

Women Pastors and “the Law”

Some writers seem to be at a loss to know what St Paul referred to when he wrote, in 1 Corinthians 14:34, “as **the Law** also says.” However, in the parallel passage (1 Tm 2: 11-14) St Paul filled out the reference to “the Law” in 1 Corinthians 14:34 by listing the two reasons from the Pentateuch (the Law of Moses), for the command that the women should be subordinate and quiet. It should be a double reminder to the church of all ages of how things were in the Creation and the Fall. The man was created first, and the woman was deceived first. This should also be a timely warning that those who question divinely assigned reasons. They should remember what happened when Eve was deceived into questioning God’s reason about the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil.

Many of the arguments of those who support women pastors do not work from certainty, but from doubt. They use expressions like “worth considering”, “it is possible”, “sufficient doubt”, “can’t say for sure”, “could be”, and “it is difficult to say conclusively.” This is blue smoke, and when there is enough blue smoke, lay people are likely to throw up their hands and let the “experts” have the day. It is worth observing that, when Jesus chose His apostles (with the exception of Paul), He did not choose experts or specialists, but, as in the English jury system, twelve ordinary persons. Some of them were fisherman, if you like, practical, non-academic men. When theological experts speak, it remains the duty of all spiritual priests of God to test those who claim to know and expound the meaning of the Holy Spirit. The fact is that Paul could hardly have spoken more plainly than he does in these passages, and if they do not mean much now, why should they ever have meant any thing much in the first place?

Similarly, some advocates of women pastors have simply passed off the question of “headship” in Ephesians 5,] Corinthians] 1, etc., as “a difficult matter” and then said no more about it! Many have argued as if it were simply not there. The reference to “in order” in I Corinthians]4:40 does not refer merely to noisy confusion, which would, indeed, be “disorderly”, but to the fact that for women to speak in a leading role in the church is forbidden. It goes beyond God’s arrangement for proper order, and is therefore shameful. Home is the place for questioning and learning. God’s Law, to which Paul still appeals in the New Testament context, has important things to say about this. This is not a custom, as the veiled head then was. This also should also not be restricted to a “disorderly” situation at Corinth, where, it is alleged, the women went too far, but it was the Lord’s command for all the churches of the saints (1 Cor 14:37).

This proper relationship between man and woman should be evident, not only within marriage, but also in other aspects of daily life. Here the words “headship” and “subordination” are primary. The translations of all these passages would do better to use the word “subordination” than words like “subjection” or “submission.” There is a direct connection between “in order” in 14:40 and this proper subordination. In 1 Timothy 2 the Apostle Paul’s injunction is also, “Let a woman learn in quietness, with total subordination. And I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man; but rather to be in quietness.” It applies to the relationship between man and woman generally.

The subordinate relationship of woman to man should be respected and obvious also in the churches. St Paul instructs us that women may not take leading speaking roles in the churches (1 Cor 14:33-34), such as uttering prophecy, presenting a psalm, a teaching, a revelation, speaking in a tongue, or giving an interpretation (1 Cor 14:17-32) addressing the congregation publicly, or even asking questions, in church. It is shameful for them to speak in these ways. Any violation of this relationship is a failure to do things according to proper order that is present in God’s creation, in the supplementary, complementary, subordinate role for women that God has ordained (Gn 2). In the context of Ephesians chapter five, it is also a failure to recognise the “bride and Bridegroom” relationship between Christ and His church.

It is amazing how people whose minds are made up will grasp at any argument that seems to be partly plausible. For example, some have argued, concerning 1 Corinthians 14:34, that a woman may speak in a leading way in church assemblies provided that she is subordinate. However, Paul’s words there are “not...but.” This contrast in v.34 should not be manipulated to mean “provided that.” For a woman to speak in that way is itself being insubordinate. The connectives “for” and “but” in the verse are important. “Let the women be silent in the churches, for it is not permitted to them to speak. But let them be subordinate...”

God’s will is that only qualified men may serve in the public ministry of the Gospel, and the Scriptures forbid the public teaching of men by women. The Scriptures make a distinction between what may happen in the home and in Christian churches. They forbid individual speaking by women in Christian worship in contexts where one speaks and the rest listen. Such speaking would indicate a lack of proper subordination to the men,

and is shameful. This kind of silence is not a custom, as was the head covering in New Testament times, but a command of the Lord. Therefore, the public ministry of the Gospel is not open to women. All those who permit women to be ministers of the Gospel, and agitate for it, should be warned that St Paul wrote, at the conclusion of this section, *“If anyone does not acknowledge this, he is not acknowledged.”* The last words are a divine passive, and mean, “God does not acknowledge him/her.” Paul’s arguments in this section become stronger towards the end. How awful that God does not acknowledge advocates for women pastors, in opposition to these words of Scripture! Scripture does not have a word to say anywhere in support of this position. The arguments that support it come from history, from sociology, from the spirit of our times, but certainly not from Scripture.