

WOMEN AS MINISTERS AND LEADERS

by Frank and Wendy Parrish

Introduction

In Micah 6:4, we see the Lord's compassionate faithfulness being poured out upon His people. He calls them to remember His redemption of the children of Israel out of Egypt: "*For I brought you up from the land of Egypt, I redeemed you from the house of bondage; and I sent before you Moses, Aaron, and Miriam.*"

God gave the almost two million Israelites this leadership trio, **one of whom was a woman**. Miriam was given great authority and responsibility in leading God's people (Exo 15:20,21).

God called her for that role, and blessed her in it. ***But is church leadership something now forbidden or discouraged for women today?*** Is a woman in ministry living in a wrong way before God? Does the Bible put limits on a woman's involvement in the Church? Is a woman "spiritually inferior" to a man, or somehow "less important" to God and His purposes?

What Does The Bible Say?

There are many opinions about women in ministry, but it is vitally important to examine **what the Bible actually says**. "*For the Word of God is living and powerful... and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart*" (Heb 4:12).

We may have our own ideas about women in the Church. Some we might have received from our culture, our denomination or even our own family. These ideas may be based only upon human wisdom, though, and not based on divine wisdom and the Word of God.

There are also some passages in the New Testament that might create questions and confusion regarding the place of women in the Body of Christ. Those will be examined in this teaching as well.

But before we can address those crucial issues, we must have a basis of understanding. To truly understand God's design for man and woman **and how they are to function together**, we must begin with God's original design in creation.

So take your Bible and let us **search out the Scriptures** to discover God's heart toward women in ministry.

CHAPTER ONE

God's Purpose For Man And Woman

From the beginning of creation, it was clear why God created both man and woman: *"So God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them"* (Gen 1:27).

It took the creation of BOTH MALE AND FEMALE to fully reflect the image, or the various attributes, of God and the Godhead or Trinity (Father, Son and Holy Spirit). God desires that we know and understand His nature and His character. He has given us a "picture" (image) of Himself in the creation of man and woman.

There are traits more common to women that reveal important parts of God's character that we might not otherwise know.

"Can a woman forget her nursing child, and not have compassion on the son of her womb? Surely they may forget, yet I will not forget you" (Isa 49:15).

In this passage, God portrays His love for us as even more passionate than a mother's love for her newborn child.

"...and God of all comfort, Who comforts us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort those who are in any trouble, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God" (2Cor 1:3b,4). Our God is a comforting God, full of compassion and mercy.

It is important to note that God created mankind as both male and female, as two people. Yet we see in Genesis 2:24 that **the two become "one"**. When God made mankind in His own image, He created a marriage. This is a reflection of the unity of the Godhead.

So we see a more complete image of God if we see the traits represented by both male and female. We can also understand that the Father, Son and Holy Spirit work together in unity and singleness of purpose.

God's Original Plan

What else did God intend for man and woman?

*"Then God blessed **them**, and God said to **them** 'Be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it; **have dominion**...'"* (Gen 1:28).

God's original plan was for man and woman to "co-rule" over creation. They had *equal authority* and position. They were to be His delegated rulers of Earth – His representatives or ambassadors. Man and woman were charged to carry out God's ultimate rule and authority.

The Seeds of Rebellion

Unfortunately, *man and woman* lost the privilege of rulership when they sinned. When mankind (male and female) "fell", they lost everything under their rule to the curse...and lost their intimate fellowship with God (Gen 3:14-24).

Eve was not directly cursed, but it is obvious she was part of God's general curse. God also said to her, "*Your desire shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you*" (Gen 3:16).

Woman was told to obey her husband, and to submit herself to him. She was warned that she would "desire her husband", which means she might desire his position of God-given authority. She might want to take the rulership over her husband, and perhaps even try to dominate him.

The seeds of rebellion were sown in Eve's choice to act against God's command (Gen 2:17; 3:1-6). Her sinful act of rebellion still affects women today.

It is important to ***listen to God's warning*** about a woman's desire to take control.

Many problems in the home and the Church are caused by those who try to push themselves forward, or to take over a leadership position that God did not intend for them to have.

But that attitude is wrong for both men and women. In order to be great in God's Kingdom, we all must come humbly and learn to be SERVANTS to others. Jesus taught that godly leaders are NOT to expect others to serve them. They are to look for ways to serve others (Matt 20:26-28).

We are not leaders so that we can "be in charge", or become more important or better than others. God asks us to lead in order to SERVE His people.

*"...nor as being lords over those entrusted to you, but being **examples to the flock**...all of you be **submissive to one another**, and be clothed with **humility**, for 'God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble'" (1Pet 5:3-5).*

God's Plan to Redeem

Leaders in the church are not to act like masters over slaves. In the same way, the words of Genesis 3:16, "*He shall rule over you,*" do NOT place the husband and wife in a "master/slave" relationship. Instead, the husband is to take on a "**servant-leader**" role. He is to redeem the original partnership for which he and his wife were created. This husband/wife relationship is intended to model Christ's role of redemption of His Bride, the Church.

This model of the husband/wife relationship is again seen in the New Testament.

"Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord.

"For the husband is head of the wife, as also Christ is head of the church; and He is the Savior of the body.

"Therefore, just as the church is subject to Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in everything.

*"Husbands, love your wives, **just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her**" (Eph 5:22-25).*

This in no way makes a woman inferior or "less valuable". As a matter of fact, it shows the **great value God places on BOTH the man and woman.**

The Godly Husband

Husbands, your wife is very valuable to God. He even compares your love for your wife to Christ's love for His bride, the Church. God gives you the wonderful honor of being a careful steward of your wife.

How does a godly husband love his wife as Christ loves the Church? By sacrificing for her, listening to her, taking care of her, nourishing her, and cherishing her as he would his own body (Eph 5:23, 25-33). [See the section on Marriage in this book for more about the husband's role.]

The Godly Wife

Wives, your husband is also very important to God. The Lord trusts your husband to cover and care for you. The literal translation for the word "submit" means "come under in an orderly manner". Just as you are to receive the covering of Christ's sacrificial blood for you on the Cross, **so are you to receive your husband's care and covering.**

When you resist your husband's covering, you are resisting God's provision for your care.

How does a godly wife behave toward her husband? Look to how the Church should respond to Christ: respect him, receive him as "head" of the family, follow his leadership, listen to him, be in unity with him, and be a true helper (Gen 2:18; Eph 5:22-33). [See the section on Marriage in this book for more about the wife's role.]

God Values Both

It is difficult for husbands and wives to put away their own selfish desires and ambitions and love each other as the Bible instructs. But *ask the Lord for help*; for with God, ALL things are possible, and His grace is sufficient to make you abound in every good work (Luke 18:27; 2Cor 9:8).

It is clear that **God values both men and women, and created them BOTH for His purposes.** Though sin changed the way mankind relates to God and to each other, Jesus provided a way for those relationships to be restored.

Would God Ever Again Speak To Or Through A Woman?

Some believe that because the man was to "rule over" the woman, God would only speak to or through a man from that time on.

But Psalm 68:11 says, "*The Lord gave the word; great was the **company of those** who proclaimed it.*"

The word COMPANY is translated from the Hebrew word **tsaba**. Strong's Concordance says it can be either masculine or feminine gender. It can represent men, women, or both.

The verse then is rightly translated, *"The Lord gave the word: great was the **mass of men and/or women organized for warfare** that proclaimed it."*

Another important verse is found in Joel 2:28,29. It is repeated by Peter in his sermon on the Day of Pentecost in Acts 2. Peter spoke this on the "birthday" of the Church, when the Holy Spirit was given. *"In the last days, God says, I will pour out My Spirit on all people. Your sons **and daughters** will prophesy...Even on my servants, both men **and women**, I will pour out My Spirit in those days"* (Acts 2:17,18 niv).

God truly desires to use His **full** creation, both men and women, to declare His wondrous works!

CHAPTER TWO

GOD SPEAKS TO AND THROUGH WOMEN

The Old Testament

We have learned that God's desire is to minister through men, and through women as well. Let's now look at some Old Testament examples of God speaking TO and THROUGH women.

Miriam: Bold Young Leader

Miriam is first mentioned in the Bible in Exodus 2. The time is approximately 1526 B.C. and Pharaoh has commanded that all newborn Israelite males are to be killed.

Moses, the baby brother of Miriam, is in danger. So their mother *"took an ark of bulrushes for him...put the child in it; and laid it in the reeds by the river's bank"* (Exo 2:3).

