

Dear Thomas,

But I did want to give you some quick thoughts (my opinion) as you are looking for some type of response. I want to thank you for taking the time to let me know how you feel about the issues that apparently have been on your heart for quite some time that you have committed to writing. Currently, I do not have the time to engage in a lengthy response to all of your points, but I will give you some more to prayerfully think about, from my study (albeit light) on the issue.

Needless to say that women in spiritual leadership is and has been a fairly controversial subject; in conversation, discussion, argumentation, and practice. Emotions from both sides of the subject have been strong (your emotions are no exception). Men and women of faith have had and still have opinions which differ and agree, either in whole or part, on this subject.

It seems clear that the Scriptures teach that every member of the Body of Messiah has something to give to the Body, that every member is important (Eph. 4:14-16 & 1Peter 4:10,11)—especially the member which seems weaker, and we are to give honor to that member which seems to be weaker (1Cor. 12:22-27).

Peter writes that husbands are to live with their "...wives in an understanding way, as with a weaker vessel, since she is a woman; and grant her honor as a fellow-heir of the grace of life, so that your prayers may not be hindered." (1Peter 3:7) This weakness is not necessarily physical, soulical, or spiritual. All of us have our weaknesses and Yeshua taught that before we attempt to remove the toothpick from our brother or sister's eye, we should work at removing the beam in our own eye. Every member of Messiah's Body needs the other member in a way we very often do not understand.

There are a number of passages in the Scripture which have been used for hundreds of years to prevent women from exercising certain leadership positions in the Body of Messiah. Proper translation and interpretation is important. One of the overarching Scripture verses that you refer to is 1Timothy 2:11-14.

It appears that with the different translations (NAS, Amplified, etc...) of vs. 12 taken from the Textus Receptus (known in English as the Received Text), there is a reason that a woman, or wife, was not to be given the full responsibility of trust for or management of the public assembly. The Greek word 'authentein' before the word "of a man" is what belongs to a man. Although the Greek 'authentein' can be translated as "authority over," the possessive case of "man" seems to relate the authority **OF**, or belonging to, a man, not authority **OVER** a man. This makes a big difference in understanding and applying the principle in this verse. It implies there is an authority of a man, and an authority of a woman. Each authority having a different role, as the ranks in military service. Apostle Paul is emphasizing in this passage an order of authority within the guidelines of order in the public worship assembly and he was concerned with the content of the teaching going on in the believers' public assemblies. He may have been forbidding women to teach that women were the originators of man (1Tim. 2:13ff). There is also an authority in teaching. The New Covenant does not indicate that the teaching ministry had authority because it was restricted to particular individuals. The New Covenant associates teaching with the callings of the 'episkopos' and the 'presbuteros' (1Tim. 3:2; 5:17). In 2Tim. 2:24, the Lord's bondservant is instructed to be able to teach. This bondservant could be Timothy himself, or anyone committed to serving the Lord.

Concerning women teaching men, we only need to read how Priscilla was a part of instructing Apollos more perfectly in the way of God (Acts 18:26). In Torah, the Lord told Abraham to follow Sarah's leadership concerning Hagar (Gen. 21:12). Deborah, a Judge in Israel, provided judgments between the people of Israel, and was a prophetess. Deborah was not a 'ro'eh' or a leader in the sense of a shepherd, but the judges of Israel were leaders. When Deborah went with Barak, she stayed within the proper limits of her authority. She did not exercise the authority of a general leading the army. Although Deborah was a "leader" in Israel, the biblical record does not indicate that she had the full management of the affairs of Israel. Neither did the other women mentioned in the Bible have the full management of the assemblies they were ministering over.

Then there was Lydia, who diligently served in building the 'ekklesia' in her house. Scripture does not indicate that she was the leader of the group, but it does indicate she was very instrumental in the group. There is biblical precedence for a woman as deaconess. Romans 16:1 relates that Phoebe was a 'diakonon' – a deaconess. This is the same word used in Acts 6:2 to describe the seven men chosen as deacons, or servants. In Titus 2:3-5, there is indication of the ministry of an eldress. Since the older woman would be experienced and mature, it would stand to reason that she would have exercised somewhat of the office of an elder.

Thomas, it seems evident to me that every position in the Body of Messiah except one is available to women. The 'ro'eh' or shepherd of the Congregation does not seem to be open to women. In Ephesians 5:22-24, we read of the comparison between the order of authority of a husband and his wife, and the order of authority of Messiah and His bride – the Body of Believers. A third relationship is obviously missing – the relationship of the congregational leader to the congregation. There is no reason not to apply the same principle – male to female order of authority – to this third relationship.

