair or a shaved head was the mark of Corinthian prostitutes. Her shame was not from the short hair itself but from the fact short hair was culturally defined as the hair of a man. In the same way, the shame of going uncovered was not from the attire itself but from the fact the lack of a cover was culturally defined as the attire of a man.

11:7-12: ⁷*For a man ought not to cover [his] head, being the image and glory of God; the woman, on the other hand, is the glory of man.* ⁸*For man is not from woman but woman from man; ⁹for neither was the man created on account of the woman but the woman on account of the man.* ¹⁰*For this reason, the woman ought to have authority on [her] head, on account of the angels.* ¹¹*Nevertheless, neither is woman apart from man nor man apart from woman, in the Lord.* ¹²*For just as the woman is from the man, so also the man is by the woman, and all things are from God.*

Verses 7-10 provide a further reason why a man should not wear the cover but a woman should. This kind of "cross dressing" not only violates God's creation order; it also ignores the fact that woman's existence glorifies man (in addition to God) whereas man's existence glorifies only God. This difference in the object of glorification has implications for who is a suitable candidate for wearing female clothing.

Woman's existence glorifies man because man "gave birth" to woman and because woman was made to help the man, to be a nonleading partner. According to Gen. 2:20-23, God made Eve from part of Adam's body, not independently from the ground, and he did so that she might be a helper for Adam. Given that woman is the glory of man, it is fitting that she be under a sign of authority when publicly speaking to or on behalf of God because however glorious man may be, he remains under the authority of God. Since man is the glory of God, a sign of authority over him would not be appropriate because there is no authority over God.

The head cover qualifies as a sign of authority precisely because it was a distinctly feminine piece of attire. Given that women were assigned a subordinate or nonleading role by both culture and God, clothing that was distinctly feminine naturally symbolized being under the leadership of another. (Paul does not address how or why certain items of apparel came to be distinctly feminine; he simply accepts that some did.)

heads would be recognized as inappropriate because of its connection to pagan devotional practices stumbles on the fact women are commanded to wear the covering.

⁵ There also is evidence that a shaved head marked a woman as an adulteress (see, Garland, 520), but that seems less relevant than the sex angle.

Verse 10 says that a woman should also have a sign of authority on her head, meaning the female covering, "on account of the angels." As I have already mentioned, the best way to understand this is to recognize that angels observe the worship assembly and are concerned that the creation order be honored in that forum.

Verses 11-12 make clear that the sex differences about which he has been speaking and which must continue to be honored are not a matter of superiority/inferiority. Men and women in Christ are mutually dependent, each needing the other that mankind may be what God intended it to be. Evidence of this mutual dependence is that, whereas womankind initially came from Adam, all subsequent men have come from women, and all things (men and women) come from the one God.

11:13-16: ¹³*Judge among yourselves: Is it proper that a woman pray to God uncovered? ¹⁴Does not nature itself teach you that if a man wears long hair it is a dishonor to him ¹⁵but if a woman wears long hair it is a glory to her? For long hair has been given [to her] as a covering. ¹⁶But if anyone is disposed to be contentious, we have no such custom, nor [do] the churches of God.*

Paul appeals to what they already recognized about long hair to make his point that women should not pray uncovered. The fact he mentions only prayer (v. 13) supports the notion that the two practices of praying and prophesying were in some way distinguished. Their natural sense of sexual propriety taught that if a man in that culture wore long hair it dishonored him but if a woman wore long hair it honored or exalted her. The reason was that long hair had been culturally assigned as a kind of female covering; it was inappropriate on a man. Paul's point is that the head covering in question functions the same way. Regardless of whether some want to argue the point, Paul says that neither his group nor other churches of God engage in the practice of women praying or prophesying uncovered.

1 Corinthians 14:33b-36

As in all the churches of the saints, ³⁴let the women be silent in the churches, for it is not permitted for them to speak, but let them be in submission as even the Law says. ³⁵And if they want to learn something, let them question their own husbands at home, for it is shameful for a woman to speak in church. ³⁶Or did the word of God go out from you or reach only to you?

