

IN RESPONSE - THE BIBLICAL CONCEPT OF AUTHORITY, PART VIII

by Dennis Prutow
Volume III, Number 5

We are in process of examining the final word in our list of New Testament terms translated *authority*.¹ As previously mentioned, this is likely the most crucial part of our examination because we find this word in 1 Timothy 2:12, "But I do not allow a woman to teach or to exercise authority over a man, but to remain quiet." My aim is to look at this text from both the positive and negative perspectives. Before doing this, I remind the reader we discussed the teaching role of women in the church in previous lessons. For this reason, I do not repeat that discussion.² I do want to add some comments however.

In a recent conversation, the President of Geneva College challenged me. "Women in the church perceive you desire to take something away from them," He said. My response was simple, "It is not my desire to take anything away from anyone." "Nevertheless, this is how you are perceived," was the retort. "This is strange," I countered, "My own wife teaches at Sterling College. Furthermore, she teaches in the Department of Religion and Philosophy. Not only that, she teaches young men and women how to study and teach the Bible. Does that sound like someone who is trying to take opportunities away from women?" The challenge continued, "Here is the acid test," said the Geneva President. "Would you permit your wife to teach in seminary?" The answer to that question was easy. "She has already taught in a seminary. She taught a Sangre De Cristo in Colorado. While she taught, I relaxed." One comment remained. "You would do yourself a favor if you made it clear you are not attempting to take opportunities away from

women in the church." This review *may* help alleviate the false impression.

The specific type of teaching to which Paul is referring in 1 Timothy 2:12 is the *official* and *authoritative* proclamation of the Word *on behalf of the church*. It is *the* preaching and teaching *of the church* in public before a watching world. This preaching and teaching is regulated by the church. It must meet exacting standards or norms based upon the Word of God and established by the synods and councils of the church. The church requires persons who assume the position of pastor-teacher to swear allegiance to these norms with binding vows before God. Deviations from these norms are censured. We are therefore dealing with a fairly narrow issue which places us squarely within the covenantal authority structure of the church as discussed in these lessons. This is of utmost importance to recognize.

The word employed by Paul in this text, transliterated *authenteo*, and translated *to exercise authority over*, is used nowhere else in the New Testament. As pointed out in the previous lesson, there are negative connotations. It means: *have total authority, domineer over*.³ This is the sin of Eve revisited. God warned Adam and Eve concerning the results of sin. Adam would no longer be a benevolent and loving leader but would tend toward harsh dictatorial rule. On her part, Eve would no longer be a loving helper to Adam but would work to usurp his leadership.⁴ Full blown, the fall destroyed the covenantal relationship established in Eden and put men and women at each other's throats.⁵ Paul cannot permit this kind of unwholesome and unloving interplay within the

church. He will not permit women to do this. The Bible will not permit this to men either (1 Peter 5:1-3).

Does this mean a synod or council of a church may rightly grant permission for women to hold office in the church as pastors and teachers? This would seem to be a logical conclusion. However, we must consider much more than the bare meaning of the word *authenteo*. There is the matter of biblical submission. Paul says, "Let a woman quietly receive instruction with entire submissiveness" (2 Timothy 2:10). Then too, we are operating squarely within the authority structure of the church. This is confirmed in 1 Timothy 3:15, "I write so that you may know how one ought to conduct himself in the household of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and support of the truth." We must understand Paul's comments *in this context*.

In addition, the word with which we are concerned, *authenteo*, is linked with teaching. "But I do not allow a woman to teach or to exercise authority over a man, but to remain quiet." The words *to teach* do not, in and of themselves, carry a pejorative connotation. Teaching is a very *positive* function. The linkage suggests a positive side to the words *to exercise authority*.

This all comes home as we examine the word *allow* or *permit*. This is the same word Paul uses in 1 Corinthians 14:34, "Let women keep silent in the churches; for they are not *permitted* to speak, but let them subject themselves, just as the Law also says."⁶ We will look at these subjects in the next lesson.

