

Women and the Bible: Questions & Answers

April 19, 2021

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Ephesians 4:1-5

INTRODUCTION

Welcome back!

I hope you have recovered from our teaching day mountain adventure.

This is our first Questions and Answer session.

And one of the first questions was “why are we doing this and why now?”

(1) Purpose: What are we trying to achieve with this elaborate community teaching process?

- We want to gain a more fully understanding of the role of women
- Most importantly, we want to establish a solid biblical foundation without presuppositions: we tried very hard to embark our bible study without a bias or desire for a specific outcome in mind – which is not easy to do and why we need a team to help each other stay focused on Scripture.
- Development of a framework for application for the BCC
- ➔ the main reason for “why now?”
Maintain the unity of the Spirit in our church

(2) Process: Why does it take so long?

- Community teaching takes time: a short synopsis of the process
 - ICOC Teachers ➔ “The Bible and Gender”
 - BCC Teachers ➔ Teaching foundation for the BCC: what do the teachers say?
 - Diverse, multi-generational taskforce ➔ Guiding principles
 - Region leaders & wives + Elders & wives ➔ Application
 - Teaching Day ➔ not “Valdur’s teaching” but the result of our community teaching (I stand fully behind it 😊)
- We are now in the last part of the process

(3) Questions: What happens now?

- We received over 180 questions
- What are the next steps?
 - Elders and region leaders together with their wives still working through some of the details of implementation
 - Today we are covering principles and some specific applications on some of the more popular asked questions.
 - But each of your questions is important – I read prayerfully through all the questions. A team of brothers and sisters has reviewed all questions and helped me prioritize those which have been the most frequently asked.
 - We will have another follow-up video once the elders & region leaders & wives have worked through all open issues
 - We will attempt to answer some of your questions personally since the questions cover a wide variety of topics
 - Zoom-based office hours
- This is a process!

(4) Key Conclusions: Summary of the main principles from the teaching day

- Women and men were created by God to equally reflect the nature and character of God.
- Women and men are not identical in every way. They were created by God for roles in the family and the church that overlap but are not identical.
- In the family and the church women and men need to be empowered to use their gifts while fulfilling their gender specific roles (e.g., headship).
- While the principles are clear, some of the details are left for decision and discussion.
 - This is how God works with his people: we are made in His image and he wants us to get His heart and His mind and He often leaves it up to us to work out the details.
 - Other examples: appointment of first “deacons” in Acts 6, in general, roles in the church, such as elders, evangelists, teachers.
- An admonishment to (1) not trying to “push the boundaries,” and (2) not to adopt a “pharisaic” attitude. A “checkbox” mentality is not the way to read the Bible.

Transition: we have two sets of questions, (1) Bible Interpretation and (2) application.

I. QUESTIONS ABOUT INTERPRETATION

How our interpretation was developed ... We looked at Scriptures in 1 Corinthians 11 and 14, as well as 1 Timothy 2. And we interpreted them together – following the interpretation principle of our high view of Scripture that means the Bible does not contradict itself.

We had a number of questions regarding our interpretation of 1 Timothy 2:8-15.

(1) Questions to 1 Timothy 2

- We looked at 1 Timothy 2:8-15, and in particular at verse 12: *I do not permit a woman to teach or to assume authority over a man; she must be quiet.*
- The fact that we cannot conclude with certainty on the meaning of *authenteo* does not mean we dismiss or don't use the Scripture
- While the text reflects a situational correction, it teaches a timeless principle by referring back to the creation order
- This timeless principle is the headship principle in the assembly that some of the women seem to violate by *how* they spoke
- This interpretation is consistent with the corrections in 1 Corinthians 11 and 14

We received a number of questions regarding our interpretation of 1 Corinthians 11 and 14.

(2) Questions to 1 Corinthians 13 & 14

- What is cultural and what transcends culture?
 - No Scripture is to be dismissed as “cultural” – *All Scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching, for rebuking, for correcting, for training in righteousness* (2 Timothy 3:16-17)
 - Therefore, we need to take all Scripture into account
 - The biblical writers used Scripture to demonstrate the timelessness of Scripture, examples are Paul and the creation order, Jesus referring back to Moses, etc
 - Timeless principles that 1 Corinthians 11, 14 and 1 Timothy 2 have in common: free use of gifts in the assembly, headship in the assembly, factually and visibly established
 - We must “map” cultural applications from back then to our culture here and now, example: the holy kiss (1 Corinthians 16:20)

Transition: with these comments I covered a good number of questions concerning interpretation, but certainly not all of them. As I said earlier, we want to follow up on all questions. So, stay tuned. Now let's come to application questions.

II. QUESTIONS ABOUT APPLICATION

(1) What does headship look like in the assembly?

We received probably most questions about how headship applies in the assembly, and what situations qualify as the assembly.

➤ Summary

- While answering these questions, one thing we want to clarify is that as a church, when we say the word headship, it might seem like we're saying that in all circumstances, men are over women. To be plain, that is not what we believe.
- We believe that our bible study has shown us that the principle of headship applies primarily in meetings of the ekklesia, of the assembly. That doesn't mean women can't use their gifts there, it simply means that when they use them, they must observe the principle of headship. While observing it, they can use those gifts freely.
- Our assembly meetings are our Sunday services, our midweek services, our bible talks and family group meetings. In those settings we believe the Bible clearly shows us that women should use their gifts freely while observing headship.
- There are so many other environments in which we gather as a church: topical seminars, support groups, bible studies, children's ministry rooms, missions society meetings, HOPE events and so much more. While there will almost certainly be exceptions along the way, for the most part the principle of headship would not apply in those settings.

