

Women Can't Serve as Senior Pastors, Can They?

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Myths: Myths That Christians Believe Series

1 Timothy 2: 9 -15

Let me begin by sharing some numbers with you:

“1 – 25 – 51”.

If you heard those numbers what do you think they mean; “1, 25, 51?” They're not signals being called by a quarterback in the huddle. It's not my birthday. This is not a secret code. “1” is precisely the number of texts in the entire Bible that could possibly be appealed to to prohibit a woman from preaching or being a senior pastor. There is exactly one text in the Bible that may prohibit a woman from preaching or teaching. The text is the one we'll be looking at today, 1 Timothy 2:9-15.

“25” are the number of interpretative difficulties that Bible scholars have in attempting to interpret 1 Timothy 2:9-15.

“51” is the percentage of the human race that has had the door slammed in their faces in pursuing a calling to preach or to lead a congregation.

Let me get a little personal here. In the environment in which I was raised in a New York Jewish family in the 1960's and 70's, I simply assumed that women could do virtually anything a man could do. The women I knew were strong and competent and were valedictorians in my high school class. So I was raised in an environment in which women were free to be and to do anything that their gifts and talents permitted them to do.

And then I gave my life to Jesus at age 18 and joined a college fellowship called Inter-Varsity (IV). And at IV my childhood assumptions about women's freedom to lead and to teach was further affirmed. In my campus Christian fellowship group women were free to do whatever men were free to do.

My wife, Marlene and I moved to Columbus in the late 1970's for me to attend law school and we joined a little church that was the predecessor of Vineyard Columbus. And that particular little church came under the teaching of an ecumenical community from Ann Arbor, Michigan called The Word of God Community.

Some of you are already saying, “Rich, I cannot believe that you weren’t discerning enough at the front end. No good thing could come out of Ann Arbor, Michigan.” I know that now, but understand, I was not a Columbus native.

In any case, this particular community had a very conservative perspective regarding appropriate roles for men and women. Indeed, they taught men to not even diaper their babies, that that was a woman’s role. None of us in Columbus ever went that far. But they taught that women could not be ordained as pastors in a church; that they could never preach to a mixed assembly of men and women; and, they also taught that women could certainly never be senior pastors. That was the teaching that I sat under in the 1980’s, and I thought that must be what the Bible teaches. It was so much a part of the church culture that I was in.

But in the early 1990’s I began to rethink this conservative teaching as a result of several things. First of all, there was a growing body of excellent biblical scholarship challenging the ultraconservative reading of texts like 1 Timothy 2, works by people such as our new interim Vineyard Leadership Institute (VLI) Director, Don Williams. There were excellent books written by people such as Craig Keener, who wrote: *Paul, Women and Wives*

By the way, if you are interested in this subject, I’ve got a couple of recommended books out in our bookstore. One is by William Webb: *Slaves, Women and Homosexuals*.

But the short of it is, in the early 1990’s I began to read voraciously many of the best books about women and men’s roles according to the scriptures. That began to change my views.

The second thing that changed my views from the conservatism that our church was taught in the 1980’s was the growing incoherence, the illogical inconsistencies of church practice as it came to women. Everywhere I looked I found churches saying one thing and doing something else based, supposedly, on this one text, 1 Timothy 2. So there were churches that would permit women to share from the Bible for an hour, but they could not teach. Or women could teach so long as they were under the covering of their husbands, whatever that meant. Or women could preach and lead out on the mission field in Africa or Latin America, but they couldn’t do it here at home.

In one particular domination, a very prominent woman was permitted to preach from the floor of the convention hall. But she wasn’t permitted to stand on the stage. I heard about one denomination that permitted women to preach from the pulpit on the right of the church, but never to preach from the pulpit on the left.

