

WOMEN IN LEADERSHIP

There are no striking differences in the attitudes of the four Evangelists (Matthew, Mark, Luke and John): for all relate stories about women and relate them sympathetically. Whereas, Jewish genealogies normally included only males, Matthew's genealogy of Jesus mentions four women: Tamar, Rahab, Ruth, and Bathsheba (Matt.1:3-). Matthew tells the birth narrative primarily from Joseph's viewpoint, while Luke tells it from Mary's. Luke portrays both Mary and her relative Elizabeth with understanding, highlighting Mary's positive and ready acceptance of God's will in contrast to Zechariah's skepticism (Lk.1:18-20). He relates that Elizabeth is filled with the Holy Spirit upon seeing Mary and he records Mary's prophetic song of praise. Luke alone tells of the aged prophetess Anna. John's sympathetic portraits of women have been interpreted as evidence for women's equality, but most likely they represent **Jesus' own attitude**.

All the Gospels portray **Jesus** as the one who fully accepted women. Regardless of their social or marital status, He was unfailingly courteous, and compassionate towards them. When a woman, ritually unclean with a hemorrhage, touched Him on the way to the house of a synagogue leader, He stopped to heal her and commended her faith, addressing her affectionately as "Daughter"(Mk. 5:34). He affirmed the dignity of a crippled woman, calling her a "daughter of Abraham"(Lk. 13:16). Jesus healed Peter's mother-in-law (Mk.1:29-31), Jairus's daughter (5:35-43), Mary Magdalene and the Syro-Phoenician woman's daughter (even though she was a Gentile); and restored the life of the son of the widow at Nain (Lk.7:11-15).

In a cultural society in which women were not counted as full members of a Jewish congregation and were discouraged from studying the law, **Jesus taught women along side men!** (Matt.14:21; 15:38; etc.). Whereas some rabbis laid down the law (of man) that a man should not even speak to a woman in a public place, **Jesus** shared a drinking vessel with the Samaritan woman and spoke to her of the deepest spiritual things (Jn.4:1-30). He similarly revealed Himself to Martha, who declared her faith with the words, "I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God"(Matt. 11:27). While it is certain that John used some of his own words, one cannot doubt that these episodes represent **Jesus' attitudes**, which contrasted dramatically with contemporary Jewish teaching (and with some of the teachers of today).

Luke similarly records Jesus' acceptance of sinful women. When a woman who was a sinner (prostitute?) lavishly anointed Jesus' feet and wiped them with her hair, He accepted her service and commended her love (Lk.7:47). He encouraged Mary to sit at His feet and listen to His teaching, and He declined Martha's request that He bid her sister help her with the serving, saying: "It's Mary who has chosen the better part; it is not to be taken from her" (Lk.10:41). **Jesus** thus affirmed a woman's **right** to be a **disciple** and not to be concerned solely with domestic affairs.

Motherhood was important to Jesus. As a matter of fact, He made it of importance in the Fifth Commandment, when He commanded us to honor our father and our mother! In the Gospels, Jesus stresses the importance of faith even more than motherhood. When a woman in a crowd

called out, “Blessed is the womb that bore you and the breasts that you sucked,” He replied, “Blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and keep it” (Lk.11:27f.). Notice that Jesus did NOT say, “Blessed are only the MEN who hear the word of God and keep it,” but He said, “Blessed rather are those who hear..” Or, in other words both men **and** women who hear and keep the word of God will be blessed.

The twelve apostles were all men, and there is no evidence that any of the **Seventy**, who were sent out two-by-two, were female; this is hardly surprising in the prevailing social conditions. Nevertheless, some women did leave their homes to follow Jesus: Lk.8:1-3 records how Mary Magdalene, Joanna the wife of Herod’s steward, Susanna, and others ministered to His material needs, while traveling with Him, even to the point of contributing their money to His expenses. Women stood by Jesus at the crucifixion (in contrast to Jesus’ male disciples, who “all forsook Him and fled”(Mk.14:50). There is one other thing to note about the twelve apostles and that’s they were all Jewish. For those who contend that disciples, apostles, evangelists, preachers, teachers, etc. can only be men for Jesus chose only men to be His apostles, then they must also conclude that they must all be **Jewish**, because He only chose Jewish men!