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¹ This is the verb *authenteo*. It is used as an infinitive in 1 Timothy 2:12, *authentei/n*.

² To review the discussion of the place of women teaching in the Christian community, please refer to the examination of 1 Timothy 2:12 in 'Women in the Office of Pastor/Teacher,' Parts One and Two of Volume 2, Numbers 4 and 5 of *In Response*. In reviewing these articles, I find the discussion does need to be expanded.

³ F. Wilbur Gingrich, Frederick W. Danker, *Shorter Lexicon of the Greek New Testament* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983), p.29.

⁴ Perhaps this idea is behind the translation in the Authorized Version, "But I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man, but to be in silence."

⁵ This position is outlined in more detail in my original articles on 'Biblical Submission,' *In Response*, Volume 1, Numbers 10 and 11.

⁶ Italics added. Please note Paul *does not* forbid all speaking. Paul explicitly permits prayer and prophecy in 1 Corinthians 11:5. However, ecstatic prophecy is no longer extant, *In Response*, 'The Ministry of Women,' Volume 3, Number 1.

IN RESPONSE - THE BIBLICAL CONCEPT OF AUTHORITY, PART IX

Giving Women *Permission* to Speak for the Church

by Dennis Prutow

Lest you get the impression the Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America is the only conservative, Reformed denomination with people struggling over the role of women in the church, I direct your attention to the March, 1994 issue of *New Horizons*, the official publication of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church.¹ A Westminster Theological Seminary ad appeared in the December issue “that invited applications from women for a full time, tenure-track position in the Department of Old Testament.”² Speaking of supposed legal necessities, a letter to the editor asks, “[S]ince when would such a venerable institution as WTS make such an accommodation to the government of this world?”³ The editor defends the WTS ad. “If an ad invited women to apply for a position Scripture clearly forbade women to hold, we would not run it.”⁴ The Scripture text cited in expressing concern over WTS was 1 Timothy 2:12-13. Apparently the editor does not think Paul forbids women teaching at the seminary level. Another letter to the editor challenges the notion of authority in the Garden of Eden. It goes on to *imply* that equal giftedness leads to equal roles.⁵ The same letter ends with a classic statement, “Are the men in our church so caught up in the fear of losing control of their patriarchal system that they cannot sit down with women and lovingly search for the truth, casting aside cultural and gender biases?”⁶ I bring this up simply to show (1) the subject of our discussions is applicable to the broad Reformed community and (2) the issues are the same.

Now, what about the word translated *allow* or *permit* in 1 Timothy 2:12? ⁷ This word is used seventeen times in the New Testament. We find a typical example of how this word is used in John 19:38,

And after these things Joseph of Arimathea, being a disciple of Jesus, but a secret one, for fear of the Jews, asked Pilate that he might take the body of Jesus; and Pilate *granted permission* (italics added).

Our word has to do with seeking permission by asking for it and then being granted permission. We see this same use in Acts 21:39-40,

But Paul said, ‘I am a Jew of Tarsus in Cilicia, a citizen of no insignificant city; and I beg you, allow [permit] me to speak to the people. And when he *had given permission*, Paul, standing on the stairs, motioned to the people with his hand; and when there was a great hush, he spoke to them in the Hebrew dialect’ (italics added).

Notice Paul made a request for *permission to speak*. He was then *granted permission*. Acts 26:1 is parallel, “And Agrippa said to Paul, ‘You are permitted to speak for yourself.’”

Other instances of this word are similar. Matthew 8:21 with Luke 9:59 and 61, “And another disciple said to Him, ‘Lord, permit me first to go bury my father.’” Matthew 19:8 with Luke 8:32, “He said to them, ‘Because of hardness of heart Moses permitted you to divorce your wives.’” Mark 5:12-13 with Luke 8:32, “And the demons entreated Him saying, ‘Send us into the swine so that we may enter them.’ And He gave them permission.” Two references are to Paul being given permission to visit friends and to stay by himself, Acts 27:3 and Acts 28:16 respectively. Two references relate to the permission of God, 1 Corinthians 16:7 and Hebrews 6:3. One would assume this is permission granted in response to prayer.

