

10. APOSTOLIC TEACHINGS ABOUT WOMEN

One of the most controversial issues churches face today is that of the participation of women in ministry and service. Viewpoints range from prohibiting women to do much of anything if men are present to permitting women to do anything a man may do. Every church and every church-related organization or institution must now find it necessary to study the texts of Scripture and determine exactly what the Bible teaches and how those teachings should be applied. Of course, there are many groups who dis-regard what the Bible says and make their decisions on other considerations; but for those who want to be biblical in their decisions, the texts have to be studied carefully first and then the proper application made.

Even then we will find that there will be different conclusions drawn, and so one would hope that each group would respect the other groups' conclusions even though different. We do this with church government, baptism, the Lord's Supper, and a number of other topics. If a group comes to a different conclusion based on their careful and honest¹ study of the text, then we have to respect that. We also have to recognize with humility that in some of these areas we may be wrong. We may hold fast to our convictions, but we must do so in a way that acknowledges that there are many believers who love the Lord and His word and who have come to a different conclusion.

Review of the Biblical Data

¹ I say "honest" because it often happens that someone will have his mind made up before the study of the text and then force the text to fit his view. We all have in mind what we believe, perhaps because of our background or church affiliation, but we must try to interpret the text with a view to discovering the intent of the passage. And as we do, we must be aware that many other folks will not agree.

As we study the apostles' teachings that have this issue in mind, we will see that they draw on the Old Testament a good deal. Therefore, before discussing the texts in question it will be helpful to bring back to mind the key material from the Old Testament that will be used here.

The Design of Creation

When we study how the apostles, especially Paul, use the Old Testament, and Genesis in particular, it will be evident that we must think through those passages in their immediate contexts to be sure we have understood all that is being said. We have seen several things that are fundamental to this whole topic.

First, according to Genesis 1:27, "humankind" (*adam*), which is "male and female" (*zakar u-n'qebah*), is the **image** of God. The "image of God" (*selem 'elohim*), then, is not corporeal; rather, it is the capacity to function as God's representatives by virtue of the inbreathing of the communicable attributes (Gen. 2:7). In short, the image of God does the work of God on earth--ruling over the earth and creating life. In God's design, male and female share these capacities by using their individual but complementary capacities. Trying to fulfill the design of the creator in isolation cannot succeed.

Second, the point of "**corresponding** to him" (*k'negdo*) in Genesis 2:18 and 20 is that the woman is the spiritual and intellectual equal of the man. The man was "dust from the ground" into which God breathed the "breath of life" (*nishmat hayyim*), animating him with eternal life, spiritual understanding, and a functioning conscience. When the woman is said to correspond to the man, it means basically that what God had invested in man He extended also to the woman. Therefore, the woman is not inferior to the man.

Third, the woman has a distinct contribution to God's creation. The English word, inadequate as it is, is "**helper**" (*'ezer*); it signifies that she supplied what the man was lacking, correcting the one thing in creation's week that was "not good"--his being alone. This term in no way indicates inferiority; in fact, in the Bible it is most often used to describe God--He is the Helper. I think also that a good case can be made for reciprocity; if she completed what he lacked, then he would complete what she lacked, so that the two together would be "very good." For example, he could not create life

with her help; but then, she could not do it either without his help.

Fourth, in the Book of Genesis the **order** of creation has as its primary purpose the appreciation of the woman, for the emphasis in the intervening time is that there was not found “a helper corresponding to him” (*‘ezer k^enegdo*) among all God’s creation.² He was made to feel alone in the whole world, and in need of a partner. But once they were brought together, Adam was filled with jubilation because she was his flesh and bone--made from the man, but shortly to become the mother of all living (this reciprocity Paul notes in I Corinthians 11:12, stating, “as the woman originates from the man, so also the man has his birth through the woman, and all things originate from God”). There is an order of creation, but in the creation account in Genesis the stress on submission is not present--and why would it be for two sinless people in a perfect environment? The point is that the passage is a narrative report, recording what happened but without directly teaching the theology that informs it. It simply tells us that the man and the woman needed each other to do the will of God, and the two together made the creation of human life very good.

Fifth, the woman was **equally responsible** as an individual to obey the LORD. The commandments in Genesis 1:27, 28 (“be fruitful” and “have dominion”) are plural imperatives, substantiating the equality of the man and the woman. In Genesis 2:15-17, the commandments were given to the man, but the LORD’s interrogation of the woman and her confession (Gen. 3:13) clearly show that she was responsible to God for her actions, no matter what Adam told her or how the serpent beguiled her.

Sixth, the narrative closes with an emphasis on the integrity and the unity of the man and the woman. The meaning of “**one flesh**”³ (*basar ’ehad*) develops from their progressive (*hayah + l^e*) union--day by day they would “become” one. This union would have been greatly facilitated by their integrity, which is expressed both by “naked” (*‘arummim*) and “they were not ashamed” (*w^elo’ yithboshashu*). They

² We may enter into speculative theology here. God built the order of creation into the race knowing that there would be a fall and that an order would be necessary in a fallen world. Similarly, the submission of the second person of the trinity to the first person was primarily for the earthly mission of redeeming a fallen world. Would submission have been necessary if there was no fall? It is an interesting question to consider, even though no answer is likely forthcoming.

³ Do not get the Old Testament word “flesh” confused with Paul’s use of “flesh” in his writings--he uses it for the sinful inclinations.

walked in their integrity without fear of sinful exploitation, functioning as a unity in the design of the Creator.

The Temptation

Our first consideration here is the explanation by the woman that “the serpent beguiled me” (*hishshi’ani*) (the Greek has *epatese me*). The verb *nasha’* simply means “to deceive, beguile.”⁴ The context demonstrates how this worked. The serpent had the advantage of knowing where the pitfalls were (he was “shrewd,” *’arum*) and consequently lured the woman into a discussion about the LORD’s commandment concerning eating from the tree. He asked a question, but a question that could not be answered without qualification. The woman’s answers reveal an imprecision about the words that the LORD used: she said “we may eat” (*no’kel* in 3:2) instead of “you may freely eat” (*’akol to’kel* in 2:16), thus minimizing the privileges; she included “neither shall you touch it” (*w’lo’ tigg’e’u* in 3:3), adding to the prohibition; and most importantly she substituted “lest you die” (*pen t’mutun*) for “you shall surely die” (*mot tamut*), bringing an uncertainty into the penalty for sin.⁵

These are the changes the woman made--or were they changes the man made? It must be stated here that there is no information in the text concerning the origin of these changes--did the man tell her imperfectly, or did she paraphrase them herself? No blame can be attached for sure to either person, although the point is clear that uncertainty about the sure word of God made her vulnerable--and that was the point of Satan’s question. It seems to me that a stronger case can be made that the man made the changes, for when God questioned the sinners, he asked the man if he disobeyed the commands, but he only asked the woman what she had done. Accordingly, the Bible will state that it was by one man that sin entered into the world (Rom. 5:12). Adam sinned wilfully, knowing what the Lord had said; the woman was beguiled.