Women were the first witnesses of the Resurrection, though some of the men were skeptical when they were told of the resurrection by the women. This is very important to note for in Jewish law women could not be witnesses, but **Jesus** allows **women** to be **His** witnesses!

Jesus not only accepted the service of women, but He also used them to spread the Gospel: Mary Magdalene was sent as the ***apostula apostolorum or as the apostle to the apostles*** to tell them of the Good news of Jesus’ resurrection (Jn.20:17- & Mt.28:10). The Samaritan woman preached the news of Jesus in her village, so that “many Samaritans believed in Him because of the woman’s testimony” (Jn.4:39).

In Acts the pattern continues: women are full members of the Church. Luke specifically records that both women and men were baptized (Acts 8:12; 16:15). Since women are baptized, are they not **true members of the body of Christ** with all the privileges and responsibilities that goes with it? Women, including Jesus’ mother, joined with the men in prayer. They were present at Pentecost (Acts 2:1). Quoting from Joel, Peter referred to “daughters” and “maidservants” prophesying (Acts 2:17-18); the Holy Spirit is said to fall on all the disciples (not just the men). Acts frequently mentions women converts, including Timothy’s mother (Acts 16:1- 2 and Tim.1:5); Lydia, a wealthy woman who gave Paul hospitality (Acts 16:13-15); Damaris at Athens; and women of high standing at Philippi and Beroea. Women were miraculously healed. The Church cared for widows; the Church met for prayer at the house of Mary, the mother of John Mark (12:12); and Phillip had four daughters who prophesied (21:9).

In spite of the frequent references to women, the early Church’s leadership, as depicted in Acts, was mostly male (Although, approximately 40% of those greeted in Romans 16 were female). One exceptional figure is **Priscilla**, who with her husband **taught** the learned Apollos (Acts 18:2, 18, 26; Rom.16:3-; 1 Cor.16:19; 2 Tim. 4:19)!

The attitude of Paul in the Epistles is more difficult to determine because of the variety of teaching found there, given in response to specific situations. The **key** to his teaching is **Gal.3:28**, which states: “There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond or free, there is **neither male or female**; for you are all one in Christ Jesus.” The context shows that Paul is speaking of the new relationship that comes through faith and Christian baptism. His use of “male” and “female” echoes Gen.1:27, where both man and woman are made in God’s image. And this passage does **not** say that this will take place in the future, but speaks in the present tense!

Here we have the **abolition not** of sexual differences between men and women but the abolition of their religious inequality.

Paul’s recognition of women as full members of the Christian community is further illustrated by his affectionate greetings to them, i.e., “the beloved Persis” (Rom.16:2); “Apphia our sister” (Philem.2); Rufus’ mother, “a mother to me, too” (Rom.16:13); and more importantly his references to them as **fellow workers**. Phoebe (Rom.16:1-) is described as a *diakonos*, a deacon or “minister,” “servant” of the church at Cenchreae (1 Tim.3:8; Phil.1:1; Eph. 6:21; Col. 1:7; etc); and as Paul’s “**patroness**” (Greek *prostatis*... “**Leader,**” or “**chief**”). Priscilla, Mary, Tryphaena, Tryphosa, Euodia, and Syntyche are all described as fellow workers or laborers in the Gospel.