The courageous young Miriam stayed nearby *"...to know what would be done to him"* (Exo 2:4).

When Miriam saw Pharaoh's daughter rescue Moses, she boldly approached her. *"Then his sister [Miriam] said to Pharaoh's daughter, 'Shall I go and call a nurse for you from the Hebrew women, that she may nurse the child for you?'"* (Exo 2:7).

Miriam arranged for Moses' own mother to nurse him. This brave girl showed her giftings as a leader even at this young age.

God will speak and work through any available vessel, young or old (1Tim 4:12; Titus 2:1-8). You can read about another young woman mightily used by God, the maid of Naaman, in 2 Kings 5.

Miriam – Prophetess And Worship Leader

In Micah 6:4, Miriam is mentioned right along with Moses and Aaron. She was one of the three that led the Israelites out of Egyptian slavery and into deliverance. This shows us **the very important role of authority and influence given to the woman, Miriam, by God.**

Pharaoh's army had been drowned in the waters of the Red Sea. The Israelites were safely in the desert. A great worship celebration then took place.

“Then Miriam the prophetess, the sister of Aaron, took the timbrel in her hand; and all the women went out after her with timbrels and with dances.

“And Miriam answered them, ‘Sing to the LORD, for He has triumphed gloriously! The horse and its rider He has thrown into the sea!’” (Exo 15:20,21).

Miriam's prophetic anointing and musical gift made her an effective praise-leader and prophetess. Like David some 500 years later, she sang the song of the Spirit with boldness.

A Divine Order Of Praise And Worship

Other Old Testament women were also used in music ministry and worship. In King David's time, *“For God gave Heman...and **three daughters**. All these were under the direction of their father for the music in the house of the LORD, with cymbals, stringed instruments, and harps, for the service of the house of God...” (1Chr 25:5,6).*

David established a divine order of praise and worship for the people of God. This divine order extends down even to the New Testament Church.

Hence it is still right that women should participate in praise, worship and music ministry. They can also lead in worship, as did Miriam and the daughters of Heman.

It is true that Miriam also fell into a dangerous trap of pride. This can happen to **any** leader (man or woman) who attempts to take authority beyond that which God has given to them.

Hagar: God Hears Her Cry

In Genesis 21:9-21 we read about **Hagar**, Sarah's maid. She had been cast out of Abraham's family. She and her son were alone, desperate, and on the verge of death.

In the midst of this scene, God hears their cries. He **speaks to Hagar** through the voice of an angel (vv17-18). Hagar is an example of a woman *hearing an answer directly from God.*

Some today believe that women are not capable of hearing from the Lord; some even think that God would not speak to a woman. We see all the way back in biblical history that God truly did speak to women--and still does today.

Deborah: Wise and Courageous

*“Now Deborah, a prophetess, the wife of Lapidoth, was judging Israel at that time. And she would sit under the palm tree of Deborah between Ramah and Bethel in the mountains of Ephraim. And **the children of Israel came up to her for judgment**”* (Judg 4:4,5).

Deborah held three important positions: **wife, prophetess** (female prophet), and **judge** or **ruler**.

Through prophetic insight, the prophetess Deborah called for the Israelite General, Barak, to go out with *only ten thousand men* against the Canaanites. It is believed the Canaanites, led by General Sisera, had *almost 100,000 men and 900 chariots of iron!*

Deborah courageously accompanied General Barak into battle. With God's power, the much-outnumbered Israelites actually defeated the Canaanites! Truly, *“If God is for us, who can be against us?”* (Rom 8:31).

Under Deborah's leadership, the children of Israel were delivered from 20 years of oppression from this alien army. Deborah later sang this prophetic song: *“...The LORD came down for me against the mighty”* (Judges 5:13). She knew the source of victory was the Lord God!

Deborah was wise and courageous. She was mightily used by God in the dramatic deliverance of Israel from oppressors. And the people of Israel enjoyed 40 years of peace following her rule.

Why, then, does much of the Church today prevent this biblical kind of leadership from being released through women?

Huldah: Inspires Revival

Let us examine another woman God mightily used in the history of His people.

*“So Hilkiah the priest... went to **Huldah the prophetess, the wife of Shallum... keeper of the wardrobe... and they spoke with her**”* (2Ki 22:14).

During the reign of King Josiah, the lost Book of the Law was discovered in the Temple. It had not been read in many years. When the priests began to read it, they realized the nation had departed far from the ways of God. They also discovered that God's judgment would soon fall.

To find out what to do, Hilkiah the high priest and Shaphan the scribe sought out Huldah the prophetess. Huldah gave prophetic details of a coming judgment already determined by the counsels of Heaven.

Because of what Huldah prophesied, Josiah repented. Huldah then prophesied that the judgments would not come during Josiah's reign, but later.

Huldah inspired King Josiah, Hilkiah the high priest, and the other leaders of Israel to make radical moral and spiritual changes. *One of the largest revivals in history took place, sparked by the divine, prophetic counsels given through a woman, Huldah the prophetess, who spoke out what God had shown her* (2 Kings 22 and 2 Chronicles 34).

Esther: Saves A Nation

Though Queen Esther did not have a specific title of "ministry," *she was*

instrumental in saving the entire Jewish nation.

She was steadfastly committed to living out godly principles. She was wise in her influence with her husband. This allowed God to use her for His purpose and glory (read more about it in Esther 2-10).

The Virtuous Woman

"Who can find a virtuous wife?" asks the writer of Proverbs 31. Read this chapter of the Bible. This portion of Scripture describes an amazingly accomplished and successful woman. She has a godly relationship with her husband, a well-ordered home, children who respect her, successful business ventures, and much more.

It is tempting to reject this example of a godly woman, since it may seem almost impossible for a woman to do all that this woman has done.

But remember, the commandments of the Lord *"are not burdensome"* (1John 5:3). They are NOT there to point out what we cannot do. They are NOT there to make us feel condemned about our poor performance.

The Scriptures ARE there to give us a righteous standard to live for. They provide a set of goals to attain through God's help, *"striving according to His working which works in me mightily"* (Col 1:29).

Proverbs 31 shows what a woman's FULL POTENTIAL is **IN GOD!** It is a set of inspiring goals that a woman **can attain** with time, effort, and much prayer. Of course, she also needs the working of God in her through His grace.

Biblical Model

These verses in Proverbs 31 show **all that God intends for women to be**, all that He calls "virtuous". This godly woman is described as:

- 1) a valuable resource to her husband, more important than wealth (v 10);
- 2) a hard-working, diligent and skilled (trained or educated) craftsperson (vv 13-15, 19, 22);
- 3) concerned with meeting the needs of her family and household (vv 15, 21, 27);
- 4) an honest business woman and landowner (v 16, 24);
- 5) strong both spiritually and physically (vv 17, 25);
- 6) confident in her abilities (v 18);
- 7) a minister to the poor and needy, with both her time and her money (v 20);
- 8) a wise and kind counselor (v 26);
- 9) respected and honored by her husband and her children (v 28);
- 10) a woman who does not trust in outward appearance, but who fully trusts in the Lord God (v 30).

THIS IS THE BIBLICAL MODEL FOR A GODLY WOMAN. Is this what we are encouraging and helping the women in our churches to become? Are we teaching them to rise up and step out into all that God wants them to be? Are we encouraging them to reach out in ministry to others?

God sees in each woman her full potential: the ability to become what He wants her to become with His strength and wisdom, under His Lordship, and through the encouragement and support of her husband if she is married. God calls her and encourages her to reach “*toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus*” (Phil 3:14).

God does not expect a woman to be functioning perfectly in all of these areas instantly. The work of the Lord is a step-by-step, daily work of transformation. He takes us from “*strength to strength*” (Ps 84:7) and from “*glory to glory*” (2Cor 3:18).

The Lord freely gives His help, grace, strength, gifts and His Holy Spirit to **both** men and women. God desires them to become all that they can become in His Kingdom and for His glory.

Shouldn't we, as servants of the Lord and leaders in His Church, have the same mind and heart? Shouldn't we freely give and encourage those around us to become all that God intends? For “*...freely you have received, freely give*” (Matt 10:8).

Old Testament Conclusion

We see in the Old Testament through these few examples (and many others found in the Scriptures) that **God condoned and blessed the sincere efforts of godly women** in prominent spiritual leadership. God also SPOKE TO WOMEN AND THROUGH WOMEN in the Old Testament.

CHAPTER THREE

NEW TESTAMENT WOMEN IN MINISTRY

Introduction

In ancient Israel, women were considered to be members of the "family of faith". Men, as head of the family, presented the sacrifices and offerings on behalf of the entire family (Lev 1:2), but the wife could also be present.

