Introduction

In lecture-segment 4, we looked at some biblical texts describing positive images of women in various kinds of leadership roles. However, in much of church history, women have been restricted from such roles. On what basis has this happened? Over the centuries theologians have based this restriction on some very plain texts in the apostle Paul's letters. Two of those texts will be the focus of this lecture segment. At the end of the segment I will give bibliographic information for all of the various biblical scholars cited in this segment.

Before you go further in this segment, return to Segment 1, “The Hermeneutical Challenge,” and to your first blog post there. You were asked to make notes to yourself about your beliefs about women and church leadership, laying out your understanding of the issues. This was your starting point. Review it before “contaminating” it with information from this lecture segment.

I. 1 Timothy 2:8-15, with a focus on 1 Timothy 2:12

As you probably knew before beginning this course but now have read many times, 1 Timothy 2:12 is likely the key passage in the Bible for curbing women’s roles in the church: “I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man, but to be in silence.”

What are the issues we have to deal with in this passage of Scripture? What is Paul prohibiting? All teaching? A certain kind of teaching? And is “the exercise of authority” a modifier of “teaching,” or does it stand alone as a separate forbidden role? Depending on your interests, please pursue any of the arguments cited in this segment by consulting books or articles by the authors listed in the bibliography at the end of this segment.
A. What is the context of 1 Timothy 2:12?

Beginning in 1 Timothy 2:4, God desires that all people “be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth.” But in 2 Timothy 3:6-7, there are weak women in the church who are ever learning but never coming to that knowledge of the truth. How can all people come to truth?

- First, in 1 Timothy 2:1-7, Christians are to pray for all people to the end that they may lead “a quiet and silent life in all ways godly and respectable.”
- Then, in 1 Timothy 2:8, Paul calls on men in the house churches to pray without anger or the disputing that characterized the controversies in 1 Timothy 1:4 and 6:4-5, controversies sparked by the false teachers.
- In 1 Timothy 2:10, women are to follow a lifestyle professing godliness—to dress modestly, to be temperate in spirit, etc.
- Finally, in 1 Timothy 2:11, women are to learn (manthano) in the posture of a genuine disciple. Learn in quietness (hesuchia), not in silence (sigato).

Women must become part of the entire educational process in quietness. They are to be calm and to have restraint and respect and affirm their teachers rather than engaging in an autocratic authority which destroys its subjects. The purpose of the letter is to remedy the teaching of heresy going on in the Ephesian church.

- The only grammatically imperative verb in this chapter is found in 1 Timothy 2:10: women must learn (in “quietness and all submission”). In a culture in which some rabbis taught that it was “better to burn the Torah than to teach it to women,” Paul is clear that women are to learn so that they can “come to a knowledge of the truth” (1 Timothy 2:4).
- Their submission is to the learning process, not to some individual.

B. “I do not permit a woman to teach…”

This is the basis on which traditionalists prohibit women from “preaching . . . and the teaching of Bible and doctrine in the church, in colleges, and in seminaries.”
• The first question we must ask is whether epitrepo ("I do not permit") is a blanket universal prohibition or a prohibition for a particular moment in time. Every occurrence of this Greek word in the Greek New Testament refers to a specific situation, not to a universal application. A more faithful translation would be "I am not presently permitting" in this specific case. Some exegetical indicators for this include:
  - The overall purpose of 1 Timothy is to silence false teachers.
  - As noted previously, the only grammatical imperative in the passage is that women must learn. "I do not permit" is not in the imperative.
• Paul in other letters spoke of women teaching. If 1 Timothy 2:12 were a blanket exclusion, Paul would not likely have commended Priscilla for teaching Apollos (Acts 18:26). If this were a blanket prohibition, he probably would have censured her for teaching Apollos and would not have permitted her to serve as his co-worker.
• "To teach" is an action, not an office. It is a function not bound to an office. This is the basic inclusive word for imparting knowledge or skills. It can be the vehicle for heresy as well as for truth.
• In the Ephesian church, women as well as men were teaching heresy. This so threatened the church that Paul not only restricted women in Ephesus from teaching, but also limited leadership by men to those who are married and are the fathers of children who are both submissive and reverent (1 Timothy 3:2-7). No single men need apply! Such men must also be able to teach.