There is one massive book written by a very prominent theologian which listed 35 different kinds of teaching from teaching bible or theology in a seminary to

singing hymns in a congregation. And this particular theologian said that according to his reading of scripture women were prohibited from teaching men in a college fellowship group, but could teach men in a high school fellowship group. Further, women were permitted to be the Director of the Adult Sunday School program, but they could not serve as the permanent leader of a home fellowship group involving men and women.

One seminary prepares women to teach, but never to be ordained as pastors. Another denomination permits women to be senior pastors, but never bishops.

Now, if you can keep all of these different rules straight in your mind, you are a better person than I am. But it seems to me from all of these incoherent rules that essentially what churches were doing was setting the bar according to their own subjective feelings of comfort regarding this or that activity and not according to any eternal Word from God.

Which led to the third reason why my position regarding women in ministry changed from the conservative perspectives our church was taught in the 1980's. Not only was there great biblical scholarship leaning entirely in the other direction; and, not only were the rules in conservative churches so illogical and incoherent, but I saw that conservative churches were quite hypocritical in claiming that they were holding onto the historic view of the church while, in fact, accommodating the growing rise of feminism in society. If you studied what many of the ancient Christian theologians taught about women and women's roles, you would be shocked. For most of Christian history, theologians held to Aristotle's view that a woman is essentially a defective man, inferior by nature. That's what the church taught.

Conservatives today are not teaching the historic view of the church. They have compromised and adjusted their views because of the pressure of contemporary culture.

And fourth, the thing that really pushed me over the edge was the realization that the door to the church was being slammed in the face of 51% of the human race, based on one single biblical text inaccurately read.

Some of you have heard of Florence Nightingale. She lived back in the 19th century in England. Above all else, she wanted to serve God in Christian ministry. But even though she was an extraordinarily competent leader and teacher, she was rejected not because of her morals, her character, or her gifting; but, simply because of her gender. Florence Nightingale said,

I would have given the church my head, my hand, and my heart. But the church would not have them.

One woman named Rita wrote to me and said that from the moment she came to Christ, she believed she was called to ministry. The day after she received Christ she led someone else to Jesus. She went to seminary and was trained, but the church she joined would not permit women to be pastors. They strung her along for years allowing her to teach in youth ministry, to be an administrator, and to work with other women. They even gave her a ministry license, but they refused her the title of “pastor.” She was a licensed minister of the gospel, but not a pastor.

She wrote to me this week and said that the new pastor of her church says that he might permit women to have the title of “pastor,” but he is still deciding on that. She’s been waiting for the past year for him to make a decision.

I’ve been doing a series that I’ve titled: *Myths that Christians Believe*. I’ve given you a little formula along the way:

A sincere Christian + False Beliefs = A Derailed (or Disillusioned) Christian

You can be very sincere as a Christian, but if you hold onto a false belief, that false belief can derail or disillusion you. Or if it becomes the teaching of the church, it can derail or disillusion many others in the church. There are very few teachings in the history of the Christian church that have created more problems for more people than this one belief – that God has set up the human race so that regardless of Christian character, or competence, or calling, a person may not preach at church, or lead a church simply because she is a woman.

I’ve called today’s talk: *Women Can’t Be Senior Pastors, Can They?* Let’s pray.

1 Timothy 2:9-15

9 I also want the women to dress modestly, with decency and propriety, adorning themselves, not with elaborate hairstyles or gold or pearls or expensive clothes, 10 but with good deeds, appropriate for women who profess to worship God. 11 A woman should learn in quietness and full submission. 12 I do not permit a woman to teach or to assume authority over a man; she must be quiet. 13 For Adam was formed first, then Eve. 14 And Adam was not the one deceived; it was the woman who was deceived and became a sinner. 15 But women will be saved through childbearing—if they continue in faith, love and holiness with propriety.

Before we look at this text, let me offer you some basic guidelines for thinking about the appropriate roles for women in the church. This subject of women’s proper roles in ministry remains incredibly controversial. There are protests all the time at the Vatican. Church denominations have split over this in recent years. The Anglican Church which permits women to be priests does not permit

women to be bishops. And all of this fuss and fighting is due to one text: 1 Timothy 2:9-15, the text that I just read to you.