⁴ The word conveys the idea of thinking or hoping one way when reality lies in another way (see Jer. 37:9 for an illustration).

⁵ The word “die” does not mean cessation or annihilation. It means separation or alienation. Physical death is separation from the land of the living; spiritual death is separation from God.

What makes this discussion poignant is that the serpent knew full well what God had said. The unusual word order of “You shall not surely die” (*lo’ mot t’mutun* in 3:4) actually has the force of “not--you shall surely die.” The serpent could be bold in his denial of the word of God, because her words displayed uncertainty. When we compare the serpent’s question with this affirmation, we can see the clever deception. Jesus, referring to the devil, described him as a murderer from the beginning and a liar (John 8:44).

After the Fall

In addition to the punishment of **death** and the perpetual **conflict** between good and evil, two announcements of the consequences of sin are attached to the woman: she must endure **pain** and **male domination**. The pain comes in having and rearing children, for “pain” (*iss^ebon*) refers to physical pain and anxiety, and “your pain and conception” (*iss^ebonek w^eheronek*) form a hendiadys--“your pain in conception”--as the parallel clause actually using the preposition indicates; and because there is no pain in conception, the term must be a synecdoche for the whole process of bringing a child into the world. This painful part of life was later regulated by the Levitical laws of purification on childbirth and menstruation with all the complications and biological complexities (underscoring why Peter refers to the woman as the weaker vessel, although a partner and joint heir). In all probability this area of the woman’s life was targeted for pain as a significant reminder that God’s command had been disobeyed, that his purpose for the man and the woman to be fruitful had been contaminated. (The same word for pain is used for the man’s anxious, frustrating toil of the soil).

But bearing children under the curse, painful as it would be, was turned into a glorious prospect by faith. Adam named his wife “Eve” (*Khawwah*), “because she was the mother of all living.” The race would continue in spite of the announcement of death. Here then was the consolation, the redeeming factor as we might say -- she would be the mother of all living. The statement is a **faith** statement, because under the punishment of death it is the forward look to the victory of life over death. God’s blessing would be evident to them. Eve’s statement of faith came in Genesis 4:1 when she acknowledges that she had made a man with the Lord’s help.

The other announcement is the difficult “and your desire (was/is/shall be) to your husband, but he shall have the mastery over you.” The sentence has no verb, and

so the tense of the supplied verb must come from the context. The context is the oracle of judgment and so cannot be equated with Paul's teaching of submission which comes by the filling of the Spirit. It seems that "desire" (*ʿshuqah*) in this context concerns the **desire to control**, which turned out to be a prompting to sin; or to put it another way, rather than remain a complementary partner the woman prompted the man to eat, and therefore would (by *talionic* justice [the punishment fits the crime]) be dominated by him in life. This interpretation is confirmed by two points: first, immediately in rebuke of the man the LORD says, "Because you obeyed your wife" (*ki shama'ta l'qol 'ishtek*); and second, the LORD used these very expressions to warn Cain in Genesis 4:7. Note the parallels between 3:16 and 4:7.

"and to your husband [is/was] your desire
but he shall have the mastery over you"

"and to you [is] its [sin's] desire
but you can have the mastery over it"

This verse, then, captures one major element of fallen human nature--the struggle for control. The fallen nature of both women and men seeks to dominate. People may live well together for some time, but sooner or later this urge will come to the surface in some crisis; the woman will try to control or manipulate, and the man will try to put it down or dominate. The stories in Genesis illustrate that again and again (e.g., note Gen. 16:3 which uses the words of Genesis 3 to say that Abram obeyed Sarai his wife and slept with Hagar; see also the struggle in Genesis 27). This is not a passage that instructs people how to live; it is not a motto to live up to. This is a declaration of how life will be now that sin has ruined it. This is human nature at its worst, especially in a marriage.⁶ Believers of every age have tried not to live on such a base level, but it takes faith and ultimately victory in Christ to remove the sting from the curse and enable people to live on a higher level.

God provided clothing for the sinners after they confessed, and so they were restored to communion with God even though they were prevented from having immediate access to God. Through obedience to the word and the regular communion with God they would be enabled to live above the curse.

⁶ This does not mean that people act this way all the time. It simply means that the potential is there in the human heart to act this way--it is a struggle for control, to get one's own way.

The Participation of Women in Old Testament Service

In time God set about calling to Himself worshipers who would learn to love Him and obey His word. He chose faithful men and women to communicate His word in a variety of ways. Although the times and circumstances led naturally more often to the use of men, women were also used in this capacity.

Women were prophetesses. Israel's prophets produced Scripture, conveyed the divinely imparted meaning of history, predicted coming events, declared oracles of rebuke or exhortation, and gave advice and comfort to the faithful. They spoke for God, because, after all, it was a theocracy. They were classical prophets, which is different than the spiritual gift of prophecy in the New Testament. Some think that by the New Testament times the function of the prophet had narrowed to one--ecstatic utterance. But in the list of spiritual gifts Paul still ranks prophets above teachers (1 Cor. 12:28), so there is more to be said on this issue. It would be very hard to read through the accounts and writings of the prophets in the Old Testament and not think of them as having a teaching ministry, albeit more forceful and urgent than the instructions of the priests. In our understanding of a prophet's work of producing Scripture we would have to say that prophecy is a form of teaching, because it informs, instructs, and motivates. Even the predictions and historical interpretations are didactic because they are homilies. Thus, many of the ministries of the prophets overlap with various teaching and exhorting ministries today. The prophets were authoritative speakers in the theocracy. The fact that they were not part of the Temple staff often made their ministry more powerful.

In some of these functions of prophetism God chose to use women. Miriam was called a prophetess (*hann^ebi'ah*) in Exodus 15:20-21, when she led all the women to give (antiphonal) praise to God. Deborah was also a prophetess (and wife); she, with Barak's help, sang a song of praise that was inscripturated for both men and women to read (Jud. 5). Interestingly, Deborah and Miriam served as national leaders as well, Deborah as a judge, a mother in Israel who judged the people who came to her for "decisions" (*mishp^etim*), and Miriam as a leader with Aaron and Moses (Micah 6:4).

