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The place of women in the family, in society, and in the Church has been the subject of much attention since the latter part of the twentieth century. It is important for a pastor to have a clear Biblical footing in an area where positions vary to an extreme degree. I am limiting my discussion to three major stances within Protestant Evangelicalism; where there are significantly differing views as to the proper activities, role, and status of women in the Church.

Subordinate Status of Women:

This view embraces the traditional thinking of the last millennium and a half in assigning women a subordinate status. Proponents argue that the priority of man's creation gives him a superiority over woman (1 Cor. 11:8-9; 1 Tim. 2:13). As she led him into sin, God has ordained that he should rule rather than she (Gen. 3:16; 1 Tim. 2:14). Because of Eve's misdemeanour, the earlier church fathers, most notably Tertullian, had concluded that women were weak, degraded, depraved, and an obstacle to the spiritual development of men.

Although considerably modified, modern theologians have eloquently expressed the doctrine of woman's inferiority as well. Women are viewed as less capable of good judgment, while decision-making and leadership in ministry become male prerogatives. There is a strong emphasis on the prohibition against women teaching or exercising authority over men (1 Tim. 2:11-14) and there is the command for them to be silent in the congregation (1 Cor. 14:34-35; 1 Tim. 2:12).

Some stress the subordination of women as following implicitly from the subordination of Christ to the Father and draw on the headship concepts of 1 Cor. 11:3-15. Others accord women a full equality of being but an inferiority of status both in the family and in the Church. The subjection of wife to husband in Christian marriage (Eph. 5:22; Col. 3:18; 1 Pet. 3:1) is transposed to general male-female relationships in the Church. Certain evangelicals hold that the submission of wife to the husband must extend even to obedience if he commands her to perform a sinful act and that the moral choice and guilt are his rather than hers.

Biblical Feminism: As a result of traditional subordinate view of women, here has grown up a so called biblical feminism. Although the roots of this stance are older than the last century. D. L. Moody, J. Gordon, C. G. Finney, and J. Blanchard all found the equality of women to be a biblical concept and urged full utilization of women in the Church.

One contemporary group lays stress on Gen.1: 27; 1 Cor. 11:11-12; and above all on Gal. 3:28 in its affirmation of women as equals of men in Jesus Christ. These universal statements, it is maintained, supercede the narrower dictates of Paul, who is sometimes viewed as a victim of rabbinic prejudices. The contradictory natures of Paul's statements are explored and a distinction made between those which are universally normative and those that are culturally relative. Just as certain statements regarding slavery are no longer applicable today, so certain statements regarding women are no longer applicable today.

God is affirmed as no respecter of persons (Acts 10:34) and as having maternal aspects (Ps. 131:2-3; Deut. 32:18; Isa. 42:14; 49:15; 66:9-13; Matt. 23:37). This maternal and feminine image allows women as well as men to serve in the gospel ministry. For some, theological justification for ordination rests upon the leadership roles of women in both O.T. and N.T. Egalitarian marriage is set forth as a biblical and humanitarian principle involving mutual submission (Eph. 5:21). Allied in some respects with liberation theology, this group has produced a radically new theology that is highly controversial in the evangelical world.

Equality of Women & Scripture:

A more irenic school of thought, seeking to uphold both the authority of Scripture and the equality of women within the Church, hold that the "difficult" passages are no less inspired by God than 1 Cor. 11:11-12 and Gal. 3:28 . Adherents demand that texts be studied in their linguistic, religious, historical, social, and geographical settings.

For instance, the Greek word for "head", unlike its English and Hebrew counterparts, did not convey the meaning of "chief" or "boss". Thus, the concept of "head" in Eph. 5:23 and 1 Cor. 11:3 must be studied in the light of its accepted Greek meanings as integrating source (Eph. 4:15-16; Col. 2:19), topmost bodily member (Eph. 1:22-23), interdependent with the body (1 Cor. 12:21; Eph. 5:23-30), and the part which is usually born first (Col. 1:15-18).

Gen. 3:16 is generally viewed as a divine prediction of sinful dominance (Matt. 20:25-28; Mark 10:42-45; Luke 22:24-27) rather than a divine decree and is countered with Jer. 31:22, 31-34 in the new covenant.

Research into the cult patterns of ancient women has a high priority in an understanding of Paul as a missionary to the Gentiles. The ceremonial shouts of women, obligatory in certain pagan practices, contained no meaning but aroused considerable religious awe in the hearers. These sacred cries are attested in Corinth; thus it is understandable that the apostle, in seeking to curtail meaningless noise and confusion during worship (1 Cor. 14), would ask women to refrain from such utterances while allowing them to pray and prophesy meaningfully (1 Cor. 11:5).

The possibility of alternative translations of 1 Tim. 2:12 is raised, especially since Greek (*authentein*), generally rendered "to bear rule", had served more common meanings in the NT era. Proponents suggest that it may be a directive against women involved in false teaching (1 Tim. 4:7; 5:15; II Tim. 3:5-7; Rev. 2:20). The entire passage (1 Tim. 2:5-15) must be studied in the wider context of the Pastoral Epistles with their concern over heretical opposition to the truth and need for suppression of false teachers (1 Tim. 1:3-4; Titus 1:10-11). In particular there is evidence that there may have been a distortion of the Adam and Eve story (1 Tim. 1:4; 2 Tim. 4:4; Titus 1:14; 2 Cor. 11:2-4, 13-15) similar to the Gnostic theologies which portrayed Eve as a celestial power and as the one who brought life and light to Adam through the serpent's gift of knowledge. 1 Tim. 2:11-15 may then be a refutation of such doctrines rather than a rationale for the restriction of women. The proper utilization of the talents of gifted Christian women remains a pressing contemporary issue and one that requires much thought, study, and reflection. *Bibliography: R. H. Bainton, Women of the Reformation, 3 vols;*

J. J. Davis, Ordination of Women Reconsidered; A. J. Gordon, The Ministry of Women; A. R. Hay, The Woman's Ministry in Church and Home; L. Merchadante, From Hierarchy to Equality: I Corinthians 11:2-16; C. C. Ryrie, The Place of Women in the Church; F. Zerbst, The Office of Woman in the Church. **Source: AIM, March 2004, Vol. 35, No.3**