

# Scripture and the Exclusion of Women from the Pastorate (II)

JOHN W. KLEINIG  
Luther Seminary

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## b. 1 Timothy 2:11–15

It is generally agreed that this passage, more clearly than 1 Cor 14:33<sup>b</sup>–38, excludes women from the apostolic ministry of the word. Whereas that text deals with a specific situation in Corinth, Paul here gives far more general instructions to his pastoral protégé Timothy about the organisation of the church in Ephesus.

### 1) Translation and structure

Since 1 Tim 2:11–15 forms a single literary unit with 2:8–10, I give the following translation of that unit which is set out to indicate its basic structure:

- a) I therefore (as the teacher of the gentiles) require
  - i) that in every place (of worship) men should pray, lifting consecrated hands without anger and quarrelling,
  - ii) and that women too (should pray),  
decorating themselves with modesty and *chastity*  
by means of respectable deportment,  
not by means of gold-braided hair or pearls or expensive dress,  
but through good works, as is suitable for women who profess reverence for God.
- b)
  - i) Let a woman learn in quietness with entire subordination.
  - ii) On the other hand, I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man,
  - iii) but she must remain in quietness;  
for Adam was formed first, then Eve;  
and Adam was not deceived,  
but the woman, being deceived, came into transgression.  
Nevertheless a woman will be saved even as she bears children (Greek: through child bearing),  
provided that she remains with *chastity* in faith and love and sanctification.

Three things are worth noting in this. First, the repetition of 'chastity' in 2:9 and 2:15 acts as a bracket which introduces and closes the teaching on the role of women in public worship. Secondly, the use of *dia* in a circumstantial sense both in 2:10 and 2:15 serves to define child bearing as a good work for a

Christian woman. Thirdly, the repetition of 'quietness' in 2:11,12 creates a chiasmic construction which is highlighted by the contrast between woman and man in verse 12<sup>a</sup>. This is how it is structured:

- a Let a woman learn in *quietness* with entire subordination.
- b Teaching, on the other hand, for a woman I do not permit,
- b<sup>1</sup> nor having authority over a man,
- a<sup>1</sup> but being in *quietness*.

It follows from this that Paul's main concern here is with discipleship rather than with teaching, and that 'teaching' and 'having authority' are to be regarded as complementary activities.

## 2) The place of 1 Timothy 2:11–15 in its context

This passage is part of Paul's written pastoral 'charge' to Timothy on the arrangement of the church in Ephesus and the need to combat the teachers of false doctrine in the church (1 Tim 1:3,18; 4:11; 5:7; 6:17). The heart of this charge is the congregational code in 2:1–3:16 which gives instruction on how the household of God, the church of the living God, is to be organised (1 Tim 3:14,15).

The congregational code covers the following matters:

- a) The nature and basis of congregational prayer (2:1–7).
- b) The involvement of both sexes in congregational prayer.
  - i) Praying by men without anger and quarrelling (2:8).
  - ii) Praying by modest chaste women who do good works (2:9,10).
- c) The involvement of women in learning rather than in teaching (2:11–15).
- d) Qualifications for leaders in public worship.
  - i) The bishop as teacher in God's household (3:1–7).
  - ii) The deacons as his assistants (3:8–13).
- e) The purpose of Paul's charge (3:14–16).

This part of Paul's letter, then, is not a household code (contra Towner, 210) but rather a congregational code (Witherington, 118), since he does not speak of conduct in general but about conduct in worship.

## 3) The authority of Paul in 1 Timothy 2:11–15

Even though Paul uses 'I' in addressing Timothy in 1 Tim 2:1,8,12, he does not give his personal opinions on congregational worship. Rather, he emphasises in 1 Tim 2:7 that he has been appointed by God both as an 'apostle' (cf 1:1) and as a 'teacher of the faith and its truth to the gentiles'. He therefore writes about what 'must' (*dei*) be done not just in Ephesus but in the whole church which is God's household (1 Tim 3:14,15; Hurley: 196; Bacchiocchi: 145–148, 151–152). He invokes his authority as an apostle for his teaching in the congregational code which must then transcend the particular local circumstances faced by Timothy in Ephesus.

