

# THE ROLE OF WOMEN IN THE ASSEMBLY: EPISTLES OF PAUL

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In the Gospels, we see women showing hospitality to Jesus, women supplying him with their means, and women traveling with him and being around the cross. We see Jesus healing women, dealing with their spiritual problems, and using women as illustrations in his teaching; but we do not find any instruction about their role in assemblies.

The same is true of the book of Acts. Women learn; they obey the gospel; they engage in good works; they show hospitality; and they participate in giving. They are not depicted as being evangelists; they do not exercise miracle-working power; they do not baptize people; they are not elders in the congregations; and they are not pastors. No passage in the Acts of the Apostles specifically deals with the role of women in assemblies.

We will turn to the epistles of Paul. Much of what Paul wrote is gender inclusive, relevant to and binding equally on men and women. Paul uses women as illustrations in his teaching. He contrasts Hagar and Sarah (Gal 4:24ff.) and declares that the Jerusalem above is our mother (Gal 4:26). He speaks fondly of women as his fellow workers. The writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews includes women: Sarah, Moses's mother, Rahab the harlot, and those who received their dead by resurrection (Heb 11:35). The Epistle of James mentions Rahab (Jas 2:25). Peter praises Sarah (1 Pet 3:6) as a model for Christian women.

In the Epistle to the Romans, however, when describing the sins of the Gentiles, Paul charges, "Their women [*thēleiai*] exchanged natural relations for unnatural" (Rom 1:26). This is the clearest condemnation of lesbianism to be found in Scripture.

In the next verse of the letter, Paul deals with unnatural relations on the part of men. He repeats the condemnation in the letters to the Corinthians (1 Cor 6:9) and to Timothy (1 Tim 1:10).

Paul gives one of the clearest definitions of adultery to be found in Scripture. A woman is bound to her husband as long as he lives. If she has sex with another man while her husband is alive, she shall be called an adulteress. She, however, is freed from the law to her husband if he dies (Rom 7:2–3).

But it is when one comes to the greetings of Rom 16 that one finds material to be considered with our topic—The Role of Women in the Assembly. Out of twenty-eight persons greeted, ten female fellow-workers of Paul are greeted by name.

Phoebe is a servant (*diakonos*) of the church in Cenchreae. *Diakonos* is a term that occurs in twenty-six NT passages for persons rendering various sorts of service, but is only here in Rom 16:1 describing a woman. In most of its occurrences, the term does not designate a specific appointment; and in a secular context, it is rendered “servant.” The one who is to be greatest is to be your servant (Matt 23:11; Mark 10:43; 9:35). A king has his servants (Matt 22:13 KJV); there are servants at a wedding (John 2:5). Where the Lord is, there will his servant be (John 12:26). Earthly rulers are God’s servants (Rom 13:4 twice); Christ became a servant to the circumcision (Rom 15:8). Paul and Apollos are servants through whom the Corinthians believed (1 Cor 3:5). The devil’s servants transform themselves as servants of righteousness (2 Cor 11:15). Paul’s opponents appear as servants of Christ (2 Cor 11:23). Paul asks if Christ is an agent of sin (Gal 2:17). Epaphras is a faithful servant of Christ (Col 1:7). Paul is a servant (Col 1:23, 25), as is Tychicus (Col 4:7), and as is Timothy (1 Thess 3:2; 1 Tim 4:6).

The KJV used “minister” for this term *diakonos* where it implies religious activity except in five passages where it transliterated the term as “deacon” (Phil 1:1; 1 Tim 3:8, 10, 12, 13), and some translations since 1611 have pretty well followed the same pattern.

All of this confronts us with the question of whether Phoebe was an appointee of the congregation in Cenchreae or just a godly, dedicated lady who served it. The Greek word *diakonissa*

THE ROLE OF WOMEN IN THE ASSEMBLY:  
EPISTLES OF PAUL

(“deaconess”) does not occur in the NT and only appears in Christian literature in the third century. When it did appear, it designated ladies who were working with other ladies, not vocal participants in assemblies. She was not an evangelist, was not a preacher, and was not an elder. A practice only appearing in the third century is too late to claim NT authority. The 2002 understanding of the term “deaconess” conveys a false image when applied to Phoebe.

Paul says of Phoebe, “she has been a helper [*prostates*] of many and of myself as well” (Rom 16:2). But he gives no specific details of what she did, whether it was in an assembly or out of it. The term *prostatis* occurs in the NT only in this passage, but in other Greek designates one in a supportive role, a patron, or benefactor. Neither *diakonos* nor *prostatis* of necessity defines a role in an assembly. The type of activity involved is not inherent in the term.

Paul in Rom 16 sends greetings to Prisca and Aquila, calling them fellow workers in Christ who have risked their necks for his life. No details are supplied. Both Paul and all the churches give them thanks. Paul also greets the church in their house (Rom 16:3–4). They are mentioned together with their names in the same sequence in Rom 16:3 as in Acts 18:18, 26 and 2 Tim 4:19. The church in their house is also greeted in 1 Cor 16:19, but there the names of the two are in the opposite order as in Acts 18:2. To make something of the sequence of the names seems to me to be desperate argumentation. We have allusions to this couple when they are in Corinth, in Ephesus, and in Rome. They were active in the congregation wherever they were. We have no specific details of Prisca’s actions in assemblies.

Paul greets Mary, who has worked hard among the Romans (Rom 16:6). No details are supplied.