How should we approach the subject of women in Christian ministry and women as senior pastors? Let me offer you four rules for approaching scripture.

Four rules for approaching scripture

The first rule for approaching scripture is this:

Women's roles are to be determined by the starting point in creation and redemption

One very important matter that is frequently overlooked, whenever we deal with an issue of Christian theology, Christian ethics, or Christian practice is what text do we begin with in forming our views. Because our beginning point will often determine our ending point. For example, if we are thinking about the person of Christ and whether as deity, he is co-equal with the Father, where do you begin? Do you begin with a text like Mark 13:32?

Mark 13:32

32“But about that day or hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father.

Which seems to point to the Son being less than the Father. Or do you begin with a text like John 1:1?

John 1:1

1 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.

Orthodox theologians throughout Christian history have started with John 1:1 and interpreted Mark 13 in light of John 1:1, not the other way around.

If we are talking about the security of our salvation, do we start with a text like Hebrews 6:4 - 6?

Hebrews 6: 4 - 6

4 It is impossible for those who have once been enlightened, who have tasted the heavenly gift, who have shared in the Holy Spirit, 5 who have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the coming age 6 and who have fallen away, to be brought back to repentance.

Or is the starting point for thinking about the security of our salvation Romans 8: 38 – 39:

Romans 8:38-39

38 For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, 39 neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Those who hold that salvation once received can never be lost begin with texts like Romans 8: 38 - 39 and interpret Hebrews 6 in light of the Romans 8 text.

The starting point often determines your ending point. When we are talking about the roles that are open to women in the church, do you begin with the seemingly most restrictive text in the Bible and interpret everything in light of that seeming restriction? Or do you begin with texts that suggest the equality of men and women in creation and redemption?

I would suggest that the conversation about roles that are appropriate for women in the church would be furthered by simply starting in Genesis 1:26 -27:

Genesis 1:26-27

26 Then God said, “Let us make human beings in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals, and over all the creatures that move along the ground.” 27 So God created human beings in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.

Our equality in creation, and Galatians 3:26 – 28:

Galatians 3:26 - 28

26 So in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith, 27 for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. 28 There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, neither male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.

Galatians 3:26 - 29, our equality in redemption.

Galatians 3:26 – 29

26 So in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith, 27 for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. 28 There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, neither male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.²⁹ If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham’s seed, and heirs according to the promise.

But in approaching the subject of appropriate roles, one of the fundamental questions that we need to answer is what is your starting point in scripture?

The second way to approach the subject of appropriate roles is:

Women's roles are to be determined by spiritual giftedness

We are *empowered* evangelicals. Our understanding of appropriate roles in the church is based primarily on our conviction that spiritual giftedness determines one's role in the body. Vineyard is primarily a church movement shaped by our experience of the Holy Spirit. Our experience is that the Holy Spirit is non-discriminatory among us. For example, in Acts 2:18 we read,

Acts 2:18

“Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my spirit in those days and they will prophesy.”

When we study Paul's teaching about spiritual gifts, we see that gifts are not given due to human merit, ethnic origin, social status or gender, but simply as the result of the will of the sovereign Holy Spirit, and also the grace of the risen Christ. There is no text that limits the endowment of leadership or teaching gifts simply to men. We in the Vineyard draw an intimate connection between gifts and ministry.

Thus, as I consider whether a role in the church ought to be open to a person, my first question, as an empowered evangelical is, “Has the Holy Spirit sovereignly given that person gifting for that role?” If I see teaching gifts or leadership gifts in a woman, I find myself in the position of the apostle Peter, who when he was challenged by the Jerusalem church because he had eaten with Gentiles said, “The Holy Spirit fell upon them just as he did upon us at the beginning. So, who was I that I could withstand God?”¹ As an empowered evangelical, I never want to find myself opposing what God is doing in the life of another person. If God is gifting a woman to teach, or to lead, then who am I to stand in God's way?

