

Bible Study, Class Arrangements, And Women Teachers

This subject is much misunderstood. Through the years brethren have discussed meeting for Bible study, arrangements for Bible classes, and women teaching classes. We must go to the word of God to solve it.

Questions Of Bible Authority

God told Noah to build an ark of gopher wood. That is general authority to “*build*” – the arrangement for labor, tools and construction aids are not specified. All such arrangements are authorized but not specified. The authority to make it of “wood” is not general but specific-- gopher wood. The basic principle involved is that of generic and specific authority.

The church is the “*pillar and ground of the truth*,” I Tim. 3:15. We have general authority to spread, uphold, or teach the truth. General authority allows us to make arrangements for specific Bible study meetings, separate classes and the use of women in their sphere. This is the same authority Noah had to “*build*” – we are to teach. We must teach the truth, that is specified.

Women Commanded To Teach

It behooves us to recognize the value of women to the church. We know in the case of Phoebe, Rom. 16:1, that a woman can be an important “*servant of the church*” and a “*helper of many*.” Many of the phone calls to our absentees are made by women and many of them in this way have been effective in reproving, exhorting, and correcting the spiritually weak.

Beyond these things women are beneficial to the church as teachers. They may, as Priscilla join with their husbands in teaching men who are inadequately informed, Acts 18:24-28. Older women can teach younger women about womanhood, motherhood, and being a good wife, Tit. 2:3-5. They are especially needed to teach children as they are to teach their own sons and daughters, Prov. 1:8. Philip, the evangelist, had four daughters who prophesied (taught by inspiration), Acts 21:9. Women with unbelieving husbands are to teach them, I Pet. 3:1-6.

Limitations On Women Teachers

“*Let the woman learn in silence with all subjection. But I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man, but to be in silence. For Adam was first formed, then Eve. And Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived was in the transgression*,” 2 Tim. 2:11-12. This passage does not contradict those in which she is commanded to teach, but simply places a limitation on her teaching. She is not allowed to teach “*over the man*.” The common error on this passage is the assumption that a woman is forbidden to do two things: first, to teach; second to have dominion over a man. This is a misunderstanding. The verse says that a woman is forbidden to do two things first to “*teach over the man*,” second, “*to have dominion over the man*.” She can teach a man as did Priscilla, Acts 18:24-26, but she cannot teach over a man. She can have dominion over her children, and/or other women, but not over man. Women are to be in quietness with subjection, not lead men in teaching, praying and worshipping together.

The Greek word for quietness (*hesuchia*) does not mean absolute silence. It is the same word used to say that men should “*do their work in quietness*,” 2 Thess. 3:12 and means “*tranquility arising from within, causing no disturbance to others*.” So Paul told Timothy women are to learn in quietness in the sense of causing no disturbance, not taking over and exercising dominion over man.

This is why she cannot be a public proclaimer of the word. An evangelist must “*speak, and exhort, and rebuke with all authority,*” Tit. 2:15. The woman however must be under authority, Tim. 2:11. So in this passage we have two elements which are modified by “*over the man.*” They are “*teach*” and *have dominion.*”

There is a parallel in the grammatical construction of I Tim. 2:12 and Acts 4:18. “*And they called them and commanded them not to teach in the name of Jesus .*” This restriction did not forbid Peter and John teaching at all, but rather such teaching as was in the name of Jesus. So it is in I Tim. 2:12, the woman is not forbidden to teach or usurp authority under any condition, but rather such teaching and exercising authority over man.

What About I Cor. 14:34-35

”Let your women keep silence in the churches: for it is not permitted unto them to speak; but they are commanded to be under obedience, as also saith the law. And if they will learn any thing, let them ask their husbands at home: for it is a shame for women to speak in he church,” I Cor.14:34-35.

I Cor. 14 was given to regulate a congregation where spiritual gifts were being practiced. This is clearly set forth from the fact that “*tongues*” are mentioned 19 times and “*prophecy*” is mentioned 12. It was to regulate an assembly where tongue speakers were speaking: and where prophesying was being done. It is common for this passage to be applied to all assemblies where men are present, hence to Bible classes where men are present. To so apply the passage is to misapply it from the context. Verse 23 of this chapter applies this passage to a time when “*the whole church be come together in one place...*” It is a perversion of the passage to remove it from this setting, or context.

With reference to the women that were ordered to keep silent in the church (assembly), Paul is speaking to a specific group of women. Why do I say this? Because of what the women in I Cor. 14:34-35 were instructed to do. *If they will learn anything, let them ask their husbands at home.*” Now if this passage applies to all women, both then and now, what about those who do not have husbands? Who are they to ask? Oh, you may say “they could ask the elders or the preacher.” That is not what the passage says. It says, “*let them ask their husbands at home.*” Thus as verses 29-30 are talking about prophets so the following verses are talking about the prophets wives.

The Word “Silence” In I Cor. 14:35

The silence in this passage (*sigao*) means absolute silence (no sound at all). The reason for this restriction is because of the nature of the assembly under consideration – one in which direct revelation from heaven was being received under the power of the Holy Spirit, whether by tongues or prophecy. Any speaking on the part of women in such an assembly would have violated the fundamental principle of submissive obedience.

Also in the assemblies to which Paul had reference, he made it very clear that women were not to “*speak.*” The word “*speak*” is from the Greek word “*laleo*” and in the New Testament means not to make a vocal utterance. If that applied to all women today they could not sing. The tongue speaker was to be silent (*sigao*) in the assembly when there was no interpreter in the assembly. Similarly, the prophet who was speaking when another person received a revelation from God was instructed to keep silent (*sigao*) in order that the one that had received the new revelation might speak.

Of the things we have said, this is the sum: (1) A woman can teach a man without teaching over him, Acts 18:26. (2) A woman cannot teach a class where men are present because she would have dominion over man which is forbidden. (3) A woman can teach a class of women or children in the church building because the class is to itself, therefore the "*whole church is not come together in one place,*" I Cor. 14:23. (4) A woman can speak up or ask questions in a mixed class where the whole church is not come together in one place, provided she recognizes her subordination to man.

What is said here does not imply that women have no acceptable ideas or wisdom about the work of the church. They have every right and responsibility to go to the men of the church or to the elders about either expedient or scriptural matters. But when they demand to be a part of a body of men who are discussing and making decisions for the church, they are intruding into an area of dominion and authority.