

Application of the Scriptural Principles Concerning the Service of Women in the Church

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There is probably no issue facing our church body today which raises more difficulties than the question concerning the appropriate, scriptural roles for men and women. This is currently the issue which has the greatest potential to cause serious division in our church. It is also one of the issues which is most likely to bring us into conflict with society and with prospective members of our congregations. This issue certainly calls for careful study of Scripture, thorough discussion, and a spirit of cooperation and mutual consideration among us. The question of how Christian women should operate in a society which rejects the biblical principles governing the roles of men and women is perhaps the most difficult practical question which Christians face today. However, my assignment in this paper is limited to just one part of this question, namely, a discussion of appropriate roles in which women may serve the church.

The Principles

My assignment is not to present the scriptural principles governing appropriate forms of service for women in the church, but to discuss the practical application of those principles. I will therefore not be providing an extensive exegesis of the relevant scripture passages, although such a study lies behind this paper. I will offer only a brief summary of the principles. This summary is in essential agreement with the statement of the principles as presented to the synod in the short and long study documents prepared by the Conference of Presidents.

The basic issue which confronts us in this paper is the proper interpretation and application of five truths derived from the Scriptures which traditionally have been interpreted as limiting the roles in which women may serve in the church.

The Scripture Texts

The head of the woman is man... for man did not come from woman, but woman from man. Neither was man created for woman, but woman for man. 1 Corinthians 11:3,8.

As in all the congregations of the saints, *women should remain silent in the churches. They are not allowed to speak*, but must *be in submission* as the Law says. If they want to inquire about something, they should ask their own husbands at home, for it is disgraceful for a woman to speak in the church. 1 Corinthians 14:34-35.

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. For Adam was formed first, then Eve. 1 Timothy 2:11-13.

The Scriptural Truths The Basic Principles

*Man is the head of woman.
Woman must be in submission.*

Primary Applications of the Principles

The woman must be silent in the church.
A woman must not teach a man.
A woman must not have authority over a man.

The scope of my assignment permits me to comment only briefly on the interpretation and exegetical issues concerning each of these statements. The bibliography contains numerous references to the extensive exegetical literature on these passages. I will briefly state what I believe to be the proper understanding of each term and refer to some of the most important studies of each term.

Man is the head of woman

The main issue here is the claim of some "biblical feminists" such as the Mickelsens that the figurative use of *kephale* "head" does not imply "authority over some one," but rather "source." This claim has been thoroughly refuted by such studies as those of Grudem and Fitzmeyer. The primary implication of "headship" in Greek usage and in Scripture is "authority" not "source." See Ephesians 1:21-22 for one of many examples. It is doubtful if *kephale* ever means "source," except in a few limited usages such as "head of a river." Even in this usage *kephale* means "end" or "extremity" more than "source." This is demonstrated by the fact that *kephale* can refer to the mouth of a river as well as to what we in English call the head. That man is the head of woman clearly means that he possesses authority over her.¹ From Christ's example we learn that biblical headship is authority which is exercised in service, sacrifice and love and which is carried out with humility. The fact that biblical headship is practiced in a spirit of service does not remove the connotation of authority from the term "head" any more than the sentence, "The king provides for his people," removes the concept of authority from the word "king."

Woman must be in submission

To be in submission means to be obedient to some authority or to defer to the leadership of another. Christ was in submission to his Father's will when he came and followed the plan which the Father had laid out for him. Because "submission" is a very general term, it does not provide us with much specific

guidance in making applications concerning the service of women in the church.²

These two principles of headship and submission are the basic principles governing the role relationships of men and women. They are really one principle viewed from two perspectives. To some degree, the three truths which follow are already applications of this one general principle of headship/submission.

Pastors among us have often called the three commands which follow "principles" governing the role of women in the church. I personally would not be that uncomfortable calling

¹ Grudem, *Trinity Journal* 6, esp. p.43. Fitzmeyer, *NTS* 35.

