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Women and Spiritual Gifts

First Timothy 2: 11-15

Since the festival of Shavu'ot in **Acts 2**, believers have met together for prayer, fellowship, worship, **the Lord's** Supper and **teaching**. Both **men** and **women** have participated in these times of public worship. In **First Timothy 2:11-15**, the apostle to the Gentiles wrote instructions on the role of **women** in public worship to **Timothy**, his apostolic representative to the church at Ephesus. This is the key passage in understanding what the B'rit Chadashah has to say about **women** in ministry. This passage is difficult, containing some unusual vocabulary, awkward grammar, references to the TaNaKh, and important theological issues.

After Sha'ul's visit to Ephesus (**First Timothy 1:3-11, 4:15; Acts 20:17-38**), false teachers had surfaced. There is a possibility they were from within the church and may have included leadership (**Acts 20:29-30**). He was anxious to oppose them (**First Timothy 1:3-11, 6:3-10**) and **teach** correct doctrine so as to ward off any further attacks by them (**First Timothy 4:6 and 13-16, 6:2 and 17-18**), to promote godly living of the laity (**First Timothy 5:1-16**) and leadership (**First Timothy 3:11-15, 5:17-25, 6:11-16**), and lay a solid foundation for church practice (**First Timothy 2:1-15, 3:1-13**). There were problems in Ephesian public worship. Sha'ul addressed *four areas* of concern in **Chapter 2**.

First, he was concerned about public prayer for all. Sha'ul begins by explaining the necessity of offering public prayers for all, especially those in authority with governmental positions, so that life might be peaceful for the church (**2:1-2**). These prayers have innate value and are acceptable before **the LORD**, Who desires that all come to repentance (**2:3-4**). **ADONAI** not only has the desire, but, **God** has also provided the way by the cross (**2:5-7**).

Secondly, the inspired apostle was concerned about men with clean consciences. He taught **the men** to pray with a cleansed conscience, free from interpersonal strife (**2:8**). Although praying with raised hands was not uncommon, Sha'ul's concern was not on the physical act, but, on the heart attitude. **The men** are to pray with spiritually unpolluted hands. In addition, Sha'ul of Tarsus encouraged **the men** of Ephesus not to have a contentious spirit. He had given warnings against quarrelsomeness to church leadership (**First Timothy 3:3**,

Titus 1:7), men in general (**First Timothy 2:8**), deacons (**First Timothy 3:8, Second Timothy 2:24**) and believers in general (**Titus 3:2**) in his pastoral epistles.

Thirdly, the apostle was concerned that **women** would dress appropriately. He was concerned with both modest apparel (**2:9a**) and with a modest attitude (**2:9b**). They should not dress for show (**2:9c**), but as **women** who profess godliness, **they** should clothe themselves with good deeds (**2:20**).

Fourthly, Sha'ul was concerned that **women** learn with an attitude of quiet submissiveness.

A woman should learn in quietness and full submission (2:11). This passage is addressed to **women** generally. First, in the preceding context, **verses 8 to 10** instruct **men** to pray and **women** to dress modestly. Since **men** praying and **women** dressing are not limited to husbands and wives, it is unlikely that **verses 11 to 15** are limited to wives. Secondly, like in **Ephesians 5:22-23**, Sha'ul does not view **men** and **women** as family members, but, as part of a worshiping community. Thirdly, had the apostle from Tarsus been speaking of the husband-wife relationship, a definite article or possessive pronoun before **to teach** in **verse 12** would be expected as in **Ephesians 5:22-25, 28-29, 31** and **33**.

An exhortation is first given that **a woman should learn**. This verb is used seven times in the Pastoral Epistles. Here it carries the idea of learning by instruction as in **Second Timothy 3:7** and **14, John 7:15** and **First Corinthians 14:31**. By saying that **a woman should learn**, Sha'ul is presupposing that **women** were a part of public worship and were included in the instruction. This was in sharp contrast to Greek thought, and the church at Ephesus existed in a city dominated by Greek culture and religion, but, Sha'ul assumed **women** would learn and could learn. Later, in **Second Timothy 3:6-7** for example, the apostle would record how false teachers had influenced some of **the women**. He probably knew how important it was to have **them** grounded in the Word.