Women attended the Feast of Tabernacles (Deut 16:14), the yearly Feast of the Lord (Judg 21:19-21), and the Festival of the New Moon (2Kings 4:23). **Women could enter into most of the areas of worship.**

But by the time of Christ, the view of women had changed. Jewish women were no longer active in Temple or synagogue worship. They were often put into inferior and subservient roles. This was not something God said to do; this was human works.

The Jewish Temple of Jesus' day had ethnic and male/female class separations. There were six different places to worship. There was an outer court for Gentiles; a restricted Court of Women, where women could listen but not speak; a Court of Israel

for male Jews; a court for the priests; the Holy Place; and the Holy of Holies.

A popular Jewish saying was, “*Thank God that I am neither a Gentile, a slave, nor a woman.*” It was commonly taught that women were not smart enough to receive religious instruction. A rabbi (religious leader) could not speak to a woman in public, even if she was his wife or his sister!

This surely must have grieved the heart of God, seeing half of His beloved creation put down, left out and oppressed!

But Jesus burst upon this scene, casting a bright new light on God's intended purpose for women in His Kingdom.

What Did Jesus Think Of Women?

At a time when ministry teams that combined men and women were not allowed by the religious leaders, Jesus welcomed several women into His team of traveling ministries (Luke 8:1-3).

Also in Luke 8 (vs. 43-48) we read of an outcast, unclean woman. She is poor, weak, and afraid. Yet Jesus responded to her faith, spoke to her as His daughter, and healed her!

Jesus encouraged Martha and Mary to sit at His feet and be discipled (Luke 10:38-42). He considered them among His close friends (John 11:5).

Jesus' respect and concern for women was something strikingly new. His attitude was very different from the other men's attitudes of His time. His view of women was especially different from the Jewish religious leaders, the Pharisees and Sadducees.

All One In Christ Jesus

Through Christ's redemptive work, ALL of the partitions have been broken down. EVERY BELIEVER, regardless of race, sex or other distinction, now has EQUAL access to God. “*For He Himself is our peace, Who has made both [Jew and Gentile] one, and has broken down the middle wall of separation*” (Eph 2:14).

In Jesus, all divisions have been smashed between Jew and Gentile, between men and women, and between priests and laymen (Rev 1:6).

“*For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. 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*” (Gal 3:27,28). Hallelujah!

Some Women Of The New Testament

Mary: Chosen Vessel

Mary, Jesus' mother, was a good and godly woman. She was a person of incredible faith in God. How else could she have responded in such a beautiful song

of praise and trust after such a bewildering announcement? (See Luke 1:26-55).

Mary truly did fulfill a ministry calling of the highest order, that of **motherhood**. What an incredible privilege God has given women in allowing them to bring forth life! She then can partner with her husband to steward and nurture their children, and to train them for the Lord's purposes. This is a *double honor*!

Some may blame women for the fall of mankind, because of Eve's sin in the Garden of Eden. But one must remember that Eve was *deceived*, while Adam *willfully chose* to disobey. The greater responsibility actually lies with Adam! Although it is true that Eve was the first to yield to temptation, God held BOTH Adam and Eve responsible for their choices.

But our God is a loving and redeeming God. All the way back in Genesis 3:15, He spoke of His plan to repair the damage done by both Adam and Eve through their disobedience. This prophecy of Jesus' coming and victory over Satan was enhanced by the fact that God would allow **a woman, Mary**, *to be the vessel through which He gave to us a Savior!*

Anna: Hope and Promise

Forty days after Jesus' birth, when the days of Mary's purification were completed (Lev 12:1-6), Jesus was brought to Jerusalem to be presented to the Lord.

"Now there was one, Anna, a prophetess...a widow of about eighty-four years, who did not depart from the Temple, but served God with fastings and prayers night and day" (Luke 2:36,37).

Anna's husband died after just seven years of marriage. She dedicated the remainder of her life to service in the Temple.

Anna was used to confirm that Jesus truly was the expected Messiah-Deliverer for which Israel had waited. This godly woman had an important part in Jesus' birth and dedication.

Anna's anointed ministry during her later years of life gives hope and promise to older women. God will always minister through sensitive, obedient and available vessels, regardless of age. The potential is great for those who are more mature to influence and shape future generations.

Many believe the Church needs more "fathers", those godly men who are mature in the things of the Lord. We need them to teach and lead. The Body of Christ needs their experience, their guidance and their support.

But the Church also needs "mothers" in the faith. We need mature, godly women who will rise up and teach the younger women. The Body of Christ needs their experience, their nurturing and their encouragement.

Forgiven Woman Becomes Evangelist

In the New Testament, both men and women believed in and followed Christ. Women were blessed, forgiven and healed the same as men.

On His way to Galilee, Jesus felt He needed to stop in Samaria (John 4:3,4). While there, he encountered a woman who was living with a man, who had also been married five times before.

She was probably surprised that a Jewish man would speak to her. She was aware that there were many rules in the Jewish religion about those they could and could not associate with (John 4:9,27). But Jesus had not come to serve man's religion, but to reach out to the sick and bring sinners to repentance (Matt 9:12,13).

Jesus shared the truth of Who He was, and the woman was blessed and forgiven of all of her sins. And the very day she was converted, **she became one of His evangelists** (John 4:28,29,39). She brought many of her village to Christ!

Women Announce The Resurrection

“Now the first day of the week Mary Magdalene went to the tomb early, while it was still dark, and saw that the stone had been taken away from the tomb. Then she ran and came to Simon Peter, and to the other disciple, whom Jesus loved...” (John 20:1-4)

On that morning of Jesus' resurrection, Mary Magdalene was at the tomb with Simon Peter and John. There were at least the three of them at the tomb. The two men went into the tomb to see if Jesus was truly gone, as Mary Magdalene had said. When they saw He was gone, the discouraged men went home (John 20:5-10).

We don't know why, but for some reason the resurrected Christ didn't appear to the two men while they were at the tomb. Jesus waited, and appeared to Mary Magdalene later as she wept outside the tomb (John 20:11-14).

Jesus spoke to Mary Magdalene. **He gave her the very important job of proclaiming His resurrection** (John 20:15-18). A woman was the first one told to preach the Good News that Jesus had risen from the dead!

Jesus' resurrection lifted Woman from her fallen state and restored her to her rightful place in His Kingdom (Gal 3:27,28). She was now free to stand at the foot of the Cross of Calvary, where the ground is completely level. No person there is higher or better than another! She was not to be over men, but **to come alongside** as God had originally intended.

Jesus' command to Mary Magdalene was to *“go to my brethren and say to them, ‘I am ascending to My Father...’*” (John 20:17). This charge proclaimed her equally worthy to give out the New Testament message of the Gospel of Jesus Christ to the world!

If Jesus gave the awesome job of preaching the first message of the Gospel to a woman, what then should our response be to women whom God has called to **preach that same Gospel today?**

Women And The Power Of The Holy Spirit

“And when they had entered, they went up into the upper room...These all

continued with one accord in prayer and supplication, with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with His brothers..."(Acts 1:13,14).

Women were among those who had assembled for prayer to receive the promised power spoken of in Scripture (Acts 1:8).

And **what happened** to that group of men and women as they prayed? "*And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance*"(Acts 2:4).

Why were they ALL filled? To fulfill the promise of Acts 1:8, "...*you shall be witnesses to Me.*" The promise of Christ was for BOTH men and women! And BOTH men and women were to preach (be witnesses) of the risen Christ Jesus!

Think again for a moment about the suppressed state of women under the Jewish Temple system. Remember that they had not even been allowed near the worship area, but were restricted to an outer court.

Also, the outpouring of the Holy Spirit in the Old Testament was most often only for the spiritual and political leaders of Israel. BUT NOW, under the New Covenant, the power of the Holy Spirit is for "*all flesh*" (Acts 2:14-21), **both** men and women!

It is no accident that the Holy Spirit, through the pen of the writers of Scripture, tells us that they were in "*prayer and supplication, WITH THE WOMEN*" and "*they were ALL filled*" (Acts 1:14; 2:4).

There was to be NO QUESTION that ALL (both men and women) were empowered to do the work of ministry and evangelism. The power was NOT just for those in special positions of spiritual authority, but for ALL flesh!

Every believer is anointed to be a priest and king to God (1Pet 2:4-9; Rev 1:6), to give to the Lord the worship due Him, and to proclaim His resurrection power.