➤ Headship has an objective and a subjective element

- Headship needs to be both (1) factually (biblically) implemented, and (2) given the proper appearance in the assembly.
- Paul clearly was not just teaching a "delegated" headship principle but was concerned about the appearance as well. Unity requires order and order needs to be visible.
- The appearance aspect of the principle is the more difficult part: it has multiple aspects, which can have a cultural dimension and are somewhat subjective.
- Also, obviously, the biblical principle of headship in itself is a foreign concept in the culture of today's world.

➤ Principles

- The headship principle is a foreign concept in the world, in particular because it is a "Jesus-like" headship. Headship is based on Jesus' self-less, self-sacrificing Agape love and has nothing to do with domineering, controlling, chauvinistic, abusive behavior that is so often found in the world. May God help us not to confuse in any way such ungodly thinking or practice with Jesus' benevolent, servant-leadership – not in our homes and not in our church!
- The meaning of how things are being done gets easily lost. Repeated teaching and reminding seems important.
- When a sister shares her convictions in the assembly the brothers should hear them with open hearts. At the same time the sisters speaking needs to understand the context and purpose in which she is serving and the limitations she has while

speaking. We should not get caught up in positions or where a brother stands but ought to be reflecting on the preparation for our sister speakers in a healthy and helpful way.

- There is a danger of falling into a Pharisaic mode where we become burdensome and overly restrictive in the way we provide guidance. Let's not do that!

(2) What is the role of women in a regular Sunday assembly?

- The example of the Teaching Day which was a meeting of the ecclesia
 - there was a display of headship in Valdur
 - there were 4 sisters (Katy, Angela, Hannah, and Alexandra) who gave a word of instruction
 - they used scriptures
 - they did not have a man stand beside them
 - they were the sole presenter
 - they did so without a communicating an attitude of being or wanting to be in control
- Sisters can fulfill similar roles in the assembly on Sunday morning
 - they would not be the main speaker/preach the lesson, for that would violate headship
 - they can participate in different parts of the worship based upon their abilities, talents and appearance of headship
 - these could include being a part of the welcome, communion message, praying, and announcements
 - Sisters can give a "word of instruction" as they did in the Teaching Day, but not as the main speaker.
- In a regular Sunday assembly, the headship principle applies as in all assembly meetings.
- Can a woman preach a sermon in a Sunday assembly?
We believe that the preacher on a Sunday morning is perceived as having a role of authority and leadership over the assembly which would be in conflict with the headship principle.
- When women use their gifts in a mixed gender audience, headship should not be in question

Transition: again, a reminder that the principles of "free use of gifts in the assembly" and the "principle of headship" need to work together and not be in conflict.

(3) Consistency of Application

- We received a number of questions on consistency of application
- What sort of consistency can we expect across the Boston Church regions?
 - We have a strong determination to have consistent practices across the regions of the Boston Church that implement the clear principles that we have taught
 - One of the questions raised: what to do if I struggle with a matter that is taught in our church?
 - My personal approach: It may sound strange to you but in some cases my own opinion on such teachings are not in line what we teach as a church and what the elders have agreed as our teaching. I realize that I am not always right, even as a teacher and I am

deeply committed to the community teaching principle. How do I deal with such a situation?

Philippians 3:15-16 → Context: Paul is pressing on toward the goal of become complete or mature!

All of us, then, who are mature should take such a view of things. And if on some point you think differently, that too God will make clear to you. ¹⁶ Only let us live up to what we have already attained/

- (1) Can I see and embrace the logic of bible interpretation, even if it is not exactly how I will land? I make sure I can explain and teach it.
 - (2) I want to have a submissive heart and will submit to the elders or majority conclusion of the elders. It is a good practice in humility. 😊
 - (3) I will keep my opinion to myself (with the exception of discussions with my wife and among friends, teachers, elders). When the issue comes up with the elders I make my case.
 - (4) Why? God is very, very concerned about me doing my part to keep the unity in His church. That's my personal conviction.
- It is my hope and my prayer that any differences will be in degree, not in the understanding of the principles and practices that the elders and region leaders agree to and that ...
 - if we disagree we can do so with humility, a heart of submission and love.
- What sort of consistency can we expect with other ICOC congregations?
- Jews and Gentiles had different practices yet maintained unity.
 - The ICOC teachers services team put together a paper to provide guidance for others churches as it has provided guidance for us. "The Bible and Gender" book is a beautiful example of unity in our fellowship.
 - Each church will make its own determination and ideally go through a process similar to ours.

Transition: we leave it with this for today.

- I know what we only addressed a subset of the questions posed.
- As I stated, we want to answer all questions, in a second video, with personal responses and with online or in person opportunities for more discussion.
- I am deeply grateful for all the feedback that we have received, in encouragement as well as by posing so many great questions.

CONCLUSION

Let's continue on our community teaching journey!

Encouragement to humility and unity.

I would like to end with a prayer by using Paul's words in Ephesians 4:1-5:

"Our Father in heaven, we need you ... please help us to adopt the attitude which your servant Paul urges us to have, to live ...

Ephesians 4:1-5

*As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling we have received.
² Help us, to be completely humble and gentle; Help us, to be patient, bearing with one another in love. ³ Help us, to Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.
⁴ There is one body and one Spirit, just as you called us to one hope when we were called; ⁵ one Lord, one faith, one baptism; ⁶ one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.*

... and we pray all of this in the name of Jesus Chris our Lord. Amen!