

The Assembly of the Saints
Lesson 4 – Should women speak in the assembly?
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Introduction: The plan of God does not change with worldly culture.

- A. We serve a God who has a plan to make us like Him. **(Rom 8:29)**
 - 1. Men who do not completely submit to God will rebel at His ways.
 - 2. The question we are considering will be a major test for this generation.
- B. The battleground is found in how we view and interpret the scriptures. We can learn how to do this from Jesus and the apostles. **(Eph 2:20; 1 Cor 14:37)**
 - 1. The way we handle this question will determine how we handle all questions concerning the Bible.
 - 2. To the man who opens his Bible with the desire to find the doctrine that comes from God, I believe it is easy to understand. **(Jn 7:17)**
 - 3. When you approach it from feeding on human wisdom and the desire to please men, then you enter a world of confusion, bitterness and dishonesty. **(Gal 1:10)**

I. What instructions are given concerning the assembly?

- A. We have specific instructions delivered by the apostle Paul. **(1 Cor 14:33-37)**
 - 1. Paul's instruction concerning women comes in the midst of instructions about the overall conduct of the assembly. **(1 Cor 14:40)**
 - 2. Paul makes it very clear that what he is teaching is what is taught everywhere, "in all the churches of the saints" and "in the churches." **(1 Cor 14:33-34)**
 - 3. These are unquestionably "the commandments of the Lord" for all time!
- B. How do we understand and apply this passage?
 - 1. Women are not to address the assembly. The speaking is *defined by the context*. Men also were not to address the assembly and "keep silent" in certain circumstances. **(1 Cor 14:28, 30)**
 - 2. While spiritual gifts are practiced in this assembly, the principles would also apply when the same action is accomplished through a study of God's word.
 - 3. This was for all women and not just married women. These are broad statements: "Let your women keep silent" and "it is shameful for women to speak in church."
 - a. The option of asking husbands at home shows the alternative to asking a question in the assembly.
 - b. The path for the married woman would show ways how the unmarried woman could act. Every group need not have specific instructions.
 - 4. This is dealing with the assembly where the whole church comes together. **(1 Cor 14:23)**
 - a. There are other circumstances where woman can freely speak! **(Acts 18:26; 21:9)**

- b. There are some things a woman could never do because of additional passages. We need to look more deeply at the broader role of women as it relates to submission in both Old and New Testament.

Questions to consider

1. How can we know what the will of God is on the role of women?
2. What keeps people from an honest interpretation of the Bible?
3. Do the instructions Paul gives in 1 Cor 14:33-37 only deal with Corinth and not other churches? If other churches then which ones?
4. What does silence mean in this context? Does this mean one cannot sing?
5. Is this addressing just married women? If so, does that mean single women could address the assembly?
6. Do these restrictions apply outside the assembly?

II. Why is women's role different than men's?

- A. Paul points back to the law and to creation. **(1 Cor 11:2-12)**
1. The trust of Paul's teaching is about subjection.
 2. This covers all men and all women, not just those who are married.
- B. The reasons for this deal with creation and not with culture.
1. The "glory" in creation. **(1 Cor 11:7)**
 2. Woman was created from man. **(1 Cor 11:8)**
 3. Woman was created for man. **(1 Cor 11:9)**
 4. Angels from creation also had to learn subjection. **(1 Cor 11:10)**
- C. Women also were to be in subjection in all her teaching. **(1 Tim 2:8-15)**
1. We could add one more reason for subjection; the first sin was committed by Eve. **(1 Tim 2:14)**
 2. "All submission" denotes a broad application and not just to marriage.
 3. The silence here denotes a spirit and never is an absolute silence. hesuchia - AV - silent 3, quietness 1; 4 - 1) quietness 1a) description of the life of one who stays at home doing his own work, and does not officiously meddle with the affairs of others 2) silence
- D. In the Old Testament we also see women's role different than men's.

Questions to consider

1. Why does Paul's appeal to creation show that this was not just a cultural restriction based on 1st century culture?
2. Give the events of creation and Adam and Eve that subjection is based on.
3. Does 1 Cor 11 only deal with wives or is broader to all women?
4. What additional instructions concerning the role of women do we find in 1 Tim 2?
5. How could a woman have authority over a man?
5. Was the New Testament a complete revelation? What are the implications of this truth?