This leaves 1 Corinthians 14:34 and 1 Timothy 2:12. From the use of the word in the New Testament, it would seem

proper to suppose permission to speak is requested by women in the church and that permission is denied by the apostle. “Let the women keep silent in the churches; for they are not permitted to speak” (1 Corinthians 14:34). “But I do not allow [permit] a woman to teach or exercise authority over a man but to remain quiet” (1 Timothy 2:12).

In both these case, Paul is giving instruction having to do with “conduct” in the household of God, which is the church of the living God” (1 Timothy 3:15). As we have seen, the church is a divinely ordained covenantal authority structure.⁸ Within that structure, certain roles obtain. The pastor-teacher is, among other things, to officially proclaim the Word of God as God’s representative, under God’s authority. There are solemn covenantal obligations involved. The office of pastor-teacher is therefore to be filled by those authorized and permitted by God as outlined in Scripture. *In this narrow sense Paul declines to grant women permission to speak.*

This is the case because Paul does not prohibit *all* speaking and *all* teaching on the part of women. Within the context of the gathered church praying is specifically endorsed (1 Corinthians 11:5). Paul instructs older elect ladies within the church to instruct and encourage the younger ladies (Titus 2:3-4). This work is of immense value. Outside the context of the gathered church women assist in teaching men and women. “But when Pricilla and Aquila heard him [Apollos], they took him aside and explained the way of God more accurately” (Acts 18:26). I emphasize this teaching took place outside the gathered church. In a similar fashion, Paul commends mothers who teach their sons the Scriptures (2 Timothy 1:5 with 3:15). This too is vital and important teaching outside the gathered body.

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¹ I am deeply indebted to the Orthodox Presbyterian Church for much of my own understanding of the church of Jesus Christ and of the Scriptures. I had the great privilege of serving in that denomination for eight years.

² *New Horizons*, March 1994, p. 22.

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ See *In Response*, January 1994, ‘The Ministry of Women,’ for a rebuttal of this position.

⁶ *New Horizons*, March 1994, p. 23.

⁷ We are concerned with the Greek word *evpitre*, pw.

⁸ See Part VI of this series, ‘The Church as a Covenantal Authority Structure.’

IN RESPONSE - THE BIBLICAL CONCEPT OF AUTHORITY, PART X

Giving Women *Authority* to Speak *for* the Church

by Dennis Prutow

We continue to work on our understanding of 1 Timothy 2:12 and the role of women in the gathered body of God's people, the church. We must keep in mind the church is a covenantal authority structure instituted by God. In this lesson, my objective is to deal with the question raised at least two times in previous lessons: Is it proper for a synod or council of the church to grant permission to women to teach and carry official authority in the church?

The Associated Press report was simple, "The church of England made it official Tuesday [February 22, 1994]: it will ordain women as priests. The amendment to ecclesiastical law to permit the historic change was the last formality in the sometimes bitter and hard-fought debate within the state church."¹ As a result of the action of its General Synod, the Church of England expects to ordain at least 1,200 women as priests in the next few months.

Beyond doubt, a covenantal authority structure has taken action and determined to *permit* women to speak in the Church of England as priests. They are now *permitted* to assume the office of pastor-teacher. There are two interesting sides to the action taken by the General Synod. First, as a duly constituted assembly of the church, did the General Synod have actual authority to authorize the ordination of women priests? Or was the General Synod acting outside of its authority? Second, since women seeking ordination must obtain permission from the church, does their ordination involve them in the kind of submission to an authority structure to which they appear to be opposed? In other words, does their ordination confirm the very type of authority these women seem to reject?

First, did the General Synod of the Church of England have actual authority to authorize the ordination of women as priests? We can answer this question in two ways. If legal authority is in view we may answer Yes. As a legal entity the Church of England or any other ecclesiastical body has the privilege of regulating its own affairs. As many other

churches have done, the Church of England has the legal authority to authorize the ordination of women as priests. No law forbids this church or any other church from so regulating its internal affairs. For this we can give thanks to God.