There were two ways in which **women** were to learn. First, they were to learn **in quietness**. This word and its related forms are only used eleven times in the New Covenant, and ranges in meaning from **silence (Acts 22:2; First Timothy 2:12)** to **rest in quietness (First Timothy 2:2; First Peter 3:4; Second Thessalonians 3:12)**. Here it is best translated **quietness**. The issue is not wordlessness, sound or content, but attitude. Secondly, **the women** were to learn in **full submission**. In **First Corinthians 11:3**, Sha'ul says: **The head of every man is Christ, and the head of the woman is man, and the head of Christ is God. Women** are to be **submissive** to **men** in the sense that **they** will respect and honor the leadership of qualified **men** that **God** has called to lead the local

church.

I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man; she must be silent (2:12). This verse elaborates on three points from the previous verse. First, **I do not permit a woman to teach** parallels **a woman should learn**. **Teaching**, of course, is where much of the problem lay in the church in Ephesus. The straying elders were **teachers (1:3 and 6:3)**, and the worthy elders, for whom **Timothy** was to serve as something of a model (**First Timothy 4:11-16; Second Timothy 2:2**), were **those whose work is teaching (First Timothy 5:17)**. So, the **women** were neither **to teach** nor **have authority over men** in public worship.

The meaning of **I do not permit** has been interpreted by some as mere personal preference, but I believe the usage here is the same as that of **not allowed** in **First Corinthians 14:34**. There, the apostle to the Gentiles stated that **women** were **not allowed to speak** and highlighted the importance of this instruction by saying: **What I am saying to you is the Lord's command** (referring to **First Corinthians 26-36**, which included **verse 34**). In addition, Sha'ul was probably using his personal authority as an apostle to back up what he was saying such as in **First Corinthians 11:16**.

The inspired apostle wrote that **women** were restricted in two aspects of public worship. They were not **to teach or have authority over a man**. First, what is meant by the phrase: **I do not permit a woman to teach**? The correct understanding of Sha'ul's words are dependent upon the tense of the Greek infinitive and the grammatical rule pertaining to it. In the case of the infinitive, the Greek has a choice between the present and the aorist tenses. When the Greek desires to refer only to the fact of the action denoted by the infinitive, without referring to details, it uses the aorist. Should any other tense be used, the writer is going out of his way to add details. Thus, the student must pay particular attention to his choice of the tense. In addition, the aorist infinitive denotes that which is eventful or particular, while the present infinitive indicates a condition or process. As a result, because the aorist tense is not used here, Sha'ul is not forbidding **a woman to teach** universally. In other words, he does not forbid *all* teaching, but because the present tense is used, **Sha'ul is saying, don't become "the" teacher. The present infinitive always indicates the one who is doing the authoritative teaching in the church.** It's as if he was saying to **women**, "Do not take that kind of leadership, but be **submissive** to the authority in the local church." If a **woman** is part of a pastoral staff that rotates the teaching of **God's Word** on a regular basis, then **she** would not be *the* teacher. **She** would still be submissive and under the authority of the church elders; thus, **she** would not be **in authority over men**, and would be able to teach in that specific circumstance.

The inspired apostle is denying to **women** the kind of **teaching** spoken of in **Acts 13:1**, **First Corinthians 12:28-29** and **Ephesians 4:11**. But, there are other places in the New Covenant that tell us about **women teaching** that help us to know what is appropriate and inappropriate. **Titus 2:3** shows older **women teaching** younger **women**. **Timothy** is shown as being **taught** as a child by **his** mother and grandmother in **Second Timothy 3:14**, and in **Acts 18:26**, Priscilla and Aquila took Apollos aside and explain **to him the way of God more adequately**. As a result, letting Scripture provide some parameters for Rabbi Sha'ul's statement, it seems clear that **women** can **teach** other **women**, children, and, under the authority of **their** husband, can **teach** a **man**, **men** or mixed group as a team. So, Sha'ul does not mean that **women** can *never* **teach**, but, he is denying to **women**, in regards to public worship in the church, a kind of **teaching** that relates to authority.

