

THE BIBLE'S TEACHING ON WOMEN AND ECCLESIASTICAL OFFICE

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Ten Theses

1. There is only one question that we must address — and that is the question, what does the Bible say? As Reformed believers we confess that the Bible is our only authority for matters of faith and practice; its teaching is *final, necessary, sufficient, and clear*. I Tim. 3:16-17: “All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work.”

2. In the Old Testament we discover two themes that bear in a general way upon our question. These are the themes of *equality* and *functional subordination*. In the account of creation, man as both male and female is created after God's image (Gen. 1:27). And in the account of redemption, men and women both participate fully in the fundamental privileges of the covenant of grace. However, in creation (Gen. 2, esp. vss. 20-25) and in redemption, there is an *order* or *role-relationship* of functional subordination. The Lord both recognizes and appoints the man to exercise leadership in the home and in the affairs of Israel. The general rule (whose exceptions only confirm the rule) was one of appointed leadership. Men were ordinarily called and appointed to exercise leadership as judges, kings, prophets, elders and priests.

3. In the New Testament both of these emphases are reaffirmed and clarified. There is an emphatic affirmation of the *equality of status* and *privilege* between men and women in the sphere of redemption, and an equally emphatic affirmation of the *functional subordination* of women to men within marriage and the church.

4. In the New Testament, there are clear indications that men and women share equally in the fundamental privileges of redemption through Christ and in the power of the Spirit. For example, in Acts 2 we find that the Spirit, in fulfillment of God's promise in Joel 2, is poured out upon “all mankind; and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy.” All members of the churches, whether men or women, must be “subject to one another” (Eph. 5:21). And all are “one in Christ Jesus” (Gal. 3:28).

5. This clear and emphatic teaching of an equality of redemptive privilege does not, however, cancel out an equally clear and emphatic teaching of the functional subordination of women to men within the family and the church. It is wrong and unbiblical to make those passages in the NT which teach the equality of redemptive privilege between men and women contradict those passages which teach the difference between the man and the woman in these two spheres.

6. I Corinthians 11:2-16 teaches that the practice of a woman prophesying without a head covering violated the fact of her subjection to the man. This subjection is not removed by redemption, for it is founded upon the fact of creation (vss. 3,8,9).

7. I Corinthians 14:33b-35 forbids women from “speaking in church” or in public worship. It forbids a form of public speaking which has for its end to teach with authority and for edification. Though the passage describes the temporary and extraordinary expression of the gift of prophecy in the context of worship, it appeals to the permanently valid pattern of creation which does not permit the woman to exercise authority over the man (vss. 29,34).

8. I Timothy 2:10-14 states, “But I do not allow a woman to teach or exercise authority over a man, but to remain quiet.” A woman is not to exercise ruling authority over the man in the church; she may not hold the office of teaching or ruling elder. It is important to note that nowhere in the NT do we find a single example or instruction to a woman to exercise this kind of official, teaching authority over a man (I Tim. 4:11,14; 6:2; I Cor. 14:33-35; Eph. 5:22-4; Col. 3:18; Tit. 2:5; I Pet. 3:1-8; II Tim. 2:2; I Tim. 3:2; Tit. 1:6). Whether in the home or in the church, it is not permissible that the woman assume the lead in exercising this teaching authority. Furthermore, it cannot be too strongly emphasized that this instruction is based upon the order of creation and the disorder of the Fall into sin (vss. 13-14).

9. There is not a single, clear instance in the New Testament of a departure from this simple rule and blessed order. Anyone who argues that the Scriptures allow the gradual evolution to a position of complete redemptive and functional likeness, must violate the unity of Scriptural teaching and appeal to one part of the Scriptures against another. He must further deny what these passages teach, that the functional difference between the man and the woman in the home and church is based upon creation. It should also be noted that this is the crucial difference between what the NT says about the institution of slavery (I Cor. 7:20; Eph. 6:5-9; Col. 3:22; Philemon) and the functional subordination of women. The Scriptures provide no theological basis for the continuation of slavery.

10. The question to which we must come back always in our consideration then, of this issue is — what does the text of Scripture say? We should recognize that this issue is but an expression of a much larger one — does the Bible have the first and the last word in our churches and are we able to confess that the Lord's commandments are not burdensome but a delight? Our culture's teaching about the relationships between the man and the woman in marriage and in church do not have and will not receive the Lord's blessing. Only of the Lord's law can we say, “O how I love Thy law! It is my meditation all the day. Thy commandments make me wiser than my enemies . . . How sweet are Thy words to my taste! Yes, sweeter than honey to my mouth.” Here especially — in our relationships as men and women, in the home and in the church — we are called not to be conformed to the pattern of this world, but to be the salt and the light of the earth.