C. “... or to have authority over a man.”

Can a tiny two-letter conjunction like “or” have any significance? In 1 Timothy 2:12, this conjunction joins the two infinitives didaskein ("to teach") and authentein ("to exercise authority"). On the surface, in English it looks as if we have two separate ideas in this verse: the idea of teaching and the idea of exercising authority. But the conjunction oude (translated “or”) does not function that way in Paul’s letters. He typically used oude to join two ideas or to make the first idea more specific, joining either equivalent ideas or contrasting ideas to convey a single idea. Payne illustrates this use with the following example: We often use the expression “Don’t eat and run,” which
means, “don’t leave right after eating.” It doesn’t mean “don’t eat” and “don’t run” as two unrelated activities. The conjunction and in this case creates a single idea out of two different actions. Similarly, in 1 Timothy 2:12, not every form of teaching is prohibited to women, but a specific way or kind of teaching.

That brings us to the next word in the Greek text, authentein, translated “exercise authority over.”

- In 1 Timothy 2:12, the Greek word translated “to exercise authority” is authentein. We call that word a hapax legomenon because it appears only here in the Bible, so we can’t look elsewhere in Scripture to help us determine its meaning.
- The apostle Paul normally used exousiadzo to denote the exercise of authority (that is, the orderly responsible exercise of authority). So we have to ask, why, when he always used exousiadzo everywhere else, did he use authentein here if he meant the exercise of authority?
- Paul could also have used kurieuo or katakurieuo meaning “to lord it over.” Or he could have used proistami, meaning “to rule or manage.” Because Paul had other words at his disposal, he need not have chosen a coarse word like authentein.
- How was this word used in first-century Greek writing? The infinitive authentein, when joined by oude to didaskein, can have five different meanings:
  - to teach autonomously (to thrust oneself) independent of authorized doctrine;
  - to teach in a contentious manner;
  - to teach in a domineering, despotic, or high-handed manner;
  - to teach in such a way that virtues are destroyed (teaching licentious doctrines and practices);
  - to teach in such a way that murders [the truth].
- Before and during Paul’s era, we have no undisputed case of authentein meaning “to exercise authority over.” That meaning came later in patristic writings. Payne argues that the first three meanings above have the best lexical and contextual evidence.
- If oude authentein limits the kind of teaching forbidden by Paul to that which is done contentiously or in a domineering fashion, it probably would also apply to teaching by men as well.
D. 1 Timothy 2:13-14: “For Adam was formed first, then Eve. And Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived, fell into transgression.”

Some argue from 1 Timothy 2:13-14 that only men can exercise leadership because Paul says that Adam was created first, then Eve, and that she, not Adam, was deceived.

- Note that the verb in verse 13 is not the one for create; it is the Greek word plasso, meaning “formed” as in educational formation. Before Eve was created, Adam was directly instructed by God about the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. He would not have been deceived by the serpent because he had a prior and direct formation which Eve lacked. Thus she was open to deception, like the Ephesian women in 1 Timothy 2:11 who needed instruction because they were not “formed” or taught.

- The Kroegers have noted that both the Gnostic and proto-Gnostic teachings on origins stated that Eve preceded Adam, gave him life, and wisely ate the fruit that imparted knowledge. In light of Paul’s reference to “falsely called knowledge/gnosis” in 1 Timothy 6:20 and other parallels between Gnostic teaching and the false teaching described in 1 and 2 Timothy (especially the references to “myths and endless genealogies” in 1:4), perhaps Paul here in 2:13-14 is refuting false teaching about the relationship of Adam and Eve.

- Eve’s deception in verse 14 explains Paul’s restriction on women’s teaching in verse 12. The theme of the entire letter to Timothy is false teaching, and 2 Timothy 3:6-13 makes clear that women in the Ephesian church were “deceiving and being deceived,” reminiscent of Eve in Eden. Her deception points to the need for women to learn in quietness and all submission. They cannot teach because they have not yet learned the truth.

