As womanhood has been devalued and her function altered, the rest of society has suffered dramatically. After all, women inevitably exert a profound influence on culture and society—for good or ill. Virtuous femininity is the glue that holds human civilization together. In the words of American poet William Ross Wallace’s immortal poem, “The Hand That Rocks the Cradle, Rules the World” (1865). Sadly for America, feminism has overtaken the rocker, thrown the baby out with the bathwater, punched Dad in the face, and stomped away from the house in a huff.

The Bible Still Has the Correct Perspective

This polarization that continues to divide the church is an age-old pattern. From the Garden of Eden to the present day, the idea of male-dominated society and the resulting male-dominated church has had disastrous consequences.

Male and Female Roles: Gender in the Bible

Dave Miller, Ph.D.

Paul’s insistence that women keep their veils on during the worship assembly amounted to an implicit directive to refrain from leading in the assembly—a directive stated explicitly in 1 Cor. 14:34. The allusions to Creation law (11:1-9; cf. 14:34) underscore the fact that Paul saw the restrictions on women as rooted in the created order—not culture. Also, Paul made clear that such restrictions applied equally to all churches of Christ (11:16).

Later in the same context (in chapter 14), Paul addresses further the confusion over spiritual gifts and returns specifically to the participation of women in the exercise of those gifts in the assembly. He again emphasizes the universal practice of churches of Christ: “as in all churches of the saints” (14:33). (NOTE: Grammatically, “as in all churches of the saints” links with “let your women keep silence.” Cf. the AV, RSV, NIV, NEB, NAB, etc.) The women who possessed the awesome privileges of exercising spiritual gifts should not be allowed to exercise them in the mixed worship assembly of the church. To do so was disgraceful—“a shame!” (14:35). To insist upon doing so was equivalent to (1) presuming to be the authors of God’s Word, and (2) assuming it was the role of men to lead in worship.
that God’s standards do not apply to everyone (14:36).

Granted, 1 Corinthians chapters 11 and 14 address a unique situation. After all, spiritual gifts are no longer available to the church (1 Corinthians 13:8; see Miller, 2003a), and veils, in Western society, are no longer a cultural symbol of female submission (see Miller, 2003b; cf. Moore, 1998). Nevertheless, both passages demonstrate the clear application of the transcultural principle (female submission in worship) to a specific cultural circumstance. The underlying submission (Miller) and male remains intact as an inbuilt constituent element of the created order.

I Timothy 2: The Central Scripture

I desire therefore that the men pray everywhere, lifting up holy hands, without wrath and doubting; in like manner also, that the women adorn themselves in modest apparel, with propriety and moderation, not with gold or silver or pearls or costly clothing, but, which is proper for women professing godliness, with good works. Let a woman learn in silence with all submission. And I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over men in any way, but to be in silence. For Adam was formed first, then Eve. And Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived, fell into transgression. Nevertheless she will be saved if they continue in the sanctification of love, and holiness, with self-control (1 Timothy 2:14).

The premier passage in the New Testament that treats the role of women in worship is I Timothy 2:1-15. The emphasis of the book is proper behavior in the life of the church (1 Timothy 3:15). The immediate context of chapter two is worship, specifically in the assembly, but includes the general life of the church. In this passage, Paul affirms that adult males (androi) are to lead prayers anywhere people meet for worship. “Lifting up holy hands” is a figure of speech, metonymy, in which a posture of prayer is put in place of prayer itself. Their prayers are to be ushered forth from holy lives. On the other hand, women are admonished to focus on appropriate apparel and a submissive attitude. Notice the contrast framed in the passage: Men need to be holy, spiritual leaders in worship while women need to be modest and unassuming. “Silence” and “submission” in this passage relate specifically to the exercise of spiritual authority over adult males in the church. “Usurp” (KJV) is not in the original text. Authentein should be translated “to have (or exercise) authority” (NKJV, ESV, NIV, RSV, NASB). Thus Paul instructed women not to teach nor to have authority over men in any way. Why? Why would an inspired apostle place such limitations on Christian women? Was his concern prompted by the culture of that day? Was Paul merely accommodating an unenlightened, hostile environment, stalling for time and keeping prejudice to a minimum, until he could teach them the Gospel? Absolutely not. The Holy Spirit gives the reason for the limitations, and that reason transcends all church and all cultures. Paul states that women are not to exercise spiritual authority over men because Adam was created before Eve. Here we are given the heart and core of God’s will concerning how men and women are to function and interrelate. But what does the chronological priority of Adam have to do with the interrelationship of male and female?

Grounded in Creation—Not Culture

Paul is saying that God’s original design for the human race entailed the creation of the male first as an indication of his responsibility to be the spiritual leader of the home. He was created to function as the head or leader in the home and in the church. That is his functional purpose. Women, on the other hand, was specifically designed and created for the purpose of being a subordinate—though not inferior—assistant and co-worker. First, God created the woman first, but He did not. He could have created both male and female simultaneously, but He did not. His action was intended to convey His will with regard to gender as it relates to the interrelationship of man and woman.

This feature of Creation explains why God gave spiritual teaching to Adam before Eve was created, implying that Adam had the created responsibility to teach his wife (Genesis 2:15-17). It explains why the female is twice stated to have been created to be “an help meet for him, suitable for the man” (Genesis 2:18,20, emp. added). This explains why the Genesis text clearly indicates that in a unique sense, the woman was created for the man—not vice versa. It explains why God brought the woman “to the man” (Genesis 2:22, again, as if she was made “for him”—not vice versa. Adam confirmed this understanding by stating “the woman whom You gave to be with me” (Genesis 3:1,2, emp. added). It explains why Paul argued in the Corinthian letter on the ordination of women, “That this is very distinct: Neither was the man created for the woman; but the woman for the man” (1 Corinthians 11:9, emp. added). It further clarifies the implied authority of the woman over the woman in his act of naming the woman (Genesis 2:23; 3:20). The Jews understood this divinely designed order, evidenced by the practice of primogyny—the firstborn male. God’s creation of the man first was specifically intended to communicate the authority/ (cont. on p. 105)
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prerequisite to becoming a Christian (Romans 10:9-10). This singular point makes Christianity and Islam forever incomparable. One must be a Christian to be saved (John 14:6; Acts 4:12), and yet one cannot be a Christian without believing in, and verbally confessing, the deity of Christ, and then being immersed into Christ (Romans 6:1-4; Galatians 3:27). The Bible declares that Jesus was the final revelation of God to man (Hebrews 1:1-3). There have been no others.

Dave Miller

In the News

Seeing the Designer in Shrimp Vision

Humans have amazing eyesight. In fact, many camera companies have looked to the eye in an effort to glean useful information in developing better photographic and video technology. As effective as the human eye is, however, there are certain things it cannot do. One of those is to detect ultraviolet light. But researchers have recently discovered a creature with the amazing ability to detect ultraviolet light—the mantis shrimp.

Mantis shrimp are some of the most interesting creatures in the water. They have extremely powerful claws and lightening fast reflexes. But their ability to see ultraviolet light makes their eyesight one of the most remarkable abilities in the animal kingdom. Michael Bok, one of the researchers studying mantis shrimp vision stated: “The overall construction of the mantis shrimp’s visual system is just so unbelievably ridiculous, this is so just another piece of that tapestry” (Pappas, 2014). What makes their vision “unbelievably ridiculous” is that they have 12 photoreceptors in their eyes, while humans only have three (2014). Another interesting element to their vision is that the shrimp uses amino acids that act as sunscreen in their eyes to help them see ultraviolet light.