#### 4) The meaning of 'teaching' in the Pastoral Letters

Since 'teaching' is the key term in our text, its exact sense needs to be established before we can examine Paul's argument. Like the New Testament in general, Paul uses the terms for 'teaching' in a much narrower and more technical sense than we do in modern English (eg 1 Cor 12:28; Eph 4:11). It usually refers to the teaching and application of God's word by Jesus and his apostles. A teacher therefore teaches the apostolic tradition and uses it to build up the church as a liturgical community.

As the teacher of the gentiles (1 Tim 2:7), the apostle Paul is also a teacher of the gospel (2 Tim 1:11) which God has entrusted to him (1 Tim 1:11). He has been Timothy's teacher (1 Tim 1:2; 2 Tim 2:2) and has passed on to him what he himself has received from Christ (2 Tim 1:13,14). He therefore urges Timothy to teach what he has received from Paul (1 Tim 4:11; 6:2; 2 Tim 4:2) and to live a life consistent with that teaching (1 Tim 4:16). Timothy is to use the Old Testament (2 Tim 3:16) and the words of Jesus (1 Tim 4:6; 6:3) in his teaching which is usually associated with the public reading of the Scriptures (1 Tim 4:13) and the preaching of the word to the congregation (2 Tim 4:2). By teaching he convinces and encourages his hearers (2 Tim 4:2); he rebukes and corrects those who teach what is contrary to the apostolic tradition (1 Tim 1:3). Ultimately, he himself is required to hand on to other faithful men what he has been taught by Paul, and to appoint them as teachers in the church (2 Tim 2:2).

Paul uses a number of terms to describe the role of the teachers in the church. As 'bishops' they supervise the worship and life of the congregation (1 Tim 3:2). As 'elders' they arrange the worship of the congregation and manage its operation (1 Tim 5:17). As 'servants' of the risen Lord they represent him in their teaching and work with him (2 Tim 2:24). Their basic qualification is that they are teachable and skilled in teaching (1 Tim 3:2; 2 Tim 2:24). Such teachers teach God's word in the congregation (1 Tim 5:17) and use the healing doctrine of Christ to encourage the faithful and to refute those who contradict it (Tit 1:9).

So then, for Paul a teacher is one who has been authorised to teach the apostolic doctrine and engage in the apostolic ministry of the word.

#### 5) The argument of 1 Timothy 2:11–15

Paul makes it quite clear that, unlike Jewish women who were excluded from direct involvement in the public prayers of the synagogue as well as from becoming students of the law, Christian women were able to join in the intercession of the church for the world and to 'learn' God's word as disciples of Jesus Christ. In fact, he commands them to be disciples. The unusual absolute form of the verb (cf 1 Cor 14:31; 2 Tim 3:7) suggests that this command has to do with being a disciple rather than with learning a particular lesson. Like all the men, they too are to be recipients of the apostolic tradition (cf 2 Tim 3:14). They should learn to pray and do good works. These, rather than teaching, are the marks of a disciple.

Their disposition as disciples is characterised by two terms. First, they are to learn in quietness. This is not just described as an attitude but also as a state of being. Such quietness involves stillness and harmony, receptivity and teachability, respectful listening and readiness to receive direction (see Acts 11:18; 21:14; 22:2; 1 Thess 4:11; 2 Thess 3:12; 1 Tim 2:2). It is the mark of a wise learner and a sage who never ceases to be student. Secondly, women are to be in a state of entire subordination. As in 1 Cor 14:34, Paul does not mention the object of their subordination. Since it is linked with being a disciple who is concerned with learning well and living harmoniously in the church, Paul probably means submission to Christ's word and to those who teach it rather than to men in general (Moo: 183).

