

**God's Plan
For Gender Roles
In the Church**

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by
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God's Plan for Gender Roles In the Church

What a joy it is to operate within the boundaries and direction of God's plan! Nature illustrates the blessing of accepting God's design. The Canada goose experiences great freedom and fulfillment as it lives within the boundaries of its Creator. When the inner instinct to migrate urges it to fly a thousand-mile journey, it lives within its God-given plan and flies south. A resistant, independent, and self-willed attitude would only result in bondage and death in the cold North. Similarly, a fish enjoys great freedom as it lives in the waters of streams and lakes but would only harm itself if it tried to shake free of those boundaries and live on the land.

In the same way, the plan of God for men and women in the home and church is both good and freeing. But when those God-intended roles are ignored and disregarded, confusion inevitably results. Just as God created man with a longing for peace and joy that only He can fill, He has designed that different roles for men and women bring contentment and fulfillment. Human reasoning and political correctness have sometimes extended to gender functions in the church, but only as we follow God's plan will men and women be fulfilled and the church receive His blessing.

So what *is* God's plan for gender roles in the church? The book of I Timothy addresses this question.

The Scriptural Basis for God's Plan

In the process of calling new leaders from the local congregation, I Timothy 3 is nearly always referenced. This is very appropriate because of the leader qualifications found here. But this chapter and surrounding passages are instructive for other aspects of church worship and church life as well. Paul declares his express purpose for writing this book:

These things write I unto thee, hoping to come unto thee shortly: But if I tarry long, that thou mayest know how thou oughtest to behave thyself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth. (I Timothy 3:14-15)

Paul expresses his desire to visit Timothy in Ephesus soon, but he is forthright in saying that if he gets delayed, he wants Timothy and the church to know “how you ought to behave yourself in the house of God.” Paul is giving instruction for appropriate order in God's house. One aspect of this involves the characteristics of godly church leaders (I Timothy 3:1-13). A second aspect is the differing functions or roles of men and of women in the church. This will be our focus here. The scriptural basis is found in I Timothy 2:8-15:

8 I will therefore that men pray every where, lifting up holy hands, without wrath and doubting.

9 In like manner also, that women adorn themselves in modest apparel, with shamefacedness and sobriety; not with broided hair, or gold, or pearls, or costly array;

10 But (which becometh women professing godliness) with good works.

11 Let the woman learn in silence with all subjection.

12 But I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to usurp

- authority over the man, but to be in silence.*
- 13 For Adam was first formed, then Eve.*
- 14 And Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived was in the transgression.*
- 15 Notwithstanding she shall be saved in childbearing, if they continue in faith and charity and holiness with sobriety.*

Men Should Be Prayerful and Holy

Paul first addresses men and prayer. The word used here for “men” (Greek “*aner*”) specifically refers to the male gender. Thus, this instruction to pray is specifically directed to men rather than mankind in general. As we consider order in the house of God, prayer is an indispensable part. It is the unseen force behind the work of a successful ministry. It is essential for a meaningful worship service. Men in every place are called upon to lift up holy hands in prayer.

The phrase “lifting up” can be either literal or figurative. The statement here is not in imperative form but rather describes one appropriate posture of prayer. In some circles it is common for men to observe this literally during prayer, and that is entirely proper. The real emphasis, however, is on the word “holy,” as evidenced by the phrase that follows, “without wrath and doubting.” Men everywhere should pray with holy hands, hands unstained by anger, hands free of dissension, hands without strife and disputing, hands raised in prayer to God.

Certainly all believers should pray. Perhaps it is because of man’s tendency to be lax in this area that Paul emphasizes this specifically for men. Or perhaps it is because men should take the initiative in leading out in prayer. Not all men are called to preach. Not all can go to the foreign mission field, but all Christian men everywhere can pray. To pray effectively,

however, our lives, represented by our hands, must be clean, pure, and holy. We must be fully committed to the Lord Jesus.

Women Should Be Modestly Adorned and Render Good Works

Next, Paul turns to the sisters in verses 9-10. Sisters, you are called upon to pay attention to your adornment. This seems to come naturally for most women, but Paul directs our attention specifically to the proper type of adornment. Do not adorn yourself with decorated hair, don't adorn yourself with jewelry (gold and pearls), and don't wear costly, extravagant garments. Instead, focus on good works, which benefit women making a claim to godliness.