But did the Church of England have the moral authority to take the action it did? Although legally on solid ground, was it morally correct? What is legal may not be and often is not right. Abortion is legal. The practice is morally reprehensible. On the basis of the discussion of our last two lessons, my position is the General Synod of the Church of England did not have the moral authority to authorize the ordination of women as priests. I think its action is contrary to the Word of God. The apostle Paul says he does not permit women to speak in the capacity authorized by the Church of England (1 Corinthians 14:34 and 1 Timothy 2:12). Who is wrong? Is Paul wrong? Is the Church of England wrong? Or is our understanding of Paul wrong?

One thing is sure. Paul is not wrong. He speaks under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. If the Church of England is correct, our understanding of Paul must be wrong. Do we understand Paul's words correctly? I think we do. We have labored to show the church is an authority structure with covenantal qualities guided by Holy Writ. When a church acts contrary to its covenant standards, the Scriptures, it acts outside of its moral authority. It is disobedient.

Is our application of Paul's words incorrect? That is, were Paul's standards culturally conditioned so that they do not apply in twentieth century America as they did in the first century? Beyond doubt Paul speaks out of a particular cultural context. Yet his words regarding women in the role of pastor-teacher are rooted in creation. They go back to the covenantal structure established by God in the Garden *before* the fall.² Paul's prohibition in 1 Corinthians 14:34 is founded upon what Paul declares, "the Law also says." "What 'the law says'

was evidently in Paul's mind when he grounded his doctrine in ch. xi on the O.T. story of the creation of Man and Woman."³ In like manner, Paul specifically locates the reason for the ban of 1 Timothy 2:12 in creation. "For it was Adam who was first created, and then Eve" (1 Timothy 2:13).

I agree. Paul was a man of his times. He lived in the first century. We live at the end of the twentieth. Be this as it may, the Holy Spirit, speaking through the apostle, is not culturally conditioned when He grounds His words in the created order. As a result, I say Paul was correct; our understanding of Paul is adequate; and the Church of England was wrong. The Church of England acted outside its moral authority. In its decision to ordain women as priests it does not speak for God. It has broken covenant with God. This means the women ordained by the Church of England have the legal authority to preach, teach, and administer the sacraments within that Church. Women have the same legal authority within several denominations in the United States.

Women operating under this *legal* authority do not have the sanction of God. They will teach in the gathered assembly of God's people and publicly proclaim the Word of God. They will also sit in the solemn assemblies of the synods of the church and *exercise* legally obtained *authority*. They do so in violation of 1 Timothy 2:12, "But I do not allow [permit] a woman to teach or exercise authority over a man, but to remain quiet." They therefore do not have the right to expect the blessing of God. What about women teaching in Christian colleges and in seminaries? We will look at the latter question in the next lesson.

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¹ *Hutchinson News*, February 23, 1994, p. 7.

² Review Parts I, II, and III of this series.

³ W. Robertson Nicole, ed., *The Expositor's Greek Testament, Volume Two* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1961), p. 915.

IN RESPONSE - THE BIBLICAL CONCEPT OF AUTHORITY, PART XI

Giving Women *Authority* to Speak for the Church, Continued

by Dennis Prutow

As we continue to work on our understanding of 1 Timothy 2:12 we have two questions with which to deal. First we complete our look at the Church of England and ask: Since women seeking ordination must obtain *permission* from the church, does their ordination involve them in the kind of submission to an authority structure to which they appear to be opposed? In other words, does their ordination confirm the very type of authority these women seem to reject?