Gentile Women And The Gospel

Among the first persons to receive the Christian missionaries in Europe – Paul and Silas – were a women's prayer group. "*And on the Sabbath day we went out of the city to the riverside, where prayer was customarily made; and we sat down and spoke to the women who met there*" (Acts 16:13).

This little group of women was later converted and became the founding members of the church at Philippi. Here, the women are mentioned who "*...labored with me [Paul] in the gospel*" (Phil 4:1-3).

Lydia: First European Convert

One of this group of women who met for prayer was Lydia. She was the first European convert.

"*Now a certain woman named Lydia heard us. She was a seller of purple from the city of Thyatira, who worshiped God. The Lord opened her heart to heed the things spoken by Paul*" (Acts 16:14,15).

Though Lydia was a "worshipper of God", she was not a Christian until she received the message of the Gospel and believed on Jesus as her personal Savior. She also brought her entire household into the family of faith (Acts 16:14,15) – another New Testament woman evangelist!

Lydia was a “*seller of purple*” (the color worn by royalty). It is possible she had wide contacts among the most influential families of the Roman Empire. As an enthusiastic evangelist, one can only wonder how far her message of the Gospel was spread!

The historian Eusebius indicates in his writings that Lydia led the Philippian church for a time. It may be that Lydia was one of those to whom Paul refers: “*And I urge you...help **these women who labored with me in the gospel...***” (Phil 4:3).

Priscilla And Aquila: A Husband And Wife Ministry Team

This godly woman and wife was used significantly by God in ministry with her husband in the early church.

The fact that Priscilla is never mentioned without her husband, Aquila, is evidence that she understood **the multiplied power of a husband and wife** ministering as a team. There is no evidence that they ever fell into the devil's trap of division or competition. **They were partners, humbly serving the Lord's purposes.**

Many things were done in ministry by Aquila and Priscilla. They provided a job for Paul (Acts 18:2,3); traveled and ministered with Paul (Acts 18:18); risked their own safety (Rom 16:3,4); had a church in their home (Rom 16:5); and explained “... *the way of God more accurately*” to the powerful preacher Apollos (Acts 18:24-28).

Teaching Apollos the way of God was quite significant, as Apollos is described as “...*an eloquent man, and mighty in the Scriptures...*” (Acts 18:24). The fact that he was able to receive teaching from Priscilla and Aquilla shows that they were greatly anointed to teach. And it also shows that they came with gracious and submitted attitudes.

It should encourage you to know that you do not have to be the most "eloquent" or "mighty" person for God to use you or speak through you! The Lord used the simple and humble Aquila and Priscilla, as well as the eloquent Apollos!

Four Virgins Who Prophesied

“...*we who were Paul's companions departed and came to Caesarea, and entered the house of Philip the evangelist...and stayed with him. Now this man had **four virgin daughters who prophesied***” (Acts 21:8,9).

These verses about Philip's daughters allow us to see his family as a model of spirituality and godly order. His children were obviously trained in the ways of the Lord (Prov 22:6; Eph 6:4) and raised to walk in the purity of holiness.

Each of Philip's daughters exercised the gift of prophecy. It is clear, then, that women DID bring God's word by the power of the Holy Spirit in the early Church.

This kind of ministry through women was fully accepted.

Philip must have been a man who was well versed in the Scriptures, for he and his family LIVED the promises of God.

“I will pour My Spirit on your descendants, and My blessing on your offspring” (Isa 44:3).

*“And it shall come to pass afterward that I will pour out My Spirit on all flesh; your **sons and your daughters shall prophesy...**”* (Joel 2:28).

*“Then Peter said to them, ‘Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. **For the promise is to you and to your children...**”* (Acts 2:38,39).

No doubt Philip accepted these biblical promises for his daughters, and a lovely prophetic anointing rested upon them. These young women were free to do what the Bible said – and they prophesied.

Phoebe: The Servant

In the church at Cenchrea, there was a woman Paul calls “*a servant of the church*” and “*a helper of many*” (Rom 16:1,2). Some Bible versions translate the word 'servant' (*diakoneo*) used in this verse as 'deaconess'. Others use the word 'minister', since this same Greek word is used in different places in Scripture as 'minister'.

The historian Eusebius says that Phoebe oversaw two churches and traveled extensively in ministry. Many scholars believe it was Phoebe who carried the written book of Romans to the congregation in Rome.

THE ELECT LADY

“To the elect lady and her children, whom I love in truth ...” (2John 1).

John's letter was to an "elect [chosen] lady", and gave instructions to her about who she should allow to minister in her "house" (a word used for early church fellowships). *“If anyone comes to you and does not bring this doctrine, do not receive him into your house nor greet him”* (2John 10).

It seems evident she was a spiritual leader of some prominence and authority, **possibly the pastor of the church in her home**. The word "LADY" is from the Greek word *kuria*, the feminine form of *kurios* – meaning, as a respectful title, "supreme in authority".

CONCLUSIONS FROM BOTH THE OLD AND NEW TESTAMENTS

It is indeed a mystery why the place of women in ministry is a problem in so much of the Body of Christ.

Though most of the spiritual leaders mentioned in the Bible are men, there are also many examples of anointed, consecrated, chosen **women** of God in both the Old and New Testaments.

These women were never denied leadership roles or the right to function in a

God-given gift or calling.

It is important to note that this teaching is not intended to provide reasons for women to either stay home and avoid ministry, or to leave home and pursue it. The Bible tells us that *“to obey is better than sacrifice”* (1Sam 15:22).

The most important thing we can do as leaders and ministers is TO OBEY GOD.

The Lord will often use the counsel of those who are in authority over us (Prov 11:14). So **it is important for a woman to be in agreement with her husband and local pastor when moving ahead into ministry.**

EVERYTHING in our lives should be judged according to the Scriptures. Our decisions should also be submitted to the counsel of others who are living godly lives. Then we can receive the guidance to help us to be obedient to God's purpose **at every time and season in our lives.**

As believers in the Lord Jesus Christ, our pursuit of ministry, or any other goal in our lives, should never be based on selfish ambition or wrong desire (Gal 5:19-26; Phil 1:16; 2:3). Our reason to minister should only be **our obedience to God's call.** Our ministry and decisions should always consider **God's priorities** for our lives, our families, and His Church.

There are some difficult questions to answer regarding women in ministry today. Does marriage affect a woman's ability to minister? How about children? And what about those passages of Scripture in the New Testament that **seem** to not allow women ministry within the Church?

We will examine these issues in the next chapter.

CHAPTER FOUR THE MARRIED WOMAN AND MINISTRY

The Role Of Women

God said to man, *“It is not good that man should be alone”* (Gen 2:18).

It was part of God's plan from the beginning for man and woman to live together in marriage. He made woman FOR man, to be a helper at his side. They are intended to share with each other, love and respect each other, and work and live together in harmony – **one unit**, under the authority of God.

That is godly companionship. It implies cooperation, working WITH each other, worshiping and praying together, serving and ministering together, winning souls together.

“I will make him a helper...”

It is important for Christians, BOTH men and women, to remember that God made a wife as a **helper** to her husband. A wife is not a slave or somehow less important than her husband. She is instead created to be a partner, a sharer, a

companion to her husband.

“And the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall on Adam, and he slept; and He took one of his ribs, and closed up the flesh in its place.

*“Then the rib which the LORD God had taken from man He made into a woman, and He brought her to the man. And **Adam said**: ‘This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh’” (Gen 2:21-23).*

That is the way the Bible says a man should feel about his wife – he should love her as his own flesh, and nourish and cherish her (Eph 5:28,29).

The Woman As Sexual Partner

“Therefore a man shall... be joined to his wife, and they shall become one flesh” (Gen 2:24).

God created man and woman with the ability to be "one flesh", to be joined together in intimate sexual union. It is a very important part of the marriage relationship. This part of marriage is not just to provide children, but also to strengthen the love and sharing between husband and wife.

One must be married in order to have sexual relations, according to biblical principle. In Old Testament times, if anyone could prove a woman was not a virgin when she married, she was brought to the door of her father's house and the men of the city stoned her to death (Deut 22:20-21).

In New Testament times, Jesus showed mercy to those who broke the moral laws. He forgave and restored them, but did tell them *“Neither do I condemn you; go and **sin no more**”* (John 8:11).

The Jews understood the importance of a husband and wife enjoying a proper sexual relationship. Their culture freed a newly married man from his military or business duties for a whole year so he could *“...bring happiness to his wife whom he has taken”* (Deut 24:5).

