

# THE CONTROVERSIAL TEACHINGS OF PAUL

In his letters to the young churches, Paul provides us with a considerable amount of teaching about the relative positions of men and women in the church, and in the family. Because he assumed his teaching would be contested, the apostle made it plain that his instructions were "**...the commandments of the Lord.**" (1 Co 14:37).

Paul has been the target of much criticism because of his forthright teaching about male leadership. His reputation has been reduced in the eye of some feminists to that of a bigoted old bachelor and a 'woman-hater.' But since this apostle provides us with by far the most teaching on this subject, it is important to analyse his most controversial statements. This is particularly important since he claimed that his conclusions were given to him by divine inspiration.

## (1) 1 Corinthians 11:3-16 *"The Head of Woman is Man"*

The Key Bible Reading begins by presenting a clear-cut chain of authority - "**..the head of Christ is God...the head of every man is Christ...the head of woman is man...**"

In explaining this, Paul compares the 'head-coverings' which he considered were appropriate for men and women attending a public worship meeting. It was a custom at that time for women to wear a covering on their head, to honor the authority of their husband. Some women had discontinued this custom on the grounds that they now had equality with their husbands. Paul disagreed with this practice, saying that, "**the woman ought to have a symbol of authority on her head, because of the angels.**"

The covering itself was not the important issue - rather it was the woman's attitude which had caused her to remove it. A covering on the head spoke of submission to authority, and removing that covering reflected an attitude of rejecting the husband's authority. The words "*a symbol of*" have been added by translators, and we have a better sense of the meaning if we revert to the original text - "**the woman ought to have authority [the authority of her husband] on her head [as a protective covering] because of the angels.**"

When a woman wore a covering on her head, it was to acknowledge that she had the covering of the authority of her husband. The covering was a sign of her willingness to submit to her husband's headship. The essence of Paul's teaching is that, by their general demeanor, women should display a respectful and submissive attitude towards their husbands.

This doctrine is repeated by the apostle Peter. "**Wives, likewise, be submissive to your own husbands...Do not let your adornment be merely outward...--rather let it be the hidden person of the heart, with the incorruptible beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is very precious in the sight of God. For in this manner, in former times, the holy women who trusted in God also adorned themselves, being submissive to their own husbands, as Sarah obeyed Abraham, calling him lord..**" (1 Pet 3:1,3,-6).

### *Submission to Authority Provides a Covering*

Paul advises that women should publicly show their submission, "**...because of the angels.**" On the one hand, God's angels have been assigned to protect us and carry out God's designated purposes for us. But on the other hand, Satan's angels are always poised to take advantage of any disobedience that removes our spiritual covering.

When a woman rebels against her husband's headship, she removes the covering provided by his position over her in the chain of spiritual authority. On the one hand this removes a woman from the protective care of God's angels, and secondly, it opens the door for attacks upon her by Satan's fallen angels.

### ***Man's Acceptance of the Responsibilities of Headship***

Whilst women were instructed to cover their heads (in order to convey their submission to their husband's authority), Paul said that a man "**...ought not to cover his head, since he is the image and glory of God;**" and that "**Every man praying or prophesying, having his head covered, dishonors his head.**"

Paul gave two reasons for his instruction.

(1) "**since he is the image and glory of God;**" When Paul said that man should not cover his head because he "is the image and glory of God," he was referring to men as males, not mankind in general. Man as a male is in God's image because he was placed in a position of authority before Eve was formed. Whereas women were to uncover their heads to show their submission, men were to uncover their heads to acknowledge their authority.

(2) "**Every man praying or prophesying, having his head covered, dishonors his head.**" Paul argues that if men covered their heads, they would dishonor their head (ie Christ, who is above men in the chain of authority), because they would then be seen to have rejected the position of authority entrusted to them. Using the same symbolism, a man who leaves his head uncovered signifies to all that he accepts the responsibilities of headship in the biblical chain of authority.

### **(2) Ephesians 5:22-33 *"The Husband is Head of the Wife"***

This passage reads in part, "**Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband is head of the wife, as also Christ is head of the church; and He is the Savior of the body. Therefore, just as the church is subject to Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in everything. Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her...So husbands ought to love their own wives as their own bodies; he who loves his wife loves himself. For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as the Lord does the church...For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh'...let each one of you in particular so love his own wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband.**"

God has ordained that the husband is Christ's delegated authority in the family. The husband is a type of Christ (the 'bridegroom'), and the wife is a type of the church (the 'bride'). Just as Christ loves and nurtures the church, so the husband should love and care for his wife. And just as the church should be subject to Christ her head, so the wife is called to be subject to her own husband.