Very simply, adornment from the latest fashion magazine will draw attention to a woman's **body**, while adornment from "God's Book of Style" will be modest and discrete, drawing attention to a woman's **character**. Perhaps Paul addresses this here because of the woman's tendency toward a wrong focus in this area. Sisters, a godly woman will not be known by her good looks but by her good works and her unselfish devotion to the needs of others. She will be a model of reserve and dignity in the home, the church, and the community.

Women Should Not Teach or Have Authority over Men

Verses 11-15 give further counsel for the Christian woman relating to her teaching in an assembly of people. This passage and a similar one in I Corinthians 14 often draw a strong negative reaction from our culture and even many professing Christians. At first blush, these verses do seem very harsh and perhaps even out of character with some other Scriptures. Yet we recognize that this is the inspired and inerrant Word of God. It therefore deserves close study and examination.

Verse 11 states, “Let the woman learn in silence with all subjection.” Some other translations say: “A woman should learn in quietness” (NIV), or “Let a woman quietly receive instruction” (NAS). The word used here for “silence” (Greek “*hesuchia*”) means stillness, quietness, in tranquility, or without disturbance. This word does not necessarily call for absolute silence but rather directs that she speak in a quiet manner without disturbance. The godly woman is governed by an attitude of submission even as she sits and learns under the ministry of the Word. A form of this same word is used in 1 Peter 3:1-4 which states, “Likewise, ye wives, be in subjection to your own husbands ... Whose adorning let it not be that outward adorning of plaiting the hair ... [but rather] the ornament of a meek and quiet (Greek “*hesuchios*”) spirit, which is in the sight of God of great price.” The “meek and quiet spirit” of I Peter 3:4 equates to learning “in silence” (I Timothy 2:11). This same word is also used at the end of verse 12 of our text, which again says a woman should “be in silence,” that is, she must “remain quiet” (NAS). The godly woman who is adorned with a meek and quiet spirit will also be obeying the silence restrictions to “let the woman learn in silence” (verse 11) and to “be in silence” (verse 12).

Verse 12 further states, “I suffer not [do not allow] a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man.” Let us first consider the prohibition against teaching. The word “teach” (Greek “*didasko*”) speaks of an **authoritative** or **official** teaching. A study of this word’s usage reveals that it does not refer to giving your testimony or sharing your faith with others. This verse is not forbidding these types of expressions. Rather, this word “teach” refers to formal instruction. Jesus, Peter and John, Paul, and Timothy are men who are said to have taught using this word. There is only one reference in Scripture where a woman taught using this word. In Revelation 2:20, Christ speaks to the church of Thyatira and counsels, “*Notwithstanding I have a few things against thee, because thou sufferest that woman*

Jezebel, which calleth herself a prophetess, to teach (Greek "didasko") and to seduce my servants to commit fornication, and to eat things sacrificed unto idols." The one woman in Scripture who taught using this word was out of place. Paul says, "I do not allow a woman to teach," that is, a woman cannot teach in an authoritative or official position. We will see later that women (especially older women) do have a teaching ministry to other women and to children, which they should exercise. But that word "teach" is a different word than the official teaching forbidden here. This verse clearly forbids placing women into a position where teaching the Scripture to men and shepherding the church is the primary function.

The second part of this verse forbids a woman from usurping authority over the man. Usurp means "to dominate" or "exercise authority over." The clear statement is that a woman should not exercise authority over a man. Standing before a mixed audience, which includes men, to open the Bible and teach or preach is taking authority. Serving in an executive position within the church is operating in a ruling capacity. Licensed or ordained positions within the church are positions of authority. All of these are therefore out of order for a woman. **A woman will not be called by God, nor should she be called by the church, to fill a position which would place her in a position of authority over men.** This does not mean that a woman cannot express her wishes, make suggestions, or let her counsel be made known at appropriate times. Women are very important in the life of the church and their viewpoint is important. But positions of authority need to be held by godly men.

We find a similar teaching in I Corinthians 14:33-34.

For God is not the author of confusion, but of peace, as in all churches of the saints. Let your women keep silence in the churches: for it is not permitted unto them to speak; but they are commanded to be under obedience, as also saith the law.

