

Feminist Theology: Another Gospel

By James Moriello, Firm Foundation Christian Church, Woonsocket, RI, 2016

Feminist theology is one of many alternate theologies that has sprung up over recent decades. For many, it constitutes another gospel. At the very least, it is made an essential point of the Christian faith by its more ardent proponents. It is exalted to a place alongside the true Christian gospel, which states that belief in Jesus Christ and His death, burial, and resurrection is the most important and most essential thing (John 3:16; 1 Corinthians 15:3-4). In “traditional” Christian theology, Christ is the main thing, and Bible doctrine matters (Acts 2:42). *“If anyone teaches otherwise and does not consent to wholesome words, even the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, and to the doctrine which accords with godliness, he is proud, knowing nothing, but is obsessed with disputes and arguments over words, from which come envy, strife, reviling, evil suspicions, useless wrangling of men of corrupt minds and destitute of the truth, who suppose that godliness is a means of gain. From such withdraw yourself.”* (1 Timothy 6:3-5, NKJV). In feminist theology, ambition is the main thing, regardless of the fact that God’s Word is contradicted, misinterpreted, mistranslated, and misapplied. To do such things to the inerrant Word of God is to engage in presumptuous sin. Scripture sets boundaries for us to live by, and if one wants to please God in both the private and public spheres of worship, one must stay “in bounds.” I was challenged by feminist theology very early on in my ministry, and it has come up occasionally throughout my ministry. The challenges are always evolving, and are endless. As each claim is debunked, new claims arise in their place. It is simply not seen as an option for the feminist theologian to abandon the position. The goal of feminist theology is to break down clear Bible passages and commands and make them mean something else. If one can find a loophole, or create a web of words to confuse one’s audience, then (the thinking goes), one has proved the point. My purpose in writing this is twofold. First, I want to give a reasoned defense for those who are confused about matters of gender roles, as they are prescribed in the Bible. Second, I wish that those who are confused by such things and know that something is amiss with feminist theology gain understanding through careful study of the Scriptures. My purpose is not to denigrate women or imply that they are in any way inferior to men. My experiences in life and the ministry make me wonder if, in fact, the opposite is true! Neither is my purpose to incite endless debate on the issue, since the church of God is easily able to settle the matter and direct energy into promoting the Gospel of Jesus Christ. The Word of God has spoken, and it is quite clear on these matters. We shall now examine relevant Scripture texts, answer a few of the points made by the feminist theologians, and offer practical considerations.

1. *“For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if*

you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise"

(Galatians 3:26-29). The context is clear that this passage deals with salvation, and not roles within the marriage or the church. Gender distinctions, like ethnic distinctions, remain. The point of this passage is that salvation through faith alone in Christ alone is available to all, and can be enjoyed to the full, regardless of ethnicity, social status, or gender.

2. *"Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband is head of the wife, as also Christ is head of the church; and He is the Savior of the body. Therefore, just as the church is subject to Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in everything. Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her"* (Ephesians 5:22-25). This passage deals with the divine order of things. Christ is the head, the husband is to exercise authority in the marriage in a Christ-like way, and the wife is not to seek to usurp that authority. This same manner of order ought to be present within the church, or else a poor and unscriptural example will be set for all of the marriages and families in the church assembly.
3. *"For God is not the author of confusion but of peace, as in all the churches of the saints. Let your women keep silent in the churches, for they are not permitted to speak; but they are to be submissive, as the law also says. And if they want to learn something, let them ask their own husbands at home; for it is shameful for women to speak in church. Or did the word of God come originally from you? Or was it you only that it reached? If anyone thinks himself to be a prophet or spiritual, let him acknowledge that the things which I write to you are the commandments of the Lord. But if anyone is ignorant, let him be ignorant"* (1 Corinthians 14:33-38). In verse 33, the context is "in the churches." In verse 34, we find the command for women to "keep silent in the churches." In verse 35, we have an anticipated objection answered and an application that arises out of the command. The Scripture adds that "it is shameful for women to speak in church." "Shameful" is "aischros", and "shameful" or "disgraceful" is its meaning in both English and the original Greek. In the verses that follow, Paul anticipates that certain headstrong people will disobey these things to pursue their own agendas. As clear as this passage is, it does appear to come into conflict with 1 Corinthians 11:2-5, a passage which clearly affirms male headship in a way consistent with Ephesians 5:22-23, but speaks of women praying and prophesying. These women's ministry activities must have been taking place outside of the regular church worship service, or else they would be in violation of the command given three chapters later! Nothing in Scripture would prohibit women from exercising their ministry in a public place or in specially appointed

church meetings for such purposes. One rule of biblical understanding is to understand the unclear passages in light of the clearest passages, so to take the 1 Corinthians 11 passage and interpret all other clearer passages in light of it is poor Bible study method indeed.

