

THE PROBLEM WITH THE PROBLEM WITH WOMEN IN MINISTRY—*OUTLINE*

An Answer to Those who Mistakenly Believe that Women should not be Spiritual Leaders

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In 1 Timothy, a letter of advice to a first-time pastor (Timothy) from an experienced church leader (Paul), we encounter a passage that has often been misunderstood to suggest that women cannot have roles of leadership or instruction in churches. These verses, and ones similar to them, get misapplied and create hurtful confusion—seeming to relegate women to a smaller place of ministry or significance than men. Remembering that the whole Bible is the best backdrop with which to view specific passages, let's ask the simple questions: ***Can women be leaders or teachers in church?*** What does the Bible say on the subject?

I. Biblical Context.

A. Old Testament Examples of Female Leaders.

1. Deborah the prophetess (Judges 4:4-5).
2. Ruth and Esther.
3. Prophetic outpouring on sons and daughters (Joel 2:28-30).

B. New Testament Examples of Female Leaders.

1. Women in unconventional roles of spiritual attention:
 - a. Four women in Jesus' lineage—Tamar, Rahab, Ruth, Bathsheeba.
 - b. The angel greets and prophesies to Mary.

2. Women as leaders and teachers:
 - a. First converts in Philippi; key figures in Thessalonica.
 - b. Priscilla (and Aquilla) teaches Apollos (Acts 18:26).
 - c. The prophetess daughters of Philip (Acts 21:9).
 - d. Phoebe the leader of Cenchrea (Romans 16:1).
 - e. The chosen leader of a church (2 John 1).
3. Jesus' interaction with women:
 - a. Women among the disciples (Luke 8:1-3).
 - b. The woman at the well (John 4:7-42).
 - c. Jesus' parables (ten virgins, the lost coin, persistent widow, etc.).
4. Equality and fellowship of women with men:
 - a. Upper Room prayer meeting (Acts 1:14).
 - b. Euodea and Syntyche "fellow workers" who "shared our struggle" (Philippians 4:3).
 - c. "...there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus" (Galatians 3:28).
 - d. A wife has as much "authority over" her husband's body as he has over hers (1 Corinthians 7:4).
 - e. "...in the Lord, neither is woman independent of man, nor is man independent of woman" (1 Corinthians 11:11).

C. Related Passages.

1. 1 Peter 3:1-12.

- a. “Wives submit to (situate and arrange yourselves with, fit in and along with) your husbands, so that you will win them back to the truth. Your choice to please God—by how you are on the inside—is the best way to win back a husband to truth. Live in touch with his wishes.”
- b. “Likewise, husbands when your wife has strayed from the truth, you will be more likely to win her back with attentive gentleness than with harsh rejection. Remember that she is precious to Him—and worth the cost of His Son’s death. Live in touch with her needs.”

1. 1 Corinthians 11:2-16.

- a. Headship (*kephale*) isn’t power to lord over someone. It is, rather, the source and origin of life and blessing to others. In this sense, men and women are both heads of—completely interconnected with—one another. The seed of man begets life in a woman, but without that woman no other life (male or female) can come into being.
- b. Adam was given life through Christ; Eve was given life through Adam. This creative order has implications for the world after the fall. Men will be tempted to disregard their calling to sacrifice for their wives; wives will be tempted to refrain from fitting in with (help-meet) their husbands.
- c. In Corinth, prostitutes advertised their availability with uncovered heads or close-cropped hair. Freedom in Christ does not absolve us from how others may misinterpret our appearance. We should do everything we can to keep from stumbling fellow believers.

2. 1 Corinthians 14:34-40.
 - a. The newfound freedom in Christ had incredible implications for 1st Century believers. Not only were they learning how to properly move in the Spirit—prophesying, receiving words of wisdom, speaking in tongues, etc.—but they were also coming to grips with gender-integrated services.
 - b. Expressions of personal liberty were to be constrained with an eye toward edifying others and maintaining order. Anything causing confusion or distraction—speaking in tongues without interpreting, interrupting others to prophesy, etc.—was not allowed. Women had been denied the theological training of their husbands, so their questions would likely take too long to answer publicly, and could be more helpfully answered at home.