

Shalom,

[This letter (taken out of a slightly longer one) is a response to a conversation with a local congregation minister in which he gave several defenses of the practice of having women preach from the pulpit and head congregations. Much of the letter answers the “context” argument, which says that the limitations on women’s ministry are there only because of some female “cult” mentioned in the context. Some of it answers the language claim that the Greek *authenteo* means “domineer” and not “have authority over.” The rest answers several other defenses of ignoring the plain meaning of 1 Timothy, mostly common ones.]

## New Doctrine

- 1) I would just like to point out again what a subjective arena you put yourself in once you are willing to ignore these scriptures and the traditional doctrine. For example, you told me during our talk that you would not allow a woman to preach as often as every other week because that would “appear” too much like she held a leadership office. But you see, that’s nothing more than your subjective opinion. Someone else could just as easily say something different. Someone could easily have women preaching over half the time, and you’d have nothing more than your feelings in suggesting that’s wrong. And I don’t have to point out the irony in the fact that this feeling-based thinking is the feminine form of thought, one which we should not be led by. It will prove very, very dangerous if we continue in this way.
- 2) To continue on the theme of the weakening of doctrine in general, which I think we BOTH take seriously, I’d ask you if you don’t see the similarity in the arguments you present and the arguments used by those who defend sodomy. For example (and more on this later) if you are willing to take one facet of the much broader context in the 1 Timothy verses, and claim that this one facet makes the verses irrelevant today, why complain when Christians defending homosexual behavior use similar arguments.

One common argument in Romans 1, is to grasp phrases like “burned in their lust” (and I’d point out that this is much closer to immediate context than the ones you bring up) and claim that because of this characteristic Paul is only condemning homosexual behavior which is led by the passions and not by love. I know, it sounds ridiculous, but it’s not a far cry from your argument. They will also claim that prohibition against sodomy in Leviticus sits next to rules about ritual purity (which it does) and claim that this means the text is only prohibiting sodomy as a part of worship, and not sodomy in general. Do you see what I’m saying? If you really believe one can grab one facet of context (as you do) and then ignore other facets of it, ignore the logical flow of the text and ignore the plain meaning of the prohibition then you would be weak in complaining

when the defenders of this also unnatural vice do very similar things. You are misusing the context.

One last note in weakening the doctrinal framework, how do you think you have strong arguments left when congregations today begin ordaining women pastors and elders? They can use some of the very same arguments you do. They can claim that the male headship was just cultural or related to a local situation. All the truth you'd have left to stand on are your feelings and mere tradition. Do you really want the Body of Messiah to have such a fractured doctrinal base? It sounds terrifyingly weak to me.

- 3) The crux of the issue rests on the **meaning** of the verses in question. As any concordance will tell you "to have authority over" is a primary meaning of the Greek word, and as you can see for yourself, it reads naturally in context and makes sense. While it is true that the meaning "domineer" is an alternate meaning, it does not read naturally in context, primarily because it is an ethical norm. Neither women nor men should use their authority in a domineering way.

You want us to read the passage – I do not permit a woman to teach or to "domineer" a man, but to be in silence. For Adam was formed first, then Eve. And Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived fell into transgression. However, it's easy to recognize how unnatural this is, since a prohibition on domineering seems superfluous since it is an ethical norm, and the second part about the differences between man and woman thus seems downright awkward, if not comical. Why point out such differences for an ethical norm?

In fact, if you want to amuse yourself, you can just start inserting ethical norms where my NKJV correctly puts "have authority over" and let the fun begin. It will read like standup comedy, and all for basically the same reason. Let's see -- I do not permit a woman to teach or to bear false witness...for Adam was formed first, then Eve. Or how about – I do not permit a woman to teach or to commit armed robbery....for Adam was formed first, then Eve. Do you see what I am saying? Why do you expect any reasonable person to think an ethical norm makes sense there?

To go further, any ordinary reader can tell the logical clash between a prohibition on teaching, and a permission to hold authority. See, what you're proposing expects us to imagine a time two thousand years ago (a very strange time), when women held positions of authority (assuming they didn't "domineer" men too much), but were forbidden to teach above those same men. I mean, that's awfully difficult for a reasonable person to imagine. Why do you expect others to accept that?

The reading which is behind the traditional doctrine is the normal one. It is based on the primary meaning of the word and it makes good sense in context. Do you really, honestly not see the problem with your alternate reading? Do you really, sincerely think it makes sense? I'll bet you

that you could show these offending passages to one thousand people with contemporary values and one thousand out of one thousand would be deeply offended. Why? Because they're all reading it correctly. The normal reader, and the traditional doctrine are correct. Your alternate reading does not make sense.