Hannah praised and prophesied in the House of the LORD, and her words were recorded as Scripture for men and women to use in their giving of thanks (I Samuel

1:9-2:10), and part of her psalm was quoted in Psalm 113. She would not be called a prophetess, but the Spirit of the Lord enabled her to prophesy. Huldah was a prophetess (married) who prophesied before the High Priest and the men of King Josiah; people came to her “to inquire of the LORD” (2 Kings 22:8-20; 2 Kings 22:3; and Jeremiah 1:2). The prophet Joel predicted that one day Israel’s “sons and daughters” would prophesy (Joel 2:28-32 and Acts 2:16-18). The virgin Mary’s praise to God was recorded in Scripture for both men and women to read (Luke 1:46-55), but she was not called a prophetess. Anna, however, was an aged prophetess (married) who served God night and day with fasting and prayers; she spoke to all of the Redeemer who had been born (Luke 2:36-38).

Psalm 68:11 [12] announces: “The LORD gives (the) word; the **women who publish the tidings** of it are a great host.” The Hebrew has the feminine plural participle: *hambasserot*. This may be a reference to the women coming out with song and dance to rehearse God’s mighty deeds (Exod. 15:20; Jud. 5:1, 12; 1 Sam. 18:6; and 2 Sam. 1:20) or a general publishing abroad as Anna later would do; there follows in the psalm a section of fragments of victory songs inscripturated. The term used is “tidings” (*’omer*) and not “word” (*dabar*); *’omer* indicates a word of power and a word of promise, such as was fulfilled when Israel conquered Canaan by God’s word of power and promise. The women spread the triumphant news.

Women ministered at the House of Yahweh. Besides the ministry of prophesying, women participated in other aspects of Israel’s worship activities. We have two references that state that a number of women served at the door of the sanctuary; Exodus 38:8, for example, mentions the ministering women who ministered at the door of the tent of meeting (*hassob^e’ot ’asher sab^e’u [saba^e’*, “host,” again, as in Psalm 68:11 above). The same idea is expressed in I Samuel 2:22, where unfortunately the women were abused by Eli’s sons -- unless these women were participants in the corrupt worship.

Women sang in Temple choirs. The heading *’alamot* in Psalm 46 may be taken to refer to women (literally, “virgins” or “young women”) who would sing the song. In I Chronicles 25:5-7 we learn that Heman had 14 sons and three daughters who were to sing in the House of the LORD. And even Sennacherib, the king of Assyria, says that among his conquests of Judah he took male and female singers from the temple. Nehemiah 7:66-67 refers to 245 “male singers and female singers” (*m^eshor^erim u-m^eshor^erot*). These seem to be official temple personnel, whereas

prophets were not.

Women were not priests. In Israel women did not serve in the function of priests (i.e., priestesses). Many reasons have been offered for this, including the traditional ideas about male leadership, or the fact that priestly duties in the ritual were strenuous, or the idea of the contrast with the pagans in which priestesses had functions totally incompatible with Yahwism. But one additional consideration that must not be overlooked is the basic distinction that was made concerning women and the Law, namely, that women were bound to keep all negative laws, but were not bound to keep time-related positive laws. If women could not fulfill timed obligations at festivals and regular services because of the laws of purification, they would have difficulty performing all the service of the priesthood.

Deuteronomy 33:10 clarifies what this service as a priest would involve: teaching the legal decisions (*yoru mishpatetyka . . . w^etorateka*), burning incense (i.e., intercessory prayer), and making the atoning sacrifices whenever needed. Certain men (not all the men) of the tribe of Levi were entrusted with this task of performing the ritual and teaching the customs and the laws. Malachi, in his rebuke of the priests of his day, reminds his audience: “the lips of the priest must keep knowledge, and Law must be sought from his mouth, because he is the messenger of Yahweh of hosts.” So it was men of the priestly line who taught the Law and led the worship ritual in the temple, being the LORD’s messengers. This distinction that women could minister in the sanctuary, prophesy, but not be the regular teaching priests may very well lie behind Paul’s distinctions in the churches, that is, that the woman should not be the teacher, but could prophesy and function with all the spiritual gifts.

Women in New Testament Service

Women were highly regarded in Jesus’ ministry. Several related observations may be made with regard to the way Jesus ministered to and was ministered to by women. There was a loyal group of women who accompanied Jesus and “served him” on his ministry tours. Matthew 27:55, for example, uses *diakonousai auto* (see also Mark 15:41 and Luke 8:1-3). The ministry of the later deacons included all the related activities of this service.

In contrast to Jewish custom, Jesus spoke with the Samaritan woman and revealed Himself to her with a revelation that she took to her people (John 4:7-26).

Jesus also permitted Mary, Lazarus' sister, to sit at his feet and learn, a privilege normally granted to men (Lk. 10:42). Moreover, women who had been healed by Jesus praised him publicly in the synagogue --there was no isolation of women in synagogues at this time (Luke 13:13 has *edoxazen ton Theon*). And Jesus entrusted women with the high privilege of carrying the news of his resurrection to the disciples (Mark 16:6-8; Luke 24:11). This was remarkable because of the Jewish teachings on valid testimony (see also Luke 24:22). Thomas Traherne says, “‘He is not here, for he is risen; come see the place where the Lord lay.’ How are angels employed in so low a place as to catechize women; and the women after were employed in so high an office as to catechize the apostles.”⁷

Although Jesus had both male and female disciples, all twelve apostles were men (Matt. 10:1-4). This may have been, in part, because they lived together off and on for three years. But Jesus cared equally for the infirmities of women (Mark 1:29-31; 5:25-34), and drew attention to the devotion of a poor widow to teach a lesson on discipleship (Mark 10:11-12). And in his teachings he redressed legal situations that were weighted against women (Matt. 19:9-10).

Most significant, however, is the Great Commission. Jesus' commission for evangelism and discipleship, given in person to the disciples, applies to the Church at large with reference to all believers, men and women (Matt. 28:19,20). The entire missionary movement is based on this text. This commission commands that believers go and make disciples . . . baptizing . . . and teaching (*didaskontes*).

It must be noted, then, that women played an important part in the ministry of Jesus, and would be expected to continue to do so both in the fulfilling of the great commission and in the life of the Church.

Women ministered in the early Church. From the references in the Book of Acts we may observe that women were just as actively involved in the life of the early Church as the men. First, the women prayed with the men in the upper room. In fact, the text says that the disciples “continued with one accord in prayer and supplication with the women” (Acts 1:14; see 12:12). Second, both women and men received the Holy Spirit at Pentecost (Acts 2:1-4, a continuation of the account of all of them praying in the upper room)--“they were all with one accord in one place. . .and

⁷ “Church's Yearbook,” Bod. MS. Eng. th. e. 51.

they were all filled.” Third, women had various ministries with charitable works (Dorcas in Acts 9:36; Mary, the mother of Mark, in Acts 12:12; Lydia in Acts 16:14-15). Fourth, the Holy Spirit used women as his prophetic speakers (Philip’s daughters, Acts 21:8-9). And fifth, Priscilla and Aquila “explained the way of God more accurately” to Apollos (Acts 18:26-28). The fact that Priscilla’s name was placed first gives prominence to her, even though she is mentioned with her husband.