And third,

Women's roles are to be determined with an eye to the coming kingdom of God

You know the center of Vineyard's theology is the kingdom of God. We believe that in the coming of Christ, God's reign, God's rule, was breaking into this world; that Christ was bringing into this world the future age to come in which God reigns and every opposing rule, every dominion, every power, every authority which stands in opposition to Almighty God is destroyed. We in the Vineyard

believe that Christ introduced that future age; and, that we get to taste something of the ultimate purpose of God right now.

So when we in the Vineyard are trying to solve theological problems, or ethical problems, or practical problems in the church, we ask the question: What is God's ultimate purpose? To find that we ask: What will the future kingdom of God be like? What will the world be like when Christ returns and sets up his kingdom here on earth?

The Lord taught us to pray in the Lord's Prayer,

Your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.

What are we praying for? We're saying, "God, bring your reign into this world now just as it will be when Jesus returns and sets up his kingdom." Bring your reign into this world now in such a way that cancer is healed. God, bring your reign into the world in such a way that this person decides not to leave their marriage, but to be reconciled. Bring your reign into the world in such a way that mental illness is healed. Bring your reign into the world in such a way that hungry people are fed, and thirsty people are given clean water, and children are loved and protected and not sold into prostitution.

It is with the view of the coming kingdom that abolitionists during the 19th century said that slavery does not reflect the ultimate will of God for creation now. Southern preachers and some northern theologians like Charles Hodge argued that the Bible clearly permits slavery and that to be an abolitionist was to be unbiblical. But the abolitionists said that we need to interpret the scripture in light of the coming kingdom.

There is a trajectory to scripture. It points ahead of itself towards God's ultimate reign. And in the ultimate reign of God there will be no slavery. And in the ultimate reign of God, men will not rule over women. So we approach the subject of women's roles using the starting point of creation and redemption. We approach the subject of women's roles, in light of women's spiritual giftedness. We approach the of women's roles in the light of the coming kingdom.

And fourth, and finally,

Women's roles are to be determined by the promotion of the gospel

We see in 1 Corinthians 9 a general principle that the apostle Paul adopted regarding social roles. Here is what we read in 1 Corinthians 9:19-23.

1 Corinthians 9:19-23

19 Though I am free and belong to no one, I have made myself a slave to everyone, to win as many as possible. 20 To the Jews I became like a

Jew, to win the Jews. To those under the law I became like one under the law (though I myself am not under the law), so as to win those under the law. 21 To those not having the law I became like one not having the law (though I am not free from God's law but am under Christ's law), so as to win those not having the law. 22 To the weak I became weak, to win the weak. I have become all things to all people so that by all possible means I might save some. 23 I do all this for the sake of the gospel that I may share in its blessings.

First of all, what are the principles we draw out from 1 Corinthians 9:12-23? The apostle Paul says in 1 Corinthians 9:19 that he is free and belongs to no man.

1 Corinthians 9:19

19 Though I am free and belong to no one, I have made myself a slave to everyone, to win as many as possible.

In what sense is Paul free? It means, if you follow his argument, that he is financially independent of everyone. He is free of the Corinthians and anyone else who would attempt to use money and finances to control his ministry. It's wonderful when you know that you are in the ministry not to draw a paycheck, but that you are in the ministry because God has called you to minister; you have a sense of divine constraint about this.

Paul says he is free of all. But then in 1 Corinthians 9:19 he goes on and says, *I have made myself a slave to everyone, to win as many as possible*. What does he mean?

Well, in the examples that follow, he is saying that he is willing to accommodate himself to whatever social situation he finds himself in so as to win as many as possible. And then in 1 Corinthians 9:20-22 he talks about various social situations. He says:

1 Corinthians 9:20-22

20 To the Jews I became like a Jew, to win the Jews. To those under the law I became like one under the law (though I myself am not under the law), so as to win those under the law. 21 To those not having the law I became like one not having the law (though I am not free from God's law but am under Christ's law), so as to win those not having the law. 22 To the weak I became weak, to win the weak. I have become all things to all people so that by all possible means I might save some.