While the phrase “to learn” or be “in silence” in I Timothy 2 meant “without creating a disturbance,” a different word is used here that does mean “without talking.” This word translated “keep silence” (Greek “*sigao*”) does mean “to remain absolutely quiet.” If this were the only passage we had on this subject, it would seem that Paul is teaching absolute silence for all women in the assembly. How do we reconcile the use of this different word with that of I Timothy 2:11?

Here in I Corinthians 14, Paul is dealing with the subject of spiritual gifts, particularly the teaching gifts of tongues and prophecy. He uses the word “*sigao*” several times in this passage:

- If there is no interpreter, the man with a message in a foreign tongue should keep absolutely quiet (“*sigao*”). (1Corinthians 14:28).
- If something is revealed to another person, the first person is to keep absolutely quiet (“*sigao*”) so that the second can speak. (1Corinthians 14:30).
- Let the women keep absolutely quiet (“*sigao*”) in the churches. (1Corinthians 14:34).

The context shows that the silence Paul is commanding here relates to speaking in foreign tongues and preaching or prophesying in the church. If there is no interpreter, a man is to keep absolute silence (i.e. not speak in foreign tongues). Likewise, in the church service, women are to keep absolute silence (that is, they are not to speak in tongues or preach or prophesy before the assembly). These verses are not intended to prohibit these men and women from all normal speaking. But God is a God of order. His worship services must be orderly. And God’s order for the church is that women should refrain from teaching men or exercising authority over them. Just as a man who delivers a message in a foreign tongue without an

interpreter is out of place, or just like the person who monopolizes the time and does not allow another brother to speak is out of place, in the same way, a woman who teaches or prophesies in the main worship service is also out of place.

Note also that I Timothy 2:11 and I Corinthians 14:35 both speak of women as learners. I Corinthians 14:35 says, “And if they will learn anything, let them ask their husbands at home, for it is improper for a woman to speak in the church.” While women are not to be teachers in the context of the worship service, neither should they be shut out of the learning process. The right of women to learn is a given today, but this was not assured for many first-century believers. In fact, most ancient religions did not perceive women to be worthy of participating in religious life. Old Testament Jewish women in Israel were regarded higher than in many surrounding nations; they were not barred from attending the synagogue, but neither were they encouraged to learn. And some Rabbis prohibited women from all teaching, even teaching small children.¹

In contrast, both Jesus and Paul had a high regard for women:

- When a woman was taken in the act of adultery by the Scribes and Pharisees, Jesus was the only One who came to her defense and prevented her stoning. (John 8:3-11)
- Jesus had a great love and concern for the woman of Samaria at Jacob’s well. (John 4:1-42)
- Jesus shared close fellowship with Mary and Martha. (John 11:1-46)
- Paul highly commended Lois and Eunice for their faith and their instruction to their son Timothy. (II Timothy 1:5).
- At the conclusion of Paul’s letter to the Romans (ch. 16), he commends and sends greetings to about 30 people at Rome, of which at least eight were women.

The New Testament recognizes women as a great asset to the church. They are an invaluable part of the plan of the kingdom of God, vessels for God, and useful in the program of the church. Paul affirms their right to learn but instructs them so they can contribute to church life in a proper way.

Returning to I Timothy 2, we are given two reasons for the limitation on women's leadership whereby they should learn in silence and not exercise authority over a man. First, verse 13 mentions the order of creation. Adam was first formed and then Eve. From the very beginning, God had arranged that the woman should be a helper to man, not his head or ruler. She was not created to lead but to be a suitable helper (Genesis 2:18).

Secondly, verse 14 mentions the history of the fall. Eve was deceived in the garden and sinned first, eating of the fruit. The serpent knew that Eve was "the weaker vessel" and therefore tempted her. Adam sinned without being deceived. Therefore, in the order of God's judicial sentence, the serpent, the prime offender, stands first; the woman, who was deceived is next; and the man, persuaded by his wife, is last (Genesis 3:14-19). In Romans 5, Adam, as the head of the sinning race, is represented as the first transgressor without reference to Eve. Being the one in authority, he was ultimately responsible. But it was Eve who first sinned.

