

Is There A Biblical Limit On The Ministry Of Women?

In these days we need to be especially sure that our experience is scriptural when we see so much error and deception in the church on all sides. Our cherished opinions have to be examined, and possibly corrected at the bar of God's word. It has become politically correct for women to hold positions of high authority in every sphere of life, and the church is no stranger to this. Old institutions like the Anglican denomination, as well as more modern New Churches are giving authoritative ministry and leadership to ladies. Even some 'Watchman' ministries opposing modern errors and calling for a return to Biblical standards are led by women. Now we do not doubt that many of these are gifted individuals with much to offer the Body of Christ, but does the Bible endorse this practice of authoritative leadership by women?

Overview of New Testament Leadership

Before we begin, we must be clear on the Biblical concept of leadership in the body. The only leaders identified as such in the local church are elders (Titus 1:5). There is no other leader of a local community of Christians.¹ These people are identified as men who govern a church in equal plurality,² whose main role is to feed the sheep (1 Pt 5:1-4). The chief way this is done is by teaching (1 Tim 3:2; Titus 1:9, 2:1; not necessarily in a preaching format) which carries authority. There is no NT concept of a dominant senior pastor or other ranked person. In addition to elders there are deacons who assist in the care of saints under the direction of elders. These may include women.³

There are various ministries for the building up and equipping of the saints in local churches who are not called leaders but do have authoritative input in various situations (Eph 4:11-12). The most common would be pastors and teachers; the very nature of their gifting reveals that local elders must have these gifts in evidence (1Tim 3:2,5). Evangelists would be sent out from the church to preach the Gospel or train folk in this expertise.⁴ Prophets minister the word of God in a more direct way than teachers and are usually associated with other ministries (eg apostles or teachers). Like apostles, their work is said to be foundational (Eph 2:20). There are specific tests of genuine prophets,⁵ and local elders must weigh their words in a meeting, prophets do not override elders (1 Cor 14:29-33). Apostles are men sent out from the church to plant new ones (Acts 13:1-4). Apostleship is not a title of authority over churches but a description of missionary activity. It means 'one sent out'⁶. Apostles do not have authority in a local church because they are apostles, they only minister in an established local church on the basis of their gifts. Paul was an apostle in planting churches but a teacher in his home base at Antioch (Acts 13:1).

¹ A bishop is the same person as an elder: Acts 20:17 with v28; Titus 1:5 with v7.

² Titus 1:5 (NB 'elders' plural); 1 Tim 3:1-7

³ Phil 1:1; 1 Tim 3:8-13; Acts 6 (Although the term 'deacon' is not mentioned here.)

⁴ eg: Philip

⁵ Deut 13:1-5, 18:21-22

⁶ *Apostolos*: a delegate, messenger, he that is sent, from *apostello* to send out.

Having established some leadership basics, where do women fit into all this?

The Church Elevated The Position Of Women

The role of the ordinary woman in ancient society was menial and poor, by and large; the Gospel changed this dramatically.

In antiquity it was a common male saying that one should give thanks for not being an unbeliever, a barbarian, a slave or a woman.⁷ Jewish Rabbis had a very similar adage. Athenian women were treated with disrespect, although Spartan women were more esteemed. In ancient Rome, a wife could be justifiably killed by the husband for adultery, though the reverse was not allowed.⁸ A woman who had sex with her slave was to be sentenced to death in the time of Constantine (326 AD).⁹ At other times she just became a slave.¹⁰ If a Roman man made clothing for his wife from his own wool, it belonged to him, even if the wife helped to make it. Yet if a wife, from her wool, made clothing for her husband, it belonged to him.¹¹ In marriage, women were very definitely subordinate to men. These laws give a flavour of the status of women in those times.

If a woman was unable to marry, she had few options for survival apart from begging, prostitution or slavery. There were some professions available to them, but most required initial capital (weaving, farming, market trading). The few that did not required a skill, including acting, music (harp, trumpet), dancing, painting, dressmaking, laundering and even fighting as gladiators in Rome. These options would be greatly reduced in rural settings.

The life of the Biblical woman was arduous by today's standards, and she had few rights. Apart from the familiar housework, she had to draw water from a well in heavy jars, take clothes (made by herself) to a river to wash them, grind her own flour and bake her own bread and so on. Most likely her material would have been woven and dyed by her own hand. Read Proverbs 31 for an illustration of this.

Women could not even go into the same area of the temple as men but were restricted to their own court. Rabbinic writings viewed women as greedy, vain creatures and restricted their religious opportunities. In the Old Testament a woman's worth was based upon her ability to bear children; she was often treated as a mere possession. In fact, a husband could divorce a wife but the wife could not divorce the husband (Deut 24:1-4). Even polygamy was still practised in New Testament times.¹² A mother was required to purify herself twice as long for a daughter than for a son (Lev 12:2-5) and women were to be silent in the synagogue¹³; in fact, conversations with women were discouraged altogether.¹⁴

⁷ Kittel, Theological Dict. of NT (1 Vol Ed.) p134

⁸ Marcus Cato, Speech 'On the Dowry'

⁹ Justinian, Codex 9.11.1

¹⁰ Paul, Opinions 2.21A.1-4.

¹¹ Pomonius, On Sabinus, book 4

¹² C. Brown, Dict. of NT Theology, p1057

¹³ Megillah 23a

¹⁴ Erub 53b

Into this situation came the Gospel which raised women to a new status. In their standing before God both men and women were placed on the same level for the first time. In justification there is neither male nor female but all are one in Christ (Gal 3:28). Early in the Gospels, the faith of Anna is placed alongside that of Simeon. Many of Jesus' key helpers and friends were women. Jesus went out of his way to help certain women who would be considered as outcasts and sinners (eg Jn 4:27). Jesus' sayings and actions lifted women to an equal status with men. The ones that rushed to his grave first were women and the only person to anoint him for burial was a woman.