² Nearly every study of the subject has a detailed discussion of "submission."

the three truths which follow "principles" since they are primary applications which guide us in making specific applications concerning the roles of women in the church. However, there is some danger of misunderstanding when one calls them "principles" since the commands to be silent and not to teach are not absolute laws which apply under all circumstances. It is not every sort of speaking and teaching which is prohibited. For this reason, many of our writers prefer to call these truths "primary applications" or some similar name.

A recognition of the need to distinguish between the basic principle of headship/submission and the primary applications "do not teach" and "be silent" is not a new idea among us. It appeared in the *Quarterly* at least as early as 1916 in an article by August Pieper.

Paul does not want to establish the legal or evangelical regulation that the woman is to be silent in the assembly. In the passage just discussed [1 Cor 11] he is actually assuming that she steps forth in the assembly and publicly prays and prophesies; only she is not to do this with a denial of her modest reserve and her subordination to the man by prophesying with an uncovered head. In I Corinthians 14 we have the precise antithesis in "but must be in submission as the Law says." Where therefore the "being in submission" is not denied by the public speaking, praying, and prophesying of the woman, there it is neither immoral nor obstructive for the Gospel.³

We must be careful not to confuse the basic principle which Scripture sets forth with the applications which it makes of that principle. However, because the three commands which follow are broad, comprehensive applications of the principle by an inspired writer, we cannot lightly pass them by. We must study them carefully as general applications of the principle which guide us in making specific, narrowly focused applications.

The woman must be silent in the church

This is perhaps the truth most difficult to apply, because of questions about the exact context and scope of the silence enjoined in I Corinthians 14 and I Timothy 2. The topics under discussion in these chapters are delivering a public message in the church and leading the public prayer of the church. The silence enjoined in I Corinthians 14 cannot be limited to avoiding disruptive chatter and refraining from ecstatic shouts since it includes a prohibition even of asking questions. On the other hand it is clear that the command of silence does not forbid all public prayer and praising of God by women since many passages of the New Testament refer to such activities by women. In 1 Corinthians 14 the "not allowed to speak" is explained by "must be in submission." It is speaking and questioning which violate the principle of submission which are forbidden.⁴

A woman must not teach a man.

A woman must not have authority over a man.

These two commands complement and explain each other.

Several passages of Scripture, such as Titus 2:3,4, show that women are not prohibited from all teaching in the church. The context implies that the object, "a man" is to be understood

³ Pieper, *WLQ* 13, July 1916. Read the context p. 179-182. English, see *WLQ* 86, Winter 1989, p. 53-55.

⁴ Becker, *WLQ* July 81, and many other studies.

with both verbs. What is forbidden is for a woman to provide formal, authoritative religious instruction to a man in the church.⁵

The phrase "have authority over a man" has caused more controversy and discussion than any of the other phrases in question because of the debate about the meaning of the hapax *authentein*. In spite of the efforts of some to obscure the issue, it is clear that the basic meaning of *authentein* in this context is "to exercise authority." Recent studies of the word, even that of the Christian feminist Wilshire, which was based on hundreds of occurrences of the word in the TLG compact disc library of Greek literature, demonstrate that *authentein* meant "to exercise authority" before, during, and after the time of Paul. The word also means "kill" (or more likely this is a homonym), but that meaning does not fit the context in 1 Timothy. The precomputer studies of *authentein*, by Panning and Knight have stood the test of time very well.⁶ The claims of Kroeger that "exercise authority" is a late meaning of *authentein* and that *authentein* has an erotic, cultic connotation as a basic meaning are demonstrably false.⁷

The command "not to exercise authority over a man" can be understood as a "principle" more readily than the preceding two commands since it is in some respects simply a restatement of the principle "be submissive." As such it gives the basis for the application "do not teach."

Conclusion

The scriptural truths discussed above must be accepted as binding on Christians today, because in all three passages Paul relates the principle and his application of it to an order established by God at creation. We cannot set aside these principles. Nor can we ignore the basic applications he makes of the principle. We must make the principle the basic foundation on which we base all decisions concerning proper roles for women in the church. We must carefully study the applications which he makes of the principle to weigh their applicability to specific situations in the church today.

