

THE ASSEMBLY MESSENGER

Proclaiming the Timeless Truths of the Church to a New Generation of Believers
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Dear Reader

A local assembly generally is comprised of both brothers and sisters in the Lord. God has ordained that the men and women are to have different roles as they function as part of the assembly. These different roles have been a source of great conflict and great blessing — great conflict when self-will is manifest, and great blessing when all goes on in harmony with God’s will and thus the Holy Spirit is neither grieved nor quenched. While much could be said as to the roles of men and women in the home, we want to concentrate on these roles in the local assembly. This issue of the Newsletter is adapted from the book, *Man + Woman: God’s Design* by R.P. Daniel, Believers Bookshelf.

Introduction

If by one clever scheme Satan could play havoc with God’s plan for His Assembly, do you think he would hesitate to use it? Of course he would use it because he hates God and God’s people, and he *is* using it and with much success! Satan’s scheme is to subtly entice both men and women to leave their God-ordained spheres and roles. We who claim to recognize Jesus Christ as the Lord of our lives, have a special obligation to maintain His rights. Nowhere is this more important than in the local assembly in regard to His order for the sexes.

People always seek a verse to support their views. Galatians 3:28 has been used to attempt to show that God does not have gender-distinctions in the assembly. This verse says, “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.” Does this one verse negate all the other verses that speak of distinct and different roles for men and women? Of course not! Scripture must be taken as a whole, rightly divided, properly interpreted. “No prophecy of Scripture is of any private interpretation” (2 Pet.1:20). Rather, the context of Galatians 3 shows that Christian men and women alike are the elect of God, alike are born of the Spirit, alike heirs of the promises of God. We alike enjoy our spiritual blessings in the heavenlies in Christ. We alike will have a future of reigning with and serving our blessed Lord in His thousand year reign and in the eternal state (Rev. 20:4-6; 22:3-5, etc.). Peter tells us that the Christian woman is “God’s fellow-heir [with the man] of the grace of life” (1 Pet.3:7 NASB). But while we are still living on this earth, God has proclaimed a certain order to be maintained in the local assembly by men and women, and He has explained why He has chosen that particular order. When this order is maintained, the assembly has the ability to function as God intended.

God’s Basis for His Ordering of Men and Women

God wants the conduct of men and women in the local assembly to picture or depict spiritual realities. The first picture or basis has to do with *creation*, the second with Christ and His Church. For creation, please read Genesis 1:26-28; 2:7, 18, 20, 21-24. We will quote several New Testament verses that summarize the verses in Genesis. “Adam was formed first, then Eve” (1 Tim.2:13); “I want you to know that the head of every man is Christ and the head of a woman is man, and the head of Christ [as man] is God ... for man is not from woman, but woman from man, nor was man created for the woman, but woman for the man” (1 Cor.11:3, 8-9).

These verses give God’s simple order as a result of creation. Man was created before the woman. The woman was created to be the man’s helper, to be the perfect complement and companion for him, physically, emotionally and spiritually. Yet both were equally created to be *representatives* of God on earth, being in His “image,” and both *resembled* God (“likeness”) in the sense of being creatures with a spirit and thus able to have intelligence and a God-consciousness (Gen.1:26-28). But God’s order in creation still dictated that the man was to be in headship.

Neither Adam nor Eve knew that God's ordering of the sexes in creation looked forward thousands of years to show forth even to angels the truth that God was going to have a *bride* for that Redeemer, the Lord Jesus Christ, who would come through "the woman's seed" (Gen.3:15), and that *bride* would not be a physical woman, but a unique set of millions of people who would have a very special and eternal relationship with Him. They would be "the fullness (completeness) of Him who fills all in all" (Eph. 1:23), just as Eve was to be the fullness or completeness of her husband, Adam.

God has also ordained that brothers and sisters in the Lord are to picture Christ and His Church (Eph.5:23-33). Their proper conduct in the assembly will manifest "the manifold (many-sided) wisdom of God [which] might be made known *by the Church* to the principalities and powers in the heavenly places" (Eph.3:10). Just as the wife is to be in submission to her husband, the Church is in submission to Christ. In like manner, Christ teaches His Church: the Church *never* teaches Christ. Even this (as we will see) is worked out in the man-woman roles in the assembly and home.