Additional Notes:

Meaning of Head

The word head (keyhole) refers to "that which is upper-most in relation to something" (Zodhiates 860). When used of persons, it is "the head, chief, one to whom others are subordinate" (Ibid.). "In the case of living beings, to denote superior rank" (Bauer 430). "A figurative extension . . . one who is of supreme or pre-eminent status, in view of authority to order or command - one who is the head of, one who is superior to, one who is supreme over" (Louw & Nida 739). When it says that "man is the head of woman," it is saying that, in terms of authority, man has the higher position. This clearly puts man in the leadership position. For a woman to resent this and attempt to step out of her role is to disrespect God. This is not the result of some male-dominated society and chauvinistic apostle. This is the inspired teaching of God, and it must be respected.

One question that arises is whether or not this is speaking only of the husband and wife relationship. Some women will say that the only man they have to submit to is the husband. However, there is nothing in this context limiting the relationship to only husbands and wives. It says, "man is the head of woman." If "man" here is "husbands only," then does it also mean "husbands only" when it says "Christ is the head of every man"? If "every man" extends beyond husbands, then on what grounds does it become "husbands only" within the very same sentence? The general relationship is that man has authority over the woman. This is exactly what 1 Timothy 2:11-14 teaches. This does not mean that a man has a right to enter another man's home and boss that man's wife around. It does not mean that men generally can "command" women to be at their "beck and call." It simply means that God has placed man in the leadership role, and women are to follow this lead, not attempting to usurp authority over men. --- T. Doy Moyer, What Does 1 Corinthians 11:3 Teach About the Role of Women? – Truth Magazine, Feb 2, 1995

Command or Culture – Discerning the Difference

By Wayne Jackson

In 1967 the United Presbyterian Church in America adopted a new confession of faith. Concerning the nature of the Bible the following statement was made:

“The Scriptures, given under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, are nevertheless the words of men, conditioned by the language, thought forms, and literary fashions of the place and times at which they were written. They reflect the view of life, history, and the cosmos which were then current. The church, therefore, has an obligation to approach the Scriptures with a literary and historical understanding. As God has spoken his word in diverse cultural situations, the church is confident that he will continue to speak through the Scriptures in a changing world and in every form of human culture.”

The foregoing paragraph contains some very subtle implications. It reflects what is known as the “historical critical” approach to biblical interpretation, and is based upon an “existential” attitude toward the scriptures. This interpretative theory was popularized by radical theologians like Rudolph Bultmann. It suggests that the Bible is principally the result of the formative influence of the life-situation of the early church. In other words, the New Testament is merely the record of how the primitive Christians, consistent with their subjective inclinations, adapted the broad principles of the religion of Jesus to their unique life styles. This view contends therefore, that what was true for the first-century church may not be true for today’s church. Christianity is viewed as a rather “plastic” religion; it may alter its forms of expression to fit the mood and tempo of any given culture and historical circumstance.

In 1976 Presbyterian scholar Robert C. Sproul addressed this controversy, describing the existential approach as "a new hermeneutic" ("Controversy at Culture Gap," *Eternity*, May 1976, pp. 13ff). Does that sound familiar? Indeed! It is the identical philosophy that we are now hearing from numerous clerics who identify themselves with "Christendom." And given enough time, all of the latest denominational fads eventually find their way into the kingdom of Christ. A relatively recent writer opined:

“The historical method of hermeneutics approaches the Scripture with the understanding that the text was written in another period and from within a culture different from Western civilization. Instead of asking, ‘What is the meaning of the text for me today?’ the historical method asks, ‘What is the meaning of the text to those who first read it?’ The history and culture behind the text are what determine the real meaning. . .

“The implication of this method of interpretation for the Restoration Movement is that many proof-texts which have been used to support favorite doctrines must now be challenged as to their application for the 20th century church” (Bill Swetmon, “The Historical Method in Hermeneutics,” *Image*, July 1989, p. 23).