- 4) And let's face it, **truth is a network**. I believe you err seriously here, in part because you are erring in other areas. In this case, areas just a few verses down where we see "she will be saved in childbearing if they continue in faith." Not only are you ignoring the prohibition on women having certain roles given in the text, but are also ignoring the PRIMARY role that a woman is to have, which is in childbearing and of course by extension the home and raising of children. In fact, while [GROUP] congregations mock the ordinances of I Timothy by having women preach from the pulpit, they simultaneously nearly ignore the major ministry of the home. In fact, I don't know if I have ever heard that preached in a [GROUP] congregation. I know, times being what they are, that shouldn't be surprising, But the fact that it's not surprising, doesn't make it any less wrong.

The woman's primary domain, throughout the breadth of scripture, is the home. That is equally as relevant today as it was two, three thousand years ago; not only have women's natures not changed, but the home remains immensely important, and especially important in an age where couples are refusing to bear children, women are nearly imitating men in their lifestyles and parents send their children to spend most of their hours to be raised and educated by total strangers and often immoral unbelievers. Woman's role in the home is in dire need today.

So to return to my original point, I believe you'd start to respect the meaning and natural logic of the text we are debating, if you began taking to heart certain other texts such as this one. The prohibitions of I Timothy are there because of God's ordinances. So is the woman's role in the home.

- 5) I want to also point out some the other methods which you claim as evidence against the traditional doctrine, but which upon examination I believe turn out to be extremely weak, and sometimes irrelevant. For example, your argument by context is a severe abuse of context, and doesn't stand to reason either way. You claim that we should ignore what we naturally read these texts as prohibiting, because back then there were these cults in the area which put women above men and this is the only relevance and perhaps the only application of the scriptures. However, this is a terrible argument, and does nothing to take importance away from the prohibitions.

**Firstly**, you have to paint a grand picture of cults which is not at all in the local context. In fact, I briefly reviewed the surrounding chapters the other day, and they do mention a wide variety of false teachings, yet no description of these cults you are claiming. It seems to be a variety of false teachings he is warning about, not just a female thing. **Furthermore**, false teachings do not represent the only context or relevance, but we can also clearly see that the context includes

norms for the congregations, while at times specifically speaking of women. Hence, you hardly own the context in terms of the argument at hand. **To continue**, even if a terrible cult which elevated the women in authority over the men does indeed provide the primary relevance, this does not change the fact that the statements are applicable broadly, as are many statements made within a certain context. There is nothing to lead us to believe a specific subset of women was being talked about exclusively here. The recall of Genesis supports this point. **Lastly**, even if we assume the primary relevance is coming from this enigma of a cult, we have just as much relevance for the teachings today, for today also there is a cult called “the world”, and this “world” makes its way into the ecclesia; it puts the woman in an unnatural place of authority, has her abandon her place in the home, and even has women and men having sex-change operations. If there was relevance two thousand years ago, there is double the relevance today. Do you see my point here? I’d really appreciate it if you did.

I also want to note that your desire to exclude these prohibitions based on what I’d call a tiny subset of the context, is not matched by a desire to exclude other parts of the texts. How about dropping 1 Timothy 2:1-3 about prayers, supplications, intercessions and giving thanks? How about claiming they have no relevance outside of that time and place? What about dropping 1 Timothy 3:1-13 based on your contextual claim? Why not say they mean nothing to us today? These are the two passages flanking ours. Your desire to erase 1 Timothy 2:11-15 based on a facet of context is clearly inconsistent with what you are doing elsewhere in nearby verses. Why do you continue to claim it then?

- 6) Phoebe is called a minister, or servant, and is nowhere shown to teach above men or have authority over them. It comes across as extremely weak to continuously use her as an example. However, even if there was one sure and clear exception, we do not draw rules from exceptions. Why should Phoebe matter then, in settling the question?
- 7) Then there is the matter of some people, and I don’t remember if you did, claiming the Deborah the judge provides a reason that we should ignore these prohibitions. However, this also is weightless as an argument. A judge is a civil leader so you’re mixing different domains here.
- 8) The use of women as prophets as an argument against 1 Timothy also comes off as irrelevant. Teaching is teaching. Congregational authority is congregational authority. They are not the same as a regular congregant who believes they have a word from the Lord to share. Again, this argument mixes domains, and gives us no reason at all to abandon the ordinances given. Why keep bringing it up?
- 9) Would you agree that the fact that every example of “preaching from the pulpit” to the congregation in the New Testament is done by a man, and exactly zero examples are done by women, is a strong form of supporting evidence for the normal reading?

10) I asked you during our conversation if you thought we ought to eradicate a normal reading of scripture and two thousand years of tradition based on the kind of arguments that you are putting forth. You didn't answer my question, but changed to a different, albeit relevant subject. I suggest, you ought to have much stronger evidence to do such a thing, but what you are claiming as evidence are a very awkward reading of these verses, examples from wildly different domains, and one mere facet of the context. This hardly sounds strong enough to overthrow what is plain for any ordinary person to see. Don't you think you need better evidence than that?

I would like it if you could answer the questions I've included here. I send them to you both to challenge you and also to receive answers. I believe you have made a terrible and damaging mistake. I hope that you are open-minded about the possibility that you might just be wrong and would willingly reverse course if you found that to be true.

Thank you again,