Since "headship" and "submission" are very general concepts, we will have to focus especially on understanding and applying the commands of "silence," "not teaching" and "not having authority over a man." We will do this with the help of the immediate context of these passages and with the help of other passages of Scripture which describe or authorize specific works of service by women in the church.

General Principles Concerning Applications

Before we weigh specific applications, we will briefly examine some general guidelines which Christians should follow when making difficult moral decisions. In many cases we will find two principles which are in tension with each other. We must strive to give proper balance to both members of the pair.

1. Christians who believe in the goodness of God's moral directives do not seek to stretch the outer limits of God's law. We should not be looking for loopholes in God's law or for subterfuges to evade the intent of God's law.
2. Christians do not want to build such a "fence around the law" that they deny women opportunities for service which the Lord permits.

⁵ Kuske, *WLQ* Oct. 81.

⁶ Wilshire, *NTS* 34, esp 130,131. Panning, *WLQ* July 81. Knight, *NTS* 30.

⁷ Kroeger, *Reformed Journal* March 1979.

3. Christians do not want to burden consciences unnecessarily by legalistic imposition of arbitrary applications of God's law.
4. Christians do not want to provide each other with consciences soothing excuses for conformity to the standards of the world. We must beware of adopting the hermeneutical methods of negative higher criticism which searches for strange word meanings and obscure historical settings in order to evade the clear meaning of God's Word.
5. The church does not want to establish a detailed code of canon law which is binding on all Christians regardless of their local circumstances.
6. Because we live in a mobile society, a certain amount of mutually agreed-upon uniformity of practice is necessary to avoid confusion and offense among our members. Members of our congregations will experience less confusion if we develop carefully considered guidelines concerning practices among us. Great confusion will result from "everyone doing what is right in his own eyes."
7. Good hermeneutics requires that we base applications on principles derived from specific commands of Scripture, not from vague examples drawn from unclear incidents in Scripture.
8. Principles concerning the roles of women in the church must be derived from those passages which are addressed specifically to this issue, not from passages that speak of the spiritual equality of men and women.
9. Christians should not approach this question as a power struggle between men and women, but as an attempt of all Christians to work together in service to the Lord in ways which will be in harmony with his will.

Applications

In the rest of this paper we will discuss specific applications of the principles. I will offer my opinion about the specific form of service in question on the basis of the scriptural principles and historical precedents and on the basis of my analysis of the basic character of this office or function among us. In some cases I will also refer to the views of others concerning the particular application. I want to stress that much of what I say in the following sections is my judgment, not clear doctrine of Scripture or a consensus of the synod. In many areas, especially the gray areas, we still need a considerable amount of discussion among us as we work toward some degree of uniformity.

The Office of Pastor

In the passages we have considered, Scripture does not focus on what offices a women may hold, but on what activities or roles she may fill. A serious shortcoming of many studies of this question, especially those originating in the LCMS, is to focus too much on the office of pastor or elder. Scripture does not say that a woman should not be ordained or that she should not be a pastor or an elder. It does say she should be submissive and that she should be silent in the church and should not teach or have authority over a man. Whether she does these things as the holder of a specific office or not is irrelevant. The questions is whether a woman can serve

the whole congregation in the position of pastor or elder without acting in a way which would place her in violation of the scriptural commands cited above.

Although the pastor is to labor in the congregation with the attitude of a willing servant, it is very clear in Scripture that he is also to be regarded as an authoritative leader of the congregation. "Obey (πειθεσθε) your leaders and submit to their authority (ὑπείκατε). They keep watch over you as men who must give an account." (Hebrews 13:17). "These then are the things you should teach. Encourage and rebuke with all authority" (ἐπιταγῆς) (Titus 2:15). The very nature of the pastoral office is to be an "overseer" (ἐπίσκοπος).

It should be very clear that the principles that man is to be the head, that woman should submit, and that woman is not to have authority over man forbid a woman to exercise the office of pastoral leadership over the whole congregation. However, many of the functions performed by a pastor may be performed by women under certain circumstances.