Of course there is much more to say in this regard, but I think that as we learn to follow God's male to female order of authority, while practicing the male to female equality, we will recognize the leadership anointing that the LORD gives women -an anointing that works with the other half of the Body of Messiah towards the building up of itself in love. Eve was created from Adam, for Adam, to be his helpmeet. We are recreated from the last Adam, for the last Adam, to reflect His glory.

I trust that you will ponder these things as I am pondering the issues you brought up in initially contacting me.

Shalom,

Again, thank you for your response in providing several detailed reasons for the current policy regarding women in ministry. I do not think, however, that you have addressed all of the arguments I put forth in my original letter or all of the concerns. It is true that many people feel strongly about this subject, including myself, but I'm sure we can all agree that mere emotions should not win the day on anything.

Rather we should follow what we know best to be true. It is my conviction that we can know what is true in this area, and with fairly ordinary methods that anyone can use.

Having read through the reasons you provide for abandoning the restrictions on women teaching or having authority over men, it remains clear to me that the traditional doctrine is rooted in **the ordinary methods we usually use to understand**, and the new feminist approach is rooted in using unusual methods and even some very poor ones. This is at the root of my protest and continues to be. The usual methods of knowledge stand behind the patriarchy which the Bible teaches.

Your first and apparently main argument is that *authenteo* means “to have the authority of.” To begin with, my concordance and the large majority of respected translations say to “have authority over” so I don’t know why I should take your word over theirs. The regular translation of “have authority over” is the primary meaning, fits perfectly in the local context and agrees with other biblical teachings on the subject. This is backed by the **NKJV, ASV, ESV, NASB, RSV** and **NIV** which all use “have authority over”, “have dominion over”, “exercise authority over” or “assume authority over.” These are all highly respected versions. That makes your new interpretation by far the weaker.

However, even if we imagine that *authenteo* COULD mean “have the authority of” there is no problem for the traditional doctrine on the role of men. It would merely mean that this passage (in prohibiting both teaching and authority) is saying two things of similar meaning. This is because the authoritative teachings of men come from the spiritual headship positions of men. We see in the New Testament in I Timothy 3:1-13 and Titus 1:5-6 that bishops, elders and deacons are to be men, and we also see over and over by example both in the New Testament and Hebrew Scriptures that the spiritual authority is always had by men. Therefore, your alternate reading is in no conflict with the patriarchy taught in scripture. It is in harmony with it.

Now if you assert (and it appears that you do though I’m not sure) that a woman can be a congregational head without having these positions, you have then suggested a reading (as other alternate readings do) which creates massive logical problems in the text. You now have a reading where women are permitted to head a congregation but prohibited from teaching over men. This sounds remarkably illogical doesn’t it? How is that possible? Can you name any period in history when women were permitted to head congregations but simultaneously forbidden from teaching over the men therein? I hope you can understand my strong objection here. Your alternate understanding has just made the text illogical.

Now some people (I'm not sure you're among them) will try to get out of this obvious conundrum by creating yet another conundrum – they will say, well you see, preaching from the pulpit isn't really "authoritative" teaching. Well, all you have done now is ignored what the Body of Messiah has understood to be authoritative through the bulk of history, and massively changed the role of the pulpit. You have now said that the only real authoritative teaching is at a round table by some upper leadership people from time to time. However, this is not how congregants have seen it throughout the years. The pulpit has been, day after day, week after week and year after year the main and most common form of receiving authoritative teaching. So here again, the feminist position on women in ministry is forced to twist things remarkably out of shape to even begin to get its position to fit.

Sir, the traditional teaching which upholds biblical patriarchy demands no such jumping through hoops. None. It accepts the primary reading of the words that anyone can look up in their concordance. It accepts a meaning of the words which fits logically in its local context including the whole flow of the text. It fits perfectly with other passages in which scripture teaches about male headship and female submission. It is furthermore in harmony with the multitude of examples of male spiritual authority throughout the whole of the Bible. Moreover, anything akin in scripture to preaching from the pulpit has always been done by men. The position I am standing behind is also consistent with centuries of tradition and from an early date. That is strong and weighty evidence. Would anyone contest that this is weighty evidence?

It seems that the feminist position, as I have asserted from the beginning, has little of such weight. To briefly peruse some of its arguments and I believe fairly describe them, it demands we accept alternate definitions of the words, definitions which read in context either very awkwardly or illogically to a comic extent. Among other things, the feminist position tries to assert itself by taking actions from a widely different domain and applying them to this domain as well as claiming very unclear isolated incidents as exceptions, when even if these hard-to-define incidents were, we do not use exceptions to draw rules. On top of all this, the modern feminist position largely chooses to ignore the bulk of the evidence I've listed above, evidence which a reasonable person would take seriously.