He greets Andronicus and Junias described as his kinsmen, as fellow prisoners, and as being in Christ before Paul himself (Rom 16:7). Here we have the on-going dispute over whether *Ioulian* (Junias) is a masculine or a feminine name. The KJV had Junia (a feminine name); the ASV, RSV, and NIV chose Junias, but TNIV has Junia as do the Holman CSB, NCV, NABR, and the NET Bible. Some manuscripts, such as P 46, read “*Ioulian*,”

which reading the textual commentary considers to be a clerical error. The term “men” for this pair comes not from *anthrōpos* or *anēr* being in the Greek text but from the masculine gender of the words used. Greek can use masculine gender for couples.

There is also the question of what is meant by “of note among the apostles” (*episēmoi en tois apostolois*). The case being made by some of there being women among the apostles depends on this name *Iounian* being a feminine name and upon the following phrase (“among the apostles”) meaning that the two belonged to that group. The NET Bible renders this phrase, “well known to the apostles.” If the phrase merely means they had a good reputation among the apostles, then the case for women being among apostles vanishes. The problem is uncertain.

Certainly Junias/Julia was not one of the Twelve. If a woman, she was not one accompanied by a wife (1 Cor 9:5). The NT, however, uses “apostle” in a broader sense than is common among us. Jesus is the “apostle . . . of our confession” (Heb 3:1). A person sent out by a congregation was an apostle of that congregation. In this sense, Paul and Barnabas sent out by the church in Antioch (Acts 13:2–3) are designated apostles (Acts 14:4, 14); neither of the two was one of the Twelve. Paul elsewhere claims that he is not inferior to the Twelve (1 Cor 15:8–9; 2 Cor 12:11–12; Gal 1:17–18). Paul and his party (Silas and Timothy) might have made demands as “apostles of Christ,” but did not (1 Thess 2:7[6]). There are apostles of the churches (2 Cor 8:23; cf. John 13:16) and “your messenger” of the Philippian church (Phil 2:25). There are also those whom Paul designates “false apostles” (2 Cor 11:13), as well as those who say they are apostles but are not (Rev 2:2).

The term *episēmos* occurs only once more in the NT where it describes Barabbas as a notable prisoner (Matt 27:16). Other occurrences are in the apocryphal literature.<sup>1</sup> A recent study of *episimos en tois apostolois* by Burer and Wallace<sup>2</sup> makes a quite convincing case for the meaning “known to the apostles” as con-

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<sup>1</sup>3 Macc 6:1; Ps. Sol. 17:10; 2:6.

<sup>2</sup>Michael H. Burer and Daniel B. Wallace, “Was Junia Really an Apostle? A Re-examination of Rom. 16:7,” *NTS* 47 (January 2001): 76–90.

THE ROLE OF WOMEN IN THE ASSEMBLY:  
EPISTLES OF PAUL

trusted with “being among the apostles.”

Paul goes ahead with a greeting to Tryphaena and Tryphosa who are “workers in the Lord,” but no details are supplied. There is “beloved Persis, who has worked hard in the Lord” (Rom 16:12). Then there is the mother of Rufus (Rom 16:13). There is Julia, Nereus and his sister, and Olympas, and all the saints that are with them (Rom 16:15). Paul does not inform us about what these ladies did. To guess is futile. We cannot build a case for the role of women in assemblies from the data supplied in the Epistle to the Romans.

Paul tells the Corinthians, “It has been reported to me by Chloe’s people, that there is quarreling among you, my brethren” (1 Cor 1:11). Surely none can argue that we learn anything of Chloe’s role in assemblies from this reference! Paul recognizes that wives travel with husbands: “Do we not have the right to be accompanied by a wife, as the other apostles and brothers of the Lord and Cephas?” (1 Cor 9:5). What these women did in assemblies is not revealed.

A further case of greeting women is encountered in the letter to the Philippians. There Paul said,

I entreat Euodia and I entreat Syntyche to agree in the Lord. And I ask you also, true yokefellow, help these women, for they have labored side by side with me in the gospel together with Clement and the rest of my fellow workers, whose names are in the book of life (Phil 4:2–3).

We have no hint about what the point of tension between these women was; it is futile to conjecture. We also have not the slightest suggestion about what it was they did with Paul. All Christians are God’s fellow workers (1 Cor 3:9). It is futile to try to supply what one cannot know. Apart from this one section and Paul’s comments within the letter about Timothy and Epaphroditus, Paul’s letter to the Philippians seems gender inclusive.

Paul sends a greeting to Nympha and the church in her house (Col 4:15). Paul sends greetings to Timothy from a woman named Claudia (2 Tim 4:21). He writes to “Philemon our beloved fellow

worker and Apphia our sister and Archippus our fellow soldier, and the church in your house" (Phlm 1–2). We have no reliable details about Apphia's activities in assemblies.

### GALATIANS 3:28

Paul discusses neither the organization of the congregation nor the gender roles in assemblies in his letter to the Galatians. His theme is the contrast between salvation by the law and salvation by faith:

But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a custodian; for in Christ Jesus you are all sons [*huiōi*] of God, through faith. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female [*arsen kai thelu*]; for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise (Gal 3:25–29).

This statement declaring sonship for all of faith is a close parallel to Col 3:11 except that Colossians does not have the male-female pair in its list. Other partial parallels teaching equal opportunity are in 1 Cor 12:13 and Rom 10:12–13.

It is obvious that Paul did not intend this statement to imply that in Christ physical differences between men and women are obliterated. Women continue to bear children and men to beget them. That arrangement from creation is not affected in any way. Later, Paul denounces a man's receiving circumcision as obligating him to keep the whole law. Such a person has fallen from grace (Gal 5:2ff.). Judaism had no practice of female circumcision. Paul also is not justifying homosexual behavior by his statement in Galatians. He condemned homosexual acts in Romans, 1 Corinthians, and 1 Timothy.