Head Covering and Hair Length

1 Corinthians 11 begins with God's order in headship (v.3) and then deals with the matter of head covering for the women and no head covering for the men during prayer or prophesying (communicating the mind of God through preaching, ministry, etc.). Although some have attempted to restrict head coverings to the meetings of the local assembly, it is a *general* requirement, whether in the assembly meetings or *whenever* there is praying or any form of preaching the Word of God, including Sunday School, gospel meetings, home Bible studies, etc.

"Every *man* praying or prophesying having his head *covered*, dishonors his Head" (1 Cor. 11:4). We have seen that the man *pictures* and *represents* Christ. When a man prays or preaches with a covering on his head, he is symbolically showing the weakness of submission, picturing a weakness in Christ. That is a disgrace to the Lord of glory who is man's Head, whom man *represents* in God's picture of Christ and His Church.

"But every *woman* who prays or prophesies with her head *uncovered*, dishonors her head, for that is one and the same as if her head were shaved" (v. 5). When the woman says or even thinks her "amen" to the man's prayer or word of praise, worship or ministry, she has also in effect taken part in the religious gathering. Thus, a godly Christian woman would not want to play spiritual *brinkmanship* and try to insist that she only needed a head-covering when she was *personally* preaching or praying audibly. The Scriptural idea is that, in the presence of the things of God, she shows her submissive, godly spirit by being covered. She has her head and even her hair — her *personal* glory and covering — covered in the presence of God and God's representative-picture in the Church — the man. Is this so hard to take? If she refuses, she would be one who openly rejects her submissive role — the role given her by her Lord and Savior! *Would any godly Christian woman accuse the Lord of being biased, wrong or unfair?*

Continuing, "If a woman is not covered, let her also be shorn, but if it is shameful for a woman to be shorn or shaved, let her be covered" (v. 6). I don't know whether the early Church ever acted in discipline in cutting off anyone's hair, nor are we told to do so. However, the *principle* is that if a self-willed woman is acting like a man, boldly proclaiming a picture reserved for the man exercising headship, then she should look like the man by having her long hair cut off. It gives us an impression that God is serious about this matter: it is not *optional* or just an *opinion*. *The apostles and assemblies of that time had no such custom as arguing about or questioning these instructions* (v. 16).

Another reason for the woman to have her head covered — to have a "symbol of authority on her head" — is "because of the angels" (v. 10). As we saw also in Ephesians 3:10, the angels see in every believer as he or she functions within the bounds of his or her role, the many-sided wisdom of God. In the covered head and hidden glory, the angels observe the submissiveness of the woman to God and also the submission of the Church to Christ, its Head.

How big should the covering be? The Greek word indicates a full or large covering — certainly one clearly able to be seen! It would seem that a covering that *really* covers gives the most accurate symbology. Also, it is for *covering* the head: it is not a decoration or an adornment to draw attention to oneself.

God has ordained *hair length* to be one of the visible distinctions between men and women. 1 Corinthians 11: 14-15 gives what God has to say about it. “Does not even nature itself teach you that if a man has long hair, it is a dishonor to him, but if a woman has long hair, it is a glory [a displayed excellence] to her, for her hair is given to her for a covering” — a personal covering or veil upon which she puts *another* covering when there is prayer or preaching. God hasn’t spelled out hair length in inches or millimeters, but He has given us a principle. *The Christian woman’s hair is to be long and feminine compared to the Christian man’s normal hair length, and vice-versa.* I believe we know by spiritual intuition when a man’s hair is too long or a woman’s hair too short, yet sometimes Christians *deliberately* violate this “commandment of the Lord” (1 Cor.14:37) to send a message of rebellion or discontent, or they try to see how close to the undefined line they can get. Is that showing love and obedience to our blessed Lord?