If "ordination" simply meant being installed into the ministry of the church, there would be no theological reason why we could not "ordain" women teachers, who are considered to be members of the ministry of our church. However, such a practice could be very confusing since it would be contrary to the traditional understanding of the term ordination. Although the historical evidence is not completely clear, it seems that in the early church there was a divergence of practice concerning the "ordination" of such women ministers as deaconesses. In some places ordination of women was explicitly denied. In other places, especially in the East, an "ordination" of sorts (that is, a laying on of hands) was practiced, but it was kept distinct from the ordination to the pastoral ministry.⁸

Use of the Means of Grace

Women, of course, can share the Word with others privately as part of the priesthood of all believers. Women can share the Word as called evangelists, especially with other women. In some cultures, such as many Islamic cultures which practice strict separation of the sexes, it may be necessary for most or all of the catechetical instruction of women to be done by women. In penetrating a culture with strict separation of the sexes in worship it might be necessary for a time to have a separate women's service which was conducted entirely by women. Our synod's Europe Asia Radio Committee has considered, but not yet implemented, a radio broadcast by a woman for Iranian women. Women can, of course, lead the devotions for women's groups.

Since baptism is normally administered by the pastor in the name of the congregation, baptism will not regularly be performed by women, but Lutheran theologians, unlike Calvinists, have always accepted the validity of baptisms performed by women.⁹ The Lord's Supper likewise is normally administered by the pastor of a congregation. Therefore it would not normally be administered by a woman. It is conceivable that it might be administered by a woman in a congregation which consisted entirely of women, such as a convent. It was the opinion also of Luther that women might preach and administer the sacraments under such circumstances.¹⁰

Roles in the Worship Service

⁸ *Christian History* 17, p. 11. House, Jan. 89, p. 48. Stuhlmueller, p. 65-66.

⁹ Pieper, 111, 279. *WLS Sr. Dog Notes*, p. 60.

¹⁰ LW 40, 23. LW 30, 55. LW 36, 152.

Leadership of the worship service will rest in the hands of the pastor or in his absence, of another male called by the congregation to lead. Preaching in a Christian congregation certainly is to be authoritative teaching (Titus 2:15) and therefore should not be done by a woman. Such preaching would also conflict with the command of silence set forth in 1 Corinthians 14, where the situation which called forth this application of the principle seems to be parallel to the public preaching in our services.

More difficult questions arise concerning areas of auxiliary service in the public worship.

At least in recent times there has been little question about women singing in church choirs whether in group or solo roles. Choir music is not independent or authoritative teaching at the discretion of the singer. It is (or should be) selected by or in consultation with the worship leader to advance the theme of the service. Women choir directors have been widely accepted among us, but this issue is not so clear cut. A woman could certainly lead the choir in a way which was domineering or authoritative, but the office could also be understood and practiced as assisting in the musical performance of the congregation much as an organist does. In such circumstances the pastor still has overall responsibility for doctrinal soundness and appropriateness of the music of the service.

Most of our congregations have traditionally used male ushers for our services, but there are no theological reasons why women cannot serve as ushers and greeters since the function of these offices is to assist worshippers, not to exercise any kind of authority.

Most of our congregations normally have the pastor read the scripture lessons as part of his role of leading the worship service. We are not entirely consistent in this, in so far as we permit even children to present portions of Scripture in special services. If we accept this practice and the presentation of musical solos by women, it would be inconsistent to claim that reading