Some of Paul's most valued co-workers were women, one of whom (Priscilla, or Prisca, with her husband Aquila was especially close; two thirds of the time Priscilla is mentioned before Aquila, although I don't think too much can be surmised from this). The first convert in Philippi was a woman (Lydia) and the church seems to have met in her house (Acts 16:14,15,40). The Pauline emphasis on participation and unity in the local church gave women freedom to minister in a number of gifts along with men (1 Cor 11:5, 12:6-7,11, 14:5, 31). Philip even had four daughters that prophesied (I wonder what that household was like? Acts 21:7-9, cf. Acts 2:16-18). Access to God is now direct and not via men, they are joint heirs (1 Pt 3:7) with them. This was a new world for women. Fellowship is on the basis of the new nature, all share in the inheritance of Christ; but authority is related to creation.

Differences of Function

Having established that the Gospel gives women an equal standing before God in salvation, we have to examine the role which the New Testament allocates to them in the functioning of the Body. This is where the controversy starts, for it teaches that there are still differences in function in church activities. The equality of justification does not include equality in function. The apostles cut across modern ideas by insisting that woman is the weaker sex. This is the basis for also urging men to act honourably and carefully towards women (1 Pt 3:7).

Paul gives us an example of this distinction in the ministry of Jesus himself. He is equal with God and yet he allows himself to be placed in subjection to God in certain areas.¹⁵ At the end, God the Father puts all things in subjection to Jesus, except himself. Jesus remains in subjection to the Father. There is even one thing known to the Father but not to Jesus - the time of the end. There is no contradiction here, just a functional variation.

The same is true of the Holy Spirit. He is God. He is equal to Jesus and the Father, yet he is the executor of the wishes of the Father and the Son in applying the benefits of salvation to us. He even glorifies Jesus but not himself.¹⁶ He is said to not even speak on his own authority, and yet the Holy Spirit is equally God.

Before time began, the members of the Godhead covenanted to perform the atonement required to save mankind in which each had a specific role. The Father initiates, the Son achieves and the Holy Spirit applies. This gives functional differences yet there is still essential equality. The same is true of men and women. Their equality before God does not alter the fact that there are functional differences

¹⁵ 1 Cor 15:27-28

¹⁶ Jn 16:13-15

which must be maintained in the church.

We must note that Jesus did not appoint any women to be a disciple. Even if the disciples are a parallel to the 12 tribes, this still has a significance. There is no reference to a woman being sent as part of the 70 either, despite the availability of many women followers. Although the church in Jerusalem had women praying in the upper room, only the male apostles preached the Gospel.

Ministry for Women

At this point we need to examine the specific texts in the New Testament relating to women's ministry. The following passages outline the opportunities given to women :

- **Prophecy** (Philip's four daughters) Acts 21:9.
- **Acts of charity** and good works (Tabitha) Acts 9:36.
- **Deaconess** (Phoebe) Rm 16:1. Some commentators dispute that *diakonos* here refers to the technical term '*deacon*' and translate it as 'servant', but it is the same word used elsewhere for 'minister'.
- **Helper** (Phoebe) Rm 16:2. *Prostatis* means: protector, female guardian and is used of a Jewish legal representative or of a wealthy patron. Though related to the word *proistemi* (ruler, leader) it does not carry the same force and *proistemi* is not used of women. Sanday and Headlam suggest that Phoebe was a person of wealth and position who patronised, succoured, the church (Comm. on Romans p417-418).
- **Fellow worker** (Prisca = Priscilla) Rm 16:3, fellow labourer (Euodia & Syntyche) Phil 4:2.
- **Church worker** (Mary) Rm 16:6.
- **Workers in the Lord** (Tryphaena and Tryphosa) Rm 16:12.
- **Personal exposition** of the word (Priscilla) Acts 18:26.

To this we must add all the **gifts** given to the church which are not restricted in some way in another text. (See next section)

Restrictions of Function for Women

- Eph 4:8 specifically states that the gifts of apostleship, prophet, pastor, teacher and evangelist are for men. 1 Tim 2:12 states that a woman must not teach or have authority over men¹⁷. Taken together this gives us a clear principle, that a women must not exercise authority in the church over men. Gifts that carry significant authority are, therefore, not available for women; these include the Eph 4 ascension gifts of Christ to the church. There is obviously a difference between the leadership office and sharing of a gift. Priscilla could teach (with her husband) in a counselling situation. Philip's daughters could prophesy. Everyone can evangelise. However, the authoritative office of these gifts is not open to women; i.e. a woman cannot teach in the local church, a woman cannot be a pastor over a church, since both would include having authority over men in a mixed congregation.

¹⁷ The singular form is used ie 'I permit no woman to teach or have authority over man'. However, note that he does not say 'husband', so he is not referring to the marriage relationship here.

- 1 Cor 14:34-5: women are not to be permitted to speak. This is a powerful statement that is said to be a practice of all the churches, that it is shameful if disobeyed. But how does it square with the opportunity to share given earlier in this letter? Modern scholarship suggests that these verses are closely related to the weighing of prophecy (v29-33).¹⁸ The interpretation is, therefore, that women should not speak out in the judgment of prophecy because this is an authoritative act, restricted to men. Only men can judge what is truly a prophecy of God when various prophets are speaking. This restriction is further explained in the next section.

Why this Restriction?

Is there a reason given in scripture why there should be this restriction? The answer is yes. In 2 Cor 11:3 Paul explains that it was Eve who was deceived by the serpent in Eden. He returns to this in 1 Tim 2:13-14 where he explains that this is why women are not allowed to teach and have authority. Adam was formed first and was not deceived but Eve transgressed as a result of being *led astray in thinking she was doing the right thing*. Adam's sin was perhaps greater in that he wilfully disobeyed but not as a result of deception. *He knew it was wrong*.

This is why women are not allowed to judge prophecy. This is an area where deception easily overcomes people, especially if there are many prophets speaking. Susceptibility to deception is not a good foundation to weighing what is true.