- While Paul states that Eve’s deception caused her to fall into transgression, elsewhere Paul is clear that Adam was culpable for the fall (Romans 5:12-19; 1 Corinthians 15:21-22). He had been taught directly by God and “sinned with his eyes open,” in contrast to Eve’s deception.

The chapter ends with an enigmatic statement that has puzzled biblical scholars through the ages: “Nevertheless she will be...”
saved in childbearing if they continue in faith, love, and holiness, with self-control.” What does safety in childbirth or childbirth as a means of a woman’s salvation have to do with deception and the fall? And how does this verse relate to a woman learning in quietness or not teaching with a domineering spirit?

Grammatically, the “she” in verse 15 is the woman, Eve, in verses 13-14. Her deception, detailed in Genesis 3:13, is followed by God’s curse on the serpent: the seed of the woman will eventually crush the head of the serpent. We know this passage as the protoevangelium, the first prediction in the Bible of the final overthrow of Satan and the effects of the fall.

The translation, “she will be saved in childbirth” is erroneous. Paul wrote that “She will be saved through the childbirth,” that is, through Mary in the birth of Jesus Christ. This is spiritual salvation, not safety in childbirth. This salvation will overcome the fall.

Some teach that women are saved spiritually through bearing children. But this would exclude all women who are single or are married but barren. And this would mean that all women have to rear children in order to be saved, but men do not have this requirement for salvation—a strange requirement not borne out elsewhere in the New Testament. No, it is through Christ the Savior that women experience salvation “if they continue in faith, love, and holiness” (2:15b).

II. 1 Corinthians 14:34-35

In the New King James Version, these two verses read thus: “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 husbands at home; for it is shameful for women to speak in church.”

This passage is so harsh, very few expositors take its statement at face value. For that reason, evangelical biblical scholars have proposed at least five different ideas about interpreting these verses:

- Some believe these two verses do not belong here in the text.
- Some believe that Paul is inconsistent and contradicts himself.
- Some believe Paul is not dealing with all speaking, but a particular kind of speaking in the church.
- Some believe these verses cite a false prophecy by a self-proclaimed Corinthian prophet.
Some scholars believe that these verses do not belong here in this text.

Gordon Fee notes that verses 34-35 appear in this place in the chapter only in the Eastern manuscripts. In all Western manuscripts, the two verses appear after verse 40. That was how the passage was read in the Latin church for 300 years. It was Jerome’s Vulgate translation that moved the verses after verse 33.

Fee argues that the chapter flows more freely without verses 34-35 because the verses don’t fit the overall context. They also inject linguistic uses different from those in the rest of the chapter, for example:

- “Silence” in verses 28 and 30 curtails but doesn’t eliminate an otherwise legitimate activity, but here the silence is absolute.
- “To speak” here is different from its 21 uses in the rest of the chapter.
- The verses also contradict 1 Corinthians 11:4-6 in which women without apostolic reproof can pray and prophesy in the assembly.
- Also, Paul’s use of “all” in 14:23-24, 31 and “each one” in verse 26 includes women in speaking activities.

On the basis of these contradictions, Fee believes verses 34-35 to be a scribal gloss added first as a sidebar, then later entered into the actual text of the letter as a post-Pauline interpretation.

Keener acknowledges that this interpretation is held by both Fee and F. F. Bruce (both expert evangelical text critics), but he states that this method is not easy to defend. The main evidence for it is contextual rather than textual: the fact that the two
verses do not fit the flow of thought at this point in the chapter. Payne, however, writes: “Many who study the New Testament are unaware that the oldest surviving New Testament manuscripts differ, sometimes significantly, and various passages do not appear in the most reliable texts at all, which has led virtually all biblical scholars to conclude that some passages are interpolations,” citing R. A. Torrey in defense of this. Payne marshals impressive evidence for this method of reading 1 Corinthians 14:34-35. Before dismissing this as impossible, you may want to read pages 225-264 in Man and Woman, One in Christ where he lays out technical and textual reasons for accepting this explanation of the text.