We have confirmed the church is a covenantal authority structure. Certain duties and responsibilities obtain for everyone within this covenantal authority structure. Members take vows. Officers take a different set of vows. There are various positions and roles to be filled within every local church, presbytery and presbyterial, synod and synodical. These roles exist. Scripture gives explicit guidelines for some of them, the pastor-teacher for example. Other offices or roles are not delineated in Scripture. Who may be a choir director? Who is to fill the positions of president, secretary, or treasurer within a congregation? Are these legitimate roles? If so, what are the guidelines for filling these positions? Each position has responsibilities and privileges. They are all part of the covenantal authority structure. No matter how we try, we cannot evade this.

In the Church of England, as in many other parts of the visible church, women have petitioned the synods and councils of the church to be ordained as priests. In that they have worked within the system, their efforts are to be praised. In that they have worked within the system to change the system, these women are to be praised. That they desire something contrary to Scripture is to be deplored. As shown in our previous lesson, the General Synod of the Church of England was wrong in acceding to the request of women under its care.

Oddly enough, many women in the fight for 'biblical equality' reject the notion that the family and the church are God ordained covenantal authority structures. Yet when their church decrees they may be ordained, two things happen. First, they place themselves in sub-

mission to the authority structure of the church to be ordained. In the case of the first women ordained in the Church of England, they literally place themselves under the ordaining hands of the ordained men of the church. Second, by virtue of their ordination, they take up an office within the covenantal authority structure of the church and they carry out their duties under the authority of their synod or church council. I put it more strongly. The ordination of these women proves the very points many of them have argued against. The church is a covenantal authority structure. There are roles to be played in the church. Although all are equal in dignity and honor, all are not equal in role.

Here is our 2^d question: What about women teaching in Christian colleges and seminaries? As I have said, my wife teaches in a Christian college and has taught at the seminary level. Is this teaching a violation of 1 Timothy 2:12? I do not think it is. First of all, this teaching is carried on outside the pale of the gathered church. Many women are quite gifted as teachers. Like my wife, they are quite gifted in communicating the truths of Scripture in the classroom. The college classroom provides a magnificent outlet for the use of such talents.

Understanding my wife the way I do, I know her teaching is guided by her commitment to Christ, her commitment to the Scriptures, and her commitment to the standards of our church. She does not hold an ordained office within the church. She does not stand before the people and publicly teach the Word of God in the gathered church as the official representative of God. Although she is an active member of our denomination's Board of Education and Publication, she does not exercise authority as a member of a presbytery or synod.

The role of my wife, as an educated woman, is to teach in the classroom of the college where she is under contract. The college is an independent covenantal authority structure. It has no legal obligations to the church. The college's moral duty to parents and to the church consists in its obligation to educate young men and women according to

biblical standards and the covenant made with parents via the school's doctrinal statement, mission statement, catalog, and admissions agreements. I do not think putting women under contract in order to fulfill these moral obligations violates either 1 Corinthians 14:34 or 1 Timothy 2:12.

I think this is the case because the college is a *distinct* covenantal authority structure. The college is not a church; it is not organized as a church; it does not have the classic marks or characteristics of a church. First, its faculty and staff do not represent the church to the world in the public proclamation of the gospel. Quite the opposite is true. Pastors and teachers represent the church to the college when invited to speak to the college community. Second, the keys of the kingdom are not given to the college (Matthew 16:18-19). The college does not bring individuals into the church nor does it exercise *church* discipline. Its discipline ought to be *biblical* but this does not make it *church* discipline (Matthew 18:15-18). Third, the college has no authority to administer the sacraments. It does not bring converts into the church by way of baptism nor does it baptize the infants of believers. The college sometimes *plays* church by celebrating the Lord's Supper. But because baptism and the Lord's Supper are sacraments of the church and the college is not a church it has no authority to celebrate the sacraments. As it does not baptize, it should not celebrate the Lord's Supper. The members of the college ought to go to the church to enjoy the benefits of the sacraments. I think the same argument holds for the modern seminary. Because colleges and seminaries are not churches and do not speak *for* the church, when colleges and seminaries place women under contract to teach, they are not violating either 1 Corinthians 14:34 or 1 Timothy 2:12.

A further word about seminaries and a final word about women teaching in the local church completes this series.

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