In the garden, God also said to Eve, "in sorrow thou shalt bring forth children" (Genesis 3:16). I Timothy 2:15 substantiates that a woman's most noble fulfillment is found in motherhood. She is not called to officially teach in the public arena or to rule over man; rather, she is called to train children in the home and to live a faithful, loving, and holy life.

Summary of the Main Principles

What shall we do with this instruction? Before we consider some of the supposed problems and application of this teaching, there are three main principles that should serve as a basis for our doctrine and application.

1. All mankind are equally created in the image of God and have the same opportunity for relationship with God through Christ.

The value that God places on any person and his soul is equal, regardless of whether that person is a man or a woman. Galatians 3:26-29 clearly says that “there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus.” As we relate to one another on this earth, there are Jews and Greeks, slaves and free, male and female. But in each person’s relationship to Christ Jesus, those distinctions are irrelevant. The gifts of grace and salvation are given equally to all persons as they respond in faith to Christ. A woman is just as saved, just as important, just as valuable, and just as highly regarded as any man in God’s kingdom.

But this does not address how this equality is to be worked out in a functional way. Neither man nor woman is superior to the other, but the two sexes are very different: physically, emotionally, and temperamentally. These differences are based in creation and are not erased when both come to Christ. Scripture nowhere teaches that equality in value nullifies the functional roles of submission taught elsewhere in the Bible. Quite the opposite!

And that brings us to the second principle:

2. Women are functionally subordinate to men.

When Scripture addresses the functional or practical role of women in the church as it does in I Timothy 2, it assumes that the theological equality has already been established. Another Scripture that addresses the functional role is I Corinthians 11:2-3, “But I would have you know, that the head of every man is Christ; and the head of the woman is the man; and the head of Christ is God.” God is not a God of anarchy and therefore has established a ladder of authority. This clear line of authority is: God, Christ, man, woman. It doesn’t matter who we are, all of us without exception fall under the authority of someone else. There are many authority structures: children to parents, citizens to governments, servants to masters, employees to employers, younger to older; and we all fall under a number of these structures. But from the big picture and the overall structure, all of us are under the authority of Christ, and women are under the authority of men.

Again, this does not imply lack of equality. Jesus is equal with God. In fact, He IS God! Yet in a functional and practical way, Christ was always submissive to the plan and will of His Head, the Father. In the same way, there is a designated order of man subject to Christ, and women subject to man’s authority. To reverse these roles is to usurp authority.

That brings us to the third principle governing the role of women in the church:

3. Women must not fill ordained or set-apart positions of authority in the structure of the church.

The Bible establishes the offices of bishop (overseer or elder or minister) and deacon as the main positions of leadership in the church (I Timothy 3:1-13). These offices were established for the

proclamation of the Word of God, feeding the flock of God, being a watchman against false teaching, and general organizing and leading of the church of God. These offices are filled by those whom the church calls and ordains. Ordination is the church's authoritative calling and setting apart to fill these Biblical offices.

Numerous Scriptures make it clear that these ordained positions should only be filled by men. Notice these verses from I Timothy 3:

- Verse 1 - *“If a **man** desire the office of a bishop [overseer], **he** desireth a good work.”*
- Verse 2 - *An overseer must be “the **husband** of one wife.”*
- Verse 5 - *“If a **man** know not how to rule **his** own house, how shall **he** take care of the church of God?”*
- Verse 12 - *“Let the deacons be the **husbands** of one wife.”*

We could go to Titus 1 and find the same thing. To misrepresent this to somehow show that women can fill these offices is totally without merit. Women are not called of God to positions of authority in the structure of the church. Neither should they be called by the church to these positions.

Arguments against This Teaching

Since those who oppose Scriptural teaching provide counter-arguments against these principles, we should briefly consider a few supposed problems relating to the role of women in the church.

1. Does I Timothy 3:11 provide for deaconesses?

I Timothy 3:11 has been used by some to support women in

leadership. This verse states, “Even so must their wives be grave, not slanderers, sober, faithful in all things.” The word for “wives” here should literally be translated “women.” The NAS reads, “Women [must] likewise [be] dignified, not malicious gossips, but temperate, faithful in all things.” Because this qualification is for women, some have used this to advocate an office of deaconess. However, the very next verse (verse 12) specifically states that deacons should be the “husband of one wife.” This cannot be stretched to say, “the wife of one husband.” The most consistent interpretation of verse 11, therefore, is that it refers to the deacon’s wife. Her role of standing by and supporting her deacon husband is so vital that there are some qualifications she must meet. But this does not teach that she be authoritatively set apart with her husband. Note that Titus 1:6 gives qualifications for the children of overseers. An overseer must have “faithful children not accused of riot or unruly.” No one would suggest that because qualifications are given for a minister’s children that we ordain the children when a man is set apart as minister. In the same way, qualifications for the wife of a deacon here in I Timothy 3:11 do not establish a separate office of deaconess for women or ordination for the wives of deacons.