Therefore, I sincerely wish to ask if these methods which you and others use represent your ordinary modes of understanding. Do you use them regularly to solve problems? Do you generally force alternate definitions of words into a verse if they create obvious logical problems? Do you with any regularity use ambiguous incidents as clear exceptions or real exceptions to make rules disappear? To think of just one example, could a child who stole a cookie and lied to his parents use Jael's apparent deception of Sisera (here's the Book of Judges again) as a means of self-justification for lying? It seems to me these methods do not represent our primary ways of understanding AT ALL and even that some of them confuse rather than enlighten. If this is true, and you don't usually use these methods to solve problems, then isn't it true that you shouldn't use them here?

Please let me briefly address several of the other points which you brought up. Number one, Phoebe being described as a “deaconess” isn’t hard evidence to ignore the prohibitions, both since the word itself in Greek usage can have quite a varied meaning (Col 1:23, Rom 15:25, John 2:5, Luke 17:8 and Acts 6:2 among others are certainly NOT speaking of official deacons) and also because, whatever that title entailed, it could not have involved her having authority or teaching over men since the two are prohibited. Therefore, while the use of the word is intriguing, its meaning is limited by the restrictions we discuss. Otherwise, you’d just be using one verse to literally negate another.

You also point out that Avraham listened to God in accepting Sarah’s counsel, but this example seems entirely irrelevant to the situation at hand. A leader accepting counsel from one who is submissive is an ordinary every-day occurrence and doesn’t change the authority structure at all. I have taken advice from my wife for instance, and this does nothing to change the fact that our marriage follows the biblical and natural ordinance of male headship. So why should Avraham taking Sarah’s counsel have any play whatsoever in this question? It seems that it shouldn’t. Do you see what I mean?

You furthermore bring up Deborah, but you do not explain why you are taking one single example of civil authority in the time of judges and claiming that it makes the limitation on women’s ministry in the New Covenant disappear. With all due respect, that seems like an unnatural leap of logic. You also mention that Lydia was influential in founding a church, but the debate at hand has nothing to do with whether women can be influential in some way in the sacred community, but rather whether they can teach and have authority over men. So this example too seems irrelevant.

Now whenever discussing this subject, I cannot fail to bring up the deeply related point, that while yours and other organizations are ignoring scriptural limitations on women in ministry, they are simultaneously ignoring and failing to preach what scripture teaches and encourages women to do. For example, how often is the role of women in the home taught (Titus 2:4-5, Proverbs 31:10-31), or the importance of having children (1 Timothy 2:15, 1 Timothy 5:14)? How often is wifely submission in the home taught in a manner which is unambiguous and not watered down (Eph 5:22-24, 1 Peter 3:1-2)? How often is the wife’s role in caring for the poor and needy taught (Proverbs 31:20)? These are roles either uniquely given to women or emphasized for women, in contrast to the roles of headship and teaching which are forbidden. So sadly, and this truly grieves me, countless believers see prohibitions broken when it comes to this arena, while simultaneously seeing obligations unfulfilled. Wouldn’t it be wrong not to be upset by this?

Moreover, it seems no surprise that the Body of Messiah has entirely lost the culture around it and is impotent to change it, when we ourselves are living and thinking in ways similar to it. For example, what business do we have complaining about a man wearing a dress when we are doing similar gender-bending in the Body of Messiah itself? How can we protest that men are not living up to their roles in taking care of their families, when we are simultaneously taking men's rights and responsibilities away from them? Believers have made a mockery of gender roles not to mention a mockery of marriage over the years, and we did that by abandoning traditional principles, not by sticking to them.

Finally, I must ask you how you can stand on the gender-role position that you now have remaining? How can you stand on the position that it is only men who have what you call the "shepherd" position? Don't you think you have made the pursuit of truth subjective enough in dismissing the traditional doctrine, that now your new claim sounds much like your personal opinion? If that is your personal opinion, maybe it will change next week. I mean you certainly can't prove that position from scripture, especially not after all the scripture and common sense deductions that the feminist position chooses to ignore. Do you see what I'm saying here? You have made the truth so subjective, that now your own claim seems bound to fail.

That is why I will continually protest this decision to feminize the congregation, which is both anti-biblical and divisive, and why I continually ask you to change it. However, I don't just ask you to reverse the decision, I ask you as a leader who is responsible for many things, to help reverse the compromised course that the Body has taken. I ask you to restore the rightful roles of men and of women. I ask this not because it is my personal preference, but because the truth testifies that it's needed. I believe ALL of us can accept what I've just proposed, especially if we seek after that clear and firm grasp on the truth, which men desire to have.

I greatly look forward to any response from you and would appreciate it if you can pass this letter along to the entire committee. Please let me know if you can. Otherwise I would be happy to send it to them myself. I will certainly be in thought about all we have discussed, as you mention in your letter, and will be in prayer.

Thank you again for your time and effort in this and for all that you do.

Yours in Messiah,