It is also important to note that when this chain of authority is fully extended, children are required to be obedient to their parents. "**Wives, submit to your own husbands, as is fitting in the Lord...Children, obey your parents in all things, for this is well pleasing to the Lord.**" (Col 3:18,20).

Two things are necessary for this chain of authority to operate in the family. The first is that there must be obedience by all members of the chain to the authority placed above them. The second is that the husband, as Christ's delegated authority, must exercise his

authority as head of the family; believing that Christ, as his head, will guide and uphold him.

This also applies to parents, both husband and wife, who must be prepared to exercise a responsible headship over their children. When the role of headship is accepted and exercised under the Lord's direction, He is able to uphold those in the position of authority by instilling obedience throughout the chain.

We can take comfort in the fact that, aligned with the promise of the restoration of the prophetic ministry at the close of the age, there is also a promise of the restoration of parental authority - particularly the role of the father as head of the family. **"Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the LORD. And he [representing the prophetic teaching ministry] will turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers, lest I come and strike the earth with a curse."** (Mal 4:5-6).

### (3) Galatians 3:26-29 *"There is neither Male nor Female"*

**"For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. 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; for you are all one in Christ Jesus."**

Some use this passage to assert that men and women are equal, and should therefore have equivalent roles of headship. However this passage refers to mankind's vertical relationship with God, and not the horizontal relationship between men and women. In relation to God, both men and women are entirely equal. They have exactly the same potential for spiritual maturity, and identical rights to draw near to God's throne. We are **"..all sons of God.."** in that sense - both men and women are **"..prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.."** in order to become **"the bride, the Lamb's wife."** (Rev 21:2,9).

Man's headship over woman is not a matter of him being superior and she being inferior. In fact, according to the Lord, to be placed in a position of headship is to be assigned the task of a servant.

In Christ's realm, headship means to be held responsible, and therefore accountable, for those who are under your charge. Husbands must love their wives **"..just as [or in the same manner as] Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her."** (Eph 5:25). Of His own ministry, Jesus said that **"..the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve.."** (Mat 20:28).

### (4) 1 Tim 2:11-15 *"Let a Woman Learn in Silence"*

**"Let a woman learn in silence with all submission. And I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man, but to be in silence. For Adam was formed first, then Eve. And Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived, fell into transgression. Nevertheless she will be saved in childbearing if they continue in faith, love, and holiness, with self-control."**

Because this passage has caused so much distress to both men and women, we will break it down into its component phrases, and carefully examine each one.

· **"Let a woman learn in silence with all submission."** The context in which this is written is shown by the preceding verses, where Paul appeals to women to dress modestly and show moderation in all things, as befitting those who should display godly conduct and good works (1 Tim 2:9-10). The Greek word translated "**silence**" in this case is *'hesuchia,'* which means *'stillness,'* or *'quietness.'* It is a word used to indicate *'tranquillity arising from within,'* and is in contrast to a similar Greek word *'eremos,'* which is used to express a quietness imposed from without (1 Tim 2:2). Paul's command is therefore not a command that women should be absolutely silent, but rather, in harmony with the context, that they should have a quiet disposition in public meetings. Women are to learn with an attitude of quietness and submission, honoring their husbands as well as the operating ministry of teaching.

· **"I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man"** The Greek word for authority used here is *'authenteo,'* which means *'to seize and hold in possession by force or without right.'* It is to usurp another's authority - as the Authorised Version renders this verse, **"..I suffer not a woman...to usurp authority over the man.."** This is therefore not an absolute decree that women should not teach. Paul himself instructed older women to teach younger women, and commended Lois and Eunice for teaching a young Timothy. Priscilla is mentioned with Aquila in teaching Apollos. In the history of the church, women like Jeanne Guyon and Jessie Penn Lewis have taught under authority, and have had a profound influence on later teaching ministries. Paul was saying that women must not engage in an illegal teaching ministry; which is ministry without male oversight, and so without legitimate authority.

· **"For Adam was formed first, then Eve."** Here Paul refers back to Genesis and the divine order of creation, to remind his readers that it was God who placed man in authority over woman.

· **"Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived, fell into transgression."** The Greek word *'apatao'* which is translated here as *'deceived,'* is rendered **"beguiled"** in the Authorised Version. Because Eve was acting from a position of false authority without Adam's protective covering, she was easily deceived by Satan, and fell into sin.