Becoming a Christian by baptism did not liberate the slave from his physical servitude. Being in Christ did give bondage a new meaning. The slave became the Lord's freedman (1 Cor 7:22) while remaining in servitude. Both Philemon and Onesimus are

THE ROLE OF WOMEN IN THE ASSEMBLY:  
EPISTLES OF PAUL

in Christ, but one is the master and the other is the slave.

Later than the writing of the Epistle to the Galatians, Paul wrote that the gospel was the power of God to the Jew first and also to the Gentile (Rom 1:16). In his evangelistic work, he regularly went to the synagogue before turning to the Gentiles.

Whether *anthrōpos* was intended to be gender inclusive or to be designating the male alone was not an issue in Paul's day. Today, some occurrences of this term would be translated "person" or "individual." One would likely translate "Am I still trying to please people?" (Gal 1:10); the gospel Paul preached was not a "human gospel" (Gal 1:11), "a person is not justified by works of the law" (Gal 2:16), and "what ever a person sows" (Gal 6:7).

In Gal 3:7, 9, 11, the term *anthrōpos* does not occur, yet our translations have read "men of faith" because the masculine gender of the Greek terms is used. Galatians 3:11 also does not have the term *anthrōpos* and could be rendered "no person is justified before God" and "the one who through faith is righteous." Galatians 3:15 in the KJV was "after the manner of men"; the RSV rendered it "a human example." Gal 6:1 could be "if a person be overtaken in sin," and Galatians 6:5, "each bear his own load"; just as in v. 4, *anthrōpos* does not occur. "Do good to all men" (Gal 6:10) is merely *pros pantos* ("to all"); *anthrōpos* does not occur. Greek did not use the feminine forms as gender inclusive. First Peter 3:1–7 has different instructions for women and men while affirming that women are "joint heirs of the grace of life."

*Huios* is translated "son," but if rendered "child" could be understood in English as gender inclusive. *Huios theou* (Gal 3:7) could be "children of God" (Gal 3:26). We will not pursue this issue further at this time. It is a communication problem. Women's role in assemblies is not involved in what one does with it.

Paul never understood himself as having in Gal 3:28 announced the end of distinction in roles of men and women. His letters to the Corinthians, to the Ephesians, to the Colossians, to Timothy, and to Titus, while containing much that is gender inclusive, all make distinctions in instructions to men and women.

Paul points out in Galatians that now that Christ has come, we are no longer under the law which was a custodian (*paidagōgos*) until Christ came. All who are of faith are children of God. They

have become that by being baptized into Christ and in that way having put on Christ (cf. Rom 6:3–9; 1 Cor 12:13). The human distinctions of race, social rank, and sex are modified in Christ. Three inclusive categories are mentioned. All people of Paul’s world were either Jew or Greek, and both are included in Christ. The second category is slave or free. That takes in all; no one of faith is excluded (cf. 1 Cor 7:21–24; Col 3:22–25). There were slaves in the church, as the letter to Philemon makes clear. The third category is male and female. Since creation, normal people come in only two models (Matt 19:4; Mark 10:6); this side of the judgment, that will not change. Marriage ceases at the resurrection (Matt 22:30; Luke 20:30–36). All are one in Christ. The blessings of faith are equally open to all. All of faith are spiritual heirs of Abraham, according to the promise, “in you [and your descendants] shall all families of the earth will be blessed” (Gen 12:3 KJV). Paul is discussing oneness in Christ (1 Pet 3:1–7), not identity or equality of roles in Christ.

The role relationship of men and women in the assembly is not being discussed in this passage. The male-female distinction has its roots in creation. Its parallel to the other two groups mentioned—the Jew-Greek and the slave-free distinctions, which were only social—cannot be pressed.

While the date of the writing of the Galatian letter is uncertain, its statements cannot be used as a further development of Paul’s insights than those reflected in 1 Corinthians and 1 Timothy. While the date relation of Galatians to 1 Corinthians might be disputed, by all dating systems, Galatians would be earlier than 1 Timothy.

## 1 CORINTHIANS 11:5

Paul has dealt with the experience of Israel in the desert (1 Cor 10) which leads him to a consideration of the table of the Lord and the table of demons (1 Cor 10:14–22), and from that to food offered to idols and to consideration for the welfare of others (1 Cor 10:23–33). He then takes up the headship of Christ, pointing out that the head of a woman is her husband (1 Cor 11:3).

While it is commonly assumed that 1 Cor 11:5 is dealing with



THE ROLE OF WOMEN IN THE ASSEMBLY:  
EPISTLES OF PAUL

actions of women in the assembly and also assumed that Paul gave his approval to what was being done, there is nothing in the text that says so. When these assumptions are made, they create a conflict with what Paul then states in 1 Cor 14. Paul contrasts the Corinthians' maintaining the traditions as he had delivered them to them and what he is saying in v. 3 about the head.

However, in 1 Cor 11, actually we do not come to the phrase "when you come together" until at v. 17. Then at v. 18, we have "when you assemble as a church"; then in v. 20, one meets "when you meet together"; at v. 33, "when you come together to eat"; and at v. 34, "lest you come together"—a total of five occurrences of the phrase. None of these is applied to v. 5.

What is said about the man as "head" in the text does not apply only to the assembly; neither does that said about the length of his hair (1 Cor 11:14). Man is not head in the assembly and not head out of the assembly.