In other words, when he was with the Jews, he kept Kosher. He made sure he wasn't offending Jewish people regarding food or laws of ritual cleanliness.

And we would follow that apostolic practice today, wouldn't we? We would say that if we were going to have an observant Jew over to my home, I probably

would probably serve them on paper plates and I probably would be very careful about what I served. I might even inquire sensitively about dietary needs. Likewise, if I was going to invite an observant Muslim to my home, I would make sure that the food was halal. And if I was talking with an observant Muslim woman, I certainly would not reach out my hand to shake her hand knowing that an observant Muslim woman would not take the hand of a man who is not in her family, or to whom she wasn't married.

On the other hand, he says to those not under the law, he became like one not having the law. In other words, when Paul was with Gentiles, he was non-Kosher. Thus he said, "These things don't matter to God."

Religious people would attach Paul for inconsistency. "Well, you are one way in one setting, and another way in another setting." Paul says, "But you have to understand. My goal is to win as many people as possible. I am missional. I am most concerned with the promotion of the gospel. So even though years ago I gave up Jewish particulars regarding diet and special observances, yet I will become like a Jew." A Jew becoming like a Jew, he is saying, "I will readopt these things to win Jewish people. I will yield to Jewish customs for the sake of Jews. On the other hand, if Jewish people raise this for Gentiles as a way to be acceptable before God, I draw a sharp line."

So Paul's apostolic practice was that social roles are always secondary to the promotion of the gospel.

We'll pick up this thread in just a moment when we look, in particular, at 1 Timothy 2.

Let me give you some background to 1 Timothy 2: 9 - 15. I want to talk about the historical setting of this text. Historically, when the Apostle Paul wrote these words to Timothy, who was in Ephesus sometime in the early 60's of the 1st century,

The historical setting

...there were really two factors that gave rise to his comments in 1 Timothy 2. The first is the rise of what Bible scholars called the "New Roman Woman." And I acknowledge my debt to our former VLI Director, Steve Robbins, for his work on this subject.

The New Roman Woman

In the years immediately preceding the birth of Christ, and then proceeding in greater force through the 1st century, students of Roman history tell us that there was the rise of what Roman historians and philosophers called the *New Roman Woman*. What was meant by this term the *New Roman Woman*?

Historically in Rome men had all the power. They owned their own property, but they also owned any property that the wife brought into their marriage. They controlled all of the family's finances. And culturally it was common for men to have mistresses on the side. Men were permitted to be unfaithful to their marriage vows, while women were required to be absolutely chaste and faithful.

In 44 BC Roman law changed and the property of women, especially wealthy women, was no longer automatically transferred to their husbands on marriage. As a consequence of this, women gained financial freedom and independence from their husbands. And upon divorce women were permitted to take out of the marriage everything they brought in.

Many of these financially independent women began pursuing the freedoms that were long enjoyed by men. So these wealthy Roman women started to take lovers. In fact, there was a major sexual liberation movement in which it became common among the wealthy to practice what we now call an "open marriage." Men would have their mistresses on the side; and, women would have their lovers on the side. All of this was considered to be the new enlightened view of marriage.

Many of these wealthy women not only were financially independent from their husbands and sexually promiscuous, but many of these women were procuring abortions. They wanted to be free from the responsibility of child raising. And you can tell who identified with this movement of New Roman Woman by what they wore. You see, in the 1st century "you were what you wore." You could tell by people's dress what their station in life was, who the nobility was, and who was the commoner, who was married and who was a prostitute.