Secondly, not **to have authority over man** parallels **being submissive in every way**. But, what kind of **authority** is Sha'ul of Tarsus describing here? When we look at **First Timothy 3:1-7**; **Titus 1:9**; **Acts 20:28-30**, and especially **First Timothy 5:17**, two spheres of **authority** are in view. One is ruling, governing or generally being responsible for directing the affairs of the church. The other is preaching, **teaching** or doctrinal guardianship of the church. So **teaching** and **authority** are the two spheres of responsibility of elders, and I do not think it is coincidental that those are the two specific things forbidden to **women** in **First Timothy 2:12**. Therefore, Scripture tell us that it is inappropriate for **women** to be bishops, pastors, elders or overseers in the local church.

But, what do we really mean when we say that elders have **authority**, and how does this relate to the prohibition of **women** in the church? Elder **authority** is *servant authority* (**Luke 22:26**), it is *edifying authority* (**Second Corinthians 10:8, 13:10**), and it is *exemplary living* (**First Peter 5:3**). This is why **teaching** is part of, *really the essence of*, the exercising of biblical **authority**. *Because elder authority is exerted through persuasion and teaching and not through coercion or political maneuvering, teaching and authority go hand in hand in the B'rit Chadashah*. Leading people freely into obedience and truth is the kind of **authority** that elders are supposed to exert.

Thirdly, the former Pharisee concludes **she must be silent**, again better translated *in a quiet demeanor*, which exactly repeats the prepositional phrase **learn in quietness and full submission** of **2:11**. Thus, here in **verse 12**, he is inspired to record that **women** are not permitted **to teach men** nor **have authority over men** in public worship. Instead, as Sha'ul has already directed in **verse 11**, they are to receive instruction with an inner attitude of **quietness** and **full submission** to the truth of **God's** Word through **His** chosen **teachers**. The apostle concludes his discussion by giving two reasons why **women** were to

learn in quietness and full submission rather than **teach** and assume a position of **authority over men**.



For Adam was formed first, then Eve (2:13). First, Sha'ul begins his reasoning by pointing us back to **Genesis 2**, and later to **Genesis 3**. There are those who do not consider **Genesis 2** and **3** relevant to the discussion here, but, I don't think anyone should say something is meaningless when an inspired apostle says it is meaningful. The inspired spokesman is a better authority for the interpretation of Moses than anyone living today and Rabbi Sha'ul places **Genesis 2** and **3** *into the context* of the issue of **women** in ministry.

It is important to understand that the apostle is not referring to two verses taken from **Genesis 2** and **3**. Instead, he is using a common rabbinic method of referring to the TaNaKh, a method known as *summary citation*. That is, he used the summary statement in **First Timothy 2:13** to point the reader to an excerpt from a larger text describing the creation of **man** and **woman** in **Genesis 2:4-24**, and in **First Timothy 2:14** he is referring back to the entire summation detailing the Fall in **Genesis 3:1-25**. So, Sha'ul was not limiting his focus to two specific, isolated thoughts; rather, he was drawing on two complete narratives.

Therefore, when Saul of Tarsus points us back to **Genesis 2:4-25**, **he** is saying that we should not overlook that fact that **ADONAI, God** chose to make **the man** first, to put **him** in **the Garden** and give **him** the responsibility for caring for, literally guarding, it. The inspired apostle is saying that it's important to understand that **the LORD** gave man *the primary responsibility* for receiving, communicating, *and being held accountable* for the moral pattern of life in **the Garden**. After some time, **ADONAI, God** made **woman** from **his** side, equally in **his** image, to be **his** partner in carrying that responsibility into action. **The woman's** responsibility for **her** own moral conduct before **the LORD** was not compromised by the fact that **ADONAI, God** would hold **the man** *responsible for what went on in the relationship*. Sha'ul looks at that and says it means something. As a result, **verses 11** and **12** are not based on any temporary situation in Ephesus, or cultural circumstance. Those

two verses were based on the pattern that **God** set in motion *before* sin came into the world.

And Adam was not the one deceived; it was the woman who was deceived and became a sinner (2:14). Saul's second reason that **women** should learn in **quietness** and **submission** is that when **ADONAI's** appointed order is abandoned, bad things happen. The apostle to the Gentiles again points us back to **Genesis**, but, this time to the Fall in **Genesis 3:1-24**. He points our attention to the fact that the Adversary approached **Eve** first and drew **her** in as the spokesperson for the couple. The deceiver treated **her** as the guardian of the Garden, and **Adam** followed right along. The leader responding and the responder leading, a classic role reversal that destroyed **ADONAI's** pattern for harmony between **men** and **women**, as it brought sin into the world. Sha'ul's point is that this role reversal that caused such devastation at the beginning must not be repeated in the church. **The woman** must not be the one who leads **the man** in obedience to **her**.