A second common assumption about 1 Cor 11:5 is that prophesying was done only in an assembly, an assumption that is valid neither for the OT nor the NT. OT prophets often spoke to one individual wherever they encountered that person—on the street, in the market, at home, or in a face-to-face interview elsewhere. Temple worship was not congregational in the modern sense. Women could go to the court of the Gentiles and to the court of the women. Anna in the temple was not in a congregational assembly (Luke 2:36–38). Likely, Agabus who predicted Paul's coming arrest was not in a congregational assembly. The text only says of him, "coming to us" (Acts 21:11–12).

Like prophesying, praying also could be a home activity. Jesus spoke of praying in secret in one's inner room (Matt 6:6). Praying could be either oral (Acts 16:25) or silent (1 Sam 1:12–13). Though serving as an elder, I do far more silent praying in an assembly than I do leading prayer orally.

The third common assumption made in dealing with this passage of 1 Cor 11:5 is that Paul approves what the women are doing (if indeed it was in an assembly); but the text does not say that. The assumption is without evidence. Paul is here describing, not prescribing. It is assumed that since he does not voice opposition here, he is approving what he is describing. The assump-

tion denies Paul the privilege of waiting until ch. 14 to voice opposition and in doing that creates a picture of Paul's contradicting himself.

Even if one contends that Corinthian women had been praying and prophesying in the assembly, there is no basis for claiming that by his silence at this point Paul gave approval to what they were doing.

The statement seems to say that if the woman prays or prophesies veiled, she does not dishonor her head. Nothing is said about "in church" in the passage until one comes to v. 16. There Paul says, "If any one is disposed to be contentious, we recognize no other practice, nor do the churches of God." This statement is not referring to praying or prophesying. The nearest context is about hairstyles.

### **1 CORINTHIANS 14:33B–39**

All expositors of 1 Cor 14:33b–39 recognize that there is a question over where the paragraph begins, leaving uncertain whether v. 33b goes with what preceded or with what follows. The versification is a late addition to the text and settles nothing. The KJV did not split verses, and it has no paragraph marks after Acts 20:36. A convincing argument cannot be made on its versification. However, the Bible Societies' Greek text and all recent English translations that I have checked (RSV/NRSV/NIV/REB/CEV/ESV) except the TNIV place the statement with what follows, and I will treat it that way.

Paul's letter to the Corinthians, in addition to the Corinthians, is addressed "to all those who in every place who call on the name of our Lord" (1 Cor 1:2). Paul has earlier than ch. 14 emphasized the uniformity of his teaching in the churches on various questions. "As I teach them everywhere in every church" (1 Cor 4:17). "This is my rule in all the churches" (1 Cor 7:17). "We recognize no other practice, nor do the churches of God" (1 Cor 11:16).

There can be no dispute that Paul in 1 Cor 14 is discussing the assembly. In the chapter, he alludes to the assembly six times (1 Cor 14:19, 23, 26, 33, 34, 35). Paul here says, "As in all

THE ROLE OF WOMEN IN THE ASSEMBLY:  
EPISTLES OF PAUL

the churches of the saints" (v. 33b). "Church" (*ekklēsia*) in the Greek world meant any gathering (cf. Acts 19:32, 39, 41), so Paul defines the sort of gathering he is speaking of—"the churches of the saints." This statement would mean that what he is about to write is not solely applicable to a problem in Corinth. It deals with the practice of the congregations in general. Wherever the saints meet, this is what they do. Paul and Barnabas met with the church in Antioch (Acts 11:26). Paul's letter to the Colossians is to be read in the church of the Laodiceans and vice versa (Col 4:16).

One should notice the three stages in the instruction of the passage regulating oral communication in the assembly. First dealt with are the tongue speakers of whom only two or three are to speak, and they in turn. If, however, there is no interpreter, they are to be silent in church. Next are the prophets of whom two or three are to speak. They are to speak one by one. If a revelation comes to another, the one speaking is to be silent. No one can learn if all speak at one time.

Third are the women who are to keep silence (*sigatōsan*) in the churches. Here, "in the churches" defines where the prohibition applies. In ch. 11, Paul makes a distinction between "when you come together" and "at home" (1 Cor 11:33–34). Already in this chapter, Paul has alluded to his own speaking "in church" (1 Cor 14:19) and to the tongue speaker "in church" (1 Cor 14:28), meaning "in the assembly." Paul is not speaking about a building or of a special room in a building. The church had no special buildings in Paul's day. Paul is not ordering women to be silent at home, in the market, or in the street.

The verb *sigan* ("to be silent") has occurred in 1 Cor 14:28 instructing the tongue speakers who have no interpreter to be silent in church but permits each of them to "speak to himself and to God" (1 Cor 14:28). The verb also occurs for the speaking prophet in v. 30. It is the same limitation here placed on the women. The tongue speakers (without an interpreter) are to be silent in church; the prophet speaking when another has a revelation is to be silent; the women are to be silent in church.

This verb *sigan* occurs elsewhere of the disciples telling no one of their having seen the transfiguration (Luke 9:36), for ordering

the shouting blind man to be silent (Luke 18:39), for the silence of those not able to answer Jesus's argument about the tribute to Caesar (Luke 20:26), for people's silence at Peter's gesture when he had been delivered from prison (Acts 12:17), for people's silence in Jerusalem as they listened to Paul and Barnabas (Acts 15:12), and for the keeping secret the mystery prior to the coming of Christ (Rom 16:25). This term seems lucid enough and not difficult to understand.

"They [the women (*gynaikes*)] are not permitted to speak." This statement elaborates the previous command to be silent. No circumstances are suggested in which it would be right for them to speak. The Greek language used the same word for woman and for wife as it also did for man and husband. The practice might be compared to rural America where a man says, "That is my woman," meaning "that is my wife." I do not find the contention persuasive, however, that Paul would be saying that single women could speak but that married women could not. I would understand the prohibition to apply equally to all women present.