This last example of Priscilla and Aquila is significant.⁸ Even though the Church met in their home (Rom. 16:5), they heard Apollos in the synagogue, and they took him to themselves and “expounded to him the way of God more perfectly.” The critical part of the verse reads *akribesteron auto exethento*. It is hollow to argue that Priscilla did not teach because the verb used does not mean “to teach.” *Ektithemi* means “to set forth, expound.” The same verb is used in Acts 28:23 for Paul’s teaching on the kingdom of God, in which he testified of the truth and persuaded people to believe. In his efforts he used Moses and the prophets. So the verb can describe exposition from the Scripture in an effort to evangelize and train disciples. It is also used in Mark 4:34; in contrast to using parables, when Jesus was alone with his disciples, he “expounded” all things to them. Thus, from the exposition of Priscilla and Aquila, the young Apollos learned more accurately “the way of God.” This is instruction of biblical content. After all, Acts 18:25 says that Apollos had known only the baptism of John.

The Instructions of the Apostles

Apostolic Affirmations

It would be helpful here to include a few affirmations that are made about women in the apostolic teachings. First, Paul affirms the personal **equality** of men and women in Christ (“no male and female,” Gal. 3:28). This emphasis assuredly reflects the design of the Creator, that male and female are equally the image of God. It means, among other things, that a woman obtains salvation exactly as a man does (Eph. 2:8-9; 1 Pet. 1:18-19), that females and males are joint-heirs, that the Holy Spirit

⁸ Codex Bezae reverses the order of the names to read “Aquila and Priscilla,” but that is a very weak variant reading. Moreover, the fact that someone tried to do that shows that the order of the names was most significant. Priscilla took the lead.

also indwells women (1 Cor. 12:13; Rom. 8:9; 1 Cor. 6:19-20), and that in the new creation women have equal standing before God (Rom. 5:1-2).

Moreover, the spiritual privileges and responsibilities are the same for men and women. A woman has access to God in prayer just as a man does (1 Cor. 11:4-5). A woman is nurtured by God's word just as a man is (1 Pet. 2:2). Also, like a man, a woman enjoys the privileges and the responsibilities of the priesthood of all believers (1 Pet. 2:5; 3:7; Rev. 1:6a). In Christ a woman is given the same spiritual gifts available to men today, including pastor-teacher (one spiritual gift, not an office) and evangelism (1 Cor. 12:7-11, 27-31; Rom. 12:3-8; and 1 Pet. 4:10-12).

In addition to these truths, Paul in one place encouraged men and women to remain single and devote themselves to the service of the LORD (1 Cor. 7:32-34). This is significant because it shows that marriage is not the highest goal for women--serving the LORD is! In fact, marriage is temporal and temporary. A woman in glory will not find her identity or her rewards in a husband. Accordingly, Paul recognized that the Holy Spirit used women for prophetic speaking (1 Cor. 11:5); he instructed them to be able to teach (Titus 2:3-5; see also 2 Tim. 1:5; 3:14, 15; cf. Prov. 1:8), and encouraged them to cultivate many ministries of good works, service, and hospitality (1 Cor. 16:19; Col. 4:14; 1 Tim. 2:10; 5:9-10). Women, like men, according to the apostle, were to use their spiritual gifts to serve the LORD.

It is no surprise, then, that women were numbered among Paul's co-workers. Euodia and Syntyche were "co-workers" with Paul, the Greek term implying "striving together for a prize" (see Phil. 4:2, 3). Phoebe is called a *diakonon* of the Church (Rom. 16:1). Andronicus and Junia (fem.), Paul's kinsmen and fellow-prisoners, were said to be "outstanding among the apostles who also were in Christ before me" (*episemoi en tois apostolois*, Rom. 16:7)--a case can be made that they were considered apostles, i.e., possessing the spiritual gift of apostle (not the office⁹). In Romans 16, ten out of the 29 people Paul commended for loyal service were women (Rom. 16; 1 Cor. 9:5). No distinction in service or status is made, however.

It is clear that throughout the Old Testament and in the early Church women shared in the public ministry, often communicating the Word of God. Now it is true

⁹ The office of an apostle was special: the apostle had to have seen the risen Christ and been commissioned by him to establish the Church.

that many of these passages are descriptive and not prescriptive or instructional as the apostolic rulings are. But all Scripture is profitable for instruction. Moreover, it is relatively easy to see in descriptive passages where the text is approving or disapproving. That is, biblical narrative is a theological interpretation of the reports. For example, some have tried to discount the reports of homosexuality in Sodom on the basis that it is narrative--but we can easily see it is a narrative of divine judgment in harmony with the prophets and the Law that denounce the sin. Polygamy is another example. Malachi makes it clear that God never intended such from creation; and the reports of it are denounced as violations of the Law and trouble-causing. But all the descriptive reports of women's participation in ministry and service are favorable and positive. Thus there should be no hesitation to use the passages to show how God used women down through the ages. And one cannot simply read into the passages that God used women because men were not available.

Apostolic Rulings

Headship. The spiritual service of men and women was to be accomplished within the order of the Church. Of all the apostolic rulings on this area, three passages naturally form the substance of the discussion: 1 Corinthians 11:10 which instructs a woman to have a sign of authority on her head when she prays or prophesies, 1 Corinthians 14:34-35 which instructs a woman to be silent, and 1 Timothy 2:9-15 which prohibits a woman from teaching or having authority. There is a lot of literature on these texts, and before you come to your "convictions" you must study it thoroughly.

I think at the heart of all apostolic rulings (on this and other subjects) is the problem of the curse. Conflict, struggle, pain, and death reign because of sin. The curse will not be removed til the coming of Christ in glory. And so, how can we function in the world, in the Church, or in the home in view of this? There are natural bents that have to be controlled. The New Covenant, the coming of the Holy Spirit, does not remove the curse, **but takes the sting out of it.** As Christians we still die--but death is not now a defeat, but the path to glory, our gain. We do not sorrow as the world sorrows. The sting is gone because of the resurrection.

And so according to the curse the male would dominate the female and the female would struggle for power and control against that domination. That is the way

sinful human nature has been, and is today. Nations try to legislate equality and fairness, proving the opposite is ingrained in the human nature. The history of human relations is one of abuse, control, manipulation, deceit. But in Christ these tendencies have to be controlled and changed. Human nature is not eradicated with salvation, but the Holy Spirit begins to change people, and they learn to live by a different principle. But Paul has to take the human condition where it is and rule on how it can function harmoniously now, not down the road when everyone in the congregation has been perfected. Headship then becomes a new doctrine in place of domination. To Paul the pattern is Christ, a self-sacrificing love and a gracious attitude in being head of the Church (we shall return to this later). And so Paul's teachings are intended to take the sting out of this aspect of the curse as well, and develop a harmonious relationship. He cannot simply say that in Christ we no longer have a sinful nature--we do, and because of it we want our way. But he rules for order in the Church, and he rules to make the relationship spiritual.

