

Women In The Church

Introduction. Because God is perfect, He has given remarkable teaching about the roles of men and women. Just like men, women have an assigned role, but they also have limitations regarding public teaching and exercising authority over man. Some have erroneously concluded that because women have a primarily domestic role and are expressly limited in the spiritual realm regarding the church that women are to be spiritually passive. Our study will show that there are great opportunities for women to serve God.

Like everyone else, women have to live morally, grow in the grace and knowledge of God, and remain faithful to the Lord (2 Corinthians 7:1; Colossians 1:10; 2 Peter 1:5-11; Jude 21). Women will also appear before God and be rewarded according to their deeds (Romans 14:10-12; 2 Corinthians 5:10).

The assembling of the saints is only a small portion of one's duty involving the church. There are many other responsibilities in the areas of benevolence, edification, and evangelism that are fulfilled by Christians in their daily lives serving God. This is a wonderful measure of the strength of a church.

I. ***The Role Of Women***

- A. Paul defines a woman's role as learners rather than teachers during the public worship (1 Timothy 2:11-12). While they are not to be the public teachers in that context, neither are they to be shut out of the learning process as was generally the case in ancient times.
 1. First-century Judaism did not hold women in high esteem. While not barred from attending synagogue, they were not encouraged to learn. In fact, most rabbis refused to teach women, and some likened it to throwing pearls to pigs.
 2. A woman in Greek society did not fare much better. She led a very confined life. She lived in her own quarters into which no one but her husband came. She did not even appear at meals. She never at any time appeared on the street alone; she never went to any public assembly.
- B. The Old and New Testaments both affirm that women have a spiritual status equal to men (Deuteronomy 27:16; Proverbs 6:20; Numbers 6:2; Luke 8:2-3; Acts 1:13-14; Galatians 3:28). However, spiritual equality between the sexes did not do away with the difference in their roles.
 1. In the Old Testament, there were no queens in either Israel or Judah. No women served as priests. None of the authors of the Old Testament were women. No woman had an on-going prophetic

- ministry like Elijah, Elisha, or the other prophets where she would speak before the people.
2. In the New Testament, there were no women who were elders or evangelists. None of the authors of the New Testament were women. The New Testament nowhere records a sermon or teaching of a woman.
- C. "Subjection" means "to line up under." Women demonstrate subjection by not usurping authority over the man. A woman must not have a bossy, overpowering spirit (1 Peter 3:3-4). That violates the command of learning in "silence" or "quietness." "Silence" simply refers to the attitude of heart, not the physical act of speaking (cf. 2 Thessalonians 3:12). This is true not because women are inferior to men; while on earth, Jesus assumed a subordinate role, yet He was not inferior (1 Corinthians 11:3).
- D. In 1 Timothy 3:1-7, women cannot serve as elders. In 1 Timothy 3:8-12, women cannot serve as deacons, and in 1 Timothy 2:11-12, women cannot serve as preachers.
1. There are many who are advocating expanded roles for women in the Lord's church.
 - a) Leroy Garrett wrote, "To impose silence on women in today's church and say she can't teach a man appears to most Christians as a violation of 'the sense of scripture' and the one sure rule of interpretation, 'the spirit of Christ.'"
 - b) On July 31, 1988, the elders of the Bering Drive Church of Christ presented a statement to the congregation concerning the use of spiritual gifts, expressing their conviction that it is scriptural for sisters as well as brothers to serve in the worship roles of ushering, greeting visitors, receiving the offering, reading scripture, leading prayers, leading singing, and serving communion.
 2. Nevertheless, those of us who reject these attempts need to exercise care in our dealings with the role of women.
 - a) Male-female team-teaching programs have become more prominent in the last couple of decades. Having a woman teach when any man is present is a dangerous precedent to set and leaves an impression on young minds that women may teach a man in a public setting.
 - b) Another area of concern is the growing pattern of advocating women attending and participating (in varying degrees) in business meetings.
 - (1) No one is opposed to elders or the men in a business meeting gathering information from anyone in the congregation.

- (2) No one is opposed to meetings with the entire congregation to gather or share information or opinions.
- (3) But it is contrary to scripture for women to participate in the decision-making. God has put man in the position of oversight both in the home and in the church.

II. ***The Work Of Women***

A. Women in evangelism.

1. Women, like men, have the responsibility of teaching others.
 - a) Priscilla, with her husband Aquila, taught Apollos, who then became a mighty preacher for God (Acts 18:26).
 - b) The Samaritan woman, when she heard the truth about Jesus, went and told everyone (John 4:28-29, 39, 42).
 - c) Mary, Joanna, Salome, Susanna, and others supported Jesus in His teaching (Mark 15:40-41; Luke 8:1-3).
 - d) Euodia and Syntyche labored with Paul in the gospel (Philippians 4:2-3).
2. In doing their part in evangelism, women can host Bible studies in their homes (1 Corinthians 16:19), and they can teach through their example (1 Peter 3:1-2; 2 Corinthians 3:2). How many men do you know personally who were brought to Christ through the teaching of godly women?

B. Women in edification.

1. Women are a vital part of the body of Christ (Ephesians 4:15-16; Galatians 6:2; 1 Thessalonians 5:11, 14). They can encourage those who are discouraged and even compliment the strong. Women, being often more verbal, can many times know the right words to say to encourage a brother or sister who is struggling from the loss of a loved one, sickness, family problems, or spiritual weakness.
2. Women can teach children, especially their own (2 Timothy 1:5). Older women can teach younger women good conduct (Titus 2:3-5). Finally, women can help create a learning environment by disciplining and controlling their children.

C. Women in benevolence.

1. The natural attributes of women quite often make them very capable in benevolence. Cooking, keeping the home, babysitting, ministering to the sick and needy, and extending hospitality are all actions women can take when they help others (Proverbs 31:10, 13, 15, 19-20).
 - a) Dorcas helped needy widows (Acts 9:36-39).

- b) Priscilla provided a place for Paul to stay as he worked with them, and even laid her life down for him (Acts 18:3; Romans 16:3-4).
 - c) Widows supported by a local church had to be benevolent in their past to show that they were worthy (1 Timothy 5:9-10).
2. A woman's benevolent work is a powerful contribution to the work and reputation of a local church (Matthew 25:34-40; James 1:27).

Conclusion. Thank God for godly women. Women must stop believing the devil's lie that the only role of significance is a leadership role. Regrettably, time has failed us to speak of other great women such as Phoebe, Mary, Tryphena, Tryphosa, and Persis, who have all labored in the Lord (Romans 16:1-2, 6, 12). The mothers, wives, and daughters that have been the source of great joy and comfort in this life have blessed our lives. God has a plan for women, and when that plan is followed, the beauty of womanhood is seen in its glory.

The true measure of a local church is not defined only by what occurs in the assembly. It includes what the members do day by day, in the home, at work, and in the world. It involves what benevolence, edification, and evangelism takes place on a daily, personal basis. Women in the church are very important, but are too often relegated to positions of insignificance. Just because God has assigned to women a specific role that contains limitations in relation to men, does not mean that women are any less important (Proverbs 31:10).

I am deeply indebted to Mark Copeland for the use of his material.