There is no justification for translating or understanding the verb *lalein* ("speak") as "piping up" or its equivalent. The verb is the same one used for tongue speakers and for prophets speaking. However, when designating tongue speaking, Paul regularly also inserts the word for "tongues" which is not here. This feature mitigates against applying the prohibition only to female tongue speaking, as also does the women's wanting to learn, and their asking their husbands at home.

Next is that "they should be subordinate." This is the same verb that Paul uses when he urges the Ephesians, "Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ" (Eph 5:21 NIV). It is used for the wife's submission to her husband (1 Pet 3:1ff.). It is used for the church's submission to Christ (Eph 5:24). It is used for Christians' submission to their leaders (Heb 13:17) and for submission to teachers (1 Cor 16:16).

We are puzzled about what passage Paul had in mind as he says, "even as the law says." Paul never uses the term "law" (*nomos*) for human tradition or for human custom. Elsewhere, his allusion to law (Rom 3:19; 1 Cor 9:8) is to the law of Moses.

THE ROLE OF WOMEN IN THE ASSEMBLY:  
EPISTLES OF PAUL

He has alluded to the law in 1 Cor 14:21, a quotation from Isaiah. One guess here points back to Gen 2:18 where woman at creation is a “helper” suitable for the man; but this is only a conjecture. Another possibility is that the reference is to Gen 3:16: “Your desire shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you.” This also is a conjecture.

Next in the text is that if the woman wants to know (*mathanein*) anything, she can ask her own husband at home. The verb is the same one meets for women’s learning in 1 Tim 2:11. One should see the contrast in this passage between “in church” (*en ekklesia*) and “at home” (*en oikō*). What is being said about “in church” does not apply “at home.” The women are not instructed to be silent there.

Paul emphasizes by saying, “It is a shame for women to speak in the church [*en ekklesia*]” (KJV). Surely some one will ask, “How about in a house church?” While the distinction between “church” and “house church” seems natural today, one should remember that there were no church buildings for the first two centuries. “In church [*en ekklesia*]” apparently would apply wherever Christians met.

The term “speak [*lalein*]” is the ordinary Greek term for oral communication. One can speak orally, and one can speak silently (as has been shown by the instruction to the tongue speaker with no interpreter); it seems obvious enough that oral discourse is being spoken of here by Paul.

“It is a shame for women to speak in the church.” The term “shame [*aischron*]” occurs in four NT passages. It is disgraceful for a woman to be shaven or shorn (1 Cor 11:6), a shame for her to speak in church (1 Cor 14:35), a shame to speak of things that the Gentiles do in secret (Eph 5:12), and a shame teaching for base gain what those spoken of have no right to teach (Titus 1:11).

Paul’s next statement seems to be to shame the Corinthians out of what they were doing. “What! Did the word of God originate with you, or are you the only ones it has reached?” This question seems to ask, “Do you think that you are making the rules?” “Do you think that you are an authority to yourself to do whatever you please?”

The next verse is a claim of authority for the teaching of Paul

in this chapter. A prophet might claim that he had a revelation which contradicted what Paul was teaching. In the OT, we have prophets face-to-face with Hananiah saying the opposite from what the Lord had revealed to Jeremiah. We call the opposing figures false prophets. Paul warns the Galatians about those who would offer a different gospel from that which he had preached (Gal 1:8).

A spiritual person (*pneumatikos*) would apparently be one who thought because of his possession of a gift of the Holy Spirit, he had a different revelation from Paul. Paul has used this term “spiritual” in Corinthians a number of times (1 Cor 2:13, 15; 3:1; 9:1; 10:3–4; 12:1; 14:1; 15:44, 46).

Paul calls on these two classes of persons—prophets and spirituals—to recognize that what he is speaking is a command of the Lord (1 Cor 14:37). Such a flat assertion of authority is not found elsewhere in Paul’s letters. He adds that any one who does not recognize this is not recognized. The claim of contrary authority is cut out from under those contrary claimants.

In closing the chapter, Paul approves the actions of those who prophesy and those who speak in tongues. He does not modify or negate what he said to the women. It stands with no retraction or modification. He urges that all be done decently and in order.

## 1 TIMOTHY 2:11–15

As in other books of the NT, the letters to Timothy use masculine gender forms as gender inclusive. At times, it also uses *anthrōpos* as gender inclusive. Future translations will read, “who desires all people to be saved” (1 Tim 2:4) and “one mediator between God and people” (1 Tim 2:5).

Paul declares that he is writing Timothy that Timothy might know how he ought (*dei*) to behave himself “in the household of God, which is the church of the living God” (1 Tim 3:15). The verb *dei* describes obligation. Jesus said to Nicodemus, “You must be born anew” (John 3:7). The duty was not optional. Because of the behavior spoken of being “in the church” (1 Tim 3:15), it is assumed that 1 Tim 2:11–15 discusses assembly questions, though

THE ROLE OF WOMEN IN THE ASSEMBLY:  
EPISTLES OF PAUL

the phrase does not occur in those verses.

Paul begins 1 Tim 2 with the admonition that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all people (*hyper pantōn anthrōpōn*). He then specifies prayer for kings and all in high places. God wants all to be saved. Christ gave himself a ransom for all. Christ did not die solely for males. God does not want only males to be saved. The inclusive word “all” is three times in these verses.