General Conduct of Men and Women

God singles out older Christian men and women for certain conduct that befits their age and Christian maturity. Most of this conduct has application within the assembly sphere. Titus 2:2-5 is well worth studying using several translations. Young men are addressed in verses such as Titus 2:6; 1 Timothy 2:1-2; 3:15; 4:12, 14; 6:12; 2 Timothy 1:6; 2:3, 15, 22; 4:2, 5. Young women are addressed in 1 Timothy 3:11 and 5:13. You will gain much valuable spiritual insight if you will read all these verses and apply them to your situation (young or older; male or female).

Women to be *Silent* in the Meetings of the Local Assembly

God’s ordering for the sexes in the Church and in that which gives support to the local assembly is different than in the home or business environments. Somewhat different rules apply, as we shall see. God has ordained that speaking in the “assembly meetings” is to be *entirely* a male prerogative because the man represents Christ, while the woman represents the Church which is always silent and submissive when being taught by Christ through Holy Spirit-led brothers. The instructions for such meetings are too plain to be misunderstood. “Let your women keep *silent* in the churches, for they are not permitted to speak, but they are to be submissive ... 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*” (1 Cor.14:34-35). In Newsletter 98-12 we sought to define the meetings that fit the category of being “in church” or “in assembly.”

The Holy Spirit foresaw how unpopular this prohibition would become and thus inspired Paul to write, “If anyone thinks he is a prophet [one who speaks God’s mind] or spiritual, *let him [or her] acknowledge that the things which I write to you are the commandments of the Lord*” (1 Cor.14:37). Yet, there is a major push today for women preachers and women in leadership positions in many Christian groups. *However, it is plainly unscriptural!* People can argue about the culture in Corinth at the time Paul wrote, that Paul was a bachelor who didn’t understand women, etc. The fact is that these instructions are the *Lord’s* (not Paul’s) commandments. When the assembly meets “in assembly,” the woman is not to speak — not to preach, not to ask questions, not to pray audibly. *She is to willingly put herself into subjection to this commandment of the Lord.* These instructions apply to *every* local assembly, for they were written not only to the assembly at Corinth, but also to “all who in every place call upon the name of Jesus Christ our Lord” (1 Cor.1:2).

Saying “Amen” and Singing

By Old Testament example (which was written for our learning — 1 Cor.10:6-11) women are free to and encouraged to say “Amen” to the prayers said by the brothers. “All the assembly [of Israel] said Amen” (Neh.5:13). The word *amen* means *so be it* and thus is an expression of agreement. The “Amens” of the sisters indicate their agreement with the prayer or worship or praise just uttered by a brother and would be the same thing

as if they had just prayed (which they can't audibly do in the assembly). The brothers' "Amens" equally are encouraged. Women are free to sing the hymns given out by the brothers in the meetings of the assembly. See Numbers 21:17 and Judges 5:1 for Old Testament examples.

Women Speaking in Informal (non-Assembly) Meetings

1 Timothy 2:11-12, NASB, gives instructions on women speaking that are more general. They cover situations other than the "assembly meetings" seen in 1 Corinthians 14. Note that Paul's letters to Timothy were written to an individual, not to a local assembly, although there certainly is much instruction in Timothy of how the *individual* is to conduct himself in the house of God, the Church (1 Tim.3:15). "Let a woman *quietly* receive instruction with entire submissiveness. But I do not allow a woman to *teach* or *exercise authority* over a man, but to remain quiet [to be in quietness, JND]."

The word *quietness* (Greek: *hesuchia*) has the thought of not causing a disturbance, not arguing, etc. It does *not* mean *silence*, no speaking at all! It is *not* the word used in 1 Corinthians 14! Being in *quietness* would permit asking questions or making a comment in non-assembly meetings such as the Sunday School, home Bible studies and general discussions. However, under no conditions does it permit the woman to take the place of a teacher over the man — not even the sneaky teaching-question, "Don't you think ... teach, teach, teach!" But *teaching* is more than expressing a thought or making a comment. *It is the systematic exposition of Scripture.* Further, under no conditions is the woman to do anything that is, or gives the impression of exercising authority over the man, whether in the home or assembly or any other "religious" setting. At home, the man is the head; in the assembly he pictures Christ. He is *never* to be under the woman's authority in such environments.

