
Rite Reasons

Studies in Worship

No. 86

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May, 2004

Liturgical Man, Liturgical Women

Part 1

by James B. Jordan

The ordination of women to the Christian ministry, specifically the pastoral office of overseeing worship and performing preaching and the Lord's Supper, is a recent development in Church history. From the early church until the late 20th century, women were never ordained as ministers, not in any branch of the Church, East or West, Protestant or Catholic. Only in a few sects, almost always anti-theological and/or "pentecostal," were women "ordained."

It is today often assumed that the Church has been wrong about this, universally and consistently, for nearly 2000 years. This assumption holds that the Holy Spirit has either misguided the Church on this matter, or that the Spirit has allowed the Church to remain in error, for His own good reasons, and is only now correcting that error; it is assumed that only now has the Church grown and developed to the point where she is able to recognize this error.

It is not my purpose here to engage this whole issue, but to make some fundamental theological points that have been made before in Church history, but which are often not heard in evangelical circles wrestling with this issue.

The question I wish to raise is the nature of male and female in the human creation. Today it is broadly assumed that the difference between men and women is fundamentally biological, with perhaps some psychological differences linked to that biology. Taking this view, it seems that liturgical function is simply a matter of taking up a role in the Church community. To use familiar language, there is a lower storey in human life that is biological, where the differences between men and women are important; but there is an upper storey, a spiritual realm, in which those differences may not be important.

I wish to turn this on its head and look at things from that perspective. My thesis is that the differences between men and women are, by creation

design, fundamentally liturgical and only secondarily biological and psychological. To put it another way, my thesis is that the physical and psychological differences between men and women are grounded in their differing liturgical roles.

The Liturgical Creation

Let us begin by considering some foundational Biblical data. When God created mankind, He first created a male, and then a female. Paul refers to this in a seemingly absurd argument in 1 Timothy 2:12-13, "But I do not allow a woman to teach or exercise judgment over a man, but to remain quiet, *because* it was Adam who was formed first, then Eve." This is certainly an odd argument to modern ears.

Moreover, what Paul says is clearly not absolute, since we find plenty of prophetesses and wise women in the Old Testament and in the New. Deborah, for instance, obviously taught the men around her. Huldah gave instruction to the High Priest in 2 Kings 22:14-20. Hence, Paul's argument must not be removed from its Biblical context.

What is the context of 1 Timothy 2? Many modern popular evangelical writings, influenced by the theology of non-sacramental parachurch movements, read the Pastoral Epistles as if they were written directly to all believers. In fact, they are written directly to pastors, to servant priests. Of course, what is written has relevance to the lives of believers, royal priests, but what is written must be read in context. Briefly, then:

1:3-11 addresses Timothy as a teacher, and discusses false teachers.

1:12-20 speaks of Paul's conversion and of his authoritative excommunication of Hymenaeus and Alexander, an example of priestly power and duty set out as an example for Timothy.

2:1-7 says that prayer is to be offered for all mankind, which moves us into the realm of worship,

but not necessarily into the realm of special worship.

2:8-15 begins by saying that men should offer prayer and women should be modest. This odd contrast – women don't pray also? – points us to a specific kind of prayer. We shall expand on this below.

3:1-13 concerns office in the Church. The section on “elders” says nothing about women, but seemingly excludes them by saying “husband of one wife. The section on “deacons” pretty clearly encompasses deaconesses (v. 11). The restriction of eldership to men is confirmed by the fact that this paragraph follows 2:8-15.

4:1-16 concerns false teachers, again dealing with leadership.

5:1-16 concerns widow women, and implies an “office” of widow in v. 5, 9-10.

I won't continue farther. The rest of the epistle continues the same theme: The letter is an address to a pastor about order in the church, and pays attention to men and women and their different roles.

Turning to 2:8-15, Paul begins by saying that men (males) should lead in prayer, and women follow (vv. 8-11). His context, hence, is liturgical, but seemingly general, providing a general rule. After all, women may pray in public (1 Cor. 11:5), and the men in Timothy's congregation should receive instruction quietly and with submissiveness.

Paul moves to a strict rule, however, in v. 12: Women are not permitted to “teach” or to “exercise authority over a man.” He does *not* write, “Let a woman quietly receive instruction with entire submissiveness, *because* I do not allow a woman to teach” Rather, v. 12 begins a somewhat new thought, indicated by “and” or “but” (the Greek can go either way).

The word “teach” is important here. Throughout 1 Timothy, and arguably everywhere in the New Testament, “teach” (*didasko*) has reference to authoritative teaching by someone appointed or recognized as a teacher. It is Timothy, the pastor, who is to “teach” in 4:11 and 6:2, and Paul who is a “teacher” in 2:7. The official character of “teacher” is also seen in 1:3, 7 and 6:3.

From this it is fairly clear that it is the official function of teacher in the church that is in view in v. 12. The context of Paul's argument provides an indication of how he is reading and understanding the creation account in Genesis 2. When we look back at Genesis 2, it becomes apparent that “official teacher in the church as gathered for sacrament” is what Paul has in mind here.