After declaring himself a preacher, an apostle, and a teacher of the Gentiles (1 Tim 2:7), Paul makes a clear distinction between his instruction for men (*andres*) and for women (*gynaikas*). I am not willing to dismiss the teaching of this passage as I recently heard an elder try to do on the basis that Paul only says “I desire” (*boulomai*) and not that “God desires.” Paul has just affirmed his authority in v. 7. I approach this passage from the assumption that Paul is the author of the Pastoral Epistles and that their teaching is as authoritative as that of his other letters. As an apostle, Paul’s writing is authoritative except in those cases where he makes a distinction between himself and the word of the Lord, which is only a few times in 1 Cor 7: “To the rest I say, not the Lord, . . .” (1 Cor 7:12); “Now concerning the unmarried, I have no command of the Lord, but I give my opinion as one who by the Lord’s mercy is trustworthy” (1 Cor 7:25). See also 1 Cor 7:40.

That Paul in 1 Tim 2:8–9 is making a distinction between the duties of men and women here would be easily understood by all if we were dealing with restroom signs. “Men” go here and “women” go there. When I tried to make the point with a life insurance agent, I said, “Men pay this rate” and “women pay that.” His response was, “We are arguing for a unisex rate.” Paul is not setting forth a unisex rate in this passage.

Though Paul has used *anthrōpos* three times in vv. 2–3, here for some reason he used *anēr* as he also does in v. 12. Paul instructs the men (*tous andras*) to pray “in every place” (cf. 1 Cor 1:2; 2 Cor 2:14; 1 Thess 1:8). He never states that anywhere about women.

I am not willing to ignore what is said immediately afterward about women on the basis that we do not commonly raise our hands when we pray. Jesus raised his hands and blessed the disciples before leaving them (Luke 24:50). However, Paul

and the elders of Ephesus knelt down and prayed (Acts 20:36); Paul and the people of Tyre knelt down on the sand of the beach and prayed (Acts 21:5). Paul writes to the Ephesians, “I bow my knees before the Father” (Eph 3:14). Scripture knows more than one posture of prayer. I would insist that motive is more important than posture; hence, “holy hands” rather than the participle “raise” should be stressed. The psalmist says that the person with clean hands will stand in the Lord’s holy place (Ps 24:4). James 4:8 calls on people to cleanse their hands. If one in rebellion or in anger raises his fist to God, he has raised hands, but not “holy hands.” The same would be true of impenitent hands, immoral hands, and hands raised to be seen of people. “Without anger or quarreling” should be stressed as the condition mentioned for prayers.

Paul making a distinction in 1 Tim 2:9 next says “also [*hōsautōs*] want women to dress modestly” [NIV]. This text does not say that women should pray also (as some would have it say), but that Paul is shifting to a discussion of women. The term “likewise” (*hōsautōs*) is used in lists of instructions (1 Tim 3:8, 11; 5:25; Titus 2:3, 6). Paul had used the definite article “the men” but here has none—just “women.”

I do not think we have dealt fairly with the total passage when we dismiss its teaching because we may have been lax on heeding what it says about female adornment. We have been entrapped by the English word “modest” for which this verse has been, and is still, used as a proof-text against under dressing when Paul is really speaking of being overdressed rather than being underdressed. The word modest is not limited to that which is sexually enticing. I live in a modest house. A comparison as is made here, however, need not bind no adornment at all, but it evaluates good deeds above jewelry. When Jesus said that man does not live by bread alone but by every word from the mouth of God (Matt 4:4), he did not mean that no bread at all was to be eaten. A like warning about female overdress is in 1 Pet 3:2–4. Instead of abandoning the next admonition of 1 Tim 2, I would urge ladies to make further consideration of this one. Good deeds for the Christian (male and female) are called for in Titus 1:16; 2:14 (cf. Eph 2:10).



THE ROLE OF WOMEN IN THE ASSEMBLY:  
EPISTLES OF PAUL

Using a chiasmic form in which a statement opens and closes with the same concept—in the case “in silence”—Paul proceeds to give instruction for women and then gives the reason for it. Women are to learn “in silence [*en hēsychia*] with all submissiveness [*en pasē hypotagē*].” We will return to “in silence” later. Jesus commended Mary for learning (Luke 10:38–42). Paul wants women to learn; the law of Moses provided for women to learn (Deut 31:12); but stressing manner of learning, how Paul wants them to learn is significant. The verb “learn [*manthanein*]” is the same verb used in 1 Cor 14:31, 35. It occurs seven times in the Pastoral Letters (1 Tim 2:11; 5:4, 13; 2 Tim 3:7, 14 [twice]; Titus 3:14). Women need to be grounded in Scripture to escape false teachers (2 Tim 3:6–7).

The meaning of each Greek word in Paul’s admonition is today under heated dispute in evangelical circles. The dispute has moved far beyond the information available to Vine and Thayer. One with access to proper equipment and computer research can now examine every occurrence of a word or an idiom in known Greek literature. One can even go beyond the most recent word and theological dictionaries. He can go beyond the scholarly competence in Greek of most of us, including me. But even with that equipment, one must come up with a specific example of the usage he is claiming, not just make sweeping generalizations.

What does “all submissiveness” mean? This noun *hypotagē* occurs in four NT passages. The first speaks of one’s submission to the gospel (2 Cor 9:13), the second expresses Paul’s refusal to submit to the Judaizers (Gal 2:5), and the third speaks of the elder’s having his children in submission (1 Tim 3:4) with the qualifying “in every way” (*meta pasēs semmotētos*). The fourth case is here in 1 Tim 2:11.