Submission, Headship and Head Covering

AUTHORITY

The basic reason for the restriction upon women's ministry has to do with authority. The traditional opinion refers back to creation as the origin of this sexual difference. In 1 Tim 2:13-14 Paul states that Adam was formed first, not Eve, and uses this, along with a female proneness to deception, to explain why a woman must not have authority over a man. The original creation ordinance for humans (Gen 1:26-28) was *'to make man'*, not man and woman. Man was then created in the image of God. Twice it says that the image was in man, only then is it expanded to *'male and female he created them'*. The word *'man'* is not generic and inclusive of women here since Paul interprets it as referring to males only in 1 Corinthians 11 (see later). It is man who bears God's image as ruler, not woman (Gen 1:26).

In the expanded account in Gen 2, we see that man was formed first from dust and the application of the *'breath of lives'* upon it from God. Man thus became a living being (v7). Man is given authority over the garden (v15). The man is then given authority over animal life (v19). Only after this account is woman created as a helper fit for man (v18-21). The texts emphasise the woman being different yet complimentary to man. The woman is not said to be created to be in the image of God or to express God, but to be for man. Only Adam was given authority with dominion over the earth, women are subordinate to men in this respect. Woman was not designed to reflect the glory of God as ruler, but reflects the glory of man. She is not created from dust but *'out of man'* (v21-23). She is: *'bone of my bones, flesh of*

¹⁸ See for instance: Don Carson, *Showing the Spirit*, in. loc.

my flesh'. Note also that Adam names Eve (v23) after naming all the animals (v19-20). This, at least, implies a degree of authority over the one named.

Whatever else may be inferred, there is a crucial creation difference between the sexes which cannot be denied. They do not originate the same way, they are not given the same authority (the *'them'* of Gen 1:26 applies to the race of men, not men and women), they are not formed at the same time and one is specifically said to be for the help of the other one.

In the fall, we should notice that the cause was: first the serpent, then Eve and finally Adam. God recognises this by addressing the serpent first, then the woman, and finally Adam (Gen 3:14, 16-17). Eve took the initiative in eating the fruit, she assumed the leadership role to disastrous consequences. However, commenting on this, Paul holds Adam solely responsible for the entrance of sin into the world (Rm 5:12). The buck stopped with Adam. He took the blame because he was the responsible authority. The judgment of God highlights the responsibilities of the couple, childbirth for the woman and work for the man. The word *desire* in Gen 3:16 is the same as in 4:7 i.e. Eve had the same desire that sin had for Cain, to master and control Adam, i.e. reverse God's appointed roles. In judgment, God highlights Adam's 'rule' over her (3:16). Adam's order of priority over Eve is set in God's decree.

Paul uses this scenario to build a case for male authority which is restricted from women. He also makes these same points elsewhere, e.g. that God's image is male only: *'a man ... is the image and glory of God; but woman is the glory of man'*; that *'neither was man created for woman, but woman for man'*, and that *'man was not made from woman, but woman from man'* 1 Cor 11:7-9.

To summarise, woman is under man in God's government because:

- Man was created first to bear full responsibility (1 Tim 2:13).
- Woman was created out of man (Gen 2:23).
- Woman was created for man's benefit, to complete him (Gen 2:18-22, 1 Cor 11:9).
- Eve was deceived, not Adam (1 Tim 2:14).¹⁹
- In Israel this is exemplified in there being no Queens or priestesses, despite the common practice of other nations.²⁰

So we see a clear distinction of sexual creative order, purpose and authority in the Genesis account and this is taken for granted in more than one New Testament text.

SUBMISSION

Following on from this, the apostles (not just Paul) teach that women should be subject to men (not just wives subject to husbands):

The head of the woman is the man. 1 Cor 11:3²¹

Train the young women to love their husbands ... and submissive to their husbands, that the word of God may not be discredited. Titus 2:4-5

¹⁹ It may be of note that women outnumber men in mental hospitals by 3 to 1.

²⁰ Isaiah sees it as judgment and deception that women should rule over men (Isa 3:12).

²¹ I am aware of the argument regarding the way *gune* is translated (it can refer to a 'woman' or to a 'wife'; *aner* can also mean 'husband' and not 'man'). However, on balance I believe that the translators have got it right in I Cor 11 as it would make no sense to limit the passage to husbands and wives and exclude single women.

Wives be subject to your husbands. Eph 5:22-24

Wives be subject to your husbands. Col 3:18

Wives, likewise, be submissive to your own husbands 1 Pt 3:1

Holy women who trusted in God also adorned themselves, being submissive to their own husbands 1 Pt 3:5

The words: *submission* and *subjection* are emotive today and this causes unnecessary problems in approaching these texts. A wife is to be submissive as we are subject to God and each other. It does not mean slavery or dejection. Paul's teaching is very clear that the husband should love his wife sacrificially, even to his own detriment as Christ loved us. There is no implication of tyranny, but rather of nurturing and cherishing.

There is an implied authority in the one who nurtures over the one who is nurtured. Though in a partnership, there has to be a recognised difference of function that enables the husband to cherish the wife. She must submit to this for it to be effective. The same principle is true in church meetings, which is why in discussing them, Paul states that the man is head of the woman.

To help understand this correctly, Paul explains that Jesus is subordinate, in some respects to God the Father. How can this be since Jesus is equal in power and glory to the Father? When Jesus took human nature he became subservient to the will of the Father, he *delighted to do his will* (Ps 40:8), *the Father is greater* (Jn 14:28). In the same way, men and women are equal in standing before God; however, as respects function now, women's function is subordinate to men's. God's order is:

God → Christ → Man → Woman.

Man's head is Christ, woman's head is man (1 Cor 11:3). As a man submits to Christ, he receives authority from him. As women submit to men in church affairs, they also have authority to minister in the way God intends (e.g. praying and prophesying). The Police Force contains men and women who are all equal citizens under law; yet in service, one is a sergeant and has authority over a constable. A Superintendent has authority over a sergeant, and so on. Authority and submission in the Police Force does not affect the basic equality of individual rights.

Head Covering

Paul makes this point especially clear by advocating an observable difference between men and women in the church meeting, this is the fact that women should cover their heads in recognition of their submission:

1 Imitate me, just as I also imitate Christ.

2 Now I praise you, brethren, that you remember me in all things and keep the traditions just as I delivered them to you.

