

Third International Training Consultation
Emmaus Bible College
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Workshop 3.1 Training and gender challenges. A Hermeneutical-Cultural challenge

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Remit Understanding the role of women in Christian ministry and their development in leadership. In most countries, education opportunities for girls are identical to those for boys. How do we apply Biblical concepts of gender identities and roles in our training of men and women for Christian ministry. This workshop is an application of the morning plenary sessions on how we interpret the Bible regarding the Gospel and its demands on us as applied to different cultural contexts

Workshop 3.1 Training and Gender: A Hermeneutical-Cultural Challenge

- I. Workshop objectives
- II. Some Hermeneutical considerations (see attached summary)
- III. Training and the gender challenge
 - a. No relevant restrictions for women in many cultural settings
 - b. High percentage of women attending Bible colleges/schools
 - c. Access to homiletical, exegetical, and leadership coursework/programs
 - d. Application of learning/training in the context of the local church and other ministry settings
- IV. Mini case study: Female academic leadership in a Bible college context in North America
 - a. Biblical considerations
 - b. Contextual considerations
 - c. Areas of sensitivity
 - d. Reflecting on outcomes

Some Hermeneutical Considerations

This workshop will seek to explore the following:-

1. The role of context and culture in reading and understanding (exegesis) of the original texts. Did Paul/Christ expect women to be publically participating in the local church, to what extent? Were they expected to participate in leadership and to what extent?
2. The role of context and culture in the contemporary application of the exegesis. Having decided on the answers to the above, where are the lines to be drawn (if any) in your local church, and what are the rationales for those lines (or lack of them). What is the relevancy of the question of how effectively can a church with restrictive practices for women communicate Christ to a culture with no restrictive practices for women, and if it is relevant then to what extent?

The following summarize viewpoints that are part of the range of proposed hermeneutical outcomes (the following is not exhaustive! – albeit exhausting). These are applied here to the church government/administration of plural eldership/leadership as found historically in Brethren assemblies or churches.

1 Corinthians 11 and 14 – the verbal participation issue

(A) That chapter 14 states the true position - silence of women in the case of public local church participation. Varying lines of reasoning:-

- That Paul in essence contradicts himself, either careless in the detail of chapter 11 which he corrects in chapter 14, or simply speaks (in chapter 11) for the sake of the argument (headship) in the context of the Corinthians' practice of freedom for women to participate publically (which he fundamentally disagrees with) but then overrules the Corinthians' freedom with his own view of silence in chapter 14 to be applied in all churches (and implied, for all time).
- That chapter 11 is in the context of private devotions in the home with husband and wife, where both may participate, but chapter 14 is the case of when the whole assembly is met together, where women should be silent (note: in which case, headcoverings are only overtly required for private prayers between husband and wife, and when the wife participates).

(B) That Chapter 11 states the general situation (women free to participate publically generally in the local church) but that chapter 14 addresses a specific situation in which wives should be silent publically.

- That the verses are themselves not in the original, so there is no issue here of Paul restricting women's public participation, but the verses are the opinion of some unknown scribes reflecting their own prejudiced church practices.

- That the reference is to talking among women who sat separately to the men, and the women's questions and discussion were disturbing the overall flow of the service.
- That the reference is to married women's specific relationship with their own husbands: when there is specific discussions regarding prophecies made (by men and women) and where it could end up with a wife debating against her husband as to the meaning of his or her prophecy. In such a case Paul commands the wife to give way to her husband and ask her question of him at home, thus averting a clash of headship between wife and husband in the public meeting of the local church (thus reinforcing and harmonising with the headship principles of chapter 11)
- That in the complex and explosive situation in Corinth (ref: prevalence of prophetesses who functioned as de facto leaders in pagan temple worship, and the frequent use of ecstatic language), Paul feels it wisest for the women to be silent. But in the modern context of universal education for girls and little or no social restrictions on female engagement in public life, his concerns would no longer relevant. His overriding concern was for the effective communication of the Gospel (1 Cor. 9:18-24), and on that basis a local church with no restriction on female participation/leadership gives the most effective route forward for Gospel communication.

1 Timothy 2 1-15 – the teaching – leading issue

Here the issue of "leadership" is the subject rather than verbal participation. Again there are two broad groupings of exegesis outcome, leading to further ranges of applicative outcomes.

(A) That Paul lays down here a universal and permanent order in which women are not permitted to teach men. In point of application of this principle there has been a large range of application of this exegesis as to where the lines are drawn.

- Women are allowed/disallowed to teach Sunday schools, children's' clubs, youth classes, evangelistic meetings, give testimony, share reports of ministry, etc.
- The most common universal agreement has been that women are not allowed to open the Scriptures and explain or share from them in a mixed company – though again some would permit their participation in a mixed small group (bible study or hose group).
- That women should be teaching and leading women is self-evident from Titus. Despite this, some assemblies have sought to restrict that also by not permitting any formal meeting of women without a man present.

(B) In the context of untaught or poorly taught women, Paul restricts their ability to teach or take authority (leadership positions), commands that they should learn with a good submissive attitude, and with the reasonable assumption that when they are well taught then the restrictions would be lifted. Outcomes in application to present day cultures include:-

- Women would then participate, teach and or lead without restriction and according to individual gifting and calling.
- Women would then participate, teach and or lead according to individual gifting and calling, but not as elders based on exegesis/application of eldership/headship passages and principles.

Ephesians 5, 1 Tim 3, Titus 1 – the eldership/Headship issue

- (A) That eldership (recognised as the plural, key and ultimate human group responsible to Christ for a local church) is to be male only on the basis of original practice (no female elders referred to in the NT) and on the principal of headship (an application of the husband/wife headship seen in Ephesians 5 and 1 Corinthians 11) that men should take up the headship responsibilities in a mixed company. Applications of this have ranged to include the following:-
- All male eldership, and a secondary application has restricted all leadership positions to men e.g. all-male deacons, male-only Sunday school superintendent, men-only speakers for women's meetings, etc.
 - All-male eldership, but the recognition of women with leadership ability to serve as deacons, in leadership teams, "virtual eldership" of ladies groups, significant leading positions in para-church groups,
- (B) That the headship principal applies to the husband wife relationships only, and can't be universally applied to all men/women interface. In the NT, all the cultures of the day did not respect or approve women in overall leadership groups, hence the absence of examples of female elders.
- In cultures where no gender distinction is used as restriction to leadership service positions, then choice of elders should be based on the 1 Tim 3 type characteristics, gifting and sense of calling without reference to gender.
 - A shift towards Leadership teams rather than |Elders alone as the main local church "headship." Often there may be recognised elders (who may be mainly or exclusively male) within the Leadership team, on the basis that women can fully function in leadership within the team, with a headship retained (perhaps more symbolic than functional) by a group of elders within the team.