

THE FEMINIST MOVEMENT ENDANGERS GOD'S INTENDED ROLE FOR WOMEN

Donald Townsley

The people of God have had to fight the impact of different philosophies of men from apostolic days (Col. 2:8), and so it is today. The strong efforts of those who advocate the philosophies of the "women's liberation movement" have been felt in all segments of our society. The Media and our educational systems have been literally saturated with their philosophy; our children have been indoctrinated with it over the past two decades. Slowly, but surely, some of the ideas of this philosophy have become rooted in the minds of many women (and men) in the church today. There are now signs that those who hold to this philosophy would set aside God's **plain** and **fixed pattern** for women in the church.

Over a decade ago the philosophy of the "women's liberation movement" began to erode the barriers that were in most denominations against women becoming preachers. In the late 1970's the United Methodist church had over five hundred "women preachers". Denominational seminaries began to see an increase in the enrollment of women -- women training to be preachers. It has become a common thing to see Presbyterians, Lutherans and Baptists ordaining women as priests and preachers. All of this is in violation of New Testament teaching (I Tim. 2: 8 - 15; I Cor. 14: 34 - 35).

Institutional churches of Christ, being deeply involved in the "social gospel", had to face the impact of the "women's liberation movement" in the 1970's. There were men among them advocating that it was **not improper** for **women** to lead prayer in the presence of men. In small gatherings of both adults and young people, **females** were allowed to lead prayers; in some instances, the females participated (along with the males) in what they called "chain prayers". Those men among them who spoke out **against** this **innovation** were branded as being men who wanted to hold to the "**traditional postures**". So, the liberals allowed women to lead prayer in violation of Paul's plain statement, "*I will therefore that men pray everywhere, lifting up holy hands, without wrath and doubting.*" (I Tim. 2:8, *emphasis mine, dt*). Paul designates **men** ("aner", males) to do the praying "everywhere" or "in every place" (ASV). So we learn that whenever believers gather together (whether the whole church or a smaller group of Christians) to have a Bible study; or when a prayer of thanksgiving is offered before a meal, the **males** are to lead, both in the Bible study and in the prayers. This is not "**traditional posture**"; this is **BIBLE AUTHORITY**.

We are hearing a clamoring today for women to be included in the general business meetings of local churches. This, I believe, is a result of the influence of the "women's liberation movement". The church of the Lord is **not** a democracy, nor are its business affairs to be determined upon a democratic basis. The church is a **kingdom** (Col. 1:13); ruled by the King, Jesus Christ, and His order for ruling His people is "*elders in every church*" (Acts 14:23). God's people are to be ruled according to His Word by elders who have wisdom to carry out His Word, **not** by a democratic vote of men and women in a business meeting. Where there are no elders the business affairs of the Kingdom are not to be decided by a democratic vote, but by the **males** of the congregation coming to a mutual agreement just as elders would do.

God has made no provision in the New Testament for women to have authority over the church, nor for them to have leadership over men in His Kingdom. The limitations God has placed on the role of women in the church **must be respected** just as we respect any other requirement God has revealed in His Word. We must learn that the legal status of women and the aims of the feminist movement **do not dictate** the place of women in the church of the Lord.

Paul sets forth the role of women in relation to man in I Timothy 2: 8 - 15. This is woman's role whether **in** the assembly or **out** of the assembly. Let us take a look at this context. Paul, after emphasizing the importance of prayer in verses one through seven, then shows the relation of women to men in **prayer** and in **teaching**. In verse eight he teaches that is the **man** ("*aner*", male) who is to lead the prayers "*in every place*" (ASV), **not** the woman. The woman is not to lead a prayer when men are present; in doing so, she would be in a position of authority **over** the man. She is not to be in a position of authority **over** men or **with** men (I Tim. 2: 11 - 12; I Cor. 14:34; Gen. 3: 16). In verses nine and ten Paul points out that a woman expresses her devotion to God through her modesty and good works. In verses eleven and twelve he states the will of God with regard to a woman's place in relation to man's role as a teacher and spiritual leader, when he says: "*Let a woman learn in quietness with all subjection. But I permit not a woman to teach, nor to have dominion over a man, but to be in quietness.*" (ASV). The woman is to "*learn in quietness with all subjection*", and she is not to "*have dominion over a man*". To be "*in quietness*" refers to her whole demeanor of life. The word "quietness" does not forbid her asking a question or making some appropriate comment in a Bible class; it does not prohibit her singing in the assembly (Col. 3:16), confessing Christ (Acts 8:37), or

confessing her sins (I John 1:9; James 5:16); nor does it keep her from fulfilling any spiritual responsibility that is enjoined upon her by the word of God. It **does**, however, **require** her to carry out **all** these functions while **showing her proper subjection to man** as God requires (I Tim. 2: 11 - 12). In this context a woman is prohibited from doing two things: (1) **teaching over man**, and (2) **usurping "authority over the man"** (KJV); **having "dominion over a man"** (ASV).