Adam was made first. God said that it was not good for him to be alone, and determined to provide a helper suited for him. Animals passed before Adam, but none was such a helper. Then Eve was formed from his side, and she was such a helper.

But what kind of helper? Animals are indeed helpers for men; one need only think of oxen helping plow a field. “Ah, but animals cannot bring children for Adam.” True, but nothing about children is found in this passage. According to Genesis 2, Eve was not formed primarily to help Adam reproduce, but to be a helper in some other sense.

To understand that sense, we have to note that the

context is the Garden of Eden, the first sanctuary, wherein were placed two sacramental trees. The setting is not the land or the wider world. If it were, then the idea would be that the woman is needed to help with various dominion tasks – which is indeed partly true, but secondary and not the point of the passage. The point of the passage is that animals could not help Adam worship God in the sanctuary. Adam needed a liturgical helper, someone who could join him in liturgical speech and action.

Adam was created not *homo sapiens* but *homo adorans*, worshiping man. His first and most important purpose was to worship the Father, as the Son and Spirit worship the Father. And as the Father is worshiped by two, not by one, in the Godhead, so in the creation there is a need for two worshipers, not merely one. John 4:23 says that the Father seeks worshipers, who worship in truth (like the Son) and spirit (like the Spirit). Worship happens when “two or three” are gathered. A “testimony of two witnesses” is needed for this kind of worship. To be sure, we can worship privately and individually, but that is not the best and highest form of worship. For the worship in the Garden to be true and complete, Adam needs a liturgical helper.

The fact that she is intended as a liturgical *helper* already indicates that Adam is the leader in worship. But there is more in the passage that is important to consider. Before Eve was formed from Adam, God had already pointed out the two sacramental trees to Adam and forbidden him to eat of the Tree of Knowledge. After Eve was made, God told both of them that every fruit-bearing tree would be for them to eat (Gen. 1:29). Hence, what Eve heard God say implied permission to eat of every tree in the Garden.

How, then, did Eve learn that the Tree of Knowledge was (temporarily) forbidden? The answer is that Adam told her. Adam was her teacher in liturgical matters. This does not mean that Adam was to be her teacher in all matters, nor does it mean that he would never be instructed by her. What it does mean is that God set up the world in the beginning so that in matters of worship the woman is taught by the man.

And not only taught, but led. Adam was told to guard the Garden, and told this before Eve was made. Eve was now in the Garden, and Adam was to guard her. While men should generally be protective toward women as “weaker vessels” (and indeed, instinctively are protective toward women; 1 Pet. 3:7), the context here is liturgical. Adam was to guard Eve's worship. This is what he failed to do, as he stood by and refused to interrupt the serpent and protect Eve from eating of the forbidden fruit (Gen. 3:6 - “with her” can only mean he was standing by during the conversation). Rather than teach, lead, and guard her properly, Adam allowed her to be deceived, tricked by the serpent, and by himself as well.

Hence, Paul states that he does not allow a women to teach *or exercise authority* over a man, in worship, and he follows up this twin prohibition by saying that the man was created first (and hence was the teacher who had the earlier-imparted informa-

tion) and that the woman was deceived (2 Tim. 2:14, pointing to the fact that Adam had not exercised his authority as she fell into transgression).

If we go back to Genesis 3:17, we find that God condemns Adam for two things: "Because you have listened to the voice of your women, and have eaten from the tree" Listening to the woman is mentioned first. Adam's sin was in failing to be a teacher and guard, and allowing himself to be taught by his woman *in the liturgical setting of the Garden on the sabbath day*. I reiterate: Eve was not at fault here. She was tricked. It was not her action that brought about the fall of humanity, but Adam's.

To put it bluntly, Adam fell by letting a woman be the pastor of the Garden church. He allowed her to make the decision about the sacramental tree, to be the authority over the sacramental food. He allowed her, in other words, to be in charge of the Lord's Table.

Let us be clear that Eve did not take up this role because she was a feminist, because she coveted the pastoral office. No, she took up this role because she was tricked into it, and because the man refused to do his duty and perform his role as sacramental supervisor in the liturgy of the Garden. She is not condemned. The word "curse" is absent from the judgment that comes upon her. She suffers, but not for her own sin. She suffers because of Adam's sin.

In Leviticus we find a distinction between "sins of inadvertency," which is better translated "sins of being led astray or of wandering astray," and "high-handed sins." Eve's sin was one of being led astray, a "sin of ignorance." Adam's sin was deliberate, high-handed. He sinned with full knowledge. He had actually heard God's voice forbid the Tree of Knowledge.

Today, of course, we encounter feminists who covet and demand pastoral office. But very often, women serve as pastors (and as table-supervising "ruling elders" in certain types of churches) simply because men won't. Men have stepped back and allowed women to be pastors. The fault lies with men, and not primarily with women.