Phil 4:2-3

- 2 I plead with Euodia and I plead with Syntyche to agree with each other in the Lord.
- 3 Yes, and I ask you, loyal yokefellow, help these women who have contended at my side in the cause of the gospel, along with Clement and the rest of my fellow workers, whose names are in the book of life. (NIV)

What do you suppose Paul meant when he said that they were **fellow workers or laborers** “in the Gospel?” Do you suppose that they cooked and washed for him? Think for a moment... What if these words had been directed at men? Would you think that Paul meant that the men cooked and washed for him or that they preached the Gospel also? Yes, that is what Paul meant, when he referred to the women as **workers** “in the Gospel.” They preached the Gospel also. Notice that it says plainly that these women worked side by side in telling the Good News to others. **This IS preaching the Gospel!**

Junia (Rom.16:7) is said to be “outstanding among the apostles.” The evidence that this name should be read as feminine is overwhelming: Chrysostom *Hom. 31 in rom.*; C.E.B. Cranfield, *ICC on Romans* (1979), II, 788; Brooten, “Junia... Outstanding among the Apostles,” in Swidler, *Women Priests*, pp. 141-144; **No where in history is there an example of a man ever bearing the name Junia!!** There are a few who believe that Romans 16:7 means that the apostles found this woman to be an outstanding woman, but disbelieve that it meant she was an apostle. However, all the references mentioned assure us that the correct understanding is that this woman was an apostle and that she did the work of an evangelist in spreading the Gospel to both men and women.

Nevertheless, some passages suggest limitations on women’s freedom and religious role:

1 Cor.3:1-3 sets the setting of how Paul feels about the church of Corinth, when he says, “Brothers, I could not address you as spiritual but as worldly... mere infants in Christ. I gave you milk, not solid food, for you were not yet ready for it. Indeed, you are **still** worldly. For since there is jealousy and quarreling among you, are you not worldly? Are you not acting like mere men?” The **Corinthian church** was in trouble, it was in chaos and unruly. Apparently, the leaders of that church, a Gentile church, had written to Paul for guidance. We don’t have the questions that they asked, but only the answers from Paul. So, we have to “read between the lines” in order to understand what Paul was saying. We need also to understand what type of people made up the Corinthian church, their background, and their former ways of worship.

In 1 Cor.11:2-16 Paul argues that a man should pray with his head uncovered, a woman with hers covered. It is supposed that Paul was addressing a **specific situation** in the Corinthian church at that time. It could be that some of the women were coming to church with their heads uncovered, as was the custom of the pagan temple prostitutes. His essential point is that the customary distinctions in the outward appearance of women or men should be observed and in no way should it reflect that they are any part or of any way associated with the pagan worship in that area! Nelson’ Bible Dictionary adds this: “According to Paul the covering of a woman’s head gave **authority** and a new freedom to women **from Christ**. Thus, she was able to pray and prophesy in the services. By wearing the head covering, she would show that her authority came from God; and that she had not seized it herself. The important thing to understand is that Paul’s arguments are designed for a **particular audience in a particular situation and cannot be applied as a general principle**. It’s important to note that Paul assumes that women will be praying aloud and prophesying in the congregation; their head covering is a sign of their authority to do so.”

1 Cor.14:31-35 enjoins women to keep silence in the churches and be subordinate; “If there is anything they desire to know, let them ask their husbands at home.” It’s not clear whether women are here prohibited from all public speaking or only from chattering. First of all the passage presupposes that all the women in the church are married (If this refers only to the married women, does this mean the unmarried women may speak freely?), and contains an uncharacteristic appeal to the Jewish law not to the law of God. (It is to this that many Biblical scholars contend that this was not written by Paul, but may have been added and inserted by Jewish converts, who still wanted to observe the requirements of the law of the Pharisees). Many commentators suspect it of being non-Pauline on textual and other grounds. **But** if it is genuine, and if Paul is **not** contradicting what he said in 1 Cor.11:5, it must be assumed that he is here permitting women to pray and prophesy, but not to disturb the congregation with unnecessary questions.