B. Some believe that the apostle Paul is inconsistent and contradicts himself.

Hurley does not identify any evangelical writer holding this position, and I’ve not found one among contemporary writers. It is possibly an idea held by earlier writers but rejected by most today.

C. Some believe that Paul here silences women completely.

The early church father Origen was aware of the tension between “all may prophesy” (14:31) and this prohibition, but he concluded, “Even if she speaks marvelous and holy things, ‘it is shameful for a woman to speak in church’ simply because it comes from the mouth of a woman. For a woman to speak forth in church brings her under shame and the condemnation of the whole church.” [Look for this in contemporary writings.]

D. Some believe that Paul is not dealing with all speaking, but a particular kind of speaking by women in the church.

This is perhaps the most frequently used method of interpreting these verses in 1 Corinthians 14. Kroeger and others see verses 34-35 as a ban limited to disruptive speech in public worship. This has been the view of most Protestant interpreters before the 20th century. Because Paul wrote this directive to the church in Corinth and not to other churches, Keener assumes that the problem was specific to Corinth and perhaps a few other cities like it. If that is the case (that the problem is local in a specific cultural context), then it does not apply to every conceivable situation we face today.

Hurley and Piper and Grudem limit verses 34-35 to being a prohibition against women discerning or judging prophesies made
by men in the assembly. They see the central issue to be the behavior of women who “dishonor the role of the men as the leaders of the congregation.” Their focus is on the word shameful in which women’s judging of men’s prophecies compromises the calling of the men to be primary leaders in the church. Applying the verses to women judging prophecies does ignore the fact that verse 35 doesn’t mention prophecies but rather links the prohibition to women asking questions out of a desire to learn. “Learning” implies “sitting under” rather than “standing over” and doesn’t express “judging” what men have said in worship.

Some commentators hold that silence is required only of women who are false teachers, uneducated women, or women who are not prophesying or otherwise contributing to worship.

E. Some believe that these verses cite a false prophecy by a self-proclaimed Corinthian prophet.

Numerous scholars have argued that these verses express the view of a group in Corinth who opposed Paul. Bilezikian believes that in verses 34–35 Paul is quoting legalists in the church (the Cephas party of 1 Corinthians 1:12), and in verses 36–38 as Paul’s refutation of the legalists.

Throughout this first letter to the Corinthians, the apostle quotes from some Corinthian teachers and then refutes their statement. Here the statement silencing women is not Paul’s, but is from his opponents.

A problem with this method of interpreting 1 Corinthians 14:34–35 is that none of the other Corinthian quotations are this long, and the verses are not introduced as a false prophecy. Nevertheless, this is a legitimate possibility.

Conclusion

The subject of women and church leadership can feel like a “third rail”—too dangerous to touch. As we work with even the two passages explored in this lecture segment, we may be tempted to throw our hands up in the air and walk away from the issue. However, we cannot do that. At the end of our last segment (on positive images of women in church leadership in the early church), we noted that if the Bible forbids women to be in
positions of leadership in the church and we allow it, it is a sin if a woman leads. On the other hand, if Scripture allows women to be in positions of leadership in the church and we forbid it, God’s kingdom is deprived of the spiritual gifts God gave to women for its benefit. For that reason, we press on, attempting to sort through the issues one by one.

Blog time: In the light of material in this lecture-segment, are there changes you would make in the effort you made at the beginning of the course to lay out your beliefs about women and church leadership? Take time now to review your position and comment on it, adding or subtracting anything you think needs to be changed.

Here is a beginning bibliography of exegetical and theological studies that include the two passages covered in this lecture segment (1 Timothy 2:4-15 and 1 Corinthians 14:34-35). These suggested readings are also useful for the previous lecture-segments without bibliographic suggestions. Books are listed, not in order of “importance,” but alphabetically by authors’ last names: