



Female Roles in Leadership and the Ideological Texture of 1 Timothy 2: 9-15

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There is perhaps no more hotly debated issue in the Christian community today than the issue of women serving in positions of leadership. Though a number of scriptures speak to the roles of women, for the purpose of this analysis, 1 Timothy 2: 9-15 is examined. Using the concept of socio-rhetorical criticism (Robbins 1996), this paper explores the ideological texture of 1 Timothy 2: 9-15 in regard to female leadership roles. An overview of ideological texture, as well as an overview of 1 Timothy 2: 9-15 is presented. In addition to an ideological analysis of 1 Timothy 2: 9-15, implications for contemporary female leadership are discussed.

An Overview of Ideological Texture

Socio-rhetorical criticism approaches literature from the perspective of values and beliefs both in the text and within the word in which we live (Robbins 1996). Specifically, ideological texture, a subset of socio-rhetorical criticism, examines the bias, opinions, and preferences of the writer, along with specific interpretations (Green n.d.). Ideological texture relates to a society's culture by assessing behavioral, physical, and value artifacts within a culture (West 2008). Specifically, the term ideology, refers to a person's moral beliefs regarding social order. This can be based on values such as, prejudices, stereotypes, as well as beliefs based on experiences regarding how people should act (Robbins 1996). Additionally, rhetorical texts seek to persuade the readers and it is the reader's responses to answer the "what" questions within the text, that shape how they respond to that text (deSilva 2002). Evaluating scripture using ideological rhetoric, is when world

view and narrative technique, “meet in holy alliance” (Sternberg 1987, 89). This manuscript attempts to provide scriptural insight into the contentious issue of female leadership, by ideologically analyzing 1 Timothy 2: 9-15.

An Overview of 1 Timothy 2: 9-15

Timothy 2: 9-15 is a portion of the Apostle Paul’s letter to Timothy. Paul’s purpose in writing Timothy was to encourage Timothy to confront the false teachers who had infiltrated the church at Ephesus (Schatz 2006). In context, Paul is dealing with false deceived teachers who are teaching false doctrine (1 Tim. 1:3, 7). Prior to 1 Timothy 2: 9-15, Paul gives instructions to Timothy regarding how the men and women who claim godliness should conduct themselves in the church while they are in the midst of the false teachers (1 Tim. 2:1-10).

According to some, the women in the congregation who lay claim to godliness (1 Tim. 2:10) needed to handle the false teacher situation with prayer (1 Tim. 2:9) and continue to produce good works (1 Tim. 2:10) (Schatz 2006). They were not to expect that it is their appearance with elaborate dressing that will show forth the godly example, but their godly works (1 Tim. 2:8-10). In verses 9-15, Paul describes what is proper conduct for Christian women, including modeling the ideal of submissiveness and silence (deSilva 2002). The Word of God proclaims, “A woman should learn in quietness and full submission. I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man; she must be silent” (1 Timothy 2:11-12). Paul describes how in the church, God assigns different roles to men and women as a result of the way mankind was created and the way in which sin entered the world (1 Timothy 2:13-14). Paul restricts women from serving in roles of teaching and/or having spiritual authority over men, which precludes women from serving as pastors (Moo 1991).

The Ideological Texture of 1 Timothy 2: 9-15

The contentious nature of this topic makes it very important not to see this issue as men versus women. There are men who believe women can serve as leaders, just as there are women who believe women should not

serve as leaders. This is not an issue of chauvinism or discrimination, but rather of biblical interpretation (Clouse, B. and Clouse, R. 1989). Few people would deny the hermeneutical problem presented by scripture related to the role of women in the Christian community. The marginality of women in the Christian religious traditions means that early literary sources on their roles are minimal and generally recorded by males' thus reflecting bias (Ruether and McLaughlin 1979). While there were female leaders in the Old Testament, Jesus chose twelve men to be his disciples and most of the leaders specifically named in the New Testament are men (Howe 1974). The controversy hinges primarily on two New Testament passages; 1 Corinthians 14:33-25, and 1 Timothy 2: 9-15 (Leitch, C. and Leitch, H. 2010), but this manuscript focuses on the latter.