Scripture inherently and inevitably involves authoritative teaching. In churches which use lay lectors, such as the Roman Catholic Church, the lectors read not only the lessons, but also some of the prayers such as the litany. Although the Catholic Church does not ordain women, many parishes allow women lectors to read the Scriptures and the general prayers. They apparently see reading as a subordinate assisting role which does not involve authoritative teaching. The priest "presides" over the service and normally reads the gospel as an expression of this leadership. Nevertheless, I believe that under present conditions we should not adopt the practice of having women as lectors. It would be unwise from a practical point of view. It would be a source of confusion and offense, especially since some people have used and are using such roles for women as stepping stones toward the assumption of the pastoral ministry by women. Such a practice would also be doubtful from a theological point of view. It is difficult for me to reconcile the role of reading and leading the assembly in prayer with the spirit of the command of silence in 1 Corinthians 14, which excludes women even from asking questions. Furthermore, 1 Timothy 2 specifies that "men (ἄνδρας) everywhere are to lift up holy hands in prayer." It does this in the same context which says, "God wants all people (ἀνθρώπους) to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth," and that "a woman should learn in quietness and full submission." It is often asserted that 1 Corinthians 11 contradicts this position since it tells women to have their heads covered when they lead in prayer. However, 1 Corinthians 11 is vague about the specific circumstances involved. It is not clear that leadership of the public congregational worship is involved in the praying and prophesying spoken of in 1 Corinthians 11. Individual personal prayers in a setting somewhat similar to a prayer meeting may be involved, or perhaps the

mutual admonition and teaching that is done in joint hymns and prayers (Col 3:16). Since the circumstances of 1 Corinthians 11 are unclear, and the prohibitions in 1 Corinthians 14 and 1 Timothy 2 refer to leadership of the public worship, it is dubious hermeneutics to use 1 Corinthians 11 to overrule 1 Corinthians 14 and 1 Timothy 2. I believe that from a theological point of view the use of women lectors would be doubtful and a danger to many consciences and that from a practical point of view it would be very confusing and offensive under present circumstances. The practice should therefore be avoided unless we can reach a consensus concerning the significance of such a practice.

It is clear that the Lord's Supper should be administered by the pastor or by a man authorized by the congregation to administer the sacrament in his absence. But can a distinction be made between administration and distribution? The Roman Catholic Church uses a number of lay altar assistants at several stations to speed the distribution of the elements to the entire congregation. In many parishes women can distribute both the wine and the bread. Some European Lutherans argue that the pastor must retain distribution of the bread since it is at this point that the authority to exclude someone from the Lord's Supper must be exercised, but that women could distribute the wine since admission has already been determined by this point.¹¹ If the form of celebrating the Lord's Supper among us was such that the distribution of the elements was understood as simply assisting all of the congregation in receiving the elements (sort of the opposite function of gathering the offering) and if some other means of upholding the scriptural principles of closed communion was in place, it would be possible to defend the position that there are no theological grounds for excluding women from assisting with the distribution. For example, in the ancient church women were sometimes permitted to carry the consecrated elements to the sick. This was considered to be a form of distribution of the elements which enabled home-bound members of the congregation to participate in the sacrament along with the congregation. Such a form of distribution without consecration of the elements in the presence of the communicant is not practiced among us. Although there are some precedents for the practice in the history of the church, I do not believe women altar assistants could be introduced in our congregations under present circumstances without serious problems of offense.

Teaching

1 Timothy 2 clearly states that a woman should not teach a man in the church. I see no way of evading the conclusion that a woman should not teach the adult catechetical and bible classes in which men are involved, except under the most exceptional circumstances. Biblical teaching is not just leading a discussion in which all the participants throw in their own opinions, and the teacher moderates and throws in an opinion once in awhile. Biblical teaching is authoritative proclamation of truths from God's Word. This fact would also raise questions about women counseling men in many areas of scriptural pastoral counseling, which by definition is not simply a matter of non-directive listening or advising, but which is authoritative teaching which may ultimately result in church discipline.

We consider high school students to be minors who are still under the authority of their father and mother, so few questions or problems should arise over this issue at the high school level. The question is not so simple at the college level when we consider the students to be men and women with adult responsibilities. I believe we should avoid placing women in positions

¹¹ Brunner, p. 36.

which would make them responsible for disciplining adult male students or for determining whether they are qualified to serve in the public ministry of the church. Care must be taken in such areas as the assignment of supervisors for practice teaching. The same concerns would apply to giving women teachers, deans, chairmen or department heads supervisory authority over male teachers at any level.