Another thought that should be considered is that in the pagan temples in Corinth it was customary for women to call out and to speak loudly for they were considered **mediums** between men and the gods. The dress of the pagan women, ornamented with much jewelry, and imitating the “Temple Maidens,” who in truth were prostitutes, could have indeed been the women to whom Paul was addressing. It’s felt that some of these pagan converts were still using their form of religion within the Church of God at Corinth and therefore leading some outside the church to

not be able to distinguish between the pagans and the Christians. This could explain the possible questions that Paul was replying to. Remember that we only have the **answers** to the questions that Paul is answering and **not** the questions! And, Paul never knew his letters were going to be used by everyone as “Gospel” to cover all churches, when he wrote this letter only to the church in Corinth. However, there are those who would say that God knew Paul’s letters would be used as part of the Gospel. That still does **not** mean that Paul’s letters were meant for **all churches at all times!** Just as the letters to the seven churches in Revelation don’t apply to **all the churches all the time.**

1 Tim.2:12 is translated: “I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man; she must be silent.” The reason given is that Adam was formed first and she, Eve, not Adam, was deceived (note again the dependence of late Jewish exegesis of Gen. 2-3). The Pauline authorship of **parts** of this epistle has been widely questioned. If this passage was not written by Paul, it may have been inserted as a restatement of **traditional Jewish limitations on female religious leadership.** Recent research however, has proved that this verse has been translated and transposed **incorrectly!** As it was said previously, all logic points to the idea that the women of Corinth were causing a great disturbance within the church meetings and Paul is still concerned with this as he writes to Timothy.

1 Timothy elsewhere presupposes a **ministry** of women (see 1 Tim. 3:11, where the word (*gune, gunay* in the Greek language) refers to **female deacons** rather than to women in general or the wives of ministers).

Something that we should all consider is that it **is possible** for women to **teach men** and yet, at the same time **not** have dominion over men. In my position as a manager, I have attended many training sessions where a woman of lesser position or rank has taught men in higher positions. For instance, we received new computers in our work place and we had to be taught how to use the computers and how to use the computer program. However, in **no way** what so ever did this person **teaching** us usurp power or have dominion or authority over us. But we were **taught by a woman** and **we did learn.** That’s what is important. It really doesn’t matter what the sex of the teacher is. What matters, what’s important is whether you learn something!

Though both 1 Cor.14:31-35 and 1 Tim.2:8-15 were later used by the Roman Catholic Church to discourage women’s public ministry, these passages must be understood in the light of Paul’s fundamental teaching in Galatians and of his clear recognition of women as ministerial colleagues, as evidenced in both the Epistles and Acts.

It’s clear, however, that in mainstream Christianity, i.e., Roman Catholicism, Lutheran, etc., the comparative freedom of N.T. times was followed by a period of some restriction with regard to women’s leadership. More attention was paid to scriptural injunctions to female silence rather than to **Jesus’ recognition of women or Paul’s proclamation of equality in Galatians 3:28.** Old social **customs** and **stratification** continued: husbands were urged to direct their wives to what is good, women to be silent and modest and to keep **“their proper place.”** Why is it that man thinks that he is the wiser or that he is the only one who can discern what is right or what is

wrong or what the scriptures say or don't say or that he understands more about the Bible than does his wife?

Are men afraid of what women may teach? Is there no protection from what they could say? If we can search the scriptures to discern what a man says is true, can we not search the same scriptures to discern whether a woman is speaking the truth?

Other texts (not the Bible) reaffirm the prohibition on women's teaching and even forbid women to bear witness or administer justice. **Jerome** (one of the founding 'fathers' of Roman Catholicism) considered it "against nature" for a woman to speak in an assembly of men (Comm. in 1 Cor. 14). Virginitly became more prized than marriage. The work of deaconesses became limited to minor liturgical roles and to the ministry of women. One reason behind such thinking was an over-zealous, literal or one-sided understanding of Paul's teaching (including 1 Cor.7), and another was a strong *culturally* conditioned sense of what is appropriate. **Tertullian** (another of the founding 'fathers' of Roman Catholicism) called women "the devil's gateway"; **Epiphanius** (another founding 'father' of Roman Catholicism) called women "a feeble race, untrustworthy, and of mediocre intelligence" (Danielou, p. 25). The role of women being subjugated to lesser importance or of lesser value was initiated and propagated by the Roman Catholic Church. All who follow this line of thinking are merely paying homage to the Roman church. Just as we all realize that the Sabbath was changed to Sunday by the Roman Catholic Church and therefore all who worship on Sunday are recognizing that church as the authority and **not God**. We must recognize that it is also this church that has denied women their **right** to be active members in all phases of the **body of Christ**. This is a far cry from **Jesus'** attitude in the Gospels and the role of women in the first century church. So, do we continue to follow the teachings and traditions of Roman Catholicism **or** do we go back to the Greek language, search the Scriptures, understand what was the original order of the words Paul wrote, and understand that Christ died for all of us and that there is equality among **all** the parts of the body of Christ?!