3 But I want you to know that the head of every man is Christ, the head of woman is man, and the head of Christ is God.

4 Every man praying or prophesying, having his head covered, dishonors his head.

5 But every woman who prays or prophesies with her head uncovered dishonors her head, for that is one and the same as if her head were shaved.

6 For if a woman is not covered, let her also be shorn. But if it is shameful for a woman to be shorn or shaved, let her be covered.

7 For a man indeed ought not to cover his head, since he is the image and glory of God; but woman is the glory of man.

8 For man is not from woman, but woman from man.

9 Nor was man created for the woman, but woman for the man.

10 For this reason the woman ought to have *a symbol of authority on her head*, because of the angels.

11 Nevertheless, neither *is* man independent of woman, nor woman independent of man, in the Lord.

12 For as woman *came* from man, even so man also *comes* through woman; but all things are from God.

13 Judge among yourselves. Is it proper for a woman to pray to God with her head uncovered?

14 Does not even nature itself teach you that if a man has long hair, it is a dishonor to him? 5 But if a woman has long hair, it is a glory to her; for *her hair is given to her for a covering*.

16 But if anyone seems to be contentious, we have no such custom, nor do the churches of God. (1 Cor 11:1-16, NKJV)

Breaking this passage down, it runs like this:

- ◆ Christ is the head of every man, v3.
- ◆ Man is the head of woman, v3.
- ◆ Men praying or prophesying with their head covered dishonour Christ (their authoritative head), v4. Man is the image and glory of God so he should not cover his head, v7. If a man covered his head, it shows subjection to other men with uncovered heads; this dishonours Christ who is man's real head (authority).²²
- ◆ A woman praying or prophesying, with her head uncovered, dishonours man (her authoritative head) because it speaks of her assuming equality with men; i.e. it disrupts God's stated order. To do this equates to being shaved, i.e. look masculine. (It is shameful since a woman's hair is her glory. A bald woman is shameful since it demeans her sexuality, dishonours God's glory given to a woman), v5.
- ◆ The only alternative to a woman veiling her head is to have her hair shorn, v6. Since her hair is also a sexual attraction, her glory for man, (especially when wearing Grecian long gowns covering the whole body) if she will not wear a veil, then she should cut this distracting thing off.
- ◆ A woman is the glory of man, not God, v7
- ◆ The creation order confirms this, v 8-9.
- ◆ That is why a woman should cover her head, in God's presence she should hide the glory given for man, v 10.
- ◆ Since angels long to look into the affairs of the church (1 Pt 1:12), which is to be a testimony to the work of God in redemption (Eph 3:10), then women should be veiled to show that they are willingly conforming themselves to God's authoritative order, v 10.
- ◆ [Paul makes a parenthetical point that although woman is not independent from man, man is also not independent of woman since he has to be born from one, v11-12.]
- ◆ Paul appeals to his Corinthian readers to see that his words make sense, v13.
- ◆ Part of this appeal is a picture from nature. Long hair is the pride of a woman as a covering of glory and attraction. Long hair in men is degrading (we don't know how long is *long* here), v14-15.

²² A further point is that man is to protect the woman. The veil shows that a woman is under the protection of a man. The Jews thought that an uncovered woman had cast off, not only her dignity, but also her protection and was vulnerable to spiritual attack.

- ◆ If anyone refuses to obey this practice, he is going against Paul's express command and the practice of the churches at that time everywhere, v16.

In my opinion, when laid out logically, the passage makes clear sense without recourse to semantic analyses, cultural comparisons, historical allusions and so on. It simply means what it says. There is no reason to overturn the logical sense which has stood for hundreds of years until the recent engagement of feminist interpretation. If the whole issue is unimportant, if it doesn't matter if women are unveiled (as feminists insist), why has there been so much argumentation over these verses? Why have women's head coverings lapsed at a point in history when feminist ideas hold much sway in the world and when there is a dearth of Biblical understanding in the church?

The head covering of women shows a willingness to be under authority, i.e. recognising the authority (headship) of men. Men should not cover their head to show that they are under the authority of God. The good order maintained this way is a testimony to angels looking on that the assembly is godly in attitude and behaviour.

The usual way to ignore the direction of these verses is by resorting to the cultural argument; i.e. this was a local, first century problem and irrelevant today. However, this cannot be the case as Paul founds his argument on universal factors (like angels), he states that it is his custom and that of his churches. In any case, the reason the problem arose in this Greek city was that Greeks did not veil their heads when praying. Jewish women (and later men also) did wear a veil. Roman women were inclined to. Paul is, therefore, insisting that these Greeks did something *alien* to their culture because of the spiritual principles involved. This makes them the ideal example for all people at all times. God is not the author of confusion, he inspired this large section for our: '*teaching, reproof, correction and training*' (2 Tim 3:16). How can we cut out half a chapter in the New Testament and say it is not applicable to us?

Disputed Texts and Words

Head (*kephale*, 1 Cor 11:3-6)

Whatever else it means, we must not allow our interpretation of this word to subordinate women generally. This is a vital safeguard which must be stressed at the outset.

Paul uses the word *head* to express the relationship of God to Christ, Christ to man, and man to woman (not husband). *Kephale* can mean *chief* (head of authority) in Greek literature, Philo, the LXX and other parts of the NT, however, it is not common. The word can also mean *origin* or *source*. There is considerable academic dispute as to which of these is the most important and original. Feminist theologians prefer the latter, traditional theologians prefer the former. The Hebrew word often carried the sense of *chief*.

Although there has been much argument about this, it doesn't affect the issue of head covering, which is what the passage is all about. It could mean source of life since Paul amplifies this thought in v8-9 and 12. If Paul's thought is relational and not hierarchical, this still forms a foundation for the need to respect the issue of God's order of glory with the use of a head covering. If the view is taken that Paul is not insisting a man has authority over the woman in general terms by using this word,

then it must be understood as the woman being the glory of man which Paul also makes clear later. In the assembly, this glory of man should be covered, and man as the glory of God should be fully expressed. Whether the word means authority, or source, a woman should still have her head covered. However, it is far more likely that Paul intends the meaning of authority because he could not have meant to say that God is the *source* or origin of Christ. The meaning of '*source*' comes from classical Greek; post Septuagint Greek usage definitely implies '*authority*'.