2. Was Phoebe a deaconess?

Another passage used to rationalize the office of deaconess is found in Romans 16:1-2

I commend unto you Phebe our sister, which is a servant of the church which is at Cenchrea: That ye receive her in the Lord, as becometh saints, and that ye assist her in whatsoever business she hath need of you: for she hath been a succourer of many, and of myself also.

Based on the phrases “servant of the church” and “succourer [helper] of many,” some have presented Phoebe as a deaconess.

The word used here for “servant” is used 30 times in the New Testament. The King James Version translates it as “minister” 19 times, “servant” 8 times, and “deacon” only 3 times. Someone reading this verse in a natural manner would conclude that Phoebe was a person who ministered greatly to the needs of the church, not as one who was officially set apart by the church as a deaconess but as a wonderful example of the kind of Christian a godly woman should be.

3. Does God give women the gifts of teaching and preaching?

Another argument for placing women in leadership is an underlying sense that prohibiting our sisters from ordained positions is a waste of their God-given gifts to the church. Some have contended that prohibiting women from positions of leadership suppresses them and forfeits the gifts and talents that God has given the church through our sisters. That is a common perception throughout many churches today. But I believe that it is a false perception. In fact, just the opposite is true. We will look at the role of women in the church in just a moment, but both men and women can be truly fulfilled only when we follow the principles of Scripture, including male and female functional roles.

There is no question that God has given spiritual gifts to our sisters. However, we must be careful not to confuse **giftedness** with **authorization**. If I may use myself as an illustration, I am an electrical engineer by trade. My responsibilities involve designing computerized control systems for high-speed assembly machines. Programmable logic controllers, servo motors, operator panels, and databases are all tools of the trade. Suppose that one day I walk up to the main entrance of the United States Mint where machines inside are stamping out quarters and printing dollar bills, and I inform them that I am here to increase

the efficiency and reliability of their equipment. They would soon determine that I had no authorization to be there and would quickly show me the door. My ability or giftedness to design machine controls does not give me the authority to touch their equipment.

In the same way, a Christian woman's spiritual gifts and abilities are not authorization to teach and lead men contrary to 1 Timothy 2:11-12. Being **qualified** in some way to do something is not the same as being **authorized** to do it. God has given a wide variety of spiritual gifts to women of faith, but none of those grants permission to violate the clear statements of Scripture. The roles of **leading** and **teaching** are biblically reserved for **men**.

Applications of this Teaching

So what is the Biblical role of women in the church? How should the Phobes and Dorcases and Marys and Marthas of today operate within our church body? What are some areas and ways in which we should be encouraging our sisters to participate in church life?

1. Women may serve in a non-authoritative helper role.

Sisters, the church needs your help and your encouragement. As we saw earlier, the silence restrictions or "quiet spirit" verses of I Timothy 2 do not forbid a woman from sharing a testimony for the Lord, asking a question in Sunday School class, or sharing a prayer request with the congregation at appropriate times. There are occasions when the floor is open to all members of the body, including women. The woman who is adorned with a meek and quiet spirit can freely share at these times.

And although a woman cannot hold a position of authority over men, she can at times be part of a sub-committee falling under the authority of a main governing board. In some cases, it may even be preferable to have a woman lead such a committee. Many men would be quite challenged if they needed to head up the food committee for a fellowship meal. Some women have the gift of hospitality; others are gifted to comfort those in need. All members of the body, including women, are given spiritual gifts, and it is our responsibility to harness those gifts in a proper and consistent way.

