

Participation of Women in Public Worship

-Tenth Draft. September 13, 1995-

(This paper consists of three parts: (1) textual study notes,
(2) summary statement, and (3) guidelines from the SBR elders)

PART 1: TEXTUAL STUDY NOTES

The following notes came from several months of joint study by the elders and staff.

Three passages relate directly to the participation of women in public worship,
I Corinthians 11:3-16, I Corinthians 14:33-36, and I Timothy 2:11-15

I Corinthians 11:3-16

TEXTUAL OBSERVATIONS

1. A man is to have no covering when he prays or prophesies.(vs. 4)
2. The purpose for a man having no covering is to honor Christ, his head (vss. 3, 4)
3. A woman is instructed to have a covering on her head when she prays or prophesies.
(vss. 5 ,6)
4. The purpose of a woman's covering is to indicate her submission to authority (vss. 3, 10)
5. A woman's submission is based on creation (vss. 8, 9)
 - a. woman from man
 - b. woman for man
6. The principle of submission is also in recognition of the angels (vs. 10)
 - a. Bible scholars offer several suggestions about the significance of the angels. We are unclear about what exactly Paul has in mind.
 - b. we do see that the principle of submission is concerned with more than cultural issues. It is founded on theological issues.
7. These requirements for a man and a woman are applied to a gender-mixed gathering of Christians for prayer and prophecy.
 - a. prophecy was not a private matter but for the common good of the church
(12:7-11)
 - b. a woman's sign of submission would not be necessary in private worship, nor in a group of only women.
8. Though men and women have different roles, their equality is seen in two ways (vss. 11, 12):
 - a. each depends on the other
 - b. each comes from God
9. In nature itself we see that there is a distinction between males and females (vss. 14, 15)
10. God's other churches follow the same practice that Paul outlines for Corinth (vs. 16)

CONCLUSIONS

1. In public worship men should honor Christ, their head, with an attitude of humility.
2. Men and women should honor their gender distinctiveness.
3. A woman's participation in worship should comply with the principle of submission.
4. A head covering was a widely recognized symbol of submission in eastern Mediterranean society of the first century. Christian women living in that society were to honor its symbol of submission. In American society, a head covering for a woman is not a symbol of submission.
5. In Jesus Christ, males and females are equal in value. (Gal. 3:28)

I Corinthians 14:33-36

TEXTUAL OBSERVATIONS

1. The larger context for this passage deals with authority-submission (11:3f), disorderly assemblies (11:17f), and the use of spiritual gifts (12:1f). Without question these verses are addressing public worship.
2. The assembly under consideration was one in which the “whole church” had gathered (11:18, 14:23)
3. The procedure described in vss. 33-36 applied to all churches, not only Corinth (vs, 33, 36)
4. In the immediate context two issues are under consideration for women: the use of spiritual gifts and asking questions.
5. Women are instructed to be “silent” (vs. 34). The word translated “silent”, signao, means “say nothing, keep silence” (A and G lexicon). It is translated “keep quite” in vs. 28 and “stop” in vs. 30.
6. The woman’s silence was to comply with the principle of “submission” stated in the Law. (vs. 34)
 - a. Since Jews referred to the first five books of the Old Testament as “Law”, Paul is probably referring to the male-female roles described in the Genesis creation account.
 - b. Note Paul’s similar appeal to Genesis in I Cor. 11:8.
7. The woman’s silence was to avoid behavior that would be considered “disgraceful” (vs. 35) and was to be consistent with an “orderly” assembly (vss. 34, 35).

CONCLUSIONS

1. The scriptures differentiate between what a woman should do in private and what a woman should do in public worship.
2. Although the context refers to the exercise of spiritual gifts, there are broader principles. The principles are:
 - a. submission as rooted in the creation
 - b. avoiding what is considered disgraceful
 - c. an orderly assembly
3. The three principles above apply to a woman’s participation in our public worship. Her participation should:
 - a. demonstrate submission
 - b. avoid what is considered disgraceful
 - c. contribute to an orderly assembly
4. The three principles also apply to a man’s participation in public worship. He should:
 - a. demonstrate submission to Christ
 - b. avoid what is disgraceful
 - c. contribute to an orderly assembly

I Timothy 2:11-15

TEXTUAL OBSERVATIONS

1. Verses 9 and 10 form part of this context:
 - a. women who worship God live in a powerfully unique way
 - b. such women emphasize inner character rather than an extravagant appearance
2. A woman is to “learn” not “teach”, to be in submission” not in “authority” (vs. 11, 12)
3. Her learning is to be in “quietness” and her submission is to be “full” (vs. 11)
4. These instructions were based on a theological consideration: Eve was created second and was deceived first.