The real problem is that modern people associate subordination with inferiority. The Bible clearly does not. Men and women are not in rivalry but in partnership; not in acts of competition but complimentary action.

Covering (1 Cor 11:5,6,10) Is hair enough?

There are two different words used in this section that apply. In verse 5 the Greek literally says: '*Every woman praying or prophesying uncovered as to the head*'. Verse 6 repeats the use of this word. But in verse 10 instead of *covering* we have the word *authority*.

The traditional meaning is that of an external covering which is clearly implied by these verses and by the comparison with the man in v7 ('*he should not have his head covered*'). Translations often use the word *veil* which unfortunately suggests the long Muslim type of veil which is not known in antiquity. What is probably meant is the loose end of an outer garment called '*the himation*', a loosely fitting light linen cloth or shawl.²³

On the basis of v15, some have suggested that a woman's long hair is a sufficient covering, but this is a misreading of Paul's argument. If a woman is not covered, she should be shorn according to v5-6. It is not good enough to avoid Paul's command by allowing hair to be the covering he calls for. In any case, many modern women have short hair, so this is of little use anyway. Others have implied that *uncovered* refers to long, loosened hair which was shameful, i.e. wanton, like a prostitute. This too is untenable: how is man's uncovered head the opposite (v7); and there is no evidence that loosed hair was a disgrace in this culture.²⁴ In fact Paul uses a different word for covering here than in the rest of the passage. This indicates a permanent covering (i.e. hair) which is not in the place of a veil. He goes out of his way to emphasise that hair is not this required covering.

The logic of the passage is that an external, unspecified covering is required and verse 15 is an argument by way of analogy. The reason for this covering is that it appears some Corinthian women were taking their equality before God too far and breaking down the distinction between the sexes; something that only takes place in heaven. This attitude led to ignoring customary barriers that disrupted worship and caused a disgrace, i.e. leaving aside a veil when prophesying. It is likely that this closely resembled the authoritative behaviour of Greek cultic priestesses which scandalised other church participants.

²³ G D Fee, *New Intern. Comm. on 1 Cor.* p496.

²⁴ *Ibid*; Fee is an excellent expositor and this commentary is a classic. He is from a Pentecostal background, and thus particularly useful in this letter. However, Fee is unusually weak in this area. After proving conclusively, as a result of 21 pages of detailed exegesis, that an external covering is precisely what Paul meant in this section, he finally, and arbitrarily, dismisses it as relevant for modern women on the basis of its bearing on ancient culture only, thus missing the vital and timeless significance of the reference to angels.

Regarding the unexpected use of *authority* (*exousia*), this is notoriously difficult and there are various suggestions. What we can say is that it doesn't change the fact that an external covering is required from the earlier verses. Some feel that *authority* is a metonym for veil (eg: RSV). Despite no explanation for why this word is used here, the solution is reasonable. The only sensible alternative is that the word implies 'freedom to choose', i.e. a woman ought to have freedom of authority over her head to choose; although this seems to be contradictory to the main argument. Paul possibly means that since the Corinthians love to shout about their authority (6:12, 8:9), they should use that freedom to choose correctly, in this case by women wearing a covering.

1 Cor 14:33-36

33 For God is not *the author* of confusion but of peace, as in all the churches of the saints. 34 Let your women keep silent in the churches, for they are not permitted to speak; but *they are* to be submissive, as the law also says. 35 And if they want to learn something, let them ask their own husbands at home; for it is shameful for women to speak in church. 36 Or did the word of God come *originally* from you? Or *was it* you only that it reached?

This passage has caused trouble for many years. The key problem is that it appears that Paul contradicts himself. Women have been allowed to pray and prophecy several times in this letter, here they seem to be forbidden. Since God cannot contradict himself, and he inspired this word, Paul cannot be referring to the same thing. The only alternative, and the soundest interpretation, is that Paul is speaking about judging prophecy, which is the context of this text. Women are not allowed to speak out and judge prophetic words. This function carries authority and must be undertaken by men. If women have an opinion, they must discuss it at home.²⁵

Earlier views regarded Paul to be talking about married women chatting or gossiping during the meeting; particularly in discussing a prophecy. Such women should ask their husbands about it later, rather than disrupt the meeting. This can be a problem today in church and needs to be warned about.

1 Tim 2:8-15

8 I desire therefore that the men pray everywhere, lifting up holy hands, without wrath and doubting; 9 in like manner also, that the women adorn themselves in modest apparel, with propriety and moderation, not with braided hair or gold or pearls or costly clothing, 10 but, which is proper for women professing godliness, with good works.

11 Let a woman learn in silence with all submission.

12 And I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man, but to be in silence.

13 For Adam was formed first, then Eve. 14 And Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived, fell into transgression. 15 Nevertheless she will be saved in childbearing if they continue in faith, love, and holiness, with self-control. (NKJV)

This passage states Paul's position so clearly that it has been attacked for centuries. Every means possible is still being utilised by modern scholars to remove the strong statements about women's ministry in verses 11-12. These usually revolve around

²⁵ Don Carson develops a similar view in: *Showing the Spirit* (in. loc.), Paternoster Press.

trying to prove that the text arises from a spurious document variant, or more recently, trying to prove that the command was for a specific unusual situation in Ephesus which was only temporary and not relevant to us today. The former can be ignored as being totally without evidence. The latter is still being presented in various ways of greater or lesser competence but every attempt produces a devastating response by a conservative scholar.²⁶ One example of seeking to mitigate the weight of Paul's words is to suggest that Paul is here contending against a local problem with troublesome women in Ephesus (e.g. Gordon Fee)²⁷ which resulted in false Gnostic teaching gaining a foothold. But again there is no internal evidence to support this hypothesis, as even Fee admits when he says that this 'might' be the case. An hypothesis or a suggestion cannot overturn a clear apostolic command.

The problem for those arguing a temporary, unique situation, whatever the suspected possibilities, is that there is absolutely no indication of that being the case in the text. In fact, it reads simply as Paul's practice everywhere. No one has problems with Paul stating that men should pray or that women should dress modestly. But pro-feminists have problems with the next three verses!