The support role of our sisters cannot be overestimated. Consider the President of the United States. How is he able to (1) stay abreast of international situations daily or sometimes hourly, (2) stay current on upcoming court cases and pending legislation, (3) nominate judges and other positions, (4) meet with members of congress, (5) much, much more, and (6) still have time to pardon the Thanksgiving turkey and spend time with the family? Of course, it is only because he has a staff of hundreds or perhaps thousands that work closely with him to accomplish these things. Maybe you are the wife of a church leader; you know the heavy load of responsibilities that he carries. Don't ever think that your support role is unimportant. You are the most important support staff he has. Using your abilities to help and encourage him is just one way of supporting the work of the church.

But some sisters may say, "But my gift is in teaching. How can I use that?"

2. Women may teach other women and children.

This principle is found in Titus 2:3-5:

The aged women likewise, that they be in behaviour as

*becometh holiness, not false accusers, not given to much wine, teachers of good things; That they may **teach the young women** to be sober, to love their husbands, to love their children, To be discreet, chaste, keepers at home, good, obedient to their own husbands, that the word of God be not blasphemed. (Titus 2:3-5)*

This is a significant ministry of teaching that I fear we have often failed to utilize to the fullest. On many occasions, younger women are looking for assistance and answers to the difficult task of running a household, finding quiet time with the Lord, and setting priorities. The best teachers in many of these areas are the older women who have experienced and passed through these difficult times themselves. Ideally, this teaching and interchange could occur on an informal basis among the sisters. But since our women do not meet at the town well each day as they may have done in Jesus' day, perhaps a more formal system is needed. The gathering of women on a regular basis to study and share together is beneficial to many. Some women have been given the gift of teaching just for this purpose. We miss a valuable resource if we do not harness these gifts.

Another vital outlet for women is the teaching and training of children.

- *Proverbs 6:20 says, "My son, keep thy father's commandment, and forsake not the law of thy mother."*
- *In 2 Timothy 1:4-5, Paul says he is "...filled with joy when I call to remembrance the unfeigned faith that is in thee [speaking to Timothy], which dwelt first in thy grandmother Lois, and thy mother Eunice."*

In a teaching environment, the person teaching becomes the authority. Since God has designed from creation that the parent is the authority over the child, there is no problem in women teaching doctrine to their own or another's children. Teaching a

children's Sunday School class is an appropriate way to use a woman's teaching gifts. Instructing other women or instructing children are very important teaching opportunities for our sisters and a great asset to the church.

3. Women may pray.

One of the most significant church services to ever transpire was the prayer and worship service in the upper room in Jerusalem where the disciples of Jesus waited for the power of the Holy Spirit. Acts 1:14 says, "These all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication, **with the women, and Mary the mother of Jesus**, and with his brethren." The women are specifically named as participating in this prayer service.

The question then arises, "What about a woman leading out in public prayer?" Leading out in prayer in a public worship service is at least to some degree a station of authority. Based on the prohibition of teaching and exercising authority over a man, a man should lead out in this type of setting. This is a good time to exercise 1 Timothy 2:8, "*I will therefore that **men** pray every where, lifting up holy hands, without wrath and doubting.*" Still, there are appropriate times for men and women to share equally in prayer in a church setting. When the church gathers and the floor is open for all members of the congregation to pray, the sisters should be as free as any other person. A small group prayer meeting is another example. We are not told if Mary and the other women in Acts 1:14 prayed audibly or not, but I believe they may have. As appropriate times arise, our sisters should be free and encouraged to join the brotherhood in prayer to God. The headship covering, in the words of I Corinthians 11:5, permits the veiled woman to pray and prophesy. This brings us to a fourth point:

4. A veiled woman may prophesy.

How does this align with the prohibition to formally teach? First of all, the principles of I Corinthians 11 are not just for a worship service but are for all of life – daily Christian living. While women are forbidden from speaking the Word in the official assembly of the church, there are plenty of other opportunities to share.

- In Acts 21:9, the daughters of Philip prophesied. We are not given any detail on what they prophesied or to whom. And it is interesting to note that even though they were present where Paul was, the Holy Spirit's message to Paul came through Agabus, not through Philip's daughters. But the Word says they did prophesy.
- And in Luke 2:36-38, Anna prophesied to all those who looked for redemption in Jerusalem.

