



## *OFFICER TRAINING 2002*

### *SESSION 8—WOMEN IN MINISTRY*

#### **Starting Point**

*(The background material in the Redeemer handout is assumed here).*

- Christians disagree about this (you don't have to accept this to be a member of City Church)
- Bible has ultimate authority and can trump even our most cherished opinions
- Bible's teaching (even when we don't like it) is ultimately for our own good
- Equality in being is possible without identity of function (like Trinity)

#### **NT Picture**

- The NT is quite countercultural in the way it elevates the status of women in ministry. Culturally, women were considered second class citizens.<sup>1</sup>

*"My God, I thank you that I was not born a Gentile but a Jew, not a slave but a free man, not a woman but a man."*

Common Jewish Prayer for Men at Time of Christ and Early Church

The NT rails against this sinfully low view of women.

- Jesus always had women as a vital part of his followers. He is OK with them being evangelists (John 4), role models to all people (Matthew 26), witnesses<sup>2</sup> to the disciples (Mark 16), and his disciples.

Nonetheless, the hard fact remains that none of the "Twelve" were female. For someone who was breaking all kinds of cultural practices, this would seem an odd one to leave intact (if indeed the all-male Twelve was only a cultural practice).

- In the Early Church, women were also key players in ministry. They were deaconesses (Phoebe in Romans 16:2; I Timothy 3:11), 'fellow workers in Christ' (Priscilla in Romans

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<sup>1</sup> It's important to understand that this cultural perspective also flew in the face of the Old Testament. From the beginning of Scripture, women and men are alike understood to be created in God's image and therefore of equal status (Genesis 1 & 2).

<sup>2</sup> This is very important as the testimony of women was inadmissible in court.

16:3; Euodia and Syntyche in Philippians 4:2-3), teachers (Priscilla in Acts 18 instructed Apollos—a man; I Cor 11 indicates women were *prophesying* and *praying* in church), apostles<sup>3</sup> (Junias in Romans 16), and other leaders in the church (Lydia in Acts 16; her house probably became the beachhead for the church in Philippi).

Nonetheless, Paul places limits on the ministry of women (I Timothy 2 and I Cor 11 are two of the most pointed instances of this). This is particularly telling in that I Timothy is essentially a letter written to one of Paul’s apprentices giving instruction on how to organize and run the church.

## A Synthesis

How do we combine the practice of both Jesus and the Early Church? On the one hand, there was wide scale empowerment of women in ministry going on. On the other hand, there were boundaries.

Let’s take a closer look at a passage that should shed light on the question.

### A Key “Boundary” Passage (I Timothy 2)

*<sup>1</sup>I urge, then, first of all, that requests, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for everyone-- <sup>2</sup>for kings and all those in authority, that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness. <sup>3</sup>This is good, and pleases God our Savior, <sup>4</sup>who wants all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth. <sup>5</sup>For there is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, <sup>6</sup>who gave himself as a ransom for all men--the testimony given in its proper time. <sup>7</sup>And for this purpose I was appointed a herald and an apostle--I am telling the truth, I am not lying--and a teacher of the true faith to the Gentiles.*

*<sup>8</sup>I want men everywhere to lift up holy hands in prayer, without anger or disputing. <sup>9</sup>I also want women to dress modestly, with decency and propriety, not with braided hair or gold or pearls or expensive clothes, <sup>10</sup>but with good deeds, appropriate for women who profess to worship God.*

*<sup>11</sup>A woman should learn in quietness and full submission. <sup>12</sup>I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man; she must be silent. <sup>13</sup>For Adam was formed first, then Eve. <sup>14</sup>And Adam was not the one deceived; it was the woman who was deceived and became a sinner. <sup>15</sup>But women will be saved through childbearing--if they continue in faith, love and holiness with propriety.*

I Timothy 2:1-15

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<sup>3</sup> It’s best to understand apostle in the sense of ‘evangelist’ rather than on the same level as the Twelve.

This is a ‘boundary’ passage. I Timothy (along with II Timothy and Titus) fall into a category of New Testament letters known as the “Pastoral Letters”. They were written by Paul to young pastors (Timothy and Titus) instructing them how to carry on in Paul’s absence. Paul’s words in I Timothy are instructive:

*Although I hope to come to you soon, I am writing you these instructions so that, <sup>15</sup>if I am delayed, you will know how people ought to conduct themselves in God's household, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and foundation of the truth.*

I Timothy 3:14-15

The instruction in the pastoral letters has to do with conduct in “God’s household”, that is, the church. So we are dealing with how things should be done in the church.

