

Role of Women in the Church Today Part Two

“And he began to speak boldly in the synagogue: whom when Aquila and Priscilla had heard, they took him unto them, and expounded unto him the way of God more perfectly”
(Acts 18:26).

In Acts 18:26 a husband and wife made an excellent ministry team. This couple is mentioned various times in the Epistles. They worked together to bring further truth to a serious seeker. They took him aside and taught (expounded) the truth to him. To “expound” one would have to “teach” or “instruct.” Together they showed Apollos the way of God more perfectly.

One of the seven deacons appointed in Acts was Philip. He had four daughters who prophesied.

“And the next day we that were of Paul's company departed, and came unto Caesarea: and we entered into the house of Philip the evangelist, which was one of the seven; and abode with him. And the same man had four daughters, virgins, which did prophesy” (Acts 21:8-9).

Women were active in the early church. However, two passages in the New Testament seemingly restrict the role of women in the church. These cause confusion over the woman's role in the church. To gain a better understanding of this, we need to know how to interpret Scriptures.

How to Interpret Scripture

To understand Scriptures we need to look at:

- 📖 The background. What is taking place in this passage? What is the pre-text (comes before)? Post-text? (comes after)? And context (background or setting)?
- 📖 Why was this passage of Scripture written (purpose)? What was happening that caused the need for writing it?

Should a Woman Keep Silent in the Church?

“Let your women keep silence in the churches: for it is not permitted unto them to speak; but they are commanded to be under obedience, as also saith the law. And if they will learn any thing, let them ask their husbands at home: for it is a shame for women to speak in the church.” (1 Corinthians 14:34-35)

Look at the background of what is being discussed. To simply proclaim that women are to remain silent in the church and not allowed to speak poses a problem, not to mention a misunderstanding.

The same writer wrote in 1 Corinthians 11:5, “But every woman that prayeth or prophesieth with her head uncovered dishonoureth her head: for that is even all one as if she were shaven.” In this verse Paul permitted women to both pray and prophesy in the church. However, the woman is to respect her head. In God's divine order, the husband is the head of the wife. She is to be submissive to her own husband. (See Colossians 3:18 and Ephesians 5:22.) Scripture does not imply that a woman should be in submission to the entire male

population, but to her own head (husband). If the woman is unmarried, she should submit to her father.

Prophecy is one of the most useful and edifying gifts used in a church service. It contains a message originating from God and not from human reasoning or understanding. It is "speaking like God speaks." God speaks to His people through human vessels. Both men and women can prophecy. Words given by the Spirit, through men and women, carry authority. God speaks to us with authority. Women at Corinth operated in this ministry, and Paul approved of it. How can a woman keep silent in the church and still prophecy?

In 1 Corinthians 14:31 Paul wrote, "Ye may all prophesy." He did not say that women could not prophesy.

Verse 34 may also be interpreted by what is written in verse 35. Women should not interrupt the service by asking questions that could be asked at home. Women in this setting were uneducated and had many questions.

Within the marriage relationship, it is not appropriate for a wife to act as the spokesperson for the family when a question arises in the congregation.

God has established a divine order for the family and the church. He compares the relationship of a husband and wife to the church. A woman needs to be in submission to her own husband. This is coming under the protection or umbrella of another. Exactly what does this relationship involve? The answer is found in reading and following Ephesians 5:31-33.

Woman, Learn in Silence

"Let the woman learn in silence with all subjection. But I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man, but to be in silence. For Adam was first formed, then Eve. And Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived was in the transgression. Notwithstanding she shall be saved in childbearing, if they continue in faith and charity and holiness with sobriety" (1 Timothy 2:11-15).

Women in the ancient world were not encouraged to learn. Paul advised that they should be allowed to learn (in silence). Obviously, before they could ever teach, they had to learn. Until they learned, they are not in a position to teach. Men could ask questions in public meetings. This liberty was not given to women. They were to learn at home.

Woman, Don't Be Pushy

A woman is not to "usurp authority over the man." This implies a woman should not be domineering or take authority that has not been designated to her. To "usurp authority over" means, "to be an absolute rule or master." (*Liddell and Scott Lexicon*) It is "the act of seizing authority illegally or assuming dictatorial rights." (*Guidepost Family Concordance*) Becoming a dictator in the church is not appropriate for either a woman or man. To "usurp" means to "seize or hold a position or function that rightly belongs to another; to encroach on a right, privilege, or office of another."

Can a Woman Teach?

If you combine "teach" and "usurp authority," you have "authoritative teaching." This type of teaching may not have been compatible

with Paul's understanding of a woman's role or culturally acceptable. He was not saying the woman could not teach. Later Paul wrote, "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).

Paul also identified how Timothy's mother and grandmother had ministered in his life.

"When I call to remembrance the unfeigned faith that is in thee, which dwelt first in thy grandmother Lois, and thy mother Eunice; and I am persuaded that in thee also" (2 Timothy 1:5).

Paul showed sensitivity to the culture in which he lived. The authority of a teacher was normally a male role.

A Woman's Highest Position

A woman's highest position and true honor comes from the home where she serves as a godly wife and mother. Paul was not trying to demean women who are not married or who could not have children.

A single woman has more time for ministry and doing the Lord's work. Once married, she looks after her husband and eventually her children. There is a definite shift in priorities as the woman moves from single life, to married life, and finally family life. However, having a husband and being in submission to him can even expand the opportunities for ministry. The woman operates under her husband's authority and

calling. Together they make a team where they complement one another and bring completion to the man's ministry.

A Church without Women

Where would your church be if there were no women in it? "Today, churches would go to pieces if it were not for the presence, perseverance, and prayers of women. In church attendance women outstrip men." (*All the Women of the Bible* by Herbert Lockyer)

Study Questions

1. What two passages in the New Testament seem to restrict the role of women in the church?

2. To correctly interpret Scriptures, what needs to be looked at?

3. Prove that it is appropriate for a woman to prophesy (under God's direction) in the church.

4. Should a woman be submissive to her own husband or the entire male population? Explain.

5. What does it mean to “usurp authority”?

6. Was Paul saying that a woman could not teach? Explain.

7. What would happen if all women were to decide to leave our churches?

8. What is a woman’s highest position in life?

9. How can having a husband and submitting to his authority actually expand opportunities for ministry?

10. Women in ancient times were not encouraged to learn. What would need to happen before they were able to teach?