The preacher must "*speak . . . with all authority*" ("*epitage*", Titus 2:15); women are commanded to be **under** the authority of men ("*hupotage*", I Tim. 2:11), therefore a woman cannot preach nor conduct a class where men are present because she would be teaching **over** men. She is not to be in any governing position **over** men or **with** men. She cannot be an elder; she can never meet the qualifications (I Tim. 3:1 - 7; Titus 1: 5 - 11), therefore she cannot be in a business meeting of the local church helping to make decisions because she can never do that which she can never qualify to be (an elder). In helping to make decisions in a business meeting she would be having authority **over** men and **sharing authority with** men.

DIVINE REASONS WHY WOMEN CANNOT HAVE AUTHORITATIVE POSITIONS OVER MEN:

- The priority of man in creation (I Tim. 2:13; I Cor. 11:3; 11: 8 - 9).
- Woman is for man (I Cor. 11:9). Man has leadership over woman because she was made for the sake of man (Gen. 2: 18).
- Woman was deceived in the transgression (I Tim. 2:14), and this is given as a reason for her subordination to man.
- Man's headship over woman is taught throughout the word of God (Gen. 3:16; I Peter 3:1; Eph. 5: 22 - 23; I Cor. 11: 3).
- God has placed the woman in subjection to man (I Tim. 2: 11 -12; I Cor. 11:3).

Brethren who believe that the New Testament is a pattern for the church for all time can find no proof that God ever gave women a place of leadership in the church. None of the apostles were women; none of the evangelists in apostolic days were women; no women were appointed elders or deacons (none could qualify to be such, I Tim. 3; Titus 1), and God nowhere left any evidence that it is a woman's place to help to manage the affairs of the Lord's church.

Just because God has placed woman in subjection to man (I Cor. 11:3) does not mean that she is any less a person; that she is unimportant, that she is inferior in any way, or that she does not have a vital role in the church and in the world. Jesus Christ is subject to God (I Cor. 11:3). He came to earth to do God's will (John 6:38); in fact, His entire life on earth was an example of His subjection to the Father's will (Phil. 2:8; Heb. 5:8, 9), but this did not make Him any less "equal with God" (Phil. 2:6), nor did it make Him any less a person because He was in subjection to the Father. All authority has been given to Christ in this dispensation (Matt. 28:18, the only exception being the Father Himself, I Cor. 15:27), but when Christ has completed His work He will deliver the Kingdom back to the Father and will be subject to Him that He (the Father) may be the only Ruler (I Cor. 15:24 - 28). The fact that Jesus will be in subjection to the Father does not mean that He is not equal with the Father (Phil. 2:6), nor does it mean that He is inferior to the Father.

I am sure some will read this article and say, "What **can** I do as a woman?" Well, God has plenty for the woman to do. Paul sums up her primary function in life in I Tim. 2:15: "*Notwithstanding she shall be saved in childbearing, if they continue in faith and charity and holiness with sobriety.*" Woman's God-given role has to do with domestic responsibilities (I Tim. 5:14; Titus 2:3 - 5), a vital role to the well-being of the home, the church, and the nation. What more rewarding things can a woman do than to be a good wife and mother, teaching and training her children in the ways of the Lord (Titus 2:4 - 5; 2 Tim. 1:5)? She can teach classes for women and children, and help her husband in home Bible studies (Acts 18:24 - 26). She can visit and minister to those who are shut-ins or are patients in the hospital. She can help older widows by providing transportation to the doctor, or help them in buying their groceries. She can write letters to teach and encourage others (friends, family, young people, older people). She can make it a point to greet and visit with all visitors who attend the worship services. She can help with a bulletin (typing, folding, addressing), and she can **always** give a smile and a word of encouragement to those who simply need to know that someone cares.

There are many things that women can and must do in the work of the Lord; those listed above are only a few. Satan has conspired against women in the twentieth century causing them to minimize and resent, rather than appreciate, the role divinely given them by God. Let it not be said that we, as the Lord's church, followed the philosophies of the day, but rather that we adhered strictly to God's will for us in **every** way; our salvation depends upon it!