

WOMEN IN THE CHURCH

- I. Representative Biblical references
 - A. Jesus' treatment of women
 1. Compassion for and healing of women
 - a. Peter's mother-in-law - Mk. 1:29-31
 - b. Jairus' daughter - Mk. 5:35-43
 - c. Syro-Phoenician woman's daughter - Mk. 7:24-30
 - d. Mary Magdalene - Lk. 8:2
 - e. Widow at Nain - Lk. 7:11-15
 2. Taught women alongside of men
 - a. Mary and Martha - Lk. 10:41; Jn. 11:20-29
 - b. Large gatherings - Matt. 14:21; 15:38
 - c. Samaritan woman - Jn. 4:1-30
 3. Compassion despite sin
 - a. Prostitute - Matt. 26:6-13; Mk. 14:3-9; Lk. 7:47; Jn. 12:1-8
 - b. Adulteress - Jn. 7:53-8:11
 4. Women as witnesses
 - a. of resurrection - Matt. 28:1-10; Mk. 16; Lk. 24:1-11; Jn. 20
 - b. of the gospel - Matt. 28:10; Jn. 20:17
 - B. Women serving in the early church
 1. Met with disciples in prayer - Acts 1:14
 2. Regarded as fellow-ministers - Rom. 16:3,6,12
 3. Lydia, in ministry of hospitality - Acts 16:13-15
 4. Dorcas, in charitable ministry - Acts 9:36,39,41
 5. Philip's daughters, as prophetesses - Acts 21:9
 6. Priscilla, as a teacher - Acts 18:2,18,26
 7. Phoebe, as a deaconess - Rom. 16:1
 8. Junia, as an apostle? - Rom. 16:7
 - C. Limitations on women serving and leading

I Cor. 11:2-16 - "I want you to understand that Christ is the head of every man, and the man is the head of a woman, and God is the head of Christ. Every man who has something on his head while praying or prophesying, disgraces his head. But every woman who has her head uncovered while praying or prophesying, disgraces her head..."

I Cor. 14:33-36 - "Let the women keep silent in the churches; for they are not permitted to speak, but let them subject themselves, just as the Law says. And if they desire to learn anything, let them ask their own husbands at home; for it is improper for a woman to speak in church."

I Tim. 2:9-15 - "Let a woman quietly receive instruction with entire submissiveness. But I do not allow a woman to teach or exercise authority over a man, but to remain quiet..."

I Tim. 3:2 - "An overseer must be...the husband of one wife..."

Titus 1:6 - "elders...the husband of one wife..."
- II. The effect of the gospel on the treatment of women
 - A. Admitted positive benefits
 1. Civilizations of Western world affected by Christianity have allowed for and effected more freedom for women than ever previously known in human history.
 2. The rights of women today are greater in those societies influenced by Christianity than in those molded by other religious and cultural ideologies.

- B. Alleged negative effects
1. Tertullian's (145-220) remarks about women often cited:
 "And do you not know that you are (each) an Eve? The sentence of God on this sex of yours lives in this age: the guilt must of necessity live too. You are the devil's gateway; you are the unsealer of that (forbidden) tree: you are the first deserter of the divine law: you are she who persuaded him whom the devil was not valiant enough to attack. You destroyed so easily God's image, man. On account of your desert—that is, death—even the Son of God had to die."
 2. Male dominated social institutions throughout history, including the institutional church, have not readily implemented fair and equitable gender relations and roles.

III. Ontological equality as revealed in Gal. 3:28

- A. Touted by some as foremost verse for understanding social relations
1. "Magna Charta of humanity" - Jewett
 2. "the break-through verse" for social relations - Stendahl
- B. Interpretational cautions
1. Does not abolish, obliterate or eradicate all distinctions – men are still men; women are still women; slaves are still slaves; masters are still masters; Jews are still Jews; Greeks are still Greeks.
 2. Does not mandate abolition of slavery, gender-roles, religious diversity, or recognition of ethnicity.
 3. Social function roles and relationships are not the contextual theme of this verse; rather, Paul is addressing the common and equal ontological or spiritual reality of being "in Christ."
- C. Exegetical details
1. "male and female"
 - a. probably echoes Gen. 1:27 - "male and female He created them"
 - b. thus ties the creation text to the concept of the "new creation" (cf. II Cor. 5:17; Gal. 6:15)
 - c. the male and female operational roles indicated by creation are not erased or eradicated by the new creation dynamic of grace in Jesus Christ.
 2. "you are all one in Christ Jesus"
 - a. addressing Christians – "you (who are) in Christ Jesus"
 - b. context is theological, rather than sociological
 - (1) "justified by faith" - vs. 24
 - (2) "sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus" - vs. 26
 - (3) "baptized into Christ" - vs. 27
 - (4) "belong to Christ...heirs according to promise - vs. 29
 - c. the oneness can refer to the objective position, standing and status that every Christian has in common before God by the imputed righteousness of Christ.
 - d. the oneness can refer to the subjective ontological presence of Christ by the Spirit equally indwelling every Christian; the imparted righteousness of the very Being of God in Christ.
 - e. the oneness thus would refer to the restoration of "the image of God" in both male and female, allowing for the visible expression of His divine character in Christians.
 - f. the oneness can refer to the unity that all Christians share in the organism of the Body of Christ, of which Christ serves as authoritative Head.

- IV. Operational order as revealed in I Tim. 2:9-15
- A. Dismissed as irrelevant by some, on basis of
 1. Denial of Pauline authorship and canonicity
 2. Cultural bias progressively superseded by more enlightened texts
 3. Particular relative occasion not to be universally applied
 4. Limited to marital relationships in the home, rather than church
 - B. Interpretational cautions
 1. Must keep in mind the greater context of advice about prayer in the public services of the church.
 2. Paul is not issuing legalistic directives about
 - a. prayer posture
 - b. feminine attire, hairstyles, cosmetics, or jewelry
 - c. subjugation of women
 - d. gullibility of women
 - e. keeping women barefoot and pregnant
 3. Paul does, without a doubt, have an underlying presuppositional premise of God's sovereign determination and directive concerning functional authority and order within His created order of humanity.
 4. Must avoid undue generalizing and universalizing by recognizing that Paul is addressing Christian men and women.
 - C. Exegetical details
 1. Vss. 8-10 – Men, and “likewise” women, are to approach the Holy God in prayer with a desire and concern for conformity and manifestation of His Holy character.
 - a. male anger and disputation are not consistent with holiness.
 - b. female cosmeticizing and attire which draws attention to oneself, whether by seductiveness, ostentation or dowdiness, does not serve to draw attention to God's Holy character.
 2. Vss. 11,12 – Women will exhibit God's Holy character when they accept God's functional order with a quiet, respectful demeanor.
 - a. Women are not to be muzzled in mute passivity.
 - b. Women are to be receptive and teachable “disciples”
 - c. The Holiness of God is not evidenced in women when they are brash, brassy, boisterous, brazen, head-strong, strong-willed, loud-mouthed, overly-talkative, having to have the last word, challenging, controlling, manipulative, critical, conceited, arrogant, aggressive, assertive, strident, interruptive, undisciplined, insubordinate, disruptive, dominating, domineering, or clamoring for power.
 - d. Rather, women accept God's holy order and character by being humbly and unobtrusively respectful and receptive in functional subordination to God, church leadership, and husbands.
 - e. Authoritative public proclamation to men in the public services of the church is not consistent with such a functional role.
 - f. Assumption or usurpation of ultimate authority over men in the context of the church is not consistent with such a functional role.
 3. Vss. 13,14 – The rationale for acceptance of this functional order is based upon the original created order and intent of God.
 - a. The explanatory and causal reason is *not* based on:
 - (1) religious tradition
 - (2) socio-cultural considerations

- (3) the curse that resulted from the Fall of man in sin
 - b. Divinely determined creational order of function is based on chronological primacy that posits that that which precedes has precedence. Principle of primogeniture.
 - (1) This was true in the leadership of first-born sons
 - (2) This was true in the leadership of husbands
 - c. Illustration of the devastating effects of violating the Divine functional roles of order can be seen in the original temptation account.
 - (1) Adam abdicated his male leadership, passively refusing to assert protective headship.
 - (2) Eve subverted God's order by usurping leadership, attempting to deal with diabolic false teaching by herself.
 - (3) The role reversal contrary to God's Divinely determined operational order was devastating.
- 4. Vs. 15 – In their distinctive physical role of child-bearing, women will also discover the psychological and spiritual fulfillment of accepting God's operational order for human functioning.
 - a. Women will be "made safe" from the dysfunctionality of selfish, manipulative, and controlling clamoring for attention and authority, through the humiliating and self-effacing process of bearing and rearing children which require constant and total attention to their needs.
 - b. This is conditioned by the need to be constantly spiritually receptive to the love and holiness of God's character in the propriety of God's intended feminine role and function.

- V. Maintaining the tension between "Ontological equality" and "Operational order"
 - A. Ontological equality has to do with the "Being" of the persons
 - 1. There is no superiority or inferiority in the value, worth, dignity, importance of men or women before God.
 - 2. Extremist egalitarian assertions are based on false premises
 - a. Absolute equality of rights, privileges, responsibilities and authority produces the chaos of no one having ultimate responsibility or authority.
 - b. The egalitarian premises of socialistic communism and radical democratization are equally unworkable.
 - c. Identity, value and worth are not found in gender-function, but in a personal Being beyond ourselves
 - B. Operational order has to do with the functional interaction of relationships
 - 1. Such operational order of function is Divinely determined
 - a. Not expediently determined
 - b. Not subjectively determined
 - c. Not culturally determined
 - d. Not democratically determined
 - 2. The revealed order of God's creation is the basis for the God-ordained hierarchical structure in familial and ecclesiastical contexts.
 - 3. Because of sin, there will always be the abuses of male-chauvinism and clamoring feminism.
 - C. Ontological equality and Operational order are not mutually exclusive or logically incoherent.
 - 1. Analogy of Trinity
 - 2. New creation grace provides the dynamic of old creation order.