Before we can think of what these passages mean for us today, we have to be clear on what Paul meant when he wrote them. I believe that these rulings applied directly to the local assemblies of the Church as Paul envisioned it, and then indirectly to other related settings and institutions that grew out of the local churches.

1. The Church came together in local assemblies. The apostolic rulings are found within sections of the epistles that clearly focus on the activities of Christians when they came together as an assembly. A straightforward reading would yield this evidence: "when you come together as a Church" (1 Cor. 11:18), "when you come together in one place" (1 Cor. 11:20), "when you come together to eat" (1 Cor. 11:33), "in the Church" (1 Cor. 14:19), "whole Church comes together in one place" (1 Cor. 14:23), "when you come together" (1 Cor. 14:26), "when you come together" (1 Cor. 12:26), and "keep silent in the Churches" (1 Cor. 14:34). And with 1 Timothy we have a clear purpose statement: "I write so that you may know how you ought to conduct yourself in the House of God, which is the Church of the living God" (3:15). The instructions in chapter 2 address concerns of the assemblies of the Church, beginning with prayer and continuing to the question of women teaching; chapter 3 then deals with the officials of the Church and their qualifications. It is clear that Paul is concerned with the activities and organization of local assemblies of the Church.

2. This local assembly had distinct purposes for meeting. The early Jewish Christians continued to go to the temple for prayer and for festivals (Acts 3:1) and to

the synagogues for the study of the Scriptures and opportunities to witness; but they also began meeting separately as Christians. Prominent among the purposes of their meeting together were: continuing in the apostolic doctrine (*didache*), fellowship (*koinonia*), the breaking of bread (*klasei tou artou*), and prayers (*proseuchais*) as believers in Jesus Christ (Acts 2:42-46; 1 Cor. 11:33). They also came together to exercise their spiritual gifts for mutual edification (1 Cor. 12:26ff.). There were other reasons for coming together, but these were the main ones--fulfilling these distinct purposes distinguished their meetings as local assemblies of the Church. Our expression “worship and service” is a summation of these activities.

3. The local assembly also took on a distinct organizational structure so that by the time of the pastoral epistles we find several offices that appear to be patterned after the structure of the synagogue. 1 Timothy 3:1 gives us the office of the bishop or overseer (*episkope*) of the assembly. The elders (*presbuteros*) are mentioned in 5:17. Deacons (*diakonos*) with their qualifications, as well as deaconesses and their qualifications, are treated in chapter 3 as well. Within one generation of the resurrection we have a thoroughly structured hierarchical organization under which the Christians could worship and serve.

One major issue for us will be application. If we conclude that Paul’s rulings are applicable directly, then we must apply them in a comparable setting -- and here is the difficulty, for many modern Christian organizations are different than local churches as Paul envisioned them. Although Christian organizations do many things that Christians do in a local assembly, they do not entirely match and so are not churches. When believers come together as a local assembly of the Church, there is a distinct organization, there are distinct purposes, and, therefore, there are specific rulings. Logically, one would conclude that the instructions for the qualifications of deacons apply to deacons, rules concerning the procedure for the Lord’s Table apply to that ritual, guidelines laid down for Church discipline serve that requirement, and the rulings made for speaking and teaching in the Church apply directly to speaking and teaching in the Church. It does not follow that if a Church-related ministry appropriates one or more of these activities or structures that it is a Church, or that all the rulings apply.

Paul himself makes other rulings that would conflict with the restrictions if we made a blanket rule about extending the restrictions beyond the Church assembly. Did Paul mean for the woman to be silent and not speak--ever? Of course not, for he

restricts this to the Churches. In 1 Corinthians 14:26-40, the restriction on speaking, Paul is addressing the issue of coming together to minister with spiritual gifts. In verse 34 he instructs, “Let your women keep silent in the Churches,” for they are not permitted to speak; if they want to learn, they should ask at home. The tension, of course, is that Paul has just said that if a woman “prays or prophesies,” she should have a sign of authority on her head. Assuming that 1 Corinthians 11:5 takes place within the assembly of the Church, the restriction in 14:34 cannot mean absolutely silent. Even if the passage does not refer to the assembly, this still cannot mean absolutely silent. Two interpretations make good sense here: (1) Paul prohibits women from speaking out to teach men in the assembly and so the verse is parallel to 1 Timothy 2, (2) Paul prohibits women from evaluating the various utterances of the prophets in the assembly since this would be an exercise of authority reserved for the elders.

Generally, interpreters try to make a difference between prophesying and teaching in conjunction with these verses. The argument often runs that prophecy is a divine utterance under divine control, and so the authority is not the speaker’s. Paul, however, says that whoever prophesies speaks edification, exhortation, and comfort, i.e., edifies the Church (1 Cor. 14:3, 4). So I suppose the point of those who take this interpretation is that the woman could speak in the assembly if she did not have the authority to say what she wished, but gave a divine utterance. Ostensibly, this would then mean that in addition to praying a woman could read the Scriptures, or give a Scriptural exhortation in the service, since the message would come from God. At any rate, the survey of how God has used women down through the ages shows that he did not intend for them to remain completely silent in the service.

1 Timothy 2:8-15. The parallel passage for the ruling on being silent is the prohibition about teaching found in Timothy. Paul says that the woman was not to teach or have authority because of the order of creation and because Eve was beguiled.

At the outset it is worth noting the not completely objective ways in which interpreters view the several ideas in 1 Timothy 2:8-15. First, verse 8 instructs men to pray lifting holy hands--that line, many decide, is cultural and so do not do it today, while others say timeless and do it, although broadening it to include women raising hands--but not for prayer, for praise (so the verse is not being followed very closely at all); second, verse 9 instructs women to dress with modesty, not wearing costly

clothes, gold, or pearls--many people just ignore this one; third, verse 12 says that women are not permitted to teach--that, some take literally, and others say was cultural, and others discard it as Paul's prejudice; and fourth, verse 15 states that women will be saved by childbearing--this one, almost everyone would say, must be figurative. Some of these are legitimate ways of dealing with a text; e.g., there are culturally directed passages on slaves, veils and long hair, and lifting hands, and there surely are figurative expressions in Paul. But who decides? And how consistently can these decisions be made? It is interesting to me that one large segment of the Church says lifting hands is cultural (and not applicable) but women keeping silent is literal and binding. Another segment says lifting hands is applicable but the silence of women was cultural. Both sides, in my opinion, show inconsistent exegesis.