Silence is better translated as *quietness*. It is the Greek word **h`suci,a** (*hesuchia*; Strong's 2271), meaning: quietness, a description of the life of one who stays at home doing his own work, and does not officiously meddle with the affairs of others. It can also mean silence. Paul mentions this word twice in two verses, introducing and concluding his powerful statement. *Submission* speaks for itself. *To teach* is the word **dida,skw** (*didasko*; Strong's 1321) a form of the verb *dao*, to learn. It means: to teach, to be a teacher, to impart instruction.

The clear meaning of Paul's command is that women cannot exercise a formal teaching ministry carrying authority over men. They must act in quietness in the church meeting, not meddling in authoritative doctrinal instruction. The ascension gifts of Ephesians 4 are not open to women. These are church offices that carry authority. It is not a teaching exhortation, but authoritative teaching ministry; not a prophetic encouragement, but the prophetic office; not sharing one's faith, but evangelistic church leadership etc.

A further word needs to pick up on Paul's clear instruction in these verses that women should dress modestly, as befitting being in the presence of God. A woman can easily emphasise her sexual difference and this is not fitting where she is testifying to being equal, before God, with men. A rich woman can also emphasise her estate, more than a man, by wearing gold or fine jewellery. This highlights a disparity with other poorer believers and must be avoided in fellowship. Finally, all dress which displays sexual attraction should be avoided. In this area we could mention: mini-skirts, low cut tops, backless dresses, high split skirts etc. There is enough temptation to distraction (both from men in lust and other women in jealousy) without adding to it.

Authority (*authentein*, 1 Tim 2:12)

Some women commentators insist that *authentein* did not mean 'to usurp authority' until the 3rd century, but referred to an attitude of sexual availability prevalent among

²⁶ See for instance *Women, authority and the Bible*; Ed. Mickelsen, IVP, Marshall Pickering, Basingstoke (1987). David Scoler considers the text as 'historically conditioned and limited'.

²⁷ G D Fee, *Comm on Tim/Titus*; G D Fee and D Stuart, *How to Read the Bible for all it's worth*, p57ff.

Gnostic cult priestesses²⁸. This is not really the issue. The word comes from the noun *authentēs* which originally meant suicide or murder. This meaning fell away but the concept of master (autocrat, i.e. self-direction) continued. *Authentein* has the meaning of self-willed behaviour, authority, exercising power, domination over someone. No serious Greek lexicon disputes this.²⁹ The AV translation *usurp authority* is unfortunate; the meaning is rather, the exercise of authority, although in practice it amounts to the same thing. Paul's whole point here is that he does not allow a woman to exercise authority at all.

Some women writers say that male rule over women resulted from the fall and not from creation. This flies in the face of both the creation narrative in Gen 1-2 and Paul's observations of it in 1 Tim 2:13-14 and elsewhere. Man's headship is not the fruit of sin but divine decree.

Are women fully redeemed? (1 Tim 2:15)

We refer to this text later in some measure, but it deserves to be stated now that Paul's clear comments in Gal 3:28 shows that justification applies to both sexes equally. Any teaching which restricts women's ministry by demeaning women's standing before God is wrong.

Is there a NT emphasis on an aspect of Women's Ministry?

Yes! Time and again Paul refers to something which he insists is the woman's key role. In these politically correct times it is extremely unpopular, but it is nevertheless indisputable. This emphasis is the role of homemaker, mother, wife and trainer of young women. Is it surprising that in recent years when the role of women has drastically changed in modern society there has been a corollary of dreadful trouble with children, discipline in schools, juvenile delinquency, marital breakdown and so on. The woman holds the key to the home, there she is absolute ruler. The strongest word in the NT for authority is reserved for the woman in the home.³⁰

Wives be subject to your husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, ... let wives also be subject in everything to their husbands. Eph 5:22-24

This does not need extensive comment here, suffice to say that Paul makes a significant point in one of his last letters from the enforced reflection in prison that wives should be subject to their husbands. In general, she rules at home but strategic decisions are the responsibility of the husband. The buck stops with him.

Yet woman will be saved through bearing children, if she continues in faith and love and holiness, with modesty. 1 Tim 2:15

This means that the women's role is to honour their husbands, bear children and raise them in the fear of the Lord. It is not referring to justification but to our present task of working out our salvation, what Peter calls, '*the salvation of the soul*' (1 Pt

²⁸ Eg: Jo Gardner, Adullam Notes 1994, no reference given.

²⁹ Eg: Abbott-Smith, Bullinger, Bauer, Thayer, Vine, Vincent .

³⁰ *Oikodespoteo*, 1 Tim 5:14, lit. 'home despot', 'master of the house'.

1:9). After being saved by God's grace through faith alone in Christ alone, we are engaged in a work for the rest of our lives to outwork, in our character, what God has placed into us, good works prepared beforehand (Eph 2:10). In this, there is a different function for men and women. Men provide for their families by protecting them and working to earn money to live, women provide for their families by homemaking and rearing children. This has been understood for centuries as normal until technological changes in this century have enabled women to work more widely. Today it is often easier for women to find work than men, especially as business companies can be prosecuted for sexual discrimination.

Bid the older women likewise to be reverent in behaviour, not to be slanderers or slaves to drink; they are to teach what is good, and so train the young women to love their husbands and children, to be sensible, chaste, domestic, kind and submissive to their husbands that the word of God may not be discredited. Titus 2:3-5

This passage re-affirms the previous one. The woman's key role is in the home, but as she gets older, what she has learned by experience she can pass on by discipling younger women who no doubt find it hard going and are tempted to give up.

The alienation of modern society, especially when added to the increased mobility which rends families, often leaves young women isolated with no help when facing problems at home. A vital issue in the church is to assist ladies in this predicament and avoid the intense pain of family break-up which affects so many people and is a major factor in the degeneration of society.