And the New Roman Women dressed in expensive clothes. They wore elaborate hairstyles, sometimes woven with gold. They wore lots of makeup. And finally, not only were they immoral, immodest and rejected the role of child raising, and dressed extravagantly, but when philosophical discussions took place in the homes of the wealthy, the New Roman Woman was brashly outspoken. There are stories of women rushing the stage and grabbing the podium away from the philosophers, arguing the philosophers down as they were attempting to speak.

Well, all of these things became so scandalous and threatened the very foundation of Roman society and Roman families so much that the Roman's passed laws against wives' infidelities. There were laws passed about what Roman women were permitted to wear.

So, here's the first factor behind the setting in 1 Timothy 2 – the rise of the Roman Woman – this liberationist movement of wealthy, immoral, immodest women, who rejected family roles, and who argued publicly with teachers and philosophers.

And the second thing that we see in the historical setting behind 1 Timothy 2 is:

The rise of a false teaching

In the pastoral epistles, 1 and 2 Timothy and Titus, Paul writes to combat false teaching that was spreading through the church. So 1 Timothy begins with Paul's charge to stop false teaching.

1 Timothy 1:3

As I urged you when I went into Macedonia, stay there in Ephesus so that you may command certain persons not to teach false doctrines any longer

And 1 Timothy ends with a similar charge.

1 Timothy 6:20-21

20 Timothy, guard what has been entrusted to your care. Turn away from godless chatter and the opposing ideas of what is falsely called knowledge, 21 which some have professed and in so doing have departed from the faith.

Along the way, on multiple occasions, Paul warns against false teaching. Apparently, if you read the epistles, this false teaching was being carried into the homes of these wealthy women, who were then spreading it to others. Here is what we read in 2 Timothy 3:6-7:

2 Timothy 3:6-7

6 They are the kind who worm their way into homes and gain control over gullible women, who are loaded down with sins and are swayed by all kinds of evil desires, 7 always learning but never able to come to a knowledge of the truth.

The New Roman Woman and the spread of false teaching that form the general background to 1 Timothy 2.

Now, let's look at

The particular meaning of 1 Timothy 2

In 1 Timothy 2: 9 – 10 he speaks of:

Women's dress

1 Timothy 2: 9-10

9 I also want the women to dress modestly, with decency and propriety, adorning themselves, not with elaborate hairstyles or gold or pearls or

expensive clothes, 10 but with good deeds, appropriate for women who profess to worship God.

Paul's counsel regarding women's dress makes total sense in light of the historical setting of the rise of the *New Roman Woman* because there were folks coming into the church whose dress communicated to every one in society, "I am sexually available apart from my husband and I am materially extravagant, and I don't care about the laws and rules of dress of our society; I reject all of that."

Paul says: No! For the sake of the church's reputation, I want you to dress with decency and propriety. Don't you understand that your dress is causing scandal outside of the church and it is damaging the gospel's success? We're being seen as this hotbed of immorality. People will say this new Christian movement is supportive of the undermining of the family, of the abortion of children, and of open marriages.

It is interesting that in many evangelical churches, while it is common to quote 1 Timothy 2:12:

1 Timothy 2:12

12 I do not permit a woman to teach or to assume authority over a man; she must be quiet.

...is not just limited to its historical setting in the 1st century, but rather applies today...some evangelical churches don't apply 1 Timothy 2: 9 - 10.

1 Timothy 2:9-10

9 I also want the women to dress modestly, with decency and propriety, adorning themselves, not with elaborate hairstyles or gold or pearls or expensive clothes, 10 but with good deeds, appropriate for women who profess to worship God.

Some conservative churches that don't permit women to be preachers do indeed permit women to come to church decked out with elaborate hairstyles, gold and pearls. Why do we say that one part of this very brief text is cultural, but another part isn't? There is no limit to the text.

Paul is combating the rise of the *New Roman Woman* and the impact that women's dress was having on the reputation of the church.