If we say the ruling for women to remain silent must be applied literally, then should we not also require head coverings for women?

The crucial issue, though, is the prohibition of women teaching. Some suggest that the point is the nature of teaching. They argue that Paul's idea of teaching is built on the Jewish model of teaching; their description essentially stresses authority, direction, indoctrination, and discipline. This may be true, but without primary support is unconvincing. The verses they mention deal with the apostle's giving Timothy and Titus the authority to pass on sound doctrine, to continue in that doctrine, or to rebuke with authority. Do we have here a Jewish model of teaching or the working out of apostolic authority? I would think that authority is based on Christ and the Word--divine revelation. Otherwise, what limits are there on authority? Jesus said that when the Pharisees sat in Moses' seat (i.e., expounded the Law) people had to listen to them; but when they took the authority to themselves and tried to generate new traditions, teachings, and interpretations, they were to be avoided--there is only one Teacher who can do that--Christ (Matt. 23:1-11).

Rather than identify the Pauline concept of the teacher with the Jewish model, which could be easily confused with Pharisaical authority, I would prefer to connect it to the Old Testament ministry of the priests who taught the Legal Decisions and led the corporate worship. This view then harmonizes with Jesus' teaching in Matthew 23. We may then say that what Paul taught was that God designated certain men--priests in the Old Testament and bishops/elders in the New--to teach the assembled worshipers His laws and doctrines. The authority lies in the revealed Word that is being taught, not the person doing the teaching, although there is built into the teaching

a perceived authority that is important in the organization of worship.

But one wonders how the distinction between teacher and prophet carries across to today, for modern teachers and preachers are supposed to expound the Word of God (I shall not here discuss the array of views on modern preaching). In Paul's day, when the congregation assembled to worship and serve the LORD, there was something distinct about the teaching of doctrine and leading of corporate worship, even though prophesying and praying played major roles. Today many groups call the sermon a prophetic message, as well as a teaching. Do pastors function in both roles? Or are different people given these different gifts?

Paul's ruling against a woman's teaching draws on the Law, that is, the Genesis account of creation and the temptation and its results. What the apostle is doing in this section, it seems to me, is making an analogical application (a Jewish *midrash*) from the text. A *midrash* is not a false or fanciful writing or rewriting of tradition; it is the homiletical or spiritual significance derived from a text. Paul argues this way: At creation, God had an order. The man was created first and then the woman. The implication of Paul's use of the Genesis passage is that the order of creation should be preserved in the Church, the new creation as it were, especially in his day when there was so much need for order. He is not saying that Genesis is teaching the superiority of the male over the female, nor that his prohibition on women teaching is expressly taught in Genesis. It is an application he is making by analogy. Being an apostle, his ruling would stand as authoritative whether he connected it to creation or not; but he shows how his instruction harmonizes with the design of the Creator in this world, and prevents the chaos of conflict which is a result of the curse.

Some may argue that by connecting the prohibition to creation Paul is saying that women never can teach men anything anywhere, or at least nothing biblical or spiritual. But Paul does not say that. He says that he does not permit a woman to teach in the assembly, and then he reasons that this instruction is in harmony with the order of creation. If we were to accept such a sweeping prohibition, how could we reconcile God's use of women down through the centuries to publish His word publicly, to edify, exhort, instruct, and comfort, whether by prophecy, oracle, song, celebration, or discipleship? The only area in which women did not function was Israel's priesthood, making sacrifices, burning the incense, and **teaching** the Law in conjunction with the worship--and now Paul carries that ruling forward to say that women should not teach or have authority in the local assembly of the Church

(although he did permit them to teach men outside the assembly). This would be a most natural extension of Old Testament Law and tradition to the early churches that had to deal with Jewish/Gentile tensions.

The second support Paul offers for his prohibition is that the woman was deceived and not the man (*exapatetheisa*). Paul is not saying that women are not as intelligent as men and are more easily deceived--Scripture and history witness to the ease in which men can be deceived (especially with doctrine). Again it seems that Paul is connecting Genesis by an analogy to make an application (still his *midrash*). He uses the word "deceived" as the link between the contexts, but such usages of the Old Testament are far broader than proof-texting--they draw the entire context into the discussion. In Genesis the woman was tempted by the Serpent (Satan) into a discussion about the Word of God. When it appeared that she did not know the wording precisely, he deceived her by setting aside the penalty of death. Consequently, she ate of the fruit and gave some to her husband. The sum of it all is that she was beguiled (she uses the word to answer God's question about eating), and the beguiling caused her to lead the man into sin rather than remain as a complementary spiritual equal. Because of that the subsequent oracle predicts that the man will have domination over the woman (domination is part of the sin nature; it is not to be confused with the New Testament idea of headship). Paul is saying that that course of action (beguiled--fell--prompted the man--he fell--curse) must not be worked out again and again in the Church--that reenacts how we got into this difficulty in the first place. Rather, Paul's ruling starts with the order laid out in the oracle, and tries to legislate Christian order without the sting of the curse: When the regular, official teaching of the Word of God in the assembly is to be done, the qualified overseer or elders were to do it.

Paul's analogy is a good one, and certainly applies to the Pauline instruction--do not re-live the pattern of the chaos and the fall, but follow the order of creation. Such an instruction would have been a necessary one for the expanding Church which was seeing all kinds of barriers and traditions falling by the way. The Apostle makes the ruling to safeguard order and authority.

The apostle completes his *midrashic* use of the Genesis material with the statement "Nevertheless, she will be saved in/by childbearing, if they continue in faith, love, and holiness, with self-control." There are, of course, many interpretations given for this verse, and the literature is readily available for anyone who wishes to read it all.

But I would like to suggest a different angle based on the context in Genesis 1, 2, and the context of 1 Timothy 2:15--which Paul is clearly connecting. Here a third analogical application is being made. In Genesis God created the male first, and then the female. He placed them together as His image, to form a complementary union to serve Him together. But in the temptation the woman was beguiled and sinned, and then prompted the man to sin. The oracle of God announced the curse for the man's sin, and in talionic justice the woman would suffer pain and domination by the man. Human nature continually repeats the struggle of Adam and Eve (which is why we call the section *archetypical*). And yet under the announcement of death, Adam and Eve by faith saw the blessing of the LORD--they interpreted childbirth as evidence of God's blessing on the redeemed. They could not do anything about what the oracle announced--that is the way life would be. But they could take what blessing God gave them and serve Him with it, for it was a token of His favor. Now in Paul's analogy we find these same steps in the discussion. By analogy with Creation and the Fall and the Blessing, Paul's ruling was that the woman must not teach or have authority. "Nevertheless she shall be saved in childbearing." "Nevertheless" suggests that this verse is almost a parenthesis, or an aside, in the discussion before he gets to the qualifications for the bishop. The word *sothesetai*, I am sure we would all agree, cannot mean "she shall be saved" in the sense of conversion/regeneration. It must refer to other levels of the meaning of *sozo*--sanctification, deliverance, blessing, glorification, rewards, or the like. The apostle might be saying--especially in the first-century when bearing and rearing children was the primary and constant activity of young women--that even though he has retained a limitation or prohibition on the woman, she should not think there is no reward or blessing for her in the faith. She, like Eve, can see God's provision of children as one important token of blessing, as well as one of the avenues of service that will be rewarding and rewarded. I stress "one" because Paul has more to offer all believers, men and women, in other passages.