To what extent did the culture of the first century affect the formation of New Testament doctrine? Which elements of New Testament teaching are culturally oriented so that, from a practical vantage point, they may be altered today to conform to our own unique situation?

Might one assume, for instance, that the New Testament ritual of immersion in water had its roots in the Jewish ceremonial washings of the first century (baptistries have been found in the Essene ruins at Qumran), so that baptism is not an obligation in the twentieth century? And what of the communion components? May we conclude that the bread and fruit of the vine were simply cultural features associated with the Passover feast, hence, other food items may be substituted today?

One of the primary motives with some professed Christians, in their quest to release the modern church from the oppressive shackles of first-century culture, is the liberation of women to assume a more dominate leadership role in the public life of the church. There is truly a feminist revolution in the making. Some are aiming for women worship-leaders, lady preachers, and yes, even female elders.

Were Paul's instructions regarding the limited sphere of woman's public teaching role culturally oriented? This was the position argued by William Barclay relative to Paul's instructions concerning a woman's teaching role. The apostle declared: "But I permit not a woman to teach, nor to have dominion over a man, but to be in quietness" (1 Timothy 2:12). Of this context Barclay wrote: "This is a passage that cannot be read out of its historical context. All the things in this chapter are mere temporary regulations laid down to meet a given situation" (*Letters to Timothy, Titus & Philemon*, Westminster Press, 1960, pp. 76,78). One writer has asserted: "Paul could not have given women much more freedom than he did without going outside the borders of his culture" (Steve Ink, "Another Look At Hermeneutics," Part 3, *Image*, March 15, 1987, p. 11).

How does the conscientious Bible student distinguish the options of **culture** from the abiding obligations of divine **command**? The following thoughts are submitted for careful consideration.

Focusing the Issue

First, **no one has the right to assume that a divinely given instruction or practice is culturally conditioned unless there are contextual considerations which clearly indicate that such is the case.**

For example, when Christ sent His disciples forth to proclaim the coming kingdom, He forbade them to preach to the Gentiles or Samaritans (Matthew 10:1ff). Was this to be the case always? Clearly not, for after the church was established, both Samaritans and Gentiles were granted the privilege of responding to the gospel (Acts 8; 10). Thus, though the preaching mission of the apostles in the **preparatory phase** of the kingdom was culturally limited, as the Jews were being prepared for an acceptance of other peoples, such is not the case now.

During his second missionary campaign, when Paul came to Lystra, he had Timothy, a young colaborer in the gospel, circumcised (Acts 16:3). Was this practice by divine demand, or was it a culturally conditioned decision? How is one to know? It is clear that the apostle's practice on this occasion was a cultural expediency for the following reasons:

- a. Certain false teachers in the early church attempted to bind circumcision as a matter of religious obligation, but the doctrine was summarily rejected by men acting under the guidance of the Spirit of God (Acts 15:1,28ff).
- b. When Judaizers demanded the circumcision of Titus, Paul refused to yield to their dictates—even for an hour (Galatians 2:3-5).
- c. The New Testament expressly states that circumcision received as a matter of attempting to achieve salvation voids the work of Christ, for in Christ the ritual is valueless (Galatians 5:2,6).

Thus, additional biblical information regarding circumcision puts the matter into clear focus.

Upon what basis, though, could one argue that immersion in water was a cultural phenomenon of antiquity and therefore not binding today? There is absolutely none! First, since baptism is "for the remission of sins" (Acts 2:38), and as the need of forgiveness of sins is both **universal and perpetual**, it is clear that this rite is universal and perpetual, hence, not cultural. Second, since the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ must always be the heart of the "everlasting gospel" (cf. 1 Corinthians 15:1-4; Revelation 14:6), why would not the ceremony that pictures this historical event (cf. Roman 6:3-4,17-18) be an abiding obligation?

Second, **there are biblical passages which indicate that the basic forms of New Testament doctrine were to be age-lasting; hence, they were not cultural.** Consider these examples. In the great commission Christ declared:

“All authority has been given unto me in heaven and on earth. Go, therefore, and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them into the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit: teaching them to observe all things whatever I commanded you and behold, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world” (Matthew 28:18-20).