The Man is to Speak

Since the man represents Christ, the man *is* to speak in the meetings of the local assembly *as the Holy Spirit leads.* *Liberty* to speak does not give *license* to speak whenever one feels like it. The Lord through the Holy Spirit is in charge of His gifts (1 Cor.12:11). The Holy Spirit "works" all those gifts (like a puppeteer works the strings of a puppet) so that the desired ministry is given by willing and available spiritually-gifted brothers. Remember Isaiah in Isaiah 6:6-9? He was morally and spiritually clean, willing and available. "Here am I: send me!" and God sent him!

1 Peter 2:5 shows that we believers are "a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ." Although all Christian men and women are priests and thus can come into the very presence of God, it is the brothers' place to *audibly* express the worship in the assembly when gathered together around our Lord. Worship and praise in the assembly are not a matter of gift: they are *priesthood-privileges*. We men might not have a public gift for ministry, but we are on equal footing when it comes to priesthood. Why then do so many brothers act as if they were women and never *speak* a word of worship or praise in the assembly? Such silence is a practical denial of one's priesthood and thus is dishonoring to God and a real spiritual loss to ourselves, for in no other way do we have the great thrill and privilege to speak directly to our Lord who is in our midst (Mt.18:20). Don't we *want* to tell Him what we think of Him and His work for us? Don't we *want* to tell the Father of our thoughts about His beloved Son in whom He found and finds His delight?

In relation to the *prophetic* or *open ministry* meeting of 1 Corinthians 14:29-33, we are told just before the instructions that the women are to be silent in the meetings of the assembly, "Let two or three prophets speak" (v. 29). The point to be made is that the men *are to speak* as the Lord leads for the edification (building up) of the saints (14:3,4,5,12,26). The Holy Spirit can use *any* of us men to bring a word for the moment before the gathered assembly (v.31). It's not a matter of gift here, but what the Holy Spirit puts on one's heart for that moment. Make sure your silence is not your own lack of study or a poor spiritual condition. In 2 Timothy 4:2, Paul told Timothy (a man) to "preach the Word ... convince, rebuke, exhort ..." That's man's work!

Then in 1 Timothy 2:8 (NASB), as opposed to the women, Paul by inspiration said, “I want the *men* in every place to pray, lifting up holy hands without wrath and dissension.” Public prayer under any circumstances (when men are present) is the *man’s* responsibility. Why don’t the brothers pray more often in the meetings of the assembly? God says, “Let Me hear your voice” (Song 2:14). But the men are to be in the right spiritual condition, free from wrath and dissension.

It is not by chance that God told Timothy -- a young man (and thus to young men of all generations) — to “be *diligent* to present yourself approved of God, as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing (handling accurately) the Word of truth” (2 Tim.2:15). We men are doubly responsible to learn the Word of God — first, for ourselves and our ministry, and secondly, for our wives. The sisters also will grow by their own diligent study. God expects all of us to get off spiritual milk and onto solid spiritual food (Heb.5:12-6:2).

Other Spiritual Work for Women

Women are able to participate in a number of assembly functions even though they do not take an audible public place in its meetings. There is the financial support of the Lord’s work. Think of the widow’s two mites — the two small copper coins worth about a penny. The Lord highly praised her because she had given her all (Mk. 12:41-44; Lk. 21:1-4). The women in Luke 8:1-3 were financially supporting the Lord out of their personal funds. The women helped build the tabernacle (Ex. 35:22-26). They used both their possessions and their abilities. The large water bowl (the laver) so important in the ministry of the tabernacle was made from the polished bronze mirrors given by the women who served at the doorway of the Tabernacle (Ex. 38:8). Paul in Philippians 4:3 commended the “women who have shared my struggle in the cause of the gospel.” Paul also commended a husband and wife team, Aquila and Priscilla, “my fellow workers in Christ Jesus,” who even opened up their house so the local assembly could have a comfortable place to meet.

RPD