· **"Nevertheless she will be saved in child-bearing"** The role of mother and home-maker--ie being responsible for the care and nurture of godly children--has divine approval, for it exercises the essence of womanhood. If a woman accepts this primary role in her heart, she will be saved from grasping at false authority, and consequently from falling into sin because of Satan's deceptions.

#### (5) 1 Corinthians 14:34-37 *"Let Your Women Keep Silent in the Churches"*

**"Let your women keep silent in the churches, for they are not permitted to speak; but they are to be submissive, as the law also says. And if they want to learn something, let them ask their own husbands at home; for it is shameful for women to speak in church. Or did the word of God come originally from you? Or was it you only that it reached? If anyone thinks himself to be a prophet or spiritual, let him acknowledge that the things which I write to you are the commandments of the Lord."**

Paul begins by telling women to be silent in public assemblies. To take this literally as

meaning not to utter a sound, would contradict his earlier teaching that women in public assemblies are to pray and prophesy with their heads covered. (1 Cor 11:5). The spiritually discerning will therefore consider the apostle's instruction in the context in which it is found.

The central theme of the fourteenth chapter of this letter to the Corinthians is the maintenance of order in public worship meetings. The same word for silence is used by Paul to warn prophets and those speaking in tongues about speaking out of order. **"If anyone speaks in a tongue...[and] there is no interpreter, let him keep silent in church...Let two or three prophets speak...But if anything is revealed to another who sits by, let the first [prophet] keep silent."** (vv 27, 28, 29, 30)

In order to be consistent, we should associate Paul's command to women with the general theme of orderly conduct in church. Men and women were generally segregated, and apparently some women were disrupting meetings by speaking aloud in tongues, asking questions, or talking in general.

In suggesting a precedent **"..as the law also says.."** to support his statement Paul again reverts back to Genesis and the divine order of creation. Expecting a hostile response from some quarters, Paul challenges the more spiritual members in the assembly to acknowledge that his command was from the Lord.

## THE MINISTRY AND POSITION OF WOMEN IN THE CHURCH

At first it may appear that women should have little or no part in the work of the church. But such a conclusion would be based on a misunderstanding of the essence of Paul's commands - that women are to maintain an attitude of submission and minister under authority.

To **"be in silence"** is to have a quiet disposition. To **"keep silent,"** is to not speak in a manner which dishonors her husband. This is in keeping with Paul's previous instruction that, **"..every woman who prays or prophesies [in church] with her head uncovered dishonors her head [who is her husband].."** (1 Cor 11:5).

Paul's warning that women should not to teach or have authority over a man, may be translated, "to teach over a man or take authority over a man." A woman must not usurp a man's authority, or engage in an illegal teaching ministry. She is permitted to teach only if she herself, and her teaching, are under the authoritative oversight of an appropriate male.

The Book of Acts provides us with the example of Priscilla combining with her husband Aquila to teach Appolos. **"So [Appolos] began to speak boldly in the synagogue. When Aquila and Priscilla heard him, they took him aside and explained to him the way of God more accurately."** (Acts 18:26).

Elsewhere in Paul's letters to the young churches, we see that women had a prominent role in the work of the church. For example Paul acknowledges the ministry of deaconess that was performed by Phoebe. **"I commend to you Phoebe our sister, who is a servant [translated elsewhere as 'deacon'] of the church in Cenchrea, that you may receive her in the Lord in a manner worthy of the saints, and assist her in whatever she has need of you; for indeed she has been a helper of many and of myself also."** (Rom 16:1-2).

Paul also mentions, **"..Mary, who labored much for us.."** and **"..Tryphena and Tryphosa, who have labored in the Lord."** (Rom 16:6,12). In addition Paul implores the Philippian church to **"..help these women [Euodia and Syntyche] who labored with me in the gospel.."** (Phil 4:3).

As we have already noted, it was acceptable in the New Testament church for women

to pray or prophesy in church, provided that they did so under the covering of submission of an appropriate male. Confirmation of this principle is found in the household of Philip the evangelist, who **"had four virgin daughters who prophesied."** (Acts 21:9).

After studying the scriptural record of the early church, we may reasonably conclude that all ministries are open to women, save that of headship. There is no scriptural warranty for a woman to fill the office of elder, or for a woman to have oversight over a church.

The current movement, which demands the right of women to assume positions of authority which are biblically designated for men, has behind it the spirit of witchcraft. Spiritual witchcraft, or the compulsion to assume illegitimate authority or power, has at its roots rebellion; **"For rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft.."** (1 Sam 15:23).