There are numerous occurrences of the verb *hypotassein* from which this noun “submission” derives. Despite the distastefulness of the idea to the contemporary mind, Christianity is a submitting religion. Christ submits to God, the apostles submit to Christ, Christians submit to the apostles. Christians submit to the government (Rom 13:1–5; Titus 3:1; 1 Pet 2:13), slaves submit to masters (Titus 2:9); wives submit to husbands (Eph 5:22; Col 3:18;

Titus 2:5; 1 Pet 3:1, 5), and children submit to parents (1 Tim 3:4). The younger are to submit to the elders (1 Pet 5:5). "Be subject to one another out of reverence for Christ" (Eph 5:21). Paul also calls on the Corinthians to submit to such men as the house of Stephanas and to every fellow worker and laborer (1 Cor 16:16). Women are to learn with all submissiveness.

Paul next states that he does not permit (*epitrepein*) a woman to teach (*didaskein*) or to have authority over (*authenthein*) a man.

The verb "permit [*epitrepein*]" occurs in eighteen passages, three of them in Paul's letters (1 Cor 14:34; 16:7; 1 Tim 2:12). One of these (1 Cor 14:34) is for women not being permitted to speak in church. It is significant that the same verb is used in the two places in discussing the woman's role. That the present tense is used does not seem adequate basis for concluding that the restriction is temporary. In Rom 12:1, "I beseech" (KJV) is present tense, but the teaching is not temporary in nature. The verb "permit" here (v. 12) expresses the same authority as the "I desire" of v. 8.

The infinitive "teach" (*didaskein*)<sup>3</sup> contrasts with the verb "learn" of v. 11 which women are to do and would seem to require no further elaboration. However, the earlier practice of some non-Bible-class people to deny any teaching to women as though Paul merely said, "I permit not a woman to teach," ignores the context of the statement as well as the statement to Titus that older women are to be teachers of good, training younger women (Titus 2:4). There is no example in the NT where a woman is presented as a teacher of men in an assembly. Despite the claims often made for her, Priscilla is never mentioned apart from her husband. Apollos was teaching in a synagogue, not in a Christian assembly. Apollos is said to teach (*didaskein*; Acts 18:25); Aquila and Priscilla are not. What appears to be a synonym is used for them; "they expounded" (*exethento*) to him the way of the Lord more accurately. It does not say, "she expounded"; it says, "they expounded." What happened in an assembly is not being described; "they took [*proslambanein*; cf. Acts 17:5; 18:26; 27:33, 36; 28:2] him." Far too much has been made of this case in

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<sup>3</sup>TDNT 2:157.

THE ROLE OF WOMEN IN THE ASSEMBLY:  
EPISTLES OF PAUL

discussions of women's role in assemblies.

"Teach" in 1 Tim 2:12 has "men" (*andras*) as its object. In Greek when two infinitives occur together as here, the case of the object is governed by the nearer infinitive. This explains why the genitive case is used. That case is correct for *authentēin* but would not be if *didaskein* stood alone.

But *authentēin* which occurs in the NT only in this passage (but of which one student counts that there are eighty-three known occurrences in Greek literature before the tenth century) is more perplexing. It is joined to *didaskein* by the particle *oude* which itself requires study. Acts 16:21 ("accept or practice") is an exact parallel with *oude* separating two infinitives. We are interpreting the phrase to describe two things: "teach men" and "exercise authority over men." That two things are prohibited is heatedly disputed among Greek scholars.

It seems to me that we first ought to safeguard ourselves from the sophistry that some have fallen into from the KJV translation "usurp authority." People reason that if the elders ask a woman to do something, she is not "usurping authority." No modern translation has "usurp" in this passage. Elders are not an autonomous authority. They cannot legitimately authorize a woman to do anything the Bible forbids her to do; nor can they legitimately place upon her any duty the Bible has not placed. They cannot legitimately deny a woman any freedom or privilege the Bible grants her. They are the teachers of God's word, not the legislators for God's kingdom. Vincent in his *Word Studies*<sup>4</sup> more than a century ago pointed out that the KJV is in error in its rendering. Now, none of the known Greek occurrences of this word support an idea of authority illegitimately or improperly exercised. The veracity of this statement is heatedly disputed by competent Greek scholars. The RSV renders the term "to have authority over men." The NIV and the Holman CSB and the NET Bible have "to have authority over a man [*andros*]."

Paul ends this instruction by the contrasting action that she (the woman) is "to be in silence [*all' einai en hēsychia*]," the phrase

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<sup>4</sup>Marvin R. Vincent, *Word Studies in the New Testament*, 4 vols. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1946).

he used at the beginning plus the verb *einai*. While Acts 22:2 and 2 Thess 3:12 have the word *hēsychia* standing alone, and 1 Tim 2:2 and 1 Pet 3:4 use *hēsychios* meaning “quietness,” the verb *hēsychazein* occurs in Luke 14:4(3); 23:56; Acts 11:18; 21:14 and 1 Thess 4:11. The prepositional phrase *en hēsuchia* occurs only in this chapter where it is twice, at the beginning and end of this instruction. The mob in the temple was the more quiet so that Paul could address them (*mallon pareschon hēsychian*; Acts 22:2). Josephus uses the term for the state of saying nothing.<sup>5</sup> The lexicon<sup>6</sup> has two meanings for *hēsuchia*. The one is the state of quietness; the other is the state of saying nothing. Philo<sup>7</sup> has “pay attention silently [*en hēsychia*] according to the command of Moses, ‘Be still [*siōpa*] and hear.’” Ignatius<sup>8</sup> has, “in the stillness of God” (*en hēsychia theou*). Josephus has, “At that moment Raguel held his peace.”<sup>9</sup> There are many other examples of this idiom *en hēsychia* in Greek. Someone expert in Greek needs to examine impartially all the secular occurrences of the phrase *einai en hēsychia*.

