



WOMEN IN MINISTRY

As we begin this study we will attempt to carefully examine and include what the Holy Scriptures teach about the role of women in ministry. The Holy Scriptures will be our source. We will not lean upon present day trends and opinions but will try to stay true to what the Word of God says. In this modern day revival, we endeavor to be carefully led by the Spirit and we look to the Holy Spirit for wisdom.

"All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness:" (2 Timothy 3:16, NKJV).

God has a unique place, calling, and a role for men and women. One is not more important than the other. Men and women have been created by the plan and purpose of our Creator. Though neither male nor female is superior to the other, they do have entirely different callings. Mankind would do well to accept and take responsibility for fulfilling its place in creation.

The value of men and the value of women are perfectly equal in the eyes of God. *"There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus"* (Galatians 3:28). The spiritual standing of every human being, regardless of nationality, class, or gender, is the same. The ground at

the foot of the cross is level—women matter as much as men. This is abundantly clear from the life and ministry of Jesus and the apostles.

"Nevertheless, neither is man independent of woman, nor woman independent of man, in the Lord. For as woman came from man, even so man also comes through woman; but all things are from God" (1 Corinthians 11:11-12, NKJV).

Men and women are without question equal as humans, but they are also entirely unique as creatures. They are not only distinct sexually, but almost every other aspect of their natures is different as well. These differences should be apparent, maintained, and even emphasized in everything, from the way we walk and talk to the way we work and dress. Men should never try to be women, and women should never try to be men.

As God's creation, men and women should embrace the unique requirements that God has ordained for them.

Though women have been called to walk in more of a helping, submissive ministry (as you will soon see from the Scriptures) it is a blessing to see the high value that the Lord and the Scriptures place on women.

Here are some examples:

- In Jesus' day, women were not allowed to count change in their hands for fear of physical contact. And yet Jesus frequently touched women to heal them, and even allowed Himself to be touched by them for their healing (Luke 13:13; Mark 5:25).
- A small group of women traveled with Jesus and the disciples, which was unheard of in those days (Luke 8:1-3).
- Jesus taught women directly and was ministered to by them. *"Now it came to pass ... that He entered into a certain village: and a certain woman named Martha received Him into her house"* (Luke 10: 38-42). He was also supported financially by women (Luke 8:3), and women were among the first to accept the gospel (Acts 16:14-15).
- Amazingly, the first person to whom the resurrected Christ appeared was not Peter. It was not the other apostles. It was Mary Magdalene. Mary was commissioned to announce His resurrection to the disciples (John 20:1-18).
- It was a Samaritan woman who had lived with five husbands to whom Jesus revealed that He was the living water. He revealed to this woman what true worship was, a woman who would be despised by most (John 4:1-27).
- One of the most remarkable statements repeated about the woman's calling of submission, is her comparison to the "Church" or "Bride" of Christ. The "woman" with her spiritual nature and calling is set forth as a type of the "Bride" or "Church" being joined to her husband, Christ. What could be more honoring than that?
- The story of Phoebe: *"I commend to you our sister Phoebe, a servant of the church at Cenchreae, that you may welcome her in the Lord in a way worthy of the saints, and help her in whatever she may need from you, for she has been a patron of many and of myself as well"* (Romans 16: 1-2, ESV). It is believed, that Paul trusted Phoebe to deliver the letter to the Romans to the church. No other female in the New Testament is recorded with the same "helping" title as Phoebe. Please note Phoebe was entrusted as a "helper" to Paul, not one who was charged with laying a spiritual foundation. Phoebe, by her faithfulness in helping Paul physically deliver the life-changing book of Romans, has blessed countless multitudes for over two millennia.

In the realm of earthly employment and leadership, women are just as capable as men to lead. Examples of great female leadership include Golda Meir, former Prime Minister of Israel. Margaret Thatcher, the "Iron Lady," Prime Minister of Britain, Corazon Aquino, the 11th President of the Philippines, and many others.

However, when it comes to spiritual authority, the callings according to Scripture are different than the world. Particularly by the time we arrive in the New Testament, women are not allowed to exercise spiritual authority over men, or to lay a spiritual foundation.

"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" (1 Timothy 2:12, NKJV).

The fact that men and women have equal rights and access to salvation does not negate the need for submission to leadership in the home or the church. Indeed, Jesus and the Father are equal, yet Jesus submits to the authority of the Father. *"The head of every man is Christ; and*

the head of the woman is the man; and the head of Christ is God" (1 Corinthians 11:3).

"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 Saviour of the body. Therefore, just as the church is subject to Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in everything" (Ephesians 5:22-24, NKJV). Other Scriptures that speak of the helping/submissive relationship of the wife to her husband may be found in (1 Peter 3:1-22, Colossians 3:18, Ephesians 5:22, 33).