Let's look 1 Timothy 2:11 for a moment, which speaks about the women's demeanor

The women's demeanor

1 Timothy 2:11

11 A woman should learn in quietness and full submission.

This verse is debated in churches today. Some versions of 1 Timothy 2:11 say that women are to be entirely silent in the church. There are some conservative churches that don't permit women to pray publicly.

But Paul is not commanding absolute silence for women as they gather in church. This word for "quietness" – hesycheia - is exactly the same word that Paul commands for the whole church in 1 Timothy 2:2:

1 Timothy 2:2

...for kings and all those in authority, that we may live *peaceful and quiet* lives in all godliness and holiness.

It really means "with a quiet spirit." Paul is telling women to not be brash and outspoken like the New Roman Woman, but to learn with a quiet spirit. Just as men who were students were commanded to learn with a quiet spirit.

And now 1 Timothy 2:12 we get to the core of the text, which speaks of the woman's dominance.

The woman's dominance

1 Timothy 2:12

I do not permit a woman to teach or to assume authority over a man; she must be quiet.

...where it says that a woman is not to assume authority, the Apostle Paul uses a very unusual word for assuming authority, or taking authority. The Greek word is "authentein".

Authentein

It appears only one time in the New Testament, right here. It is a very unusual word and biblical scholars tell us that if it was Paul's intention to forbid all women from exercising any kind of authority in church over men, he had lots of other Greek words available to him – words like:

Exousia

...which has to do with the general exercise of authority. Paul uses that word repeatedly through his letters. But in this particular instance, Paul seizes upon a very unusual Greek word, authentein, in forbidding a certain kind of authority to women. What is he forbidding?

The Greek word “authentein” means:

Authentein = domineer over

He is saying to women who are identifying with this New Roman Woman movement: I don't want you coming up front arguing with the teacher, and grabbing the podium and dominating men and dominating the church.

Does that mean that women can never exercise authority? The fact is that we have a lot of evidence for women in Paul's churches having tremendous authority. If you simply read Romans 16 you will discover that in the early church there were women who were deacons, women who worked shoulder to shoulder with Paul in the work of the gospel, and even a woman, who was an apostle, a woman by the name of Junia. What Paul is prohibiting in 1 Timothy 2:12 is not a woman having any governing authority in the church; he is prohibiting a certain kind of female domination that was characteristic of the *New Woman Roman*.

Let's look at 1 Timothy 2: 13- 14, which speaks of the woman's deception.

The woman's deception

1 Timothy 2:13-14

13 For Adam was formed first, then Eve. 14 And Adam was not the one deceived; it was the woman who was deceived and became a sinner.

Is the Apostle Paul saying that women are more deceivable than men? Women not being as smart as men, are open to being deceived where a man isn't? If so, why has virtually every major heresy in the history of the church been started by men?

The Apostle Paul is not giving us a general statement about women's deceivability. In fact, in other texts he argues that sin came into the world through Adam, through the man. Here he is addressing a local situation. Women in Ephesus were carrying false teaching, or lies, from house to house and were unsettling the entire church. And so what Paul is saying is that you New Roman Women, who are spreading lies and falsehoods in the church, you Roman Women, and you are just like your mother, Eve. She was somebody who spread a lie and looks at the damage that came through her. You're just like that.

He is not laying down a timeless principle that women can't be trusted with teaching because they are so deceivable. He is speaking to the situation that existed in Ephesus.

Finally, Paul rounds out his argument with 1 Timothy 2:15, where he speaks of the woman's deliverance.

The woman's deliverance

1 Timothy 2:15

But women will be saved through childbearing—if they continue in faith, love and holiness with propriety.

What is he talking about here? Talk about a verse that has twisted interpreters into pretzels. There are at least a dozen different interpretations for v. 15. Verse 15 is the climax of Paul's whole argument. It provides within the structure of his argument a positive conclusion to the negative things he has been saying. What Paul is saying in 1 Timothy 2:15 is that women in that church will find their place among the saved, assuming of course, that they continue in faith, love and holiness, and taking on that role which would enhance the reputation of the church, namely being a good faithful wife and mother, not throwing that off. The key word is "propriety" – being respectable within your culture rather than scandalous.