1 Tim 5:3-16

Although this passage concerns widows, it tells us much regarding women's ministry and weaknesses. A widow is to be enrolled (presumably a welfare programme) if she has evidenced good deeds. These are listed as:

one who has brought up children, shown hospitality, washed the feet of the saints, relieved the afflicted and devoted herself to doing good in every way. (v9-10)

This confirms Paul's other statements that a women's role is seen to be domestic in orientation first, then moving on to 'social work'. There is nothing in Paul about women teaching, preaching, leading in church or mission.

Paul moves on to talk about the specific proneness to certain failings in women:

they learn to be idlers, gadding about from house to house, and not only idlers but gossips and busybodies saying what they should not. (v13)

Women's weakness has to do with the tongue and what they listen to. They are quick to hear what is false and ready to repeat it. Modern women are furious to hear these words, but the issue is - are they scriptural, we can see that they are. This is not an interpretation, it is the word of God. To make this clear, Paul makes similar statements elsewhere: 2 Tim 3:6-7; Titus 2:3; 1Tim 2:14.

History shows that, like it or not, this perception of women's particular weakness has often been noticed, and unfortunately ridiculed. Novels, plays, speeches and comment have so frequently referred to it that further documentation is not necessary.

Now it would be wrong to say that every woman is prone to this failure, just as it is foolish to say that every man is masculine. Also, it is clear that men have particular

failings especially in the realms of sensitivity, openness and peace. Nevertheless, the Bible draws attention to the fact that women have a weakness here, stemming from the fall, which prevents them from authoritative teaching.

Women in Church History

It is an undeniable fact that, until the last twenty years, the role of women did not include significant leadership in the evangelical church. Women leaders have existed in various sects from the beginning like Montanism, Gnosticism or later in cults like Christian Science, but the historic church only had male leaders. This is different from pagan religions where women featured very strongly. Priests were male but high priests (priestesses) were usually women. This was usually due to the female symbol of fertility and reproduction, often allied to harvest and fruitfulness.³¹ Some cults prized female virginity in serving their god,³² while other religions favoured female prostitution.³³

This does not mean that women are not in evidence as ministers in church history, far from it. There are many female examples of missionaries, aid workers, reformers, orphanage leaders, evangelists, and so on. Monasteries (convents) for women (nuns) were also led by abbesses. But leadership in the local church has rarely been seen in any denomination until recent years. It is only since the rise of the women's liberation movement, initiated in the 60's, and feminism that the issue has become centre stage. Many people would say, 'not before time', but the question is rather, 'is it Biblical'?

Examples of godly women used powerfully by the Holy Spirit throughout church history would include:

- missionaries like Mary Slessor
- social workers and reformers like Elizabeth Fry
- hymn writers like Francis Ridley Havergal
- martyrs like Perpetua
- mothers like Susanna Wesley
- courageous carers like Gladys Aylward
- innovative child protectors like Amy Carmichael

Women like these should not be forgotten.

What about being pragmatic?

One of the key problems today, especially with emerging and pioneering churches, is: what does one do if there is no man available to teach but certain women can? Strange practices have developed here. In China, Watchman Nee tells of a group who sought to be Biblical when faced with this problem. Their answer was for the woman to teach the women on one side of the room behind a curtain. The men sat the other side listening attentively, but pretending that they were in a different meeting!

Today it is increasingly common, even in Evangelical churches, for women to teach or worse, be appointed as elders. We have seen that this is unbiblical. Some

³¹ E.g.: the Greek festival of Demeter,

³² Vestal virgins who were seduced in 7th century BC Rome were buried alive. (Plutarch)

³³ Eg: Canaanite Baal worship and later Greek cults.

churches appoint a man as the leader, who is unable to teach; and then let one or two women give the main messages to the people because they can. Such churches commit a double error: men should not be appointed to eldership if they are not able to teach (1 Tim 3:2), and women should not be allowed to preach authoritatively. The fact that churches are faced with this problem at all is symptomatic of the deplorable state which the church has sunk into. I cannot think of a time in past history when this was also true.

The fact that a woman can give a solid exposition is no surprise. All women should have this as a goal so that they can effectively teach their children³⁴ and other women. Such women have taken care to develop past a milk diet. It is men who have failed, not women. It was wrong for Israel to have a Queen, and in fact only had one when they were under judgment. The fact that a Queen could be effective in politics and leadership (like Jezebel) does not make it right for her to rule. Likewise, the effective ministry of a woman does not make it right to set aside God's word, which is clear. Pragmatics must never overrule God's order.

Churches in this position should pray for God to supply what is lacking and make temporary alternative arrangements. Sunday meetings should not be dominated by sermons anyway, but should be based upon mutual edification of various gifts under the direction of the Spirit (see 1 Cor 14). Bible studies can also be managed in *koinonia* with the able woman sharing (non-authoritatively) along with everyone else. The meeting being led by a man. If necessary, tapes and videos of able male teaches can supplement this. There is never a reason to ignore God's direction in his word.

A further qualification needs to be mentioned. There are some subjects that women excel in, where men are insufficient. Needs that pertain particularly to women, wives, adolescent girls, childbirth, nursing infants, female ailments, menopause are just a few examples. There can be no objection to a woman addressing Biblical teaching for matters such as these, to a church meeting as required. Here a woman can speak authoritatively, but without authority over men, assisting the church in areas of their specific expertise.

Conclusion

The New Testament endows women with a much higher status than they were used to in the world around them. However, the apostles see a clear difference in role and function, arising from the differences in the creation order between men and women. Man was formed first and it is man who is specifically stated to be the image of God in authority and dominion over the earth. Paul identifies a further weakness identified in the creation narratives, that is, women are more prone to deception.

As a result, women have certain restrictions placed upon their ministry in the church: they are not to teach or to have authority over men, they are not to publically judge prophecy, they cannot exercise the ascension offices and they cannot be church leaders. They can be deaconesses, but this is not a governing role in the church but a service. In public meetings they must wear a head covering to symbolise their submission to God's declared authority roles in creation. They should also dress with modesty.

³⁴ but the husband has the main responsibility here, men cannot fob this on to the wives.