Let's review the Creation story. It may be said that God made creatures in the order of their value and complexity. First, He created the base elements of earth, water, and air; then, He made vegetation and light. Next, He made the birds and fish, and then land creatures.

Finally, God made a man, and as the concluding act of Creation, a woman. Some may take this to mean that women are the most **beautiful and complex** creatures on the planet!

God did not create the first man and woman in the same way. He made the man from dust, but He made the woman out of the man (Genesis 2:21-22). And while God named the man, it was the man who named the woman. *"This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh: she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man"* (Genesis 2:23; see also Genesis 3:20). God's creation process suggests a very distinct difference between men and women.

After sin entered the picture, God established a system of authority to maintain harmony in the family, and the church. It is a system in which man would lead. *"Unto the woman He said ... thy desire (author's note: meaning desire or affection towards her husband) shall be to thy husband, and he shall rule over thee"* (Genesis 3:16). The word "rule" means to "govern," or have "dominion."

It is important not to rush past this important verse, as some may argue that the passages regarding man's leadership role reflect the biases of a male-dominated culture. But notice that the command in Genesis 3:16 comes directly from God; it did not come from Moses, King David, Peter, John, or even the Apostle Paul. It is God's own voice speaking.

As we view the Bible as a whole, we will find that women were active in the life of Israel, but most often not as leaders (there are occasional exceptions). There were no women with an ongoing prophetic ministry. There were no women priests. Of the 40 writers in the Old and New Testament, none were women. There were no female apostles, no female elders. The Apostle Paul highly respected women and appreciated their great contributions to the spread of the gospel (Romans 16, Philippians 4:3), yet never set women as elders.

We will now reexamine the foundational scripture on which we can base further truths regarding the role of women in ministry.

"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" (1 Timothy 2:12, NKJV).

In this scripture, Paul appears to be speaking primarily regarding prohibiting a woman **from laying foundational truths through her teaching**. Apostles and the local elders laid foundational truths. Paul prohibited women from taking this responsibility.

We may wonder if this command came from God, or did it come from the Apostle Paul? With this verse, we need to respect the Apostolic

authority that Paul carried as he wrote this passage. We are also reminded that God, from the very beginning, created the woman, Eve, as a “helper” to the man, Adam. *“Then the Lord God said, ‘It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him’”* (Genesis 2:18, ESV). Therefore, it seems that God’s command in Gen 2:18 and Paul’s statement in 1 Timothy 2:12 complement each other.

Paul certainly did not mean that a woman should **never teach** in any capacity. In fact, he encouraged the older women to admonish or teach the younger women to love their husbands and their children, but not necessarily do that teaching in a local church meeting.

The older women likewise, that they be reverent in behavior; not slanderers, not given to much wine, teachers of good things - 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” (Titus 2: 3-5, NKJV).

It is good to be reminded that according to Scripture, there is a new freedom for women spiritually that is attained as she wears a head covering when praying and prophesying in the local services.

“But I want you to know that the head of every man is Christ, the head of woman is man, and the head of Christ is God. Every man praying or prophesying, having his head covered, dishonors his head. 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. For if a woman is not covered, let her also be shorn. But if it is shameful for a woman to be shorn or shaved, let her be covered. For a man indeed ought not to cover his head, since he is the image and glory of God; but woman is the glory of man. For man is not from woman, but woman from man. Nor was man created for the woman, but woman for the man. For this reason the woman ought to have a symbol of authority on her head, because of the angels. Nevertheless, neither is man independent of woman, nor woman independent of man, in the Lord. For as woman came from man, even so man also comes through woman; but all things are from God” (1 Corinthians 11: 3-12).

Let us now examine the local church service (which is made up of many elements) and see where the role of women fits scripturally. Keep in mind, it appears that the primary prohibition for women according to 1 Timothy 2:12 is in **laying a spiritual foundation**.

In our worship services, we are blessed to have godly men that have been appointed and anointed to serve as elders. This follows the biblical pattern very closely. The local elders have authority and are a spiritual covering for the local assembly. Therefore, the elders may “authorize” members to share, testify, teach children, etc. As long as the functions are under the permission and covering of the local elders, it is in order. The local elders are under the covering of and are submissive to the apostolic ministries. The apostolic ministries, endeavor to always be in submission to the leading of the Holy Spirit in concert with one another.

For purposes of clarification, and in the light of the scriptures already quoted, let us consider the role of women in ministry. This is where the Bible is not as specific concerning the duties that are about to be described. For this we must look at these roles in the light of what the Holy Spirit reveals to us in the scriptures that previously quoted.

Can women “preach” from the pulpit? No. As has been stated, a woman may prophecy a word of exhortation in the midst of the congregation if she has her head covered. However, the apostle Paul has been very clear that women are not to take authority over men

(1 Timothy 2:12). Although one might argue that a woman’s “preaching” might not be considered “laying a foundation” the line to walk could be so “fine” that it would be easy to fall into error. Therefore, it is best to avoid this type of ministry for women. Of course, a woman may have a teaching for the children in a service where she gathers the children together at the front to share a Bible story and a teaching directed specifically to the children. Older women may teach younger women as described in Titus 2:3-5. However, this should be done outside the regular church service and under the authorization and guidance of the local elders.