5. The verses do not specifically mention the public assembly of the church.
6. The context, however, does deal with worship (vss. 1, 8, 10) and would necessitate some sort of church assembly in which a woman might attempt to teach: (vs. 12)

CONCLUSIONS

1. Since these instructions regarding women are based on theology rather than culture, the theology should also determine what we do in our assemblies.
2. A woman's participation in our church assemblies should not involve teaching or having authority over man.

Summary of Textual Study

1. There are specific male-female regulations for the public worship assembly.
2. These regulations for women's participation in the public worship assembly are based on God-ordained male leadership.
3. In the public worship, women are not to teach men.
4. A woman may participate in other areas of public worship as long as she does not violate the principle of male leadership.

PART TWO: SUMMARY STATEMENT

Based on our understanding of Biblical teaching (in addition to the study texts, see Ephesians 5:22-6:4; Titus 2:1-5), we affirm that we are all created in the image of God, equal as persons before God, and united without distinction in Christ. We also affirm that we are distinct in our God-created manhood and womanhood and that there are corresponding distinctions in masculine and feminine roles. These God-ordained roles are of equally high value and should be reflected at heart level in our homes and in the church.

An important part of the masculine role is the exercise of godly, caring, responsible, nurturing leadership in the home and in the church. In our society there is a wholesale abandonment of this role by many men in such actions as the irresponsible fathering of illegitimate children, abandonment of families and family responsibilities, marital unfaithfulness, absentee fatherhood, abusive treatment of spouses and children, refusal to assume leadership, etc.

The feminine role finds important expression in the intelligent, willing support of godly male leadership, the high value of motherhood and vocational homemaking, and a devotion to various ministries such as hospitality, service to those in need, ministry to other women, ministry to children, et. That have been vital to the life of the church through the ages. These feminine rolls are also being attacked and undermined in our society.

If one recognizes and affirms the God-created distinctiveness of manhood and womanhood and the resulting distinctions in masculine and feminine roles, then one has a foundation for understanding the Biblical passages concerning the participation of women in public worship. These instructions about the public assembly were rooted in teaching, developing, modeling, preserving, and reinforcing this male-female distinctiveness.

This insight in the "spirit" that gives life to the "letter". For example, the public praying and prophesying by women mentioned in I Corinthians 11 might easily be interpreted as acts of spiritual leadership, and so it was important that the cultural headcovering be worn by the woman to proclaim and preserve the principal of male spiritual eldership. Similarly women were not to exercise authoritative positions of preaching, teaching, or eldering (I Timothy 2:11 ff).

In the early church, women complied with these roles and made contributions to the mission of Jesus that were just as important as those of their male counterparts. Note Paul's high regard for the ministry of women in Romans 16 and Philipians 4:2, 3.

Today it is difficult if not impossible to establish a detailed blueprint of how women should function in every situation in the various activities of the church. Our culture is different. Our activities are different. Nevertheless, the broad guidelines of Scripture should guide our public assemblies so that the distinctive roles of men and women are maintained and the principle of male spiritual leadership is encouraged and developed.

PART 3: SBR CONGREGATIONAL GUIDELINES

The elders desire to provide guidelines for the South Baton Rouge church that will comply with scripture and will contribute to the unity of the church.

1. We believe the scriptures clearly teach that women should not be in the leadership roles of an elder or a teacher of God's word in the public worship assembly.
2. We desire for our assemblies to affirm the Biblical principle of male leadership and promote the unity of the body. Therefore, the elders are of the opinion that men should lead the following in our Sunday morning assemblies:
 - a. prayer
 - b. singing
 - c. Lord's supper
3. Because of our regard for scripture and our regard for the consciences of Christian men and women in the SBR family, we wish to evaluate any project that involves a woman in a role that this church has not experienced. Submit any new proposal to the elders for their approval.