

# **Women's Roles in the Church**

## **A Valley Bible Church Position Paper**

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The Word of God teaches that men and women have an equal standing before God. In fact, the Bible exalts women. Genesis 1:24-31 teaches that both men and women are made in the image of God. Galatians 3:28 likewise teaches that there is no distinction between men and women in redemption as they share the same salvation.

Furthermore, throughout the Bible women are equal in the nature of their ministry. Several examples include Deborah, who was a judge of Israel (Judges 4:4), Huldah and Anna who were prophetesses (2 Chronicles 34:22; Luke 2:36), Priscilla who was active in evangelism (Acts 18:26) and Pheobe who was a deaconess (Romans 16:1). Indeed, women played a prominent role in the ministry of Jesus and ministry to Jesus (Matthew 28:1-10; Luke 8:3; 23:49; John 11:1-46; 12:1-8). No spiritual gift is limited to men in the lists in the New Testament (1 Corinthians 12:27-31; Romans 12:3-8; 1 Peter 4:8-11) and women were commanded to edify the body of Christ, which included teaching (Titus 2:4) and prophecy (Acts 2:17-18; 21:9; 1 Corinthians 11:5).

However, though men and women have an identical standing before God and though both serve the Lord in significant ways, we should not conclude that God has intended men and women to function in the same capacity in the church. There are many examples of people who are equal in essence being subordinate in their function, most notably God Himself in the Trinity. Other examples are seen in the family, the government, the work place and even the church, with elders and church members.

### **The Bible says women cannot lead the church**

While women served a vital role in the church from the beginning, men were assigned the role of church leadership. The apostles were all men, the churches were started by men, the Scripture was written by men and the churches were led by men.

More important than the practice of the apostolic church, instructions are given to us that necessarily give men the role of church leadership. One of the qualifications for being an elder of a church is that the person is a man (1 Timothy 3:1). Similarly, 1 Timothy 2:12 specifically prohibits women from exercising authority over a man. In addition, Paul makes it clear that this is not a cultural limitation by resting his statement upon the order of creation (1 Timothy 2:13).

## **The Bible says women cannot teach men**

1 Timothy 2:12 explicitly teaches that a woman is not to teach a man. Paul gives two reasons why women should not teach or exercise authority over men. Man was created first and while Adam walked straight into sin, Eve was deceived (2:13-14).

In order to understand this limitation on the ministry of women, we must first clarify what is meant by teaching in 1 Timothy. First, it is clear this is only in regard to spiritual matters in the church. 1 Timothy is a pastoral epistle giving instructions for the church and the context of 1 Timothy 2:12 is the conduct in the church and the leadership of the church. This means that women are restricted in teaching or exercising authority over men in the context of the church only. 1 Timothy does not preclude women from occupations that require instruction of or authority over men, as long as these occupations are not in the church.

Secondly, teaching in the Bible is more than simply a transfer of information. It is with the expectation of acceptance and a change of life. Teaching today usually comes from an expert whose instruction is free to be ignored. Biblical teaching carries direction and an exercising of authority (cf. 1 Timothy 4:11; 4:16; 2 Timothy 3:16-17; Titus 2:15; 3:8). Teaching should be a careful, accurate explanation of the biblical text for the purpose of transforming the life of the hearer and women are restricted in performing this ministry to men in the church.

The women are nevertheless free to teach in many ways. Outside the church, women instruct men in many ways, such as in a profession. Also, believing women are commanded to explain the gospel to all, including lost men (cf. Acts 18:26). Within the church, women may teach women and children. With men in the church, women should discuss spiritual matters in a manner that informs, but should not instruct men in a manner that carries the expectation of application. This does not mean that a man cannot learn from a woman's conduct or from a conversation with a woman and apply what he learns to his life; instead what it means is that the woman's purpose in talking with a man is not to instruct him in this way.

Paul's statement of limiting women in teaching or exercising authority over men has been challenged in many ways:

Many evangelicals see women as being commanded to teach and that the restriction is not solely upon teaching but is upon teaching in a way that usurps authority away from men. Hence women may then teach men as long as they themselves are under the authority of a man. The problem with this view is that authority is inherently involved with the teaching of the Scripture. Teaching in the New Testament is not just a giving of facts but an attempt to convince with an expectation toward application and following. True teaching necessarily exercises authority. Men cannot rightfully delegate something to a woman that God has limited to men.

Some understand Paul's words "I do not allow" (1 Timothy 2:12) to mean his own personal preference which is not abiding for the church at large. However, this undermines Paul's apostolic authority. Indeed, Paul commonly spoke in the first

person in directing the church (cf. 1 Timothy 2:1,8,9) and the context of the book itself is direction for the church.

Some have argued that verse 11 gives a condition that women must meet before being allowed to teach men, that is they must be instructed. After being educated they are then qualified to teach men. Kaiser would understand Eve's deception (2:14) as being caused by her lack of education. The major problem with this interpretation is that the text itself gives no hint that instruction would reverse Paul's command.

Some contend that Paul was just wrong in his thinking, which must be rejected on the grounds of the doctrine of inspiration of Scripture (2 Timothy 3:16).

Each of these objections either disregard the text or read into it what is not there and therefore must be rejected. The plain meaning of Paul's words are clear and must be applied, regardless of the current views of our society.

### **Conclusion**

The limitation that 1 Timothy 2:12 places upon the ministry of women is not a limitation of either the nature or the significance of their ministry. They are called to minister in the same basic way as men are called to minister and the significance placed upon their ministry is in no way diminished. It is only the *sphere* of ministry in which women are limited in their authority. Women are not to teach men or exercise authority over men, either corporately in formal church leadership or personally in informal church relationships. Women may communicate information to men, but in regard to spiritual matters women must not teach believing men in a way that directs or demands a response.

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