Can women pray and prophesy in the services? Yes. However, they should be wearing a head covering. The prophecy must be for edification, exhortation or comfort - not for imparting gifts of the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 14:26, 31; 1 Corinthians 11:5).

Can women share a testimony and give praise to God in the worship service? Yes (1 Corinthians 14:26). A woman, or anyone for that matter, may share a brief testimony, read a scripture, give a short word of encouragement, etc. from the congregation as they are led by the Holy Spirit. If a man or woman wishes to give a testimony or give a word of encouragement from the pulpit, he/she may do so if authorized by the local elders. (We might add that if one has something they would like to share from the pulpit, it is helpful to the elders to know ahead of time that that person would like to do so. The elders can then determine where it best fits into the service.) Many of our young people’s services have been such a blessing as young men and women have been asked to share their experiences and testimonies with others by those providing the spiritual covering.

Can a woman lead the worship service? No. Leading in worship involves more than bringing the congregation into a place of worship. There is an authority that is given to the one leading the service. He is responsible to sense the leading and changes in direction of the Holy Spirit as the worship progresses and to lead the congregation accordingly. Often times when prophecy is flowing and time is a consideration, the person leading the meeting must sense by the Spirit when is the proper time to close the prophecy. Because of these responsibilities, an elder, deacon, or a man in the congregation who can be trusted with these responsibilities should lead the service. From time to time a man leading the service may call a woman to assist him in leading a song. This is in order.

Can women pray for prayer requests in the service? Yes, under the approval and direction of the local elders.

Can women lay hands on the sick and pray? Yes, **under the request**, approval and direction of the local elders or apostolic ministries. This must also be in accordance with the gifts that were prayed over her. While this is an avenue of ministry for women who have a healing ministry imparted to them, we must not forget that in the church setting the pattern for praying for the sick is laid down in James 5: 13-15. However, there may be times when the elders, knowing the gifts of the members of that assembly, may feel prompted by the Spirit to ask a woman to come forward to participate in that ministry.

Can women lay hands on and pray and prophesy over individuals for their gifts and ministries? No. This was always done in the New Testament and is today by a **group of elders** (men) (1 Timothy 4:14).

Can women pray over individuals for the baptism of the Holy Spirit? Yes, **but only by request or approval of the elders and in a support and encouragement role**. We find in the New Testament that every record of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit was in the presence of

men that were given that charge. Peter ministered to the house of Cornelius when all were filled with the Spirit (Acts 10:44-46). Peter ministered when the Holy Spirit fell on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:1-4). Paul prayed over the disciples in Corinth for the Holy Spirit baptism (Acts 19:2). The Apostles sent Peter and John to Samaria *“who came down and prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit”* (Acts 8:14-15). The man Ananias laid hands on Paul for healing and for the Holy Spirit (Acts 9:17-18). However, there are times that a woman may be called by the elders to stand with a timid soul in need of encouragement as he/she is prayed over. This is only by the direction of the ministries/elders having oversight.

Can women set up and remove the elements of the communion? Yes, under the approval and direction of the local elders. Though the Bible is silent regarding the specifics of setting up and disposing of the communion elements, it seems right to the brethren that if present, the deacon(s) should set up and take down the communion. If a deacon is not present, an elder should set up and take down the communion. If a deacon is not present and the elder(s) are not available because they are dealing with some matter, in the assembly, then the elder(s) may direct a wife of the deacon or a wife of an elder to set up and take down communion. However, this should be the rare exception. In all cases, the deacon or elder should be the one to dispose of the remaining wine and bread according to our current practice.

Can women oversee the physical church bank account, make deposits, keep records, etc? Yes, under the approval and direction of the local elders. This is not a common practice, but it is permissible.

Can women serve communion? No. This duty is reserved for the elders and deacons.

This article has been directed more towards the role of women in ministry. However, we remind the readers, that God has an important role, a ministry, a calling, and gifts of the Spirit for all. There is a place in this wonderful body of Christ for the married, for the single, for men, for women, for all.

Though God's gifted callings are unique to the individual, no one is more valuable to God than another. No one is more rewarded than another. All are needed. All are important. All are valuable.

Though our callings are unique, our roles as men and women, husbands and wives, young adults and children are different and varied, we all stand equal in God's eyes at the foot of the Cross.

Let us all to be faithful to the gifts and calling that God has made known to us.

“Do not neglect the gift that is in you, which was given to you by prophecy with the laying on of the hands of the eldership. 15 Meditate on these things; give yourself entirely to them, that your progress may be evident to all” (1 Timothy 4:14-15, NKJV). †

~ The Traveling Elders

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