This meant more than just having sexual relations. It also allowed time for the husband and wife **to learn to work together, to get to know each other, and to let their lives be joined together in every way.** It takes time to learn to work as a team, and to think more of your partner than of yourself.

IS SEX WRONG?

In New Testament times, there was a disagreement in the Corinthian church about the importance of the sexual relationship.

Some people had more "hedonistic" values, believing that whatever one wanted to do sexually should be all right – including fornication (sex before marriage), adultery (sex with someone that is not your marriage partner), prostitution (sex for money), and homosexual acts (same-gender sex). ALL of these are **forbidden** in the Bible.

At the other extreme there were people who thought that sex was somehow evil. They believed that one should not have any sexual relations at all, not even with one's own husband or wife (see 1 Corinthians 7).

Paul, in his Spirit-inspired letter to the Corinthians, reminded them that adultery and homosexuality were sinful and should not be participated in (1Cor 6:9-11).

But he also said husbands and wives should enjoy God's gift of sex together. Paul instructed that *"the husband should give to the wife her conjugal rights, and likewise the wife to her husband.*

"The wife does not have authority over her own body, but the husband does. And likewise the husband does not have authority over his own body, but the wife does.

"Do not refuse one another except by agreement for a season, that you may devote yourselves to fasting and prayer; but then come together again, lest Satan tempt you through lack of self-control" (1Cor 7:3-5 rsv, nkjv).

A husband and wife need to have a loving sexual relationship, to help them not be tempted to break their marriage vows.

However, there can be times when sex is not appropriate. Leviticus 18:19 says that the husband and wife were not supposed to have sexual relations during her menstrual period. And Paul said they could abstain from sex for a season to devote themselves to prayer, if they both agree. But they should come together again soon afterwards to prevent the possibility of temptation.

The Married Woman's Ministry Priority

Marriage is part of God's original plan for man and woman. It is a **privilege** to be partnered in a godly relationship.

There is a tremendous, multiplied power when two people are unified in the power of God, as opposed to one person standing alone.

A married couple living together in unity also provides a solid foundation for ministry and spiritual warfare. Our adversary, the devil, knows this and works long and hard to break marriages apart and separate families.

It takes much **prayer, humility and forgiveness** for husbands and wives to remain in unity, and to not allow Satan to divide them.

We have seen the multiplied power against the Enemy when a woman is joined with her husband in unity. **But how else does marriage affect a woman's ability to minister?**

Titus 2:3-5 says, *"The older women likewise...that they admonish the young women to love their husbands, to love their children, to be discreet, chaste, homemakers, good, obedient to their own husbands, that the word of God may not be blasphemed."*

This verse instructs older women to teach the younger women. It also tells them **what to teach the younger women, what is important for them to know** to be successful and godly. The Bible shows us these **priorities for a married women:**

1. A wife is to, first and foremost, **love her husband**. We have learned that to

love means to support, encourage, cover, bless, build up, serve, and much more. This takes time and energy to do.

2. A married woman is then to **love her children**. Again, she is to support them, encourage them, cover them, bless them, teach them, serve them and much more. This also takes a lot of time to do.

3. She is then to keep a **neat and orderly home**, and to be concerned, without complaining, about the state of her household (Prov 31:27; Phil 2:14). Again, this takes time and work.

We see these same priorities explained in 1 Timothy 5:14: *"Therefore I desire that the younger widows marry, bear children, manage the house..."*

All of these godly instructions take time and energy to complete. They are to be a married woman's priority and responsibility, and are a ministry that must come before her ministry to the Body of Christ.

The Married Man's Ministry Priority

Scripture also makes clear the priorities **men** need to fulfill regarding the condition of their families and household.

These things must be in order before a man takes on the responsibilities of ministry.

"...This is a faithful saying: If a man desires the position of a bishop, he desires a good work.

"A bishop then must be blameless, the husband of one wife, temperate, sober-minded, of good behavior, hospitable, able to teach;

"Not given to wine, not violent, not greedy for money, but gentle, not quarrelsome, not covetous;

"One who rules his own house well, having his children in submission with all reverence

"(For if a man does not know how to rule his own house, how will he take care of the church of God?)" (1Tim 3:1-5).

"Let deacons be the husbands of one wife, ruling their children and their own houses well" (1Tim 3:12).

Ministering for the Lord and serving others is both a privilege and a great responsibility. God places a high standard upon those He calls to lead, whether they are men or women.

But as men and women are faithful where God has placed them, and if they rule well what they have been given, God will release more (Matt 25:21).

The Priority Of Every Believer

Of course, even before all of those important priorities is the ONE THING that is to be the FIRST priority of any Christian's life. The ONE THING that is more

important than anything else: **Their personal and intimate relationship and walk with God** (Exo 20:2-4; Deut 6:4,5; Phil 3:8-10).

Knowing God in a personal way, and spending time talking to Him and reading His Word, is *very important* for every believer. **It is what we were created for.** God longs for us jealously, to know us and to have us choose to walk with Him (Exo 20:5,6; Gen 5:24, 6:9).

You will notice that the Bible does not say "God walked with Enoch", but that "Enoch walked with God" (Gen 5:22). It is **our choice** to live our lives daily walking with God. He wants to walk with us, **BUT WE MUST CHOOSE TO WALK WITH HIM.** All effective ministry flows out of learning to walk WITH God, not just doing work FOR God.

So spending personal time with the Lord is the first priority for every Christian, whether married or single, male or female. It is the most important thing a person can do. God waits for us to come to Him, and loves to spend time with us.

The Call Of Marriage

When a man **or** woman decides to take on the responsibilities of marriage and family, they should think long and hard about that decision. It is an important decision that will affect what they do with their time and with their life.

Paul gives advice on this in his first letter to the Corinthians:

"But I want you to be without care. He who is unmarried cares for the things of the Lord -- how he may please the Lord. But he who is married cares about the things of the world -- how he may please his wife..."

"The unmarried woman cares about the things of the Lord, that she may be holy both in body and in spirit. But she who is married cares about the things of the world -- how she may please her husband."

"And this I say for your own profit... that you may serve the Lord without distraction" (1Cor 7:32-35).

Paul is not saying it is better to be single than to marry, for he understood that God intends for most to marry.

Paul does, however, urge all those who are unmarried to consider the wisdom and benefits of living life as a single person. If you do not have to use your time to minister first to your spouse or children, you have more time to be completely devoted to the Lord's service.

It is important for a married woman to strive for balance in her life. Yes, it takes much time to care for the needs of husband, children and home. And God is glorified and people are ministered to by her godly example and ordered household.

But she is NOT to use her family or home as an excuse to hide from ministry to the Body of Christ, when God is calling her to serve Him in that way.

As her children grow older, she WILL have more time to give in ministry to others. And as her marriage and relationship with her husband grows stronger, it will

not take as much time to work through differences and challenges.

So there is plenty of reason for the married woman to consider ministry. **But she must, like her husband, make sure she is giving herself fully to ALL of the priorities established by God.** She must strive to “finish the race set before her” (2Tim 4:7) in EVERY PART of her life, not just one or two areas.

The Husband's Support

How important is it that a husband be supportive of, and in agreement with, a wife's call to ministry?

Ephesians 5 has much to say about how husbands and wives are to love and relate to each other. Among those are the directives to wives to “*submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord...just as the church is subject to Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in everything...and let the wife see that she respects her husband*” (Eph 5:22,24,33).

A godly wife should value the role that God gives her husband – to love and care for her. His opinion is very important, and **God will give him insight and wisdom for His wife as he prays for her.**

This does not mean that the husband is perfect. But it does mean that **God will honor** a wife's submissive and respectful attitude even when the husband may make a bad decision. (See part of the story of Abraham and Sarah in Genesis 12:10-20; 20:1-18; and see 1 Peter 3:1-9.)

Trusting in the leading of a husband is ultimately putting one's trust in God (see 1 Peter 3:5,6). If a wife and husband do not agree about a woman's calling to ministry, she should not rebel and do whatever she wants. Her wisest position before God is to pray for her husband continually, and to trust God to move on her behalf to release her as only the Lord can.

Our God can turn the heart of a king “*like rivers of water*” (Prov 21:1). Surely He can turn the heart of a husband who may not fully understand the will of God for His wife.

God can speak to your husband as He did to Abraham, “*But God said to Abraham...whatever Sarah has said to you, listen to her voice*” (Gen 21:12).

Husbands, Love Your Wives...

Husbands, you have a responsibility to love your wives even as Christ loves the Church. He loves the Church with a sacrificial love that is NOT selfish, fearful or full of pride. God expects you to nurture your wife, and encourage her to become ALL THAT GOD WANTS HER TO BE, just as Jesus does for His Bride, the Church.