When some **women** are told that **they are free to** participate in **any** ministry in the Church but one: **Do not teach or to have authority over a man**, many say, "Then that's exactly the one I want." **They** act just like **Eve** did in **the garden** of Eden when **she** was deceived. **ADONAI, God** told **her**, "**You are free to eat from any tree in the Garden but one; you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil**" (**Genesis 2:16-17a**). But, eventually **she** would say, "Then that's exactly the one I want" (**Genesis 3:6**).

In his book *A Symphony in Sand*, Calvin Miller not only pictures the devastating results of the reversal of **God's** appointed order, but, also Adam's responsibility in all of it when he writes, "Adam's ghost walked through Hiroshima's ruins giving apples to the dying, begging for forgiveness." Even though he followed, *he was still held responsible* (see my commentary on **Genesis**, to see [link click Bf - Your Desire Will Be For Your Husband, and He Will Rule Over You](#)).

Lest anyone think that Sha'ul didn't believe that **women** could be saved, even though **they** were to be in subjection to **men** in the worship service, he completes this passage with this: **But women will be kept safe through (the) childbirth, if they continue in faith, love and holiness with propriety (2:15).** I believe the meaning of being kept safe, literally *pulled from danger*, here means spiritual salvation. There are four reasons for this. First, because the context of this verse has to do with **Eve**; **she** must be the subject of **will be kept safe**. Consequently, it is relevant to consult **Genesis**, and **Genesis 3:15** tells us that the ancient Serpent's victory will not be final. **The Seed of the woman will crush Satan's head**. This points specifically to **Christ's birth**, not to **childbirth** in general.

Secondly, a spiritual catastrophe is the subject of **verse 14**, and spiritual deliverance is to

be expected as a part of the discussion. **Eve's** salvation was secured because **God** promised deliverance through **His Seed, Jesus Christ**. By **the** great **childbirth**, by that which has produced **the Savior, the childbearing** of Mary has undone the sin of **Eve**.

Thirdly, the definite article that appears before **childbirth** indicates a definite and particular event, rather than **childbearing** in general. There is certainly a more obvious inference to be drawn from the presence of the article. The Greek language had a very simple way to indicate **childbearing** in general. All that was necessary was to omit the article. This would throw emphasis upon the quality or idea in the noun, rather than individualizing it. The presence of the article makes the birth of **Messiah** the more credible.

Fourthly, the preposition *dia*, meaning **through**, is very important. It comes from the Greek word *duo*, meaning *two*, and directs our attention to a connection or channel between the two points. The two points are the fallen **Eve** and **her** salvation. This channel is **the childbearing**. It was through **the Seed of the woman** that salvation was possible for **her** and for all **women**.

In **First Timothy 2**, Sha'ul deals with four areas of concern in public worship in the church at Ephesus and gives guidelines for correcting them. First, believers should pray for all, especially those in government services (**verses 1-7**). Secondly, the men must pray with cleansed consciences, free from the pollution of quarrelsomeness (**verse 8**). Thirdly, **the women** should dress appropriately, with a modest attitude, clothing **themselves** with good deeds (**verses 9-10**). Fourthly, **women** should learn with an attitude of **quiet submission** to church authority rather than improperly **teach** and lead **men** because it is **the men** who are held responsible by **God** for what goes on in the local congregation (**verses 11-12**).

Sha'ul gave two reasons for this admonition. First, the pattern of **male** headship was established in creation and he wanted to see this principle affirmed in the church (**verse 13**). Second, the principle of **male** headship was violated through the reversal of authority roles in the Fall with devastating consequences, and Sha'ul wanted believers to avoid such a role reversal and its consequences in the local church (**verse 14**), but, Satan's victory in the Garden is not the final word. The spiritual catastrophe of **Eve** was undone **through** the spiritual deliverance, **the childbearing** of Mary, making salvation possible for all (**verse 15**).