It cannot be denied that Paul was influenced by the culture in which he lived and accepted the subordination of women as a divinely ordained characteristic of life in the world (Longstaff 1974). However, reading 1 Timothy 2: 9-15 within its literary context indicates that Paul is not actually addressing women simply because they are women (Heidebrecht 2004). Biblical-era society was very much male-dominated. The status of women was totally subservient to the male head-of-household. It would have been considered scandalous and an affront to the sanctity of worship for a woman to take a leadership role (Leitch, C. and Leitch, H. 2010). Not only were women prohibited from taking any role that would appear to be dominant over men, they were urged to dress modestly (1 Timothy 2:9-10). At the time, Paul and other church leaders were concerned about any appearance of scandal that would make a bad impression on people they wanted to convert to Christianity. Much of Paul's writing, beyond 1 Timothy, is concerned with instructing Christians of proper behavior and correcting problems within the church (Leitch, C. and Leitch, H. 2010).

1 Tim. 2:11-12 says: "A woman should learn in quietness and full submission. I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man; she must be silent." The text calls twice for women to be quiet and it does not allow any form of teaching. However, Paul did not believe that a woman must be silent

at all times. He says in 1 Corinthians 11 that women can pray and prophesy in a worship service. It is possible, if taken from an egalitarian standpoint, that Paul was implementing a temporary restriction based on the circumstances in his church at the time (Tkach 2006). In addition, Tkach (2006) posits that females can sometimes have authority over males. Paul was dealing with teaching in the church setting; he was not addressing civil government, business, public schools, or evangelism. Paul did not allow women to do something that was permissible for men, but is not clear whether he prohibited teaching *and* authority, or teaching *with* authority (Tkach 2006).

In verses 13-15, Paul gives his reason for the rules in verse 12, referring back to creation in Genesis. Verse 13 begins with “for” and gives the “cause” of Paul’s statement in verses 11-12 (Clouse, B. and Clouse, R. 1989). It is interesting to note that God gave the commission to be fruitful and multiple, having dominion over all other earthy creatures, to both Adam and Eve. There is no hint that there was anything but equal authority between man and woman as they existed in a sinless state. This all changed when Eve ate the forbidden fruit and enticed Adam with her; for which one of the consequences for women was the loss of equality with men (Miller 2005). Verse 15 says that “women will be saved through childbearing.” This is perhaps the most difficult verse within this set of scriptures to interpret and many scholars believe that crucial information is left out that would inform readers of the meaning behind this verse (Tkach 2006).

Scholars have debated over these verses and whether or not they are a universal principle. Some of Paul’s advice seems specific to Timothy’s situation, appearing to be without specific application required today; however, Paul’s use of Genesis to support verse 12 leads many to believe that the orders in verse 12 are a universal principle (Tkach 2006). Feminist interpretations object this notion saying that Paul only restricted the women of Ephesus from teaching due to their unruly behavior (Clouse, B. and Clouse, R. 1989). An additional objection is that Paul is only referring to husbands and wives, and not to men and women in general. The Greek

words in the passage could refer to husbands and wives; however, the basic meaning of the words refers to men and women. Verses 8-10 clearly refer to all men and women, not only husbands and wives (Clouse, B. and Clouse, R. 1989). Reading 1 Timothy 2:9-15 within its literary context reveals that Paul's instructions for women are integrated with his larger purpose for writing Timothy and dealing with the false teaching going on within the church. "Paul's overarching concern that women reflect godliness through good works acts as a counterbalance to the deceptive temptation and destructive effects of the different teaching. Paul's response is consistent with both his instructions for the entire church and his concern for Timothy" (McCloskey 2004, 6).