This may mean that husbands may have to sacrifice some of their time and energy to help their wives, so that their wives can reach out to others in ministry. The important thing is that a husband loves his wife as much as he loves himself. He must think as much about **her** potential as he does his own (1Pet 3:7).

Wives need the encouragement and support of their husbands. Sometimes they

may be fearful of stepping out in ministry, or may not feel they know enough to "do it right".

Husbands, your words and deeds of support and encouragement may be all your wives need to step out into what God is calling them to do and become, for His glory and for His kingdom!

So wives, respect your husbands. Turn to them for counsel and advice. Submit to their God-given role as leader of the family. Honor their decisions. Consider with awe and reverence the position God has given to them. Pray much for them.

Husbands, love your wives. Support, encourage and help them. Pray for them.
God has a plan for BOTH of you!

If the main goal of both husband and wife is to love and serve the other more than themselves, they will truly have a godly and unified home.

CHAPTER FIVE

Problem Passages About Women In Ministry

Introduction

Earlier in this article, we examined what Jesus thought about women in general, and His view toward women in ministry. It is obvious that He was as loving and accepting of them as He was of men, and He even entrusted them with the message of His resurrection.

Jesus gave His Spirit and gifts **to men and women equally** on the Day of Pentecost – in fulfillment of Joel's prophecy.

Christ accomplished a work of redemption for BOTH men and women. Because of sin, neither one had been living in the place of spiritual authority or proper relationship that God had intended from the beginning. And part of why Jesus came was to provide a way to restore mankind to proper relationship – first with God, and then with one another.

Yet there are some scriptures in the New Testament about women in the Church that can seem confusing. These verses must be properly examined in the light of ALL of Scripture, and in the spirit and context in which they were written.

For example, Paul states in 1 Corinthians 14:34,35: *“Let your women keep silent in the churches, for they are not permitted to speak; but they are to be submissive, as the law also says. 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.”*

How could Paul write such a thing? And what did he actually mean? Does he seem to contradict himself at other places in Scripture, when he instructs women how to speak, pray and prophecy in the church? Let us examine this more closely.

To Whom Was Paul Writing, And Why?

First, we must consider why Paul was writing the letter to the Corinthian church in the first place. He had established a church there in about A.D. 50-51, on his second missionary journey (Acts 18:1-8). Paul cared for and kept in touch with the church after he left (1Cor 5:9, 2Cor 12:14).

He had received some disturbing reports about moral and spiritual problems among the believers in Corinth. They were struggling with such things as divisions, spiritual immaturity, the role of men and women, immorality, and the improper use of spiritual gifts.

In the city of Corinth, there existed many of the same problems found in other Greek cities in Paul's day. Corinth was a city known for gross immorality, idolatry, a spirit of division, and pagan temple prostitutes. These attitudes and moral confusion were affecting the church in Corinth.

1 Corinthians 14:40 tells us why Paul wrote this letter: "*Let all things be done decently and in order.*" There was confusion and disorder in the church in Corinth. Paul wrote to encourage the believers as to what was appropriate behavior for Christians. He wrote to teach them about order in the church.

In 1 Corinthians 14:34, Paul says, "*Let your women keep silent in the churches...*" If Paul meant women were never to open their mouths in any church at any time, then why did he also say, "*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*" (1Cor 11:5)?

In one verse Paul seems to be saying women are to be silent in the churches. Then in another verse, he gives instruction on how they are to pray and prophesy in the churches. In one verse, he commands women to keep silent. In the other, he tells them how to pray and prophesy. Are women never to speak in church, or are they to pray and prophesy? Which did Paul mean?

We must remember that **Paul's number-one concern in writing to the Corinthians was ORDER in the church.** In chapter 11 he addressed one problem of order, and in chapter 14 he addressed another.

In chapter 11, Paul is addressing the problem of Corinthian social customs. A woman who appeared in public with her head uncovered was considered to be immoral, even a temple prostitute.

In that culture, a woman with her head *properly covered* meant she was either married and in proper submission to her "head" (her husband), or single, and in proper submission to her family.

A man's head *uncovered* showed that HIS covering was the Lord.

Both represented a proper spirit of submission in places of public worship.

So Paul has no problem with women praying or prophesying, as he is telling them how it is to be done appropriately in 1 Corinthians 11. The issue is that it be done IN ORDER, with a heartfelt submission to those in authority.

How, then, does that relate to 1 Corinthians 14:34, where Paul tells women to keep silent? Again, we must remember that the issue is ORDER.

Order In The Church

It is important to realize that in Jewish tradition women had not been allowed to take part in religious ceremony. They were forbidden to speak in the synagogues. Women were not even allowed in the court of worship in the Jewish temple.

These conditions still exist in many countries today. Many cultural or tribal customs allow women to be bought and sold like animals. They are told to be quiet in public, and cannot participate in heathen rites or attend sacrificial ceremonies.

When these women come to Christ, they are thrilled and excited about their forgiveness and about being restored as "co-heirs". It may take time for them to adjust to their new freedom. It also may take time for them to learn appropriate behavior in public worship services.

In the new Christian revolution of Paul's day, the woman's new-found liberty in Christ was in direct conflict with the old Jewish system. Women had always been kept in the outer court. Now, for the first time, they could come inside the churches where they could see and hear everything that went on.

It is possible that the women did not understand all that was happening; yet, they were overjoyed to be part of the ceremony and worship. They might have been tempted to ask questions or speak out of turn. They may have even discussed what was taking place among themselves, right during the meeting.

Women had perhaps not yet learned the proper order for church involvement. They may have been blurting out whatever they thought or felt. Perhaps they were arguing with the men over what was being taught and, in so doing, were challenging their husbands' authority and shaming them in public.

Perhaps the women wanted to teach the men ideas which they felt had been revealed to them, without an appropriate time of learning and testing.

I CORINTHIANS 14:34, 35

Before we can properly examine these two verses, we must look at the entire passages surrounding them. Looking at only one or two verses in Scripture by themselves can lead to wrong conclusions. It is important to also look at the other verses surrounding them.

In 1 Corinthians 14, Paul is writing to the church in Corinth, and addressing the order of the ministry in the meetings.

*“Therefore if the whole church comes together in one place, and **all** speak with tongues...*

*“But if **all** prophesy...*

*“Whenever you come together, **each of you** has a psalm, has a teaching, has a tongue, has a revelation, has an interpretation.*

*“For you can **all** prophesy one by one...” (1Cor 14:23,24,26,31).*

Notice that ALL were speaking in tongues in the church. Paul says that ALL may prophesy. Again, EVERY ONE OF YOU means ALL. And in verse 31, Paul for a

fourth time says, “*For you can ALL prophesy...* ”.

So it is clear that Paul was saying that ALL (men and women) are to participate in the ministry gifts during a service. He is discouraging the confusion of everyone trying to speak or prophesy at once. But he is still encouraging *every person* to participate.

Then, while writing that ALL are to participate in the ministry, Paul suddenly says, “*Let your women keep silent in the churches...* ” (1 Cor 14:34).

What does Paul mean?

Are Women To Be Silent?

“Let your women keep silent in the churches, for they are not permitted to speak; but they are to be submissive, as the law also says. 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).

Three words in this passage need explanation in order to understand what Paul was teaching the Corinthians. These three words are (1) WOMEN, (2) SPEAK, and (3) SAITH.

1. WOMEN - The word **women** in this verse is the Greek word *gune*, which can mean a wife (not just any female). Given the context, this instruction from Paul is probably directed to **wives**.

2. SPEAK - The Greek word used in this verse is *laleo*, which means “to talk”. This word can imply an extended conversation.

3. SAYS - Comes from the Greek word *lego*, which means to “lay forth” (an idea or doctrine) in words usually of systematic or set discourse (“...*as the law also says*”).

“*Lego*” (**says**) involved the teaching or preaching of something the speaker had prepared and carefully thought about. This type of “speaking” was encouraged.

On the other hand, “*laleo*” (speak) was a talking that interrupted the speaker or was not spoken at the right time; this was discouraged. It could be calling out questions or discussing the weather. The point was that **it was not an appropriate TYPE of speaking out** in a church meeting.

So, if the passage was expanded to include **the true meanings of the words in the original Greek language in which the Scriptures were first written**, it might read something like this:

*“Let the wives not interrupt [laleo] the meetings of the church with extended talking: for it is **not permitted** for them to **interrupt** or to call out to others with their questions; but they are commanded to be under obedience, as also it is taught in the doctrine.*

“And if they desire to learn about anything, let them wait and ask their husbands at home: for it is a shame for them to have conversations during the church service.”

