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Should women teach men in the church? Why or why not?

Women have unquestionably been subject to men in many aspects of life, whether in legislation, rights, work, or salary. The church, as rough as it may seem, is also a place where women are undervalued and are seen as not qualified to pursue the profession that men do. Although it is more common today to see women in ministry, it was not the case in the past. To our dismay, the Bible contains verses in which it can be interpreted that women adopt a role of submission to men. Among these verses are 1 Corinthians 11:2-16 and 14:33-36 (Lioy, 2020) and 1 Timothy 2 (Celoria, 2013). Although this may not be the original message that the Apostle Paul wanted to give, his letters have been interpreted in a way that has almost completely eliminated the role of women in the church. Although the idea that women have a minor role in ministry, some different factors point to the idea that the early churches, and especially the Pauline churches, were egalitarians (Beavis, 2007). Other biblical verses such as Romans 16 refer to the recognition of women's work and effort, including the one in the church. On the other hand, other verses have removed the emphasis of the role of women, as in Luke 1:46-55, in which the importance of Mary as the narrator's voice, is relieved since the writer of this Gospel is Luke (Gupta, 2015). However, sometimes one can miss the original point of the reading because the context is not taken into. Despite the usual interpretation of the mentioned verses, renewed interpretations demonstrate that this was not the message that Paul wanted to transmit. Instead, women should have the same opportunities as men to serve in the ministry, which emphasizes the egalitarian view.

One of the verses that have contributed to the submission of women in ministry is 1 Corinthians 11:2-16: "But I want you to realize that the head of every man is Christ,

and the head of the woman is man, and the head of Christ is God.” (1 Corinthians 11:3). As one can see, the Apostle Paul affirms that there is a hierarchy. He relates that Christ is superior to men and women, which is unquestionable. However, it could also say that men are superior to women, "the head of the woman is man". As seen on many occasions, the translations are sometimes not entirely correct, since a word can have more than one meaning. While many interpretations are biased by the hierarchical thinking of society Lioy's article is a good source of unbiased interpretation of these perhaps misinterpreted biblical verses. The word "head" has its origin in the Greek noun, *kephalē* (Lioy, 2020). However, this word has other meanings besides "head". Among them are "ruler, prominence, and supremacy" (Lioy, 2020). Although all these meanings entail a hierarchy, there is another translation of the word *kephalē* that denotes an egalitarian view. This meaning is "origin" or "source" (Lioy, 2020). Therefore, one of the theories is that the intention that Paul wanted to give to this verse, "the head of the woman is man", is simply a timeline based on Genesis and Creation (Lioy, 2020). Therefore 1 Corinthians 11:3 would mean that man is the source of the woman since Eve emerged from one of Adam's ribs. The time in which the Apostle Paul lived was patriarchal, but this does not support the idea that men are superior to women that some people want to give to the Bible. Therefore, Paul's writings were in some way influenced by the cultural frame of the time, without needing to mean that this was what the apostle wanted to promote. 1 Corinthians 11 continues: “⁴ Every man who prays or prophesies with his head covered dishonors his head. ⁵ But every woman who prays or prophesies with her head uncovered dishonors her head—it is the same as having her head shaved. ⁶ For if a woman does not cover her head, she might as well have her hair cut off; but if it is a disgrace for a woman to have her hair cut off or her head shaved, then she should cover her head.” That a woman had to cover her head with a veil was a symbol of many things at that time, among them

"purity, rectitude, and submission to their husband" (Lioy, 2020). We talk again, in the context of the first century AD, where the customs and the way of seeing equality were different. Another thing that symbolized not covering their heads was giving tribute to pagan gods (Lioy, 2020). For cultural reasons, this was frowned upon, just as if a man wore a head covering it was also a symbol of dishonor and disgrace (Lioy, 2020). Therefore, these physical customs were how it seemed right at that time to worship God, without the need to dictate a hierarchy in which men were superior to women.

As spoken before, God is the origin of men and women, so the human race is created in the image of God, all equally (Lioy, 2020). One of the aspects that Lioy explores in his article is that taking into account the interpretation of origin as the meaning of *kephalē*, women reflect the glory of men since men reflect the glory of God. However, Lioy does not address the fact that this implies that women are inferior to men, but rather that "women are the pride and joy of men" (Lioy, 2020), which also does not imply a hierarchy. The most relevant emphasis in this verse is that women are not inferior to men or vice versa, since we are all made in God's image, "because all people bear the image of God, they have sanctity and innate worth." (Lioy, 2020). As it can be seen, Paul was not in favor of the submission of women in society and neither around the ministry. Several interpretations by professionals point out that 1 Corinthians 11:2-16 and 14:33-36 do not have a complementary background, but rather an egalitarian one since women are never forbidden to teach.

Another verse that has been a point of controversy is 1 Timothy 2:8-15: "8 Therefore I want the men everywhere to pray, lifting up holy hands without anger or disputing. 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.” The most direct interpretation one can conclude from this verse is that women should be submissive to men and should not influence the teaching of God's word. However, we must inquire into the context surrounding this verse. In her article, Celoria points out that Paul was dealing with Gentiles in Ephesus and that what Paul wanted to promote was that the new belief and dedication to the Lord be correctly represented by dressing and looking like this new ideology. Also, a deeper analysis of verses 8 and 9 shows that what Paul is asking to be done is directed at both men and women (Celoria, 2013). The central point on which this source focuses is that Paul was concerned about the promulgation of False Teachings, which were very common in the city of Ephesus. This fact is key to understanding verses 13 and 14, in which it is said that it was women who brought the human race to its downfall, "the Fall". However, what the Apostle Paul wanted to promote was that the False Teachings, which cause people to be deceived and sin, should not be promulgated, just as Eve - the woman - was deceived by false teachings in the Garden of Eden.