Within this context the Lord authorized immersion into the name of the sacred Godhead. Note that the obligation to immerse was grounded in His **authority**, not culture. Moreover, the promised blessing—that Jesus would remain with His people unto the end of the world—was coexistent with the responsibility to be immersed. Hence, immersion would be a divine duty until the end of the world. It was not a temporal, culturally oriented option.

Are the original elements of the Lord’s supper—bread and fruit of the vine—mere relics of the Passover celebration (hence, as some contend, more meaningful, modern items might now be substituted), or must the ancient forms be retained? Let Paul answer: “. . . as often as you eat this bread, and drink the cup, ye proclaim the Lord’s death till he come” (1 Corinthians 11:26). It is clear that the apostle intended that the bread and fruit of the vine be retained as symbols of the Savior’s body and blood **until the return of Christ** is accomplished! These were not optional expedients flavored by culture.

Third, the growing contention that the apostolic limitation of woman’s role in the public worship of the church was culturally imposed ignores that fact that **the divine injunctions regarding male/female relationships were anchored in creation principles that relate to fundamental differences between the sexes. And creation foundational truths transcend culture.**

Consider this point. In the Lord’s declaration regarding the sanctity and permanency of the home, He affirmed: “Whosoever shall divorce his wife, except for fornication, and shall marry another, is committing adultery: and he who marries her when she is put away is committing adultery” (Matthew 19:9). Was this ordinance an accommodation to the cultural habits of that day? May we assume that the teaching of Jesus on divorce and remarriage is not binding today so that one may capriciously divorce and remarry without limitation? Surely not. The fact is, Jewish, Greek, and Roman attitudes concerning divorce and remarriage were all exceedingly loose in that era. The Lord’s rather rigid instruction was based upon God’s design for the human family as reflected in the acts of creation at the very beginning of earth’s history (19:4-8). Get the point, please. When a New Testament teaching is based upon the historical facts of creation, it cannot be dismissed as “cultural.”

Similarly, in several New Testament contexts Paul affirms the concept that there is a scale of authority in the divine scheme of things. In 1 Corinthians 11:2-16; 14:33-35; and in 1 Timothy 2:8-15, the apostle sets forth three fundamental truths. First, man is the spiritual head of woman; she is to respect that position (1 Corinthians 11:3,10; 14:34; 1 Timothy 2:11). Second, woman’s subordinate status is to be demonstrated by certain obligations enjoined (1 Corinthians 11:5-13), and by other activities forbidden (14:34-35; 1 Timothy 2:12). Third, the theological bases of these instructions arise from the creation background (1 Corinthians 11:7-12; 14:34; 1 Timothy 2:13), and from the historical introduction of sin into this world (1 Timothy 2:14). A consideration of these facts makes it clear that apostolic instructions regarding woman’s role in the church are not cultural and transitory. They are coexistent with the Christian age.

C. C. Ryrie has noted that Paul’s regulation of woman’s role “was not something which was simply forged on the spur of the moment because of the particular situation in one local church of the first century. It is grounded in facts which are not altered by geography or centuries (*The Role of Women in the Church*, Moody Press, 1958, p. 79). William Hendriksen’s comment is also very appropriate. He states that Paul’s “directives regarding the woman’s role in connection with public worship are based not on temporary or contemporary conditions or circumstances but on two facts that have meaning for all time, namely, the fact of **creation** and the fact of the **entrance of sin**” (“The Pastoral Epistles,” *New Testament Commentary*, Baker, 1957, p. 109).

A further evidence that the New Testament doctrine concerning woman’s role is not cultural is found in the fact that the apostles’ teaching was not merely imposed in isolated areas to accommodate fluctuating local circumstances; rather, it was bound upon churches everywhere. The epistle to the Corinthians was not only to the saints in Corinth, but also was directed to “all that call upon the name of our Lord Jesus in every place” (1:2). What he taught in Corinth, he taught in “every church” (4:17). His ordinances were bound in “all the churches” (7:17). With reference to woman’s submissive position: “As in **all the churches** of the saints, let the women keep silence in the churches” (1 Corinthians 14:33-34), and if any contended against his apostolic injunctions, they were informed that their conduct was out of step with the general practice of the churches of God (11:16). As one scholar notes:

“. . . in both 1 Corinthians, chapter 11, and 1 Timothy, chapter 2, Paul bases his instruction upon the implications of Old Testament Law, specifically, the creation narrative. Furthermore, the Apostle gives no indication whatsoever that the principles he sets down are not binding upon all the churches” (David R. Nicholas, *What’s A Woman To Do. . . In The Church?*, Good Life Productions, 1979, p. 55).