The word “prophesy” can also mean to “testify” or give a testimony. As with prayer, when opportunity is given for the members of the body to share a word of testimony of what God has done and how He is working, it is entirely appropriate for properly veiled sisters of the congregation to share in this time. There have been many times when I have appreciated and been inspired by the insight expressed by a sister on these occasions. Sisters, when the floor is open to all church members, perhaps in a Sunday School class or informal Bible study, and the Lord gives you a thought to share and contribute, please do so. You can bless the congregation in this way. Prophecy can also include informal evangelism, and that brings me to point five:

5. Women may evangelize.

The Great Commission of Matthew 28:19-20 was not given only to men. Women also need to share their faith and be involved in leading others to Christ. Many women have served

faithfully on the mission field while refraining from leading the church. Sometimes when there are not enough men, it is tempting to compromise and place women in leadership roles. Can we trust the Lord even in these times? A modern-day example worthy of note would be Elizabeth Elliot. After her husband and several other missionaries were murdered in Ecuador, she was the only missionary left who could speak the language of the Auca Indians. Rather than violate the Word of God by teaching men in church, Elizabeth taught one of the Auca men privately and he delivered sermons to the people. This continued until male leaders could be found.²

Acts 18:24-28 says that Priscilla and Aquila took Apollos and expounded unto him the way of God more perfectly. Rather than usurp the authority of Apollos as teacher/preacher, Priscilla and Aquila taught him privately, and Apollos continued his fruitful ministry. We don't know precisely what role Priscilla had in this, but together they were a blessing to Apollos and those who heard him. Women can proclaim the Word of God in obedience to the Great Commission.

Conclusion

The principles we have found in the Scriptures agree with the historic Christian view of women in ministry. The *Didache*, a Christian document from the late first or early second century, says the following with regard to church leaders:

Elect, therefore, for yourselves bishops and deacons worthy of the Lord, men who are meek and not covetous, and true and approved. ³

There is no record of an official order of deaconesses at this time. Later in Christian history, some churches did have

deaconesses, but they were subordinate to the male deacons and had different functions. The appeal to ordain women to positions of church leadership equal to men has only arisen in more modern times. It is no coincidence that the position of many churches has changed since the women's movement of the 1960s. Those who seek to ordain women have been shaped more by the social fabric of our times than by the Biblical text. Just as Satan offered the forbidden fruit to Eve, along with the promise, "...you will be **like God**, knowing good and evil" (Genesis 3:5), Satan is tempting Christian women today with a similar deception: "You can minister **like men**, teaching and leading men in my ways." Satan's tactic from the beginning has been to **discredit** and cast **doubt** on the **Word** of God. And he comes again with the question: "**Did God really say...?**" (Genesis 3:1).

Let's not be deceived. Reinterpreting Scriptures in a way that blurs or denies the **distinctions** God has established between the respective roles of men and women in the church can only lead to lost fellowship with Him. God's order must be reflected in His church. Anything less causes confusion, weakens the church, and dishonors God.

As we accept the inerrancy of Scripture, acknowledge the historical Christian view, and correctly interpret I Timothy 2 and I Corinthians 14, the New Testament Scriptures that address the role of women in the local assembly fall into place:

- We understand why the qualifications for a pastor/deacon call for one who is "the husband of one wife" (1 Timothy 3:2).
- We understand that the Scriptural command for women to "keep silence" and not "usurp authority over the man" does not dictate complete silence in the local church. Rather, it means that the woman is forbidden from preaching or authoritatively teaching the Word of God to men in a local assembly of believers, including holding ordained office.

- We understand that both men AND women possess God-given gifts for the benefit of the church. We need to encourage ALL of our members to use these gifts in appropriate ways for the honor and glory of God.

Let us follow God's plan for gender roles in the church. In this way, both men and women will be fulfilled in their proper God-given roles. And then our churches will be as I Timothy 3:15 says, "the church of the living God, the pillar and support of the truth" (NAS). May God help us to this end!

ENDNOTES

- 1 Mishna Kiddushin 4,13: "An unmarried man must not be a teacher of children, nor may a woman be a teacher of children."
- 2 [Bonnidell Clouse and Robert G. Clouse](#), Women in Ministry: Four Views. InterVarsity Press, Downers Grove, IL, 1989.
- 3 THE DIDACHE, or Teaching of the Twelve Apostles, Chapter 15:1, Translated by Charles H. Hoole, The Saint Pachomius Library.

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