The design behind mantis shrimp vision, according to those doing the work on it, is “unbelievably ridiculous,” meaning of course that it is so advanced that it takes a team of researchers just to try to understand it, much less figure out a way to copy the technology. Those who contend that the mantis shrimp is a product of evolutionary changes that have taken place over millions of years cannot explain how such advanced capabilities could reside in the shrimp. No amount of mindless tinkering could produce such highly sensitive instruments as mantis shrimp eyes.

The most reasonable explanation for mantis shrimp vision is that an intelligent Creator, Who sees all things (including ultraviolet light), designed the shrimp and its complex eye. When brilliant human researchers come away from such technology in awe of the abilities of mantis shrimp vision, the obvious conclusion to draw is that the Designer of such vision possesses an intelligence far superior to that of the humans involved in the research. When the Proverbs writer stated: “The hearing ear and the seeing eye, the Lord has made both of them” (Proverbs 20:12), that would certainly include a “seeing eye” that uses amino acids as sunscreen and 12 photoreceptors to see light that humans cannot.

Kyle Butt

Reference


submission arrangement of the human race (cf. 1 Corinthians 11:8). Observe that Paul next elaborates on this principle in 1 Timothy 2:14 by noting an example of what can happen when men and women tamper with God’s original design. When Eve took the spiritual initiative above her husband, and Adam failed to take the lead and exercise spiritual authority over his wife, Satan was able to wreak havoc on the home and cause the introduction of sin into the world (Genesis 3). When Paul said the woman was deceived, he was not suggesting that women are more gullible than men. Rather, when men or women fail to confine themselves to their created function, but instead tamper with and act in violation of divinely intended roles, spiritual vulnerability to sin naturally follows.

God’s appraisal of the matter was seen when He confronted the pair. He spoke first to the head of the household—Adam. The subsequent declaration to Eve reaffirmed the fact that she was not to yield to the inclination to take the lead in spiritual matters. Rather, she was to submit to the rule of her husband (Genesis 3:16; cf. 4:4). When God said to Adam, “Because you have heeded the voice of your wife…” (Genesis 3:17), He was calling attention to the fact that Adam had failed to exercise spiritual leadership, thereby circumventing the divine arrangement of male-female relations.

Paul concludes his instructions by noting how this situation came about from falling into the same trap of assuming unauthorized authority: “She will be saved in childbearing” (1 Timothy 2:15). “Childbearing” is the figure of speech known as synedoché in which a part stands for the whole. Thus, Paul was referring to the whole of female responsibility. Women may add to their role many other functions by concentrating on the functions assigned to them by God, undertaken with faith, love, and holiness in sobriety (i.e., self-control).

Some argue that this text applies to husbands and wives rather than to men and women in general. However, the context of 1 Timothy is not the home, but the church (1 Timothy 3:1-5). Likewise, the use of the plural with the absence of the article in 2:9 and 2:11 suggests women in general. Nothing in the context would cause one to conclude that Paul was referring only to husbands and wives. Besides, would Paul restrict wives from leadership roles in the church—then but permit single women to lead?

Deaconesses

Those who advocate expanded roles for women in the church appeal to the alleged existence of deaconesses in the New Testament. Only two passages even hint of such an office: Romans 16:1-2 and 1 Timothy 3:11. In Romans 16:1, the term translated servant” in the KJV is the Greek word diakonos, an indeclinable term meaning “one who serves or ministers.” It is of common gender (i.e., may refer to men or women) and occurs in the following verses: Matthew 20:26; 22:13; 23:11; Mark 9:35; 10:23; John 3:5, 29; 12:6; Romans 13:4; 15:8; 1 Corinthians 3:5; 16:1; 2 Corinthians 3:6; 4:3; 11:15,23; Galatians 2:17; Ephesians 3:7; 6:21; Philippians 1:1; Colossians 1:21; 2:17; 1 Thessalonians 5:1; 1 Timothy 3:8,12; 4:6.