We must remember that when one removes a divinely stated rationale for a practice from the text of the New Testament, and then injects his own assumed rationale as the basis for the instruction, he is no longer practicing exegesis; rather, he is guilty of eisegesis, i.e., he thrusts his own opinion into the Bible. This is precisely what has been done when it is argued that Paul's reasoning for woman's submission is due to culture.

The "New Hermeneutic"—Some Arguments Offered

Those who contend for the Historical/Critical method of New Testament interpretation, with its corresponding "new hermeneutic," offer several arguments which they feel buttress their position that Christianity was not designed to be a static religion with "pattern theology."

First, **it is argued that the early church never possessed the entire New Testament, hence, a New Testament pattern could not have been required as the norm for the entire family of God in that era.** This allegation is seriously flawed for several reasons.

- a. It is an argument based upon ignorance. We simply do not know how much revelatory information the churches of the first century had. A variety of spiritual gifts was available to them, and for all we know, they may have been very well informed. Moreover, those early saints may have possessed many more copies of the scriptures than is assumed by some modern scholars.
- b. We must take into consideration the fact that God may have been more tolerant of "knowledge weaknesses" in that period of progressive revelation than He now would be when we have access to the whole New Testament in its completed format.
- c. It is clear that the early saints did practice "pattern theology" (cf. Acts 2:42; Romans 6:3-4; 17-18; 16:17; 1 Corinthians 1:10). If one may adapt Christianity to his personal and/or cultural preferences, how could he even "depart from the faith"? (cf. 2 Thessalonians 2:1ff; 1 Timothy 4:1ff).

Second, **it is alleged that we must honor the "principles" which inhere in the commands of the New Testament, but that we are allowed to alter activity modes to accommodate our present situation.**

An analogy is commonly drawn between the "greeting kiss" of the first century (cf. Romans 16:16), and that of modern women preachers. It is argued that if we may honor the greeting "principle" today, without holding to Paul's specific application—the "kiss"—similarly, women may still respect the "principle" of feminine submission while publicly teaching audiences of mixed sexes.

Two things may be said in response to this quibble.

- a. The alleged parallel is specious. There is absolutely no evidence that the saints of the early church were ever commanded to kiss one another *per se* as a method of greeting, and I know of no scholar who has ever argued that position. Kissing, as a method of greeting, had been practiced for centuries (see Genesis 27:26; 29:13; 1 Samuel 20:41; 1 Kings 19:20; Matthew 26:49). The thing commanded by the New Testament writers was that the practice be "holy" and in "love" (*agape*—i.e., in the genuine spiritual interest of another). There is not a single passage in which the greeting kiss is mentioned but what the admonition is not qualified by a modifying term (see Romans 16:16; 1 Corinthians 16:20; 2 Corinthians 13:12; 1 Thessalonians 5:26; 1 Peter 5:14). In view of this, one is bound to conclude that the instruction concerning the "holy kiss" is as binding today as it ever was. No Christian will ever be allowed to greet his brother or sister in lust, treachery, or hypocrisy.
- b. Just how would one honor the **principle of obedience** while doing that which has been specifically forbidden, by failing to do that which has been commanded, or by altering sacred instruction? That is truly a curious state of affairs. It is, in fact, nonsensical. May one uphold the "principle" of remembering the death of Christ by utilizing steak and coffee in the communion supper? There is no way to maintain the "principle" of obedience while one is disobeying God!

Conclusion

There is a revolt underway in the Christian community. Many are feverishly working to throw off biblical authority and to write a new "Constitution" for the religion of Jesus Christ. It is the law of "no law." It involves a disposition that is determined to evolve a new religion fashioned after human desire. The faithful must prepare for, and vigorously oppose this growing apostasy.