I have argued that according to Genesis 2-3, humanity's first and fundamental purpose is liturgical, not dominical. The "dominion mandate" is recorded in Genesis 1, but before this, according to Genesis 2, the "liturgical/sacramental mandate" had been given. The woman was made a liturgical helper first and foremost, and only secondarily someone who would help with the "cultural mandate" to take dominion over the world. The cultural mandate is given equally to men and women (Gen. 1:28). In cultural life, the man is to help the woman as much as the woman helps the man. But in liturgy, which is primary, things are different. The man is to lead; the woman is to respond.

Now, it is true that male leadership extends into cultural life, but not absolutely. Men should be heads of their families, but if the man is a drunkard, it is not wrong for the woman to take charge. In wider life, men usually are rulers in civil society, but it is not a sin to have a woman ruler. Beyond this, there is nothing wrong with women as teachers, orchestra conductors, deaconesses, or seminary

professors (as prophetesses and wise women).

In the liturgical sanctuary setting, gathered around the sacrament (around the two trees at the center of the Garden), however, the distinction is absolute. It is a sin for a man to listen to the words of a woman in liturgy, according to Genesis 3:17. It is a sin for a woman, for whatever reason, to take charge of the sacraments. (An exception might be something like an all-woman church in a prison setting.)

The Heart of Liturgy

What we call sacrament, the food-aspect of worship, is essential here. Biblically, sanctuary worship, or worship in the heavenlies, is always a "marriage supper," always sacramental. The Protestant churches made the Lord's Supper into an occasional event, annual, quarterly, or monthly. The Protestant "preaching-only worship service" is really a glorified Bible study, and from a Biblical point of view, there does not seem to be any strong reason why a woman may not oversee and preach in such a worship setting. Why can't women teach men the Bible? Deborah clearly did so. If the "heart" of worship is prophetic and not priestly, there seems no reason Biblically why a prophetess cannot preside. When the sacrament is regarded as something merely "added to" this prophetic meeting, there seems no reason why a woman may not preside at the sacrament also.

With this mentality, evangelical Protestants are unable to deal adequately with the Biblical data. Biblically speaking, full worship is always sacramental, always includes the covenant meal. It is primarily priestly, not primarily prophetic. Once this is clearly understood, the Biblical data is clear: Only men may preside over the covenant-renewal meal.

In the Garden, the meal was the primary focus. What Adam taught Eve was about the food of the Garden: not to eat of the Tree of Knowledge. That is, his preaching was sacramentally qualified, was in a sacramental setting. In sacramental worship, the sermon is not something separate from the Table and Meal, but is a message "at" the Table. On other occasions, the preaching stands by itself, and is "prophetic," but not on this occasion. Prophetic or preaching services do not take place "in the Garden," "in the Temple," "in the sanctuary," but in the more general areas of life. In fact, it is hard to find a "preaching sermon" in the Bible that does not take place in the public square.

Having divorced worship from sacrament, Protestants are left with trying to figure out why women may not preach in worship. "Let the women keep silent in the church," says Paul (1 Cor. 14:34) – but what does that mean? Does it mean women are forbidden to join in corporate prayer, forbidden to say "amen," forbidden to join in singing hymns and psalms? Obviously not. And, is Paul contradicting the OT evidence that women *did* teach men about Biblical matters on occasion? Is the New Covenant *more* restrictive than the Old?

It is only when we see that special worship, worship "in the heavenlies," is sacramental that we can put these commands in their proper context. It is during sacramental worship, during the Lord's Day

when the Church gathers for the Lord's Supper, that the rule of men-only as "priests" applies.

The Church has various kinds of events. The rule we are discussing applies wholly only to one of these: the sacramental covenant-renewal worship liturgy. It is not wrong to allow a woman missionary to speak to the congregation on Sunday night, or to have a woman theologian teach Adult Sunday School for a time, or to have women as well as men offer prayers in a prayer meeting. The general rule of male headship may mean that such occasions are rarer than having men as teachers, but the general rule does not outlaw such events. It is only in the sanctuary context that the general rule becomes absolute.

Male Priesthood in the Bible

We can trace this theme through the Bible. We see prophetesses like Miriam (Ex. 15:20), Deborah (Judges 4-5), Huldah (2 Kings 22:14ff.), and Anna (Luke 2:36); and various "wise women"; as well as women leaders of the nation (Deborah, and Miriam, Micah 6:4). But we never see women as priests.

We see women as deaconesses at the Tabernacle (Ex. 38:8; Jud. 11:40; 1 Sam. 2:22), and perhaps women among the Levite singers (1 Chron. 25:5-6, where v. 6 almost certainly refers only to the children of Heman; compare v. 2, v. 3, and vv. 4-6a). But we never see women as priests.

The priests were males only, and they alone entered the new form of the Garden sanctuary, Tabernacle and Temple. They alone supervised the sacramental meals of those sanctuaries. They were the primary teachers in Israel as "angels of Yahweh of hosts" (Mal. 2:7). This reservation of the primarily liturgical office, teaching and sacrament, to men is precisely in line with Genesis 2-3.

(to be concluded)

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