The context of this passage is Paul's discussion of how the gifts of tongues and prophecy are to be exercised in the assembly. The exercise of tongues is regulated in vv. 27-28. Only two or three individuals are permitted to speak in tongues and they are required to do so one at a time. If there is no one present to interpret the tongues for the congregation, the tongue-speaker is obliged to remain silent.

Paul begins to regulate the exercise of prophecy in v. 29. Two or three prophets are permitted to speak and the others are instructed to weigh carefully their message. The purpose of this weighing was to judge whether the message was in fact from God (see 1 Thess. 5:19-21), and it probably included some kind of oral quizzing or examination of the prophets.

Verses 39-40 are crucial to a proper understanding of Paul's instructions about women because they reveal that *he has not changed subjects*. He is still discussing the exercise of tongues and prophecy in the assembly, so his instructions about women speaking must be understood as part of that discussion, not as a new and unrelated topic. Since the discussion of tongues concluded at v. 28, no reader would think that Paul had returned to that subject without some clear indication of an intent to do so. Therefore, the context strongly suggests that vv. 33b-36 somehow relate to prophesying. In that light, the most natural reading of this passage is that Paul is prohibiting women from participating in the prophetic process during the worship assembly. (As explained in the discussion of 1 Cor. 11:2-16, I believe the female speech that took place in the community worship assembly was prayer. My understanding of 1 Tim. 2:8-10 is likewise provided above.)

This means that women are forbidden to prophesy or to weigh (orally challenge) the prophecies that have been delivered by others. The rationale for the prohibition is the same as in 1 Tim. 2:11-14: women in the assembly are to express their divinely ordered submission to male leadership by refraining from authoritative speech. This explains the universality of the command, the statement that women are obligated to be in submission, the reference to the Law, and the strong tone of moral condemnation.

Verse 35 poses no problem for this view. It had apparently been made known to Paul that some women were publicly quizzing the prophets and were thus engaged in weighing their messages. (Questions were a common way for teaching and challenging in the ancient world.) This practice was defended by the claim that the women were only seeking to learn which, after all, was the purpose of prophecy (14:31). Paul exposes this claim as a pretext by making clear that if the women were truly interested in learning rather than in teaching, they could accomplish that outside the assembly by questioning their husbands at home. Paul's instructions in 1 Tim. 2:11 on *how* women are to learn (in quietness and in all submission) appear to address a similar concern.

It might be useful to state my understanding by way of a paraphrase of 14:33b-36:

As in all the congregations of the saints, the women must refrain from participating in the prophetic process in the assemblies, for they are not permitted to speak authoritatively but must be in submission as even the Law says. And if they want to learn something, they should question their own husbands at home rather than use that as a pretext for correcting the prophets, for it is shameful for a woman to speak authoritatively in the assembly. Did the word of God originate with you or reach only to you?

Verses 37-40 form the conclusion to the section begun in 14:26. In vv. 37-38 Paul admonishes those who consider themselves to be prophets or to be spiritual, those to whom his corrective measures specifically apply, to recognize what he has written as the command of the Lord and to act accordingly. In vv. 39-40 he sums up his discussion of prophecy and tongues by reducing it to a simple principle: pursue prophecy and accept tongue-speaking, but as with all things in the assembly, do them in a fitting and orderly way.

Conclusion

Women are prohibited in Scripture from delivering in the assembly God's authoritative message to men, either directly by prophesying (a gift I do not believe continues) or teaching or indirectly by challenging the prophecies or teaching of others. So women cannot preach or teach in the assembly. Prayer, on the other hand, is a nondidactic expression of devotion to God and therefore is not inconsistent with the submission a woman is required to manifest in the assembly. This would not, however, encompass "leading" prayers for the congregation because that role would be contrary to the biblical principle of male leadership of the church.

This is in keeping with the understanding of the early post-apostolic church. After surveying the relevant evidence, Everett Ferguson concludes in *Women in the Church* (Chickasha, OK: Yeomen Press, 2003), 54:

From the standpoint of history, the evidence of Christian writings of the second to fourth centuries is in continuity with the New Testament. . . . Women were not appointed as elders, nor did they take public speaking roles in the assembly as prophets, teachers, or leaders in the assembly. Where women did take these roles in heretical and schismatic groups, the practice was a basis for objection to these groups.