Administration of the Congregation

In our system of church government the voters' assembly is the authoritative governing body of the congregation. Among its more important responsibilities are the calling and removal of pastors and teachers, electing the leaders of the congregation, and the acceptance and removal of members. Participation in this and other governing boards in the church and its organizations should be limited to adult males who are able to properly exercise authority over other men. A few congregations have attempted to evade this reality by suggesting the voting assembly of the congregation become an advisory body. This is "a cure worse than the disease" since such a redefinition of the nature of voting and the role of the voters' assembly would amount to the establishment of a hierarchical church polity. The same would be true if the synod convention were made anything less than the authoritative governing body of the synod.

Participation in governing bodies includes both voting and joining in debate. In most cases, the purpose of voting in congregational and other governing boards is not to express personal preferences or needs, but to establish authoritative policy for the congregation. In Christian decision making which aims at best meeting the needs of all of the members of the congregation, including the minority, gathering and assessing the needs and desires of the members should be done prior to the decision-making. The responsible governing body should make decisions on the basis of an informed concern for all of the members of the congregation, not merely on the basis of personal preference. The congregation may use mechanisms such as questionnaires, family discussions, or informative meetings to obtain input about the needs and desires of all the members.

The purpose of debate is to sway opinion, to challenge and refute those who hold opposing views. A person cannot truly and freely participate in debate without challenging and contradicting the views of other parties in the debate. It is very difficult to see how women can do this in harmony with Paul's commands in 1 Corinthians 14 that women are to be silent and not to ask questions in the meeting of the church. There Paul seems to be applying the principle in a situation parallel to the exchange of views which takes place in decision-making processes in congregational meetings. Debate very often involves more challenge and assertion of authoritative viewpoints than the actual process of voting. Even questions asked during debate are often implied challenges to the views of others. Submission to headship, not teaching men, being silent and not asking questions are hardly compatible with free participation in debate. For these reasons women should not participate in the debate in governing bodies of the church.

There is no scriptural reason why women cannot be present at congregational voters' or council meetings, but as a regular practice, this often causes more problems than it solves. To be present at such meetings, but to be unable to debate or vote tends to increase frustration and hurt feelings rather than to decrease them. It is not wise to promote this practice as a way of lessening offense and anger on the part of women who feel excluded from the government of the congregation.

Congregational Offices

Women should not serve in offices of the church which have governing authority in the church and responsibility for discipline, such as elder and councilman. If such administrative tasks as treasurer and financial secretary were service positions separated from governing responsibility for the church, there is no reason women could not serve in such positions.

Committees

Women can certainly function as evangelists, teachers, counselors, and visitors of the sick if their service in these areas is in harmony with the scriptural principles of headship and submission as discussed above. If the "evangelism committee" consists of everyone who is trained to make evangelism calls, there is no reason women could not serve on such a committee. However, final supervising authority and responsibility for congregational policy must rest with the governing boards of the congregation. To avoid confusion, especially during this time when we are struggling to define and clarify our position and practices in this matter, it would be wise to use terminology which distinguishes the roles of various groups, such as governing *boards* and service *committees*. Distinctions of terminology should reflect genuine distinctions of function. They should not be imaginary distinctions, designed to evade scriptural principle. Calling a group a "service committee" when in reality it acts as a governing board and policy-making group, perhaps with rubber stamp approval from the church council, would be a sophistry aimed at evading God's will. If a woman can properly serve in a position, such as an evangelism visitor, it does not make any essential difference if she is elected, appointed or volunteers for that position or whether she is called an evangelist or a member of the evangelism committee. The key questions are "Is she being asked to serve in a way which is in harmony with scriptural principle?" and "Are we giving a clear testimony concerning our adherence to the scriptural principles?"

Other Church Organizations

There is nothing in the Scriptures to suggest that there is one set of principles governing the roles of men and women in a formally organized congregation or synod and a different set of principles for other groups of Christians who have organized to carry out some area of Christian service such, as providing a Christian high school or sending out missionaries. The principles of God's law apply to all Christians, regardless of the particular form of organization. In fact, the same principles should be followed by a group of Christians with no formal constitution or organizational structure, such as an unorganized exploratory group.