See, Paul's concern the spread of the gospel. He wants the gospel message which offers rebellious men and women a way to escape the wrath of God. He wants the gospel message which offers men and women the opportunity to be reconciled with God. He wants the gospel message which offers men and women the possibility of being adopted into God's family and being included as sons and daughters of God through a person's faith in the sinless life, in the sacrificial death and glorious resurrection of Jesus Christ.

He wants to make sure that this gospel message is not undermined by the behavior of certain women who will throw the whole enterprise into disrepute. That's what's going on in 1 Timothy 2. 1 Timothy 2 does not form a universal prohibition against women at all times, in all places, and in all settings from preaching, leading, or being a senior pastor. In fact, it has virtually nothing to do with that. What it is is a prohibition against women and against men from doing anything in any place which will undermine the mission of the gospel. The only message by which men and women will be saved.

Can women serve as senior pastors today? Absolutely, yes. Based on the same criteria that we would select a man – calling, character, competence.

You know, the view that I'm sharing with you today is not a new view. I want to make one last comment about promoting the spread of the gospel and allowing women to serve in any role. Not only is this consistent with what I believe was apostolic practice, and the purpose of the apostles' instruction, and not only do I believe it is consistent with many of our evangelical and Pentecostal forbearers, particularly leaders of the late 19th and early 20th century in the evangelical world, but it is also consistent with the actual practice of world missions.

J Herbert Kane, who was a great historian of Christian missions, said this:

If there is any one generalization that can be made about single women missionaries and their ministries, it is perhaps their bent for difficult pioneer work. The more difficult and dangerous the work, the higher the ratio of women to men.

I want to close with this. Some of you doubt that women have the strength to lead a church. They're just not made like men. They don't have the depth of conviction to set the pace for a church.

Really?

Back in the 1600's there was a 14-year old girl named Marie Durant, who was arrested in Roman Catholic France for being a Protestant. She was put in prison and told that she could get out, if she uttered one simple phrase: "I renounce my Protestant faith." If she uttered these two words, "I renounce," they would let her out of jail. Instead, for 39 years on her prison wall she wrote the words, "I resist."

Let me ask you, do women have the inner strength to lead a church?

There was a Baptist woman named Lottie Moon. She has become the patron saint of Southern Baptist missions. She served in China for 40 years. And during a famine in China, Lottie Moon, this American woman, gave away all of her money to the Chinese and then gave away all of her food to feed the hungry Chinese until she ended up starving along with many other Chinese people. The Foreign Missions Journal, in celebrating Lottie Moon's life, paid her the best compliment they could at the time. In writing her obituary, they said,

Lottie Moon was the best man ever among our missionaries.

Yes, women can serve as senior pastors and church planters, and missionaries, and preachers and pastors. And it would have been an eternal privilege to sit under a Marie Durant or a Lottie Moon. This church is committed to open wide the door of opportunity to any person – woman and man - who has the character, the calling and the competence to lead and to preach. Let's pray.

Women Can't Serve as Senior Pastors, Can They?

Rich Nathan

June 5, 2011

Myths: Myths That Christians Believe Series

1 Timothy 2:9-15

I. Four rules for understanding women's roles

- A. Women's roles are to be determined by the starting point in creation and redemption
- B. Women's roles are to be determined by spiritual giftedness
- C. Women's roles are to be determined by the coming kingdom
Women's roles are to be determined by the promotion of the Gospel

II. The historical setting of 1 Timothy 2

- A. The rise of the New Roman Woman
- B. The rise of false teaching

III. The particular meaning of 1 Timothy 2

- A. Verses 9 -10, The Woman's dress
- B. Verse 11, The woman's demeanor
- C. Verses 12, The woman's dominance
- D. Verses 13, 14, The woman's deception
- E. Verse 15, The woman's deliverance