The term is used in the New Testament in two senses. First, it is used as a technical term for a formal office in the church to which one may be appointed by meeting certain qualifications. Second, it is used as a non-technical term for the informal activity of serving or attending to. Additional words in the New Testament that have both a technical and non-technical meaning include “apostle,” “elder,” and “shepherd.” To be rational in one’s analysis of a matter, one must draw only those conclusions that are warranted by the evidence. In the matter of deaconesses, one should only conclude that a deaconess is being referred to when the context clearly shows the office is under consideration.

In Romans 13:4, the civil government is said to be God’s deacon. In Romans 15:8, Christ is said to be a deacon of the Jews. In 2 Corinthians 3:6 and 6:4, Paul is said to be a deacon of the New Covenant and a deacon of God. Apollos is listed with Paul as a deacon in 1 Corinthians 3:5. Obviously, these are all non-technical uses of the term in two senses, referring to the service or assistance being rendered. Nothing in the context of Romans 16:1 warrants the conclusion that Paul was describing Phoebe as an official appointee—a deaconess. “Our sister” designates her church membership and “servant” specifies the special efforts she extended to the church in Cenchrea where she was an active, caring member. Being a “servant of the church” no more implies a formal appointee than does the expression in Colossians 1:25 where Paul is said to be the church’s servant.

Some have suggested that the term deaconesses in Romans 16:2 translated “help” implies a technical usage. It is true that proistos can mean a helper in the sense of presiding with authority. But this word carries the same inbuilt obscurity that diakonos does in that it has a formal and informal sense. But since the verse explicitly states that Phoebe was a “helper” to Paul, the non-technical usage must be in view. She would not have exercised authority over Paul. Even his fellow apostles did not do that since he exercised high authority direct from the Lord (1 Corinthians 14:37-38; Galatians 1:8).”

Thus, Paul was referring to the whole of female responsibility. Women may add to their role many other functions by concentrating on the functions assigned to them by God, undertaken with faith, love, and holiness in sobriety (i.e., self-control).

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REFERENCE

Dave Miller
Romans 16:2 actually plays a role on words, Paul told the Corinthians to “help” (παρέχειν) Phoebe since she has been a “help” (προστάτης) to many, including Paul himself. While the masculine noun προστάτης can mean “leader,” the actual feminine noun προστάτιδα means “protector, patroness, helper” (Arndt and Gingrich, 1957, p. 718). Paul was saying, “Help Phoebe as she has helped others.”

She had been a concerned, generous, hospitable, dedicated contributor to the Lord’s work, Paul was paying her a tremendous tribute and expressing publicly the honor due her. He was not acknowledging her as an office holder in the church.

The second passage that some have appealed to in order to find sanction for deaconesses in the church is 1 Timothy 3:11. In the midst of a listing of the qualifications of deacons, Paul referred to women. What women? Was Paul referring to the wives of the church officers, or was he referring to female office holders in the church? Once again, the underlying Greek text is of no help in answering this question since γυναῖκας (from γυνή, wife) has the same meaning as the masculine noun προστάτης.

The biblical differentiation is not a purely a matter of function, assigned with such tasks.

male and female, their specific task entailed women cannot be “the husband of the Lord’s work. Paul was paying her the meaning of the passage. First, a reference to deaconesses. Their work consisted of assisting at the baptism of women, going into homes of women, visiting the sick (ministering to them and bathing them). A full-blown church order of deaconesses does not appear until the fourth/fifth centuries. Again, their responsibilities consisted of keeping the doors, aiding in female baptisms, and doing other work with women (Lewis, pp. 108-109). Those within the church today who are ministering for deacons and expanded roles for women would hardly be content with such tasks.

Even if women were deacons in the Third, referring to the wives of church officers, or was he referring to female office holders in the church? Once again, the underlying Greek text is of no help in answering this question since γυναῖκας (from γυνή, wife) has the same meaning as the masculine noun προστάτης.

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Dave Miller