So in the passage Paul makes use of the Genesis material three times. The interpreter must explain how all three uses function, rather than simply state that Paul's teachings are from creation and is therefore by nature. I would argue that Paul has used a classical *midrash* to base his rulings on the Law. In the first case he draws the comparison between the order of creation (implicit in Genesis) and his teaching to show that his teachings are in line with the way God created. In the second he warns against violating this ruling by reminding his readers of the temptation and the fall, arguing that the Church should not relive that kind of disorder and confusion, but

follow the pristine ideal of creation to keep harmony and unity. In the third case Paul makes an analogy between God's blessing on Eve and the options for ministry for women to show that women are not to be left out of the service of God. All three uses of Genesis are clearly *midrashic*; they demonstrate that Paul's teachings are founded in and patterned after the work of God recorded in the Law. Since he is clearly using Jewish *midrash*, his Jewish audiences, even though now Christian, would be very comfortable with the way he reasoned from the Law of Moses--Genesis. It was far more complex than simply proof-texting from creation to say this is always the way it should be; but even though complex, it was typical for a synagogue sermon.

Concluding Observations

There are varying opinions on the meanings and applications of these texts. It seems to me that to see Paul's prohibitions as applying specifically to the local assembly of the Church, when believers assembled in one place under a distinctly organized leadership, for the purposes of ministry and worship, harmonizes with and allows for the many other biblical passages where women were used by God in public. So Paul was being consistent with Scripture.

We always have the question of determining what is directly applicable today, and what is not, even though what is not directly applicable may provide helpful guidelines. In other parts of Scripture we readily make these distinctions, certainly with Israel's Law, and often in the New Testament in passages like the Sermon on the Mount. Were Paul's teachings on women (not to teach, wear a veil, etc.) culturally oriented? I think it would be hard to prove they were not, for all his teachings spoke immediately to issues in the early Church. But this would not mean they can be swept aside (compare the ruling on eating meat that offends); rather, in many situations the Pauline rulings would have to be recalled and obeyed even if they were nullified.

Concerning the difficulty of harmonizing Paul's rulings with other passages, one resolution is to make a formal distinction between a teacher and a prophet. While we might agree that the prophet has God's authority because divine revelation is communicated, how does this actually differ from what a teacher should be? Do teachers have authority in themselves?--only insofar as they sit in Moses' seat, meaning when the properly designated spiritual leader of the assembly teaches the Word of God. As I see it, a major problem in Christianity is that ministers often take too much

authority to themselves, or, they do everything themselves in the service (preach, teach, pray, read the Scriptures, exhort, and in some cases lead the music and praise). They become “the minister” and the people passive auditors; worse, they can become little popes, their interpretations and applications sometimes becoming the dogma of their assembly. So we must be cautious here. What Christian ministers do in exposition, preaching or teaching, must find its content and, therefore, its authority in the Word. Who can participate in the service? How is that determined?

I would conclude that Paul’s rulings on this matter had the assembly of the Church as their frame of reference. Such assemblies had a distinct organization, a distinct function, and distinct purposes. Now here is an important point in making application from Scripture: Only when we duplicate the situation of the original context and what Paul meant by the Church can we be absolutely sure that his rulings apply directly. The more that a current situation or organization differs from that idea, the more uncertain we are about how directly or literally we should make the ruling apply, and the more we have to make indirect applications.

It seems to me that there are two plausible conclusions or applications that can be made from these passages--both fit the data and both can be defended. Note that I said two ways of **applying** the material. I do not think the **interpretation** is in question--Paul was clearly not permitting women to teach or have authority in the local assembly of the Church.

1. Direct Application. If we were to apply Paul directly, attention must be given to the arena in which the text is to be applied. In the Episcopal Church, for example, the Bishop or Overseer has the authority of headship over the assemblies, and the priests (= elders) in the parish churches are under him. If headship and authority are taken as the meanings of these passages and we make a direct application, then a woman should not be a Bishop. If the parish priest is perceived as the head of the Church, then the rulings would have to be applied there directly. Now in an independent free church or non-liturgical church, for example, the pastor is the head of the assembly, and that would call for the application that a woman could not have that place. In sum, the question of applying Scripture today involves a careful study of the text’s meaning as it harmonizes with all of Scripture and then a consideration of the contemporary situation or circumstances to determine if the passage applies directly or not. A direct application simply says that Paul says no, and this applies to every situation that he had in mind--today the spiritual leadership of

the Church which supplies the authoritative teaching of the doctrines..

Note that I am not dealing with the question of ordination. In some respects that is a non-issue to me in this discussion. It is not the biblical question. In fact, ordination only appears in the Old Testament, Leviticus 8, for Israel's priests--a hereditary office at that! I am not against ordination, per se. I think it is a good thing to have for quality control of the assembly (if it works, and what I see today is not always working and does not very often even look like the biblical pattern of ordination with the priests)--but it is a Church matter. The Church has made it an important qualification for a specific type of leadership. That is fine as long as elitism and superstition do not ruin it. But the biblical emphasis is on authority. It is more a question of what one would do with the ordination than the ordination itself. For example, many churches that are against women's ordinations have been "commissioning" women for missions for decades! So there has been a good deal of inconsistency, even though I am sure the various groups can support their actions with very carefully worded biblical principles.

The strength of this view, i.e., that the application of Paul's words apply directly to today, is that the instruction is clear and direct, and that it is based on creation. However, when all the other passages with instructions are included, and the contexts studied more, the matter becomes a little more complicated.

2. Culturally Oriented. This is the second way that biblical scholars have applied the texts. If Paul's teachings here are to be considered culturally oriented, then they would apply directly today only in a setting that corresponded closely to that culture's issues (like his teachings on eating pork or things offered to idols). So to say the instructions are culturally oriented does not mean that we get rid of them completely. One dare not overturn a culture at the drop of a hat--or should I say a veil. In other words, one cannot simply sweep Paul's teachings on this matter aside by saying they were just for that culture--and retain other teachings of his that are less objectionable. If one were to argue that his teachings were only applicable to that audience in that first century culture one would have to deal with the fact that Paul, as well as Moses, worked to bring harmony and order to every believing community that was living in a fallen world. So even in a "liberated society" certain principles from Paul's teachings would have to be invoked. Caution and care in every situation are imperative. I have no trouble eating pork (although I seldom do), and doing it freely in my world. But when I am in Israel, or with new Jewish believers in Jesus the

Messiah, that freedom has to be curtailed. If someone said the ruling on women teaching was primarily cultural for the Jewish-Gentile issues, that does not mean it can be cast off completely as not applicable. It means people have to be more perceptive in how and when it may be necessary to follow it.