Paul was NOT telling women they could NEVER pray, prophesy, or otherwise minister in church. He had just been teaching them ALL, men and women, how to

minister in orderliness just a few verses before.

Paul was teaching the women, and the men, that there needed to be order in the church. You will notice **he also told the men to be silent at times as well** (1 Cor 14:28, 30).

He instructed them ALL when it was appropriate to speak in tongues, prophesy, and otherwise minister in the church. He also told them to listen with silence when the Word of God was being taught.

Paul was concerned for the witness and testimony of the Corinthian church in their community. He desired that they learn to walk in the Spirit and properly exercise the gifts God had given them.

“Therefore if the whole church comes together in one place, and all speak with tongues, and there come in those who are uninformed or unbelievers, will they not say that you are out of your mind?” (1 Cor 14:23).

The Corinthians could be loud and unruly. They even got drunk in their observance of the Lord's supper (see 1 Corinthians 11:20-26). This behavior certainly did NOT bring glory to God, or speak well of their newfound Christian faith.

These problems of lack of manners, civility, common courtesy and appropriate behavior were the issues in Paul's writings. **He was not trying to keep women from participating in an orderly fashion in the church.**

Paul's concern was for ORDER in the church, that all things be done decently and non-offensively.

“For God is not the author of confusion but of peace, as in all the churches of the saints” (1 Cor 14:33).

1 Timothy 2:8-15

This is another portion of Scripture that is often used by some to not allow women to minister in the Church.

“I desire therefore that the men pray everywhere, lifting up holy hands, without wrath and doubting;

“In like manner also, that the women adorn themselves in modest apparel, with propriety and moderation, not with braided hair or gold or pearls or costly clothing

“But, which is proper for women professing godliness, with good works.

*“**Let a woman learn in silence** with all submission.*

“And I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man, but to be in silence.

“For Adam was formed first, then Eve.

“And Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived, fell into transgression.

“Nevertheless she will be saved in childbearing if they continue in faith, love, and holiness, with self-control” (1Tim 2:8-15).

Paul wrote this section of Scripture as a letter to young Timothy, who was in charge of the church in Ephesus. He was helping Timothy deal with problems of doctrinal error, qualifications for leadership, and improper behavior by those in the church.

Timothy faced challenges in Ephesus much like those Paul addressed in Corinth. There were thousands of religious prostitutes at the shrine of Diana in Ephesus. They were taught that fornication linked people with the gods, and immorality was encouraged.

Most women were not educated or trained in those days, and knew nothing about God. It was considered virtuous for a woman to be ignorant (which is exactly the OPPOSITE of what the Bible teaches in Proverbs 31).

So Paul is writing to Timothy to help him correctly lead and provide order for the new Christians, both men and women, at the church in Ephesus.

The Women Needed Instruction

Notice in 1 Timothy 2:9,10 the kinds of issues Paul addresses first. Paul finds it necessary to give instructions about very simple matters, such as how a godly woman should dress, act and wear her hair.

He emphasizes modesty, no worldly display, and that her true attractiveness is her character. He reminds her to not be loud and out of order. (See 1 Peter 3:1-6.)

It is apparent the women of Ephesus had very little understanding about even the most basic godly priorities and values. They needed much instruction on proper behavior in the church, and in their personal lives. The clothes, jewelry and behavior of a temple prostitute were not acceptable in the church.

Let The Women Learn

Paul goes on to tell Timothy in verse 11, “*Let a woman learn in silence with all submission...*”

It is important to look carefully at the first part of the verse again. **Let a women learn.** Paul is telling Timothy that it is important to *let*, or ALLOW, a woman to learn!

Remember, in this culture, it was not normally acceptable for women to learn or be taught anything. They were incorrectly told that ignorance was virtuous for a woman.

But Paul writes to say that the women NEED TO LEARN, especially about the things of the Lord.

But how is it best to learn? *In silence* (quietly) and *with all submission*. When you want to learn something, you must be willing to sit quietly. You must accept and learn from the person teaching; you must not argue, but submit and listen.

So it is important to LET THE WOMEN LEARN. But we must encourage the

women, JUST LIKE THE MEN, to sit quietly and listen to the teacher while they are learning.

The women of Ephesus had much to learn about God, about living a godly life, and about functioning as part of the church body. How better to learn than quietly receiving what the teacher or pastor is saying.

We ALL Need Reminders

Paul then addresses the issue of women teaching, which we will look at in the next section.

But first, what does Paul mean by the phrase “*to have authority over a man*” (v.12)? At the same time he refers to Adam and Eve. What is the connection, and why does Paul put the two things together?

Some people say that because the woman was first deceived, she must somehow be weaker and more easily deceived than the man. That, some people conclude, is why Paul says a woman is not to teach or to lead. But it is doubtful that is what Paul meant.

We read in Genesis 3:16, “*To the woman He said: ‘I will greatly multiply your sorrow and your conception; in pain you shall bring forth children; your desire shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you.’*”

Because of the Fall, Eve was now subject to Adam. This did NOT mean that he was now to dominate her. It did NOT mean he was somehow more intelligent. It DID, however, give him the responsibility of leading in the marriage relationship.

Remember that Eve was originally **created by God for JOINT-RULERSHIP**. She and Adam ruled together. After sin came, Adam was charged by God to “*rule over*” her. Is it possible a woman might miss her former position, or perhaps even resent not being a “co-ruler”?

When God told Eve, “*your desire shall be for your husband*”, He most likely meant that she might again desire the position of joint-rulership – or even try to take over her husband's place of authority.

Women sometimes need reminders of God's command that their husbands are the final authority in the marriage relationship.

“Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord.

“For the husband is head of the wife, as also Christ is head of the church; and He is the Savior of the body.

“Therefore, just as the church is subject to Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in everything” (Eph 5:22-24).

But apparently **men need the same kind of reminders** of how *they* might be tempted to come out from under God's intended order of authority.

“I wrote to the church, but Diotrephes, who loves to have the preeminence among them, does not receive us.

“Therefore, if I come, I will call to mind his deeds which he does, prating against

us with malicious words. And not content with that, he himself does not receive the brethren, and forbids those who wish to, putting them out of the church.

“Beloved, do not imitate what is evil, but what is good. He who does good is of God, but he who does evil has not seen God” (3John 9-11).

Paul was writing about Diotrephes, a man who was not under proper authority and submission. Diotrephes considered himself better than others, and gossiped about his brothers.

We ALL, BOTH MEN AND WOMEN, have a human nature that is selfish and rebellious when not fully submitted to the Lordship of Christ.

“For the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary to one another, so that you do not do the things that you wish” (Gal 5:17).

Paul was instructing women to remember what happened in the Garden of Eden. He wanted them to understand and beware of the temptation to try and take charge of their husbands.

It is important to see, then, why Paul told women not *“to have authority over a man”* (1Tim 2:12) and not to try and "rule over" men.

But Paul does add, in 1 Timothy 2:15, that *“nevertheless she will be saved in childbearing”*. Perhaps he was reminding women that motherhood is a PRIVILEGED role given by God, and was more desirable than any other role, function or seemingly "higher position" in life.

Can A Woman Teach In The Church?

We have seen in his letter to Timothy that Paul was reminding women they may be tempted to step out of their place in God's order. They may even desire to take over the man's place of God-ordained rulership.

But what did Paul mean when he said, *“I do not permit a woman to teach...”* (1 Tim 2:12)?

Didn't Paul, in Titus 2:3,4 (kjv), tell older women to "teach" the younger women?

Yes, he did.

And didn't Priscilla – with Aquila – teach Apollos, the *“eloquent man”* who was *“mighty in the Scriptures”* (Acts 18:24,26)?

Yes, she did.

But in 2 Timothy 2:2 we read: *“And the things that you have heard from me among many witnesses, commit these to faithful **men** who will be able to teach others also.”*

Does Paul mean only men should learn and teach others?

The Greek word for **men** in 2 Timothy 2:2 is *anthropos*, which means MANKIND – **both men and women**. So Paul is instructing Timothy to teach the **MEN AND WOMEN**, and then encourage them to teach others also.

So when Paul says, *“I do not permit a woman to teach...”* what is it he was telling

Timothy?

The word **teach** is the key to understanding this problem verse. The original Greek word used for "teach" is *didaskaleo*, which means "to instruct or teach doctrine".