It is unlikely that Paul promulgated the inferiority of women in these verses since most Pauline churches were egalitarians (Beavis, 2007). Besides, in Romans 16:1-6 Paul mentions many women who have worked in the ministry, also showing admiration for it, and recognizing their good work. Therefore, it is difficult to imagine the interpretation of those verses in a complementarian point of view when other verses and data show that Paul showed no restrictions about the teaching of women in ministry (Celoria, 2013).

It could be seen how the Scriptures could lead us to think that women have an inferior or even no role in ministry. This is in part induced by the cultural context of the time in which Paul lived, and also because of the continuation of this mentality of seeing women as inferior to men that unfortunately is often seen in today's society. The voice of women has been less valued on several occasions. Luke 1:46-55 is one of the verses that mask the importance of women's voice and authority in ministry. Although this verse is written by Luke, the events are expressed by Mary, it is her voice impregnated on paper. Mary gives testimony about God and His interaction with the world (Gupta, 2015). By conveying her own interaction and experience with God, Mary's voice teaches the virtue of the canon itself (Gupta, 2015). However, many objections have made this event go unnoticed, to support the female voice in ministry.

We have seen that there are egalitarian theories that correctly support what Paul wanted to convey in 1 Corinthians. Linked to the theory about the image of God and the order of creation, what Paul meant by the verse "the woman is the head of the man" is simply in the order in which God placed these beings on Earth. From the man came the woman, so the origin of the woman is the man, as well as the man came from the woman, considering the nature of giving birth. The theme of the dress and physical appearance of women in 1 Corinthians 14 has to do with the cultural context and customs of that time, without giving relevance to the reflection of superiority or inferiority between men and women. In 1 Timothy 2, we look at the submissive role of women in ministry. In this, the importance lies in widespread of False Teachings, and not in whether women are allowed to teach or not. The Apostle Paul did not encourage that women could not teach, but instead that they are capable of doing so, as it can be seen in Romans 16, by recognizing the work of several women in ministry. The Book of Acts speaks of women teaching in ministry (Acts 16:14-15) (Liloy, 2020). The theory that these verses promulgate the

misrule of women in the church is also weakened by the knowledge that most Pauline churches were egalitarians (Beavis, 2007). These verses do not support the non-exercise of women in ministry, but somehow the opposite has been promoted. In Luke 1:46-55, a verse known as the *Magnificat*, shows the importance of Mary's story about, and therefore the important role that the woman plays in transmitting the word of God.

Another important aspect to look at are events in which women were important to the course of Christianity. In the Gospel of Matthew, some communities had egalitarian characteristics (Matt.19:3-9, 5:31-32) (Beavis, 2007), where it talks about the equality that God gave to both sexes in creation, and the mutual respect and union of marriage, as well as how adultery is prohibited for both women and men. Jesus offers a liberating worldview for women (Beavis, 2007). Luke 8:1-3 shows the importance of women as a support for Jesus in his ministry. Jesus did not show some favoritism toward men or women but sought support from both. Therefore, Jesus encourages discipleship of equals (Beavis, 2007). "Jesus inspires the liberation of all peoples, and that today women of various persuasions can unite to reclaim those words of liberation, which hold the potential for creating "the ideal, egalitarian community" (Beavis, 2007).

There are historic events that emphasize the importance of women in maintaining religious status in France. In this article, Machen emphasizes the role women played in demonstrating the Catholic, Protestant, and Jewish religious values of France, which were threatened after the passage of the anticlerical laws. Women did a great job in maintaining these ideals in society as well as keeping religion in an attractive position to attract more people to it. As a result, they strengthened Catholicism and secured a high position in French society (Machen, 2019). Women became a characteristic symbol of Church politics, as well as a key part and image of Protestantism and Judaism in France. "The desire to create a more just position for women within their faith groups also mirrored

each community's desire to solidify France's identity as a nation that accepted and respected everyone equally, including religious minorities.” (Machen, 2019). The French nation normalized that women be involved in church and ministry, involving them in politics, voting, and church councils, thus promoting a vision in which men and women can participate equally in the church, thus promoting egalitarianism.

The Bible does not teach that women are inferior to men. It is not what is written, but the interpretation that is given to it. The social and cultural background is very important in understanding the meaning of a certain text. Today people do things that were unthinkable in other times, such as seeing women more involved in politics, holding important positions in the workplace, or having more opportunities in the area of sports. As seen, these verses do not necessarily enact that women are inferior to men and that women do not have the right to practice in the ministry. Just because something is written in the Scriptures about practices or customs of a certain era, it does not mean that we have to apply it in our lives in this century. Today's mentality has given us the opportunity to contemplate the possibilities that were perhaps unthinkable in the past. At no time did Paul indicate that women were subjected to men, or that women did not have the right to teach in ministry. The interpretations given invoked this point of view, but as we have seen, many theories do not support it. We have seen that the scriptures have not commanded women to take a submissive position concerning the men, nor have they been deprived of their freedom. Rather, misinterpretations have led to these assumptions. We have also seen the importance of women in being witnesses to many divine events, in teaching the word of God, as in the case of *Mary's Magnificat*, and in serving as supporters of Jesus Christ. Also, women played a decisive role in maintaining religious status in Europe when it was threatened. I think that women have been decisive on numerous occasions, contributing many positive things. Therefore, I believe that women

are capable of teaching in the ministry just as men do. We all have the same abilities since God created us in His image, and although there are differences between both sexes, what unites us is much greater than what differentiates us.

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