This secondary application would work this way. Paul was clearly speaking to crises in those early churches, many of which were due to Jewish and Gentile clashes. To him it was far better to keep order and decency than for believers to exercise their new freedoms in Christ. In situations today where the issues are not present, or in arms of the Church that are not the local congregation, the prohibition of women teaching men would not be binding (unless, like other issues it offended and divided the church). So if someone today says Paul's restrictions on women having authority in the local assembly were primarily for that culture, that is a plausible argument--provided that that cultural restriction still be applied as a guideline for bringing order into the churches when necessary. To call it cultural is not a license to jettison a passage. If the culture, whether a community, diocese, or country, will be thrown into turmoil over the issue, then Paul's teaching would tell us to back off from exercising our freedoms and our rights. One always is troubled seeing Christians clamoring for their rights and leaving a trail of split churches and damaged believers.

The strength of this view is that it takes into account all the passages in the Bible on the place of women in ministry and service and does not rely on a couple of passages. The difficulty that the view must deal with is that it takes more explaining to present it because it is more complicated (people like a simple verse)--but most of the major doctrines involve a study of a number of complex arguments and numerous passages, so this is no different.

Also, people who are opposed to the ordination/ministry of women argue that it is the same as the biblical ruling on ordination of homosexuals--it both cases the modern theologian is going against a direct command of the Bible. But this is an unfair analogy, for the situations are totally different. The biblical treatment on homosexuality is clear and consistent: homosexual acts are sinful. Nowhere in the Bible is the door opened for any possible exception; nowhere in the Bible is it ever portrayed in a different light. And no amount of re-defining terms can soften the view. But in the numerous references to women in ministry the Bible is filled with samples and descriptions and teachings on their participation in worship and service. Paul's words about teaching have to be seen in the light of all those passages. So if a couple of

them are explained as culturally oriented, there are scores of other passages that support very active ministries for women (setting the question of ordination aside).

But for this important issue, whatever view is taken concerning the recognized leadership of the assembly of believers, one must be careful to stress the great ministry and service that women share with men in the kingdom of God. Too often groups that are opposed to “women’s ordination” are simply opposed to women’s participation in much of anything. The instruction for them to keep silent is pushed to the limit. Perhaps we have placed far too much emphasis on the question of “ordination” and not enough on spiritual gifts, calling, and service. Perhaps ordination has become the coveted prize by which everyone measures “ministry.” I suspect Paul would have trouble recognizing some of the things we do in the churches today, especially the way we ordain, but also the way we make one pastor the total minister.

Each person has to find his or her spiritual gifts, seek how they can be used in the church, and determine if that necessitates ordination or not. Each person then must determine how to interpret and apply these passages. And if they belong to a group that takes a particular view, they must either comply, or find other avenues of service. But the passages cannot be ignored. I am always troubled by people who take a strong position on this matter without any regard for the texts--such as simple explanations like “Jesus chose men,” or liberal views like “We can ignore 1 and 2 Timothy.” If a devout believer studies the texts carefully and conscientiously on this or any other issue and comes to a conclusion different than yours, you have to respect that (we are talking about issues that even the evangelical world is not agreed upon, not matters like the resurrection or the like). You may not be able to be a part of their organization, but you have to allow them their convictions. If it were an easy matter there would be agreement.

With regard to the participation of women in ministry in general (not just the issue of ordination or senior pastors), this is what we know from Scripture: in spite of the order of creation and in spite of the temptation and the fall, God was pleased to use women

- to give prophetic utterances, sometimes new revelation and sometimes comfort and exhortation,
- to write Scripture for the edification of all,
- to declare His mighty works, both in song and in proclamation,

- to carry the reports of the person and work of Jesus to men and women, along with men in carrying out the great commission, discipling, baptizing, and teaching,
- along with men to disciple new Christians by expounding the revelation of God,
- to pray and prophesy in the Church so long as there was recognition of authority and order present,
- to teach others the Scriptures.

The one item held back by the Apostle Paul is in the Churches that women not teach or exercise authority over men. Whether we apply this directly, or take it as a cultural instruction that still may serve as a guide, the arena of application is the local assembly of believers met to worship and be instructed in doctrine. If a congregation holds strongly in their conviction that Paul's ruling must be applied directly and thereby is opposed to the ordination of women, that view must, must, be respected. If in another place a congregation thinks it was culturally applicable and their situation does not match that cultural setting, and so they have a more open view of women's leadership, that has to be respected. But in both cases the churches must have sound biblical study behind the decision, must act in full confidence of their faith, and must take into consideration what effect their decision will have on the wider body of Christ.

Christian organizations like colleges and seminaries, and activities like missionary work, Bible classes, discipling, and counseling, move us into another (different but related) arena--they do not exactly fit the setting and circumstances of the first-century worship assemblies, or the rules for the local church. In fact, some of these activities have precedents in the Scripture, whether with Priscilla, or the prophetesses, or the Great Commission. Individuals who lead such organizations or activities may decide that it might be wise to use the apostle's rulings as safe guidelines, to maintain harmony in the group out of concern for the weaker brothers and sisters (although it is not usually weaker brothers and sisters that object). I do not believe that Paul's prohibition should be made a binding legislation in all areas so that the violation of it is a sin. I am not ready to say that a woman doing missionary work, or discipling, or teaching Bible in a college, is sinning. And I cannot say that a woman who is ordained, licensed, or commissioned to lead a Christian organization or congregation is disobedient to Scripture and therefore living in sin. She may be, depending on a variety of things including motives, circumstances, effects of such a position; but she may not be. I don't think one can just use one of these passages as a proof text--there

is more to it than that. (I am not addressing this other issue at the moment, but I should say a large number of men who are ordained or licensed are also disobedient for a number of reasons and should not be ministering--but that is another paper). I personally would say a woman can be ordained/have a leadership role in the Church, but in some situations should not.

Ultimately, each of us must decide how we interpret and apply Scripture. If it were an easy issue, it would have been settled rather easily. It is not just a matter of having convictions and clear consciences. In these issues we must also commend our activities to the consciences of others. Whether we seek ordination or not, function in a pastoral ministry or not, we all will teach and exercise authority in one way or another. Our decisions must be for the glory of God and for the spiritual growth of those the Lord brings our way.