Women were not authorized to establish the doctrinal standards, as apostolic teachers. That was a function handled by the apostolic councils (see Acts 15). "*And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers*" (Acts 2:42).

The apostolic councils set the doctrinal standards, and the women who ministered were to respect those standards and not teach to the contrary. **This rule was not just for women, but for men as well:** "...*Hymenaeus and Philetus...who have strayed concerning the truth, saying that the resurrection is already past; and they overthrow the faith of some*" (2Tim 2:17,18). These two **men** departed from the apostles' doctrine and were condemned.

Rightly Dividing The Truth

It is extremely important for those who are going to teach to have a good and solid understanding of the Scriptures and of doctrine.

When we come to Christ, we are so excited and want to tell others what has happened to us. That is wonderful, and our confession of Jesus as Lord is a right thing to do (Rom 10:9,10).

But **sharing** with others is not the same thing as **teaching doctrine to others**. One must "*be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth*" (2 Tim 2:15).

The fact that you are reading this book shows that you are interested in learning the Word of God and about the ways of God. It shows that you desire to become a more skilled workman in the things of God.

It takes much learning before one can rightly divide the truth and then teach it to others.

The Women Of Ephesus

There were some definite problems with allowing the unlearned women of Ephesus to teach. This was especially true of those who were recently saved and coming in to the church.

In 1 Timothy 2, Paul addressed some of those problems. He includes the false doctrines regarding women that were common at the time of his writing.

False Doctrine

A common religion of the day in Ephesus was Gnosticism, which comes from *gnosis*, the Greek word for "knowledge". The Gnostics had many beliefs that went against the teachings of Scripture.

The Gnostics did NOT believe that *Eve sinned* when she ate of the forbidden tree. They believed instead that she received "special knowledge". Paul addressed this false doctrine, and told them: "...*the woman being deceived, fell into transgression*" (1Tim 2:14).

Because of Eve's special "place", according to the Gnostics, they also believed women were the mediators between God and man. Of course we know that Jesus Christ is the ONLY mediator between God and man.

Paul addressed this doctrinal error also: "*For there is ONE God and ONE Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus*" (1Tim 2:5).

Today, this Gnostic error still affects many segments of the Christian faith.

But the Bible tells us, "*No one comes to the Father except through Me [Jesus Christ]*" (John 14:6). **Believers can pray directly to God the Father because of what Jesus has done for us on the Cross in restoring us to God.**

The Gnostics also taught that Eve actually lived before Adam, and that she – not God – brought Adam to life! That is why Paul reminds the church at Ephesus, "*For Adam was formed first, then Eve*" (1Tim 2:13).

There was much error and false doctrine being brought into the church Timothy was pastoring in Ephesus. Paul wrote to address these problems, specifically regarding the issues relating to women and the Gnostic religion.

It is no wonder Paul tells Timothy to "*Let a woman learn in silence*" and not teach. They had to be properly instructed in biblical ways before they could then teach others.

The Gnostics had raised women to an improper divine level, where they had spiritual authority over men. It is obvious why Paul would remind the church that the women were not "*to have authority over a man*".

Paul was not debasing women, or trying to lower them below men; rather, he was trying to align them with scriptural principle while seeking to maintain a godly and holy order in the church.

One Last Look At 1 Timothy 2:11,12

Given all of the above understanding, an expanded translation of 1Timothy 2:11,12 using the original Greek meanings would read something like this:

"But I suffer not a woman to teach doctrine contrary to that established by the apostles, or to try and take the authoritative office of apostolic teacher, or to try and rule over a man; but to remain undisturbed, and learn in stillness."

Paul's exhortation, then, is consistent with his other words regarding ministry and order in the church. It is also consistent with the rest of Scripture, which does remind women (and men) that they are to be **yielded and submitted to God's order** for relationships and the Church.

The ideas and opinions formed in human reason, and the deceptions of false religions, are NOT what ministry in the Church is based upon.

Ministry in the Church is based solely upon the WHOLE counsel of God through His Word. Pure ministry flows out of a willingness of both men and women to submit and yield themselves and their ideas to the Lordship of Jesus Christ, His Word and His ways.

IN CONCLUSION

Whatever conclusions one reaches about women in ministry, consider these final points of review:

1) The Old Testament contains many accounts of anointed women leading, ministering, prophesying and praying in the Name of the Lord.

2) The New Testament also gives us many examples of women taking the testimony of the Lord Jesus Christ to those around them. It tells us of women who ministered through teaching, prophecy, prayer and evangelism.

Women of the New Testament were considered Christians of equal standing to men: believers, followers of Christ, witnesses for Him, messengers of the resurrection, and soul-winners for Jesus' sake.

3) **Jesus our Lord fully accepted and showed lovingkindness to BOTH MEN AND WOMEN.** They were BOTH associated with His life and ministry. He spoke to them, forgave them, healed them, and encouraged them in doing works even greater than His own (John 14:12-14).

Women were certainly allowed – and encouraged – to educate, proclaim truth, and exhort (prophesy). (For biblical review, see Acts 2:17; 18:26; 21:9; 1 Corinthians 11:5; Philippians 4:3; 2 Timothy 1:5; 3:14,15; Titus 2:3-5.)

It is clear that the idea of women just sitting in church services and not participating or serving the Lord is NOT found anywhere in Scripture.

Women should share in the ministry of soul-winning, prayer, prophecy, worship, and miracles. They should fully function in all the gifts and callings the Lord freely gives to those who are His.

Christ lives in **any person** who receives His gift of salvation through His cross and resurrection. He fills them with His Holy Spirit; He serves through them; He speaks through them; He loves and ministers through them.

Why Is The Ministry Of Women So Important?

At least half of those the Lord would call to bring in the harvest and serve in His Body are WOMEN! The devil would love to have more than half of the army of the Lord kept silent and not serving!

We need the ministry that God would pour through the women of His Church. We need women to fulfill the call of the Lord for their lives. We need women to receive God's promise to **them** as well as others: *“And it shall come to pass afterward that I will pour out My Spirit on all flesh; your sons AND YOUR DAUGHTERS shall*

prophecy... ” (Joel 2:28).

This was spoken again when Peter preached, “*And on My menservants and on My maidservants I will pour out My Spirit in those days; and they shall prophesy*” (Acts 2:18).

God is truly raising up an army in these last days. He wants EVERY PERSON that He would call to answer the commission He already has given: “*and you shall be My witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth*” (Acts 1:8).

There still may be churches that do not allow women to participate **in the church meetings**. If that is the case, do not be discouraged: there is plenty of opportunity for women to serve the Lord OUTSIDE THE CHURCH!

Lift up your eyes and look upon the fields that are ripe for harvest. The WHOLE WORLD is a mission field; and those OUTSIDE the sanctuary need the testimony of BOTH MEN AND WOMEN far more than those already INSIDE the sanctuary.

Jesus is looking for the wise follower who “*hears these sayings of Mine, and does them...*” (Matt 7:24). He desires to move through those who will build their soul-winning ministry upon the rock of **faith and action**.

“*For the eyes of the Lord run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to show Himself strong on behalf of those whose heart is loyal to Him*” (2Chron16:9). **God is looking** for those who are completely His, so that He can be strong through them (**male OR female**).

“*...but the people who know their God shall be strong, and carry out great exploits. And those of the people who understand shall instruct many...*” (Dan 11:32,33). God wants to show Himself strong through those that know Him; and those that have understanding should also instruct others.

May we all, MEN AND WOMEN, desire to serve the Lord out of a pure heart!

Are you willing to go **where** He calls, **when** He calls, **to whom** He calls, in **whatever way** He calls?

It may be across the sea, or across the street – but wherever, to whomever God leads you to minister, **it is important!**

One of the most significant scriptures in the New Testament is in John 20:18. The "Living Bible" translation says: “*Mary Magdalene found the disciples and told them, ‘I have seen the Lord’ and then SHE GAVE THEM HIS MESSAGE.*”

This woman's message of the resurrection is the heartbeat of Christianity. “*And if Christ is not risen, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins!*” (1Cor 15:17). Romans 10:9,10 ties the salvation of every person to the belief that “*God has raised Him from the dead*” and to the confession of that fact to the world.

Jesus entrusted one of the greatest messages of the Church to a woman. She declared it even to the apostles themselves.

Let us not, then, keep women today from continuing to boldly proclaim the message of the Gospel.

And may we all – both men and women – be so humble, so bold and so full of faith that we will, like Mary Magdalene, open our eyes to see the Lord, and go unto all the world and declare His Message until He comes!