The boundary that Paul is placing is found in verse 12. Paul says:

*I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man; she must be silent.*

#### How Do We Approach This Passage?

Now, no one really questions that Paul intended to place a boundary on women. The big questions have to do with whether or not the command is binding for all times and what the situation was that required Paul to write this.

Some scholars have reconstructed hypothetical scenarios that involve the succumbing of the church to a female-dominated Greek mystery religion (specifically, the cult of Artemis). In this religion, women had dominance over the men. So, the position goes, Paul was writing to correct this. A closer look at the historical setting of the times, however, reveals that no such situation existed.<sup>4</sup>

Other scholars take the position that Paul’s boundary is ‘time bound’. In other words, he was adapting the gospel to his particular situation, and out of deference to that culture, he was limiting what women could do in the church. The major problem with that view is the reason Paul states for the boundary.

*<sup>13</sup>For Adam was formed first, then Eve. <sup>14</sup>And Adam was not the one deceived; it was the woman who was deceived and became a sinner.*

Thus, Paul links the boundary back to creation (and, we might add, creation *before* the fall). Paul ties the boundary to something that is inherent in the nature of maleness and femaleness. It is not something that is subject to change over time. So, this leads us to the conclusion that when we submit ourselves to Paul’s teaching here, we are getting in touch with something very deep to what it means to be male and female.

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<sup>4</sup> See expanded treatment in *Women In the Church* (eds. Koestenberger, Schreiner and Baldwin).

### So, If It Is Instruction Binding Across Times and Cultures, What Does It Mean?

Since it is clear that Paul allows women to teach (Priscilla teaching Apollos in Acts 18; the prophesying in I Cor 11 seems to be a public teaching event), what does he mean by not allowing women to teach? Giving Paul the benefit of the doubt (i.e., assuming that he is not contradicting himself), he is saying that he does not allow women to “*teach or to have authority*”. It is best to see “teach” and “have authority” as complementary verbs<sup>5</sup>. In other words, the teaching here is an authoritative teaching. It is the kind of thing that Paul was talking about when he told Timothy to be aware of heresy within the church (earlier in I Timothy). Whose role is it to determine what is doctrinally OK to teach within the church? It is that kind of authoritative teaching to which Paul is talking about. We may want to call it doctrinal gatekeeping. It is this authoritative teaching/ruling where Paul seems to draw the line with women. It is also worth noting that this doctrinal gatekeeping is also for the elders only. In other words, males who are not elders aren’t doing this either.

### **City Church Practice**

The responsibilities of the elders fall into three major categories:

- *Doctrinal/Vision gatekeeping for church.* Ultimate oversight over what is taught, what goes on during worship, how the church is structured, and the direction the church is headed.
- *Church Discipline.* The elders have the ultimate responsibility for carrying out church discipline as appropriate.
- *Admitting/Dismissing Members.* The elders determine who can join and leave the church.

These are the only responsibilities unique to the elders. Everything else is open to non-elders. That means that non-elders can do any of the following (this, of course is a partial list):

- Community Group Leader
- Community Group Coordinator
- Diaconate
- Lead Ministry Teams
- Teach Adult Christian Education
- Teach in Children’s Ministry
- Etc.

### **To What Standard Will Diaconate Be Held Regarding Women in Ministry?**

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<sup>5</sup> Even within the verb Paul uses for ‘teach’ here is the nuance of authoritative teaching.

This office does not demand the same degree of theological articulation, nor the responsibility to teach or judge doctrine, or represent the church in formal ecclesiastical settings as does the office of elder. However, members of the diaconate do have a responsibility to be standard bearers of the church's theology and vision to some degree. You must be able to *affirm and support* the theological positions of the church with a promise not to undermine the church's teaching. The diaconate, therefore, does not have the same degree of accuracy and agreement required of them in order to hold office. What is needed is an attitude of understanding, affirmation, and support of the church's theology without necessarily sharing in all the convictions.

Are you able to at minimum see the church's position as valid biblically, and not the result of a prejudicial rendering of the text of Scripture? Can you say, "As this church applies this, and this church understands this, I can affirm that this is one valid way to understand women in ministry, and I will not undermine the church or erode confidence in the leadership of the church even though I have not drawn the exact same conclusion, or still struggle with my conclusion"? (Note: A similar 'test' is applied with respect to infant baptism).