Every case will have to be evaluated on the basis of its own merits: Does the way in which women are serving in this group violate the scriptural principles concerning the role of women in the church?

We have at least one case in our synod in which we have a governing board composed of women. This is the committee which oversees the operations of our African medical mission. This group makes policy, financial and personnel decisions for our medical mission. This does not bring them into conflict with the scriptural principles since we do not have pastors or male doctors on the staff. The committee would properly be structured differently if we did.

Questions often arise about such church-affiliated groups as PTA, Lutherans for Life, and OWLS. Do these groups have any governing function, or are they simply service and social organizations? The answer may depend at least in part on how the group defines its role and organizes itself. It has not been our position that all voting is always an exercise of authority. As they define their character and set up their constitution and bylaws, the participants in such groups should ask themselves, "Are we really trying to operate within the spirit of the biblical principles of headship and submission, or are we seeking to confine these principles to as narrow a sphere of operation as possible?" Christian men and women, working together in any sphere of Christian service, will want to begin with the attitude that the scriptural principles governing the roles of men and women are not a hindrance, but a blessing for our good and that we desire to follow not only the letter, but also the spirit of these principles. Decisions concerning the roles of women in such church-affiliated groups which reflect impatience or resentment toward the biblical principles or which are aimed at eroding the application of these principles in the church would be sinful rebellion against God's will.

Conclusion

We seem to have made considerable progress toward reaching agreement among ourselves concerning the biblical principles governing the roles of men and women in the church. Although this work is not yet finished (and indeed never will be entirely finished), we must nevertheless begin to work more energetically at the second phase of our work: achieving harmony concerning the application of these principles among us. This work too will be an ongoing effort which will never be finished until Christ returns. However, we are at a point in history during which we must give special attention to this question.

The biblical principles were given in order to be applied. We cannot be satisfied to come to agreement on the principles, but then to be negligent or indifferent in applying them. But coming to an appropriate degree of conformity in this matter will not be an easy task. We are probably in a situation somewhat parallel to the struggle to come to clarity of position and harmony of practice in church fellowship which our synod experienced in the 50's and 60's. Now as then, harmony is not likely to be achieved without some disagreement and some pain. Any changes we make in our customary practices will result in a certain amount of confusion and resistance. But we cannot allow this fact to paralyze us, so that we do nothing.

We must carefully and prayerfully evaluate our practices and find a proper balance between legalistic codifying which deprives women of permissible and desirable opportunities for service and moral laxity which erodes the biblical principles. We can have harmony without complete uniformity of practice, but it is unlikely that we can preserve harmony without mutual consultation and some degree of agreement about what our practices will be.

We have a big job on our hands in educating people about the difference between principle and application. Many of our people are not well equipped to distinguish between practices which we follow because they are the only way to conform to God's moral principles and practices which we follow because we have always done them that way.

Even when we have reached the judgment that there are areas in which we can offer women more opportunities for service without violating scriptural principle, we will have to exercise care that we do not create offense by failing to provide adequate information and opportunities for discussion before we put new practices into effect. We have to educate our

people to the difference between changes which are in harmony with God's will and changes which are a capitulation to unscriptural feminist demands.

The formulation of a synod wide code of prescribed practices would undoubtedly be the simplest way to solve this problem (though it would undoubtedly result in some losses), but such an approach would introduce a form of legalism which is foreign to the spirit of the gospel and the spirit of our synod. There are gray areas in which different local conditions and different attitudes among the participants make the difference in determining whether a given practice is acceptable and desirable. Difference of attitude cannot make black white or white black, but there are gray areas which require us to walk carefully and humbly. All of us, pastors and laity, men and women, need to pray for wisdom, patience and humility as we work together to remain faithful to the principles of Scripture and to provide all of God's children with every, opportunity to serve him which is consistent with his will.

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