While some scholars argue that a few passages on women's subordination imply restricted active religious leadership for women, others have drawn attention to passages indicating that they did in deed and in fact fulfill leadership roles in both social **and** religious contexts.

The important point is **not** the precise circumstances in which Paul permitted a woman to speak, but the general principles underlying the biblical message as a whole. Increasing emphasis should be put on the fundamental biblical teaching that both men and women are made in God's image; that Jesus died for **all** of humanity; that **both men and women** are called to be **full members** of the Church of God; and that **both** are endowed with **spiritual gifts** equipping them for **teaching**. These are **gifts of God**. These are **not** gifts given **by men**. It's not up to men to decide which gifts are to be given to women and which gifts are to be given to men. **Gifts are to be given through the Holy Spirit to every baptized member**. 1 Cor 12:4-11 tells us very explicitly about these gifts.

4 There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit.

5 There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord.

6 There are different kinds of working, but the same God works all of them in all men.

- (men= Strong's # 1538. "every person")
- 7 Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good.
- 8 To one there is given through the Spirit the message of wisdom, to another the message of knowledge by means of the same Spirit,
- 9 to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by that one Spirit,
- 10 to another miraculous powers, to another prophecy, to another distinguishing between spirits, to another speaking in different kinds of tongues, and to still another the interpretation of tongues.
- 11 All these are the work of one and the same Spirit, and he gives them to **each one, just as he determines.** (NIV)

Notice that these gifts are given to **all** the children of God. Here it's speaking not to men only, but to **everyone**. There are those that would say that only certain gifts are given to men and only certain gifts are given to women. If men are to decide who will get which gifts from the Holy Spirit, then the last part of verse 11 needs to be explained, "...as **He** determines." No, my friends, it's not the decision of men, but the decision of the Holy Spirit as to who gets which gift.

What would happen for example to a spiritual gift that has been given by God, such as the gift of healing, if it were given to a woman and yet, she was not allowed to use this gift? How would she be able to answer the Lord, when He asks what she had done with her gift? Would she be able to answer only that **her church** didn't allow her to use her gift or "talent", so she buried it. And if she has been given the gift of teaching, or the gift of prophesy or the gift of discerning spirits... what then? How are we men then to answer the Lord if we "keep women in their places" and deny them the opportunity to use these God given gifts?

We are told that to love God the Father and Jesus the Son we are to obey the commandments. Does this apply to women too? Must women obey God's commandments? In Matt.28:19-20 Jesus tells us to go and make disciples and to teach them. This applies to all of God's children and therefore, applies to women.

Will the punishment for men, who disobey God, be the same for women who disobey God? Does God demand the same requirements for women as He does for men to obey the commandments? Can we truly think of ourselves as Christian if we hold that someone else is of less value than we? Where does it stop? Who will be deemed next to be of less value? In the parable of the "talents" in Matt. 25:14-30 do you suppose that the passage applies only to men ?

The Roman Catholic Church has led us down many wrong paths and the subjugation of women in the Church is one of those wrong paths. In Ephesians, chapter 5, it is summarized as this: If we are Christians, we must show it in all the relationships of life whether it's business, social, domestic or religious. The relationship between husband and wife is here represented as being a counterpart of the relationship between Christ and the Church. The exhortation is to mutual love and devotion, and in no way suggests that a man has a right to make a slave of his wife. Each is dependent on the other, because of different functions that each has in human society. Each, in serving the other, best serves self, "He that loves his wife loves himself."