The particular ministry reserved for women, apart from being good wives and mothers, is that of disciplining other women. This is now recognised as being a neglected area in society, and one from which most of society's ills arise as children grow without proper instruction, become delinquents and later even worse. The role of Christian women in this area is vitally important, both to the church and to society as a whole. However, apart from exercising the ascension gifts which carry authority (like teaching), they can minister in church, in every other way. Indeed the woman's intuitive, sensitive and emotional character should complement man's natural rational, strong, bluntness.

Appendix 1

Word Studies

Head

2776 kefalh, kephale, from the primary kapto (in the sense of seizing); TDNT - 3:673,429; n f • AV - head 76; 76 • 1) the head, both of men and often of animals. Since the loss of the head destroys life, this word is used in the phrases relating to capital and extreme punishment. 2) metaph. anything supreme, chief, prominent 2a) of persons, master lord: of a husband in relation to his wife 2b) of Christ: the Lord of the husband and of the Church 2c) of things: the corner stone. *Thayer's Dict.*

Authority

Strong's 1849 **evxousi,a** exousia, from 1832 (in the sense of ability. 1) power of choice, liberty of doing as one pleases 1a) leave or permission 2) physical and mental power 2a) the ability or strength with which one is endued, which he either possesses or exercises 3) the power of authority (influence) and of right (privilege) 4) the power of rule or government (the power of him whose will and commands must be submitted to by others and obeyed) 4a) universally 4a1) authority over mankind 4b) specifically 4b1) the power of judicial decisions 4b2) of authority to manage domestic affairs 4c) metonymically 4c1) a thing subject to authority or rule 4c1a) jurisdiction 4c2) one who possesses authority 4c2a) a ruler, a human magistrate 4c2b) the leading and more powerful among created beings superior to man, spiritual potentates 4d) a sign of the husband's authority over his wife 4d1) the veil with which propriety required a woman to cover herself 4e) the sign of regal authority, a crown • For Synonyms see entry 5820 *Thayer's Dict.*

1Co 11:10 - Ought (ofeilei). Moral obligation therefore (dia touto, rests on woman in the matter of dress that does not (ouk ofeilei in verse 7) rest on the man. **To have a sign of authority** (exousian ecein). He means shmeion exousiaj (symbol of authority) by exousian, but it is the sign of authority of the man over the woman. The veil on the woman's head is the symbol of the authority that the man with the uncovered head has over her. It is, as we see it, more a sign of subjection (y`potaghj, 1Ti 2:10) than of authority (exousiaj). *Robertson's Word Pictures.*

Covering

v4 kata

v5 uncovered =akatakaluptos

v6 katakalupto (twice)

v7 katakalupto

v13 uncovered = akatakaluptos

v15 peribolaion

Peribolaion = Strong's 4018, **peribolaion** from a presumed derivative of 4016; a covering thrown around, a wrapper, a mantle, a veil. *Thayer's Dict.*

For a covering (anti peribolaion). Old word from periballw to fling around, as a mantle (Heb 1:12) or a covering or veil as here. It is not in the place of a veil, but answering to (anti, in the sense of anti in Joh 1:16), as a permanent endowment (dedotai, perfect passive indicative). *Robertson's Word Pictures*

Unveiled (1Co 11:5)

"Amongst Greeks only the e'tairai, so numerous in Corinth, went about unveiled; slave-women wore the shaven head--also a punishment of the adulteress" (Findlay). Cf. Nu 5:18.

One and the same thing as if she were shaven

It is public praying and prophesying that the Apostle here has in mind. He does not here condemn the act, but the breach of custom which would bring reproach. A woman convicted of adultery had her hair shorn (Isa 7:20). The Justinian code prescribed shaving the head for an adulteress whom the husband refused to receive after two years. Paul does not tell Corinthian Christian women to put themselves on a level with courtesans. *Robertson's Word Pictures.*

Angels

Because of the angels (dia touj aggelouj). This startling phrase has caused all kinds of conjecture which may be dismissed. It is not preachers that Paul has in mind, nor evil angels who could be tempted (Ge 6:1f.), but angels present in worship (cf. 1Co 4:9; Ps 138:1) who would be shocked at the conduct of the women since the angels themselves veil their faces before Jehovah (Isa 6:2). *Robertson's Word Pictures.*

Authority, 1 Tim 2:12

Strong's 831, **auvqente,w** authenteo; from a compound of 846 and an obsolete hentes (a worker); 1) one who with his own hands kills another or himself 2) one who acts on his own authority, autocratic 3) an absolute master 4) to govern, exercise dominion over one. *Thayer's Dict.*

01021 auvqente,w control 37.21

auvqente,w: to control in a domineering manner - 'to control, to domineer.' gunaiki. ouvkv evpitre,pw ... auvqentei/n avndro,j 'I do not allow women ... to dominate men' 1 Tm 2.12. 'To control in a domineering manner' is often expressed idiomatically, for example, 'to shout orders at,' 'to act like a chief toward,' or 'to bark at.' *Louw-Nida Lexicon*

1Ti 2:12 - I permit not (ouk epitrepw). Old word epitrepw, to permit, to allow (1Co 16:7). Paul speaks authoritatively. **To teach** (didaskain). In the public meeting clearly. And yet all modern Christians allow women to teach Sunday school classes. One feels somehow that something is not expressed here to make it all clear. **Nor to have dominion over a man** (oude auqentein androj). The word auqentew is now cleared up by Kretschmer (*Glotta*, 1912, pp. 289ff.) and by Moulton and Milligan's *Vocabulary*. See also Nageli, *Der Wortschatz des Apostels Paulus* and Deissmann, *Light, etc.*, pp. 88f. Autodikew was the literary word for playing the master while auqentew was the vernacular term. It comes from aut&`entej, a self-doer, a master,

autocrat. It occurs in the papyri (substantive auqenthj, master, verb auqentew, to domineer, adjective auqentikoj, authoritative, "authentic"). Modern Greek has afentej = Effendi = "Mr." *Robertson's Word Pictures*.

00869 auvqente,w strictly, of one who acts on his own authority; hence, *have control over, domineer, lord it over* (1T 2.12). *Friberg's Lexicon*.

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