Paul then in 1 Tim 2 connects his instruction with the order of creation. Jesus based his teaching on divorce on the marriage at creation (Matt 19:4–6). Paul argued from creation at 1 Cor 11:7–9. Here, the meaning of *gar* (“for”) is disputed, whether it should be understood as “because” or “for example.” It is the same particle that occurs in Gal 3:28: “for you are all one in Christ Jesus.”

Paul states that Adam was first formed (*plassein*; cf. LXX: Gen 2:7–8, 15–16) and then Eve. He says nothing here of Eve’s having come from Adam as he did in 1 Cor 11:8f. Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and became a transgressor. But Paul insists that woman can be saved through bearing children if she continues in faith and love and holiness with modesty. We all grant that we are perplexed by the statement about bearing children. However, one can hardly afford to ignore the teaching of the passage because of this perplexity.

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<sup>5</sup>Josephus, *Ant.* 3:67.

<sup>6</sup>BDAG, 440.

<sup>7</sup>Philo, *Dreams* 2:263.

<sup>8</sup>Ignatius, *Eph.* 19:1.

<sup>9</sup>Josephus, *Ant.* 3:67.

THE ROLE OF WOMEN IN THE ASSEMBLY:  
EPISTLES OF PAUL

Paul later mentions that false teachers have persuaded many women to follow them in their doctrines (1 Tim 5:15; 2 Tim 3:6–7). However, one could hardly argue seriously that only women have been misled by false teachers and make that the reason for Paul’s limitations on women. Paul does not reveal a negative view of Lois and Eunice as teachers of their son and grandson. Nor does he of older women as teachers of younger women. He has no such limitation on men because some other men have been led astray. The Pastoral Letters have allusion to much false teaching by men (1 Tim 1:3; 4:7; 6:3f., 20; 2 Tim 2:16, 23; Titus 1:11, 13; 3:10f.), yet Paul does not charge men either to learn in silence or to be silent. No reason for this teaching for women other than the order of creation is suggested in the text.

### TIMOTHY AND TITUS

Timothy is to give attention to public reading of Scripture, to preaching, and to teaching (1 Tim 4:13). He is instructed about dealing with older men and younger men, with older women and younger women (1 Tim 5:1–2). He is instructed about dealing with widows (1 Tim 5:3ff.). He is charged to preach the word (2 Tim 4:2).

Paul describes himself as a preacher (*kērux*), an apostle (*apostolos*), and a teacher (*didaskalos*) (2 Tim 1:11).

A woman named Claudia sends greetings to Timothy (2 Tim 4:21). We know nothing more about her and her activities.

Titus is to teach older men and older women (Titus 2:1ff.). He is also to teach younger men (Titus 2:6).

But in contrast with both of these two—Titus and Timothy—older women are to be teachers of what is good (*kalodidaskalous*). In particular, they are to train (*sōphronizōsin*) younger women “to love their husbands and children, to be sensible, chaste, domestic, kind, and submissive to their husbands, that the word of God may not be discredited” (Titus 2:3–5).

Titus and Timothy are to teach across the whole human spectrum—old men, young men, old women, young women. But older women are to teach young women. If we were discussing building of the ark, we would say that the specification of gopher wood limited Noah to the use of that wood. If we were

discussing the Lord's Supper, we would reason that "fruit of the vine" eliminates use of water. Older women are authorized to teach women. Where is the passage that designates a woman an evangelist? Where is the passage (apart from what possibly is said about Junias/Julia which we have earlier discussed; Rom 16:7) that designates a woman an apostle? Where is the passage that designates her a teacher of men in assemblies? Where is the passage that calls her a preacher (*kēru*x)? Timothy had known Scripture from childhood (2 Tim 3:14–15) taught by his mother and grandmother (2 Tim 1:5). I know of no one who denies that women can teach children.

## WIDOWS

This presentation would seem quite negative to activities of women if we did not also look at some activities of women outside the assembly. The faith that had first been in Lois and Eunice was in their grandson and son Timothy (2 Tim 1:5).

Women made a major contribution to churches as wives of elders, deacons, and preachers just as did those who traveled with the apostles and Cephas (1 Cor 9:5)

But look at what Paul says about widows as he describes their achievements before they became widows as well as afterward. She [the widow] has set her hope on God and continues in supplications day and night (1 Tim 5:5). Women can and should pray. Admonitions like Rom 12:12 and 1 Thess 5:17 about praying constantly should be considered gender inclusive. The widow "must be well attested for her good deeds, as one who has brought up children, shown hospitality, washed the feet of the saints, relieved the afflicted, and devoted herself to doing good in every way" (1 Tim 5:10).

The last phrase, "doing good in every way," is an open door whose limits are set only by one's own ingenuity and willingness. It has no age, social, or geographical limitations. It requires no elders' permission before it is engaged in. It puts one in the pattern of Jesus who himself "went about doing good" (Acts 10:38). The emphasis should be on "doing good" rather than on "going about."

THE ROLE OF WOMEN IN THE ASSEMBLY:  
EPISTLES OF PAUL

Paul also has teaching about younger widows whom he would have to “marry, bear children, rule their households, and give the enemy no occasion to revile us” (1 Tim 5:14). Domestic duties do not take a back seat in Paul’s instruction. They are not second rate to what is called “a career” in today’s world.

Not to be overlooked is Paul’s teaching to any believing woman who has relatives that are widows. She is to assist them so that the church not be burdened but can assist those real widows who have no such relatives (1 Tim 5:16).

Whether this list covers what Paul’s female fellow workers did, no one can tell us. If they did all these things, they would have been busy women.

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