(Eph.5:28). Are we to continue to follow the Roman Catholics and use the passages that Paul wrote to a particular place and at a particular time and to a particular people as an excuse to subjugate women or to “keep them in their place”? Is this what Christ would have done? Did Jesus ever disparage women... or indicate that they were less important than men... or that less was expected of them, than of men... or that they would not receive the same rewards or punishments as men would... or that they were **not** part of the body of Christ? The answer is a resounding **NO!** The human body was used as an analogy for this very point...to illustrate that **no one** is any more important than anyone else. There is only one head, Jesus Christ. The rest of us are of **EQUAL** importance, as part of that body! Women are just as much a part of the body of Christ as any man. Jesus knew this. John knew this. Paul knew this. Matthew and the others knew this. It has only been men who have used some of the writings of the apostle Paul to keep women from being able to serve God, therefore keeping them subjugated below men. These same men neglect the other writings of Paul that support women. It hardly seems right..... No, let me rephrase that. **It is not right** to use the letters Paul wrote to answer certain questions that certain people had written to him asking, when we don't know what the circumstances were or what the questions were.

It's also been suggested that women should not be allowed to teach (that is to teach men and women) because it's a custom or tradition of the church. I shudder at this! We may question whether *traditional approaches and answers* are synonymous with *true approaches and answers*, because both Old Testament and New Testament make it clear that *tradition* does not automatically mean “truth.” The strong words of Amos 5:21-24 and Isaiah 1:10-17 come immediately to mind. Also, in Mark 7:5-13 where the Pharisees asked Him why His disciples did not “keep the tradition of the elders.” So whatever our church beliefs, we all need to ask ourselves: **Is our tradition scriptural?** No one who acknowledges biblical authority needs to fear “going where the evidence leads.” Only insecure persons might get panicky if there is doubt to their ability to have the answers to all and every difficult question.

So, let me close with this: We study and believe in what the Bible tells us. We believe that Jesus Christ died to save **all** of us from destruction. We believe that **each** and **every one** of us is part of the **body of Christ and no one is more important than anyone else.** We are all **equal** in Christ Jesus our Lord and Savior.

In the last chapter of the book of Matthew, Jesus gave a command that we refer to as the “**Great Commission.**”

Matt 28:19-20

19 Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,
20 and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age. (NIV)

Every student of the Bible and disciple of Christ realizes that this applies to **everyone.** Jesus said this in Matt. 28:19-20 to the eleven apostles, but if one follows the direction of thought

“...and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.”, it’s obvious that **those who are taught are to teach** the same to others. This is a command from Jesus Christ, Himself. But because of a **mistranslation and misunderstanding** of some of Paul’s verses, there are those who will contend that women are not as important as men. And that Christ was only speaking to men, when He made the statement. This is convoluted thinking. Remember the words of Peter in 2 Pet 3:16, when he was speaking of Paul’s writings:
“His letters contain some things that are hard to understand, which ignorant and unstable people distort, as they do the other Scriptures, to their own destruction.” (NIV)

No where did Jesus make a distinction between what He expected of men and what He expected of women as far as to “...make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and **teaching** them to obey everything I have commanded of you.” Notice that Jesus **did not** say that only men should go and do this and only men are to be made disciples and only men are to be baptized and that only men are to teach other men to obey His commandments. No. Jesus loved us **all** and died for us **all** and expects His disciples, **all** of His disciples, to do as He has commanded.

We must stop holding back some of the children of God for we are **all** God’s children! Does it make any sense at all for someone that has the knowledge and truth of the Word of God, who has the indwelling Holy Spirit, who is a baptized member of the Body of Christ and has the gifts of God to **NOT** follow the command of Jesus Christ only because that child of God is a woman?!

Compiled, written and presented by:
John H. Currier, Pastor
Church of God, Dallas-Fort Worth