Even though women must be disciples, they are not permitted to teach in the liturgical assembly. The use of *de* introduces a contrast between learning which is commanded and teaching which is forbidden (Bacchiocchi: 149; Moo: 184). In other words, 2:12 explains the concept of subordination in negative terms. The responsibility for teaching in public worship is associated with the 'exercise of authority' over a man (see Panning, Knight, Köstenberger, and Leske 3–5, for this translation of *authentain*). The sense of 'a man' is not immediately clear. It could refer to men in general or a husband or, most likely, the male leader of the congregation. The relationship between teaching and exercising authority can be taken in three ways. Paul could be prescribing two separate activities or two identical activities or, most likely, from the syntax, two related activities (Köstenberger). Whatever the case, it is clear that Paul does not allow women to be teachers in the church.

Paul bases the subordination of women to male teachers on God's will as revealed in the priority of Adam's creation. The priority of Adam established his divinely-instituted role as the head of the human family; it also established the firstborn male as the head of an Israelite family. As such they were the teachers of their families. In worship they represented their families before God and represented him to their families. This role of Adam as the liturgical head of the human family was fulfilled by Christ (see Col 1:15–23); it is now exercised by him through the male teachers in the church.

While Paul's mention of Adam's priority over Eve establishes the exclusion of women from the position of a teacher in the congregation, his subsequent reference in 1 Tim 2:14 to Eve's deception seems to be a warning against the possible refusal of women in Ephesus to remain students of God's word. The point of comparison is between Eve as an insubordinate student and all Christian women as receptive disciples. Paul does not therefore assert that women are to be excluded from the ministry of the word because they are more responsible for the fall than Adam, or because they are somehow more susceptible to deception by Satan than men. That is obviously not so. Rather, he warns against women ceasing to be disciples of Christ, subordinate to him and his word and to those who teach that word.

Indeed, Christian women who remain faithful to Christ and God's love, participate fully in the gift of salvation through their faithful involvement in public worship. Through their faith in Christ they are sanctified by him and share fully in

his holiness together with all the saints. Unlike their Jewish sisters who were rendered ritually unclean by menstruation and childbirth, and their 'gnostic' sisters who had their spirituality tarnished by the carnality associated with marriage and motherhood (cf 1 Tim 4:1–3), Christian women are not disqualified from divine worship by child-bearing. On the contrary, by bearing children (cf 5:14) and by their chaste behaviour (cf Tit 2:4–5) they perform those good works which are the mark of women who engage in the priestly work of intercession together with Christ, the heavenly mediator (cf 2:1–10), and so display true reverence for God (cf 2:8–10).

Thus, while Paul teaches the full involvement of all women in the public worship of the church as intercessors, as disciples of their risen Lord, and as holy people together with the angels, he forbids them to be teachers in the church.

### 3. CONCLUSION

The scriptural warrant for the exclusion of women from the apostolic ministry of the word is much stronger than most advocates for the ordination of women allow. Contrary to their assertions, the sense of 1 Cor 14:33<sup>b</sup>–38 and 1 Tim 2:11–15 is neither uncertain nor obscure. Both texts presuppose a liturgical setting and both prohibit the speaking of women in that setting. We may disagree about the reasons for that prohibition and its exact extent, but that does not obscure the clarity of that prohibition. Its force can, I believe, only be dissipated by declaring that, since Paul addresses the particular circumstances of the church in Corinth and Ephesus, the prohibition is irrelevant to the life of the church today. However, using this logic we could also argue that, since Paul's teaching in Galatians on the freedom of the gospel arose out of the demand for the circumcision of gentile believers, it does not apply to us today.

Much more can be said to supply a more developed adequate theological justification for this position, such as has been done in a preliminary way by Brunner, Weinrich, and Wollenberg. Nevertheless, these two texts suffice to base and uphold the historical case against the ordination of women. They are, in fact, its main obstacle. This is so especially if, as has been argued, Paul's mention of the Lord's command in 1 Cor 14:37 does, or even could, refer to the prohibition in 1 Cor 14:34. In that case the stern warning in 1 Cor 14:38 could apply to those who champion the ordination of women in the church. What's more, I would maintain that, only if we had an explicit dominical or apostolic mandate for the ordination of women, could we rightly overturn the universal teaching of the church on this matter. But we have no such authorisation. Even if it could be shown that these two texts do not exclude women from the pastorate, that would not yet give the church any authority to ordain women. In short, while the church has no mandate to ordain women, it does have an unequivocal mandate to ordain men.

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