As readers of Paul's letter to Timothy there are inferences that must be made that could potentially cloud the exegetical process. The reader hears only one side of the conversation; the letter from the author, to address mutually understood issues from a shared situational context (Heidebrecht 2004). It is important to note that readers are unable to dislocate themselves from their own context and unconscious presuppositions, thus creating meaning out of the little information provided within these verses (Heidebrecht 2004). The question in this passage is not just one of exegesis, but also one of hermeneutics. It is not enough to simply attempt to understand why Paul wrote this passage; the challenge must be faced of drawing conclusions as to how Paul's words should be applied today (Tkach 2006).

What Does It Mean For Contemporary Women?

If the church is to perpetuate the distinction of role between male and female within its structure, it must examine to what extent the distinction of roles between males and females will be portrayed (Howe 1974). Galatians 3:28 indicates that God does not view sexual distinction as ultimate and that men and women are to be counted as equals on a spiritual level (Howe 1974). Scholars on both sides of this controversy agree that 1 Timothy 2:12 puts certain restrictions on women. Paul did not allow women to teach or to have authority over men in the functioning of the church. The question is whether these restrictions were based on the situation in

Ephesus, the culture in the Greco-Roman-Jewish world, or a principle rooted in the way that God wants men and women to interact with one another in worship (Tkach 2006).

An investigation into the nature of leadership roles reveals that the New Testament clearly indicates that leadership roles are assigned by God as a spiritual gift. “God bestows capabilities and positions upon individuals for his own purposes, these subjects told me, and when he looks for a human vessel, he “sees” only the willingness of the soul to serve.” (Kwilecki 1987, 66). Paul’s letter to Timothy does not appear to address all women who were in ministry, but rather those in the congregation who were out of order. This is evidenced in the fact that many women, such as Phoebe (Romans 16:1-2), Priscilla (Acts 18:26), and Euodia and Syntyche (Philippians 4:2-3) played influential leadership roles in the early church. Numerous others served as prophetesses, evangelists, leaders, and judges (Miller 2005). Not only does scripture present numerous female leaders, but many of these leaders functioned in ways quite contrary to Paul’s prohibition in 1 Timothy 2 (McCloskey 2004). Additionally, scripture presents these female leaders, some of whom led and taught men, in positive ways, with Paul seeming to endorse their behavior (McCloskey 2004). Witherington’s (1990) explanation for this is that none of the female leaders featured in scripture engage in behaviors, specifically authoritative instruction, that Paul prohibits. More importantly, Jesus regarded women as fit for delivering news about himself to other men. For instance, John 4 describes the Samaritan women as an evangelist to an entire community. Additionally, Jesus entrusts the news of His resurrection to women before any men (Grenz 1995). More specifically, women are listed as prophets in Acts 1:8-9 and 1 Cor. 11:5, and prophets clearly had authority to both teach and preach (Spencer 1985).

There are two views on this set of scripture in regards to applicability to contemporary society. There are those who look at the twelve male apostles, and see an absolute prohibition of a leadership role for women (Leitch, C. and Leitch, H. 2010). They believe that scripture about female subservience to men should be taken

at face value. Then, there are those who view the New Testament prohibitions as practical advice to avoid scandal. This issue has often been compared to that of slavery. New Testament authors passively accepted slavery; however, very few people would argue today that we should return to a society that condones slavery. Although New Testament writers passively accepted the oppression of women, it does not imply that leadership roles for women are wrong in today's society (Leitch, C. and Leitch, H. 2010). Women took as large of a role in early church leadership as was allowed by the conventions of that society, so women today should be able to serve in whatever leadership positions they are qualified for (Leitch, C. and Leitch, H. 2010).

The overall conclusion is that Paul was not offering a universal prohibition in 1 Timothy 2, disallowing women from leadership positions in every context, but rather Paul was addressing the current Ephesian situation involving false teaching by women (McCloskey 2004). It is time for the church to reevaluate biblical teaching concerning the role of women in leadership and be consistent in the application of the conclusions drawn.

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