4. *"I desire therefore that the men pray everywhere, lifting up holy hands, without wrath and doubting; in like manner also, that the women adorn themselves in modest apparel, with propriety and moderation, not with braided hair or gold or pearls or costly clothing, but, which is proper for women professing godliness, with good works. Let a woman learn in silence with all submission. And I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over 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. Nevertheless she will be saved in childbearing if they continue in faith, love, and holiness, with self-control"* (1 Timothy 2:8-15). The context is public worship, and is not restricted here to the marriage relationship only. Some have attempted to translate "women" as "wives", but this is a clear violation of the context of the passage, which deals with the local church worship service. Therefore, the applications are to all men and women in the church, regardless of age or marital status. Women are to learn, to be taught the great truths of the Christian faith by biblically qualified men. They are to "learn in silence with all submission." The word translated "silence" is "hesuchia", which means quietness and silence, and agrees with 1 Corinthians 14:34 by way of principle. "Submissiveness" is "hupotage", meaning to line up under (with respect to authority). Paul then further explains what he means. Specifically, women are not to "teach" in the public assembly, in the church. "Teach" is "didaskein", and is in the present infinitive, meaning "to be a teacher". The word translated "authority" is "authentein", and means just what it says. Therefore, ambitious agenda-driven women are not to be allowed to usurp the authority of the leadership of the church. This does not mean that women cannot evangelize in their daily lives and teach other women and children. Indeed, they are commanded to do both (Acts 18:26; Titus 2:3-4). The reason that is given for the prohibitions against women teaching publicly in church and exercising authority over the church is not cultural norms; rather it is God's design in creation. It has to do with divine order, not human culture. What does it mean that women "will be saved in childbearing?" It cannot mean salvation, because that would contradict the gospel. Neither can it mean salvation from the command not to teach or have authority over men in the church, since God would never give a command and then nullify it. Paul is saying that women are not inferior, but have distinct roles from men, that are seen even in nature. Genesis 3:15-16 are in view here in the mind of the Apostle. It is from women

that the human race continues, and it was from a woman that the Christ was born into this world He created.

5. *“This is a faithful saying: If a man desires the position of a bishop, he desires a good work. A bishop then must be blameless, the husband of one wife”* (1 Timothy 3:1-2). This is the clearest Scripture passage regarding biblical qualifications with regard to office in the local church. The word “bishop” is used interchangeably with elder and overseer in the New Testament. The title “Pastor” is derived from the shepherding role of the man in this position. Notice in the text that the position is restricted to males. The phrase “husband of one wife” is literally “one woman man.” This deals with moral qualifications for the office, but does not necessarily exclude single or divorced men. It is a new trend of the day to have “husband and wife pastor teams.” This is unbiblical, as the wife is clearly not biblically qualified for the office, no matter what context in which the terms are couched.

6. *“Likewise, their wives must be reverent, not slanderers, temperate, faithful in all things. Let deacons be the husbands of one wife”* (1 Timothy 3:11-12). Some who would like to set up the office of deaconess translate “wives” as “women”, since the possessive “their” is not in the best Greek manuscripts. However, the next verse says that deacons are to be “one woman men.” This disqualifies women from the office, and affirms the translation “their wives” as being the logical and correct meaning. The feminists often point to Phoebe as an example of a deaconess mentioned in the New Testament (Romans 16:1-2). However, nothing in that text indicates that she held a particular office in the church. Rather, she was commissioned for a special service by the church. To argue otherwise puts the Apostle Paul, who wrote both Romans and First Timothy, into conflict with himself. Since both Epistles were written under the divine inspiration of God, one would have to deny divine inspiration in order to argue that Paul evolved in his thinking (2 Timothy 3:16; 2 Peter 1:21). Some churches have instituted an office of deaconess as separate from that of deacon, saying that since this is a specific ministry to women only, it is allowable, but it is not. The fact remains that there is no such office in the New Testament.

Other practical considerations:

1. Should women become chaplains? No, as this would violate 1 Timothy 2:12. The chaplain should belong to and work with a local church. Chaplains are generally understood to be clergy, and the church should have a public witness consistent with Scripture. Women can and should serve in public institutions, but under the authority of the biblically established leadership of the local church.

2. Where do we draw the lines with regard to the “silence” and “teaching” injunctions in the regular local church worship service? We have to draw lines somewhere. Every football field has clearly marked lines to determine whether someone is within bounds or out of bounds. Women can and should engage in congregational singing. Speaking ministries in the services should be male ministries. These include public prayer (1 Timothy 2:8), Scripture readings (which are, in my opinion, part of the teaching ministry in the service), sermons, and devotional teachings. Women can and should partake of congregational singing, participate in the Sign of Peace, and teach women’s only and children’s Sunday Schools.
3. What about Bible Studies and Prayer meetings? Women should lead when all participants are women and/or children. In mixed groups of men and women, a man should always lead, so as not to violate the principles set forth in 1 Timothy 2:12 and 1 Corinthians 14:35.
4. There are woman pastors and deaconesses that I know of in other churches. What about them? They are engaging in presumptuous sin by opposing God’s order, which is precisely the same thing the Apostle Paul and Timothy faced in Ephesus and Corinth.
5. There are many opinions about this subject. How do you know that your opinion is right? I rest upon the clear teachings of Scripture. The Bible must be read honestly and without agenda, and its plain teaching received. I am merely reaffirming what Christians have always understood quite clearly for nineteen centuries. Feminist theologians have arrayed for themselves an army of so called “scholars” who will tell them what they want to hear, regardless of the plain teaching of Scripture.
6. Do you think men are superior to women? No. Both genders are created in God’s image (Genesis 1:26-27). Both genders have equal opportunity for salvation (Galatians 3:28). Each gender has special God-given purposes, and I thank God for His wisdom in creating men and women in the unique ways that He has. Women can, should, and do serve in many areas of Christian ministry such as teaching children, serving Communion (which is not prohibited in Scripture), evangelizing, writing, exercising hospitality, praying, music, art, visitation, and so forth.