

TOPICAL STUDIES

THE ROLE OF WOMEN IN THE CHURCH



SUMMARY: There are as many roles for women as men in the church, although some are restricted to women. All members, men and women, always have a higher authority to report to. Men in charge should be especially watchful that women are allowed and encouraged to be engaged in the church.

THE ROLE OF WOMEN IN THE CHURCH:

1. Is subordinate position with respect to other persons or groups.
2. Is limited power over some other persons or groups.
3. Must be submissive to instructions received.
4. Can sin by becoming too liberal or conservative in obedience to and implementation of instructions received.
5. Has restrictions placed upon activities.
6. May be tempted to exercise more authority than is delegated.

The conclusion listed above is true, however, such is also the role of Shepherds, Deacons, ministers, men, teachers, children, and other groups in the church.

Probably a big reason for difficulty with this question is the difference between subordinate and inferior. Subordinate does not imply inferiority. We are all subordinate to someone, but it does not necessarily imply inferiority. An actor must submit to the rule of a director in making the movie, but it does not mean that the director is a better director than the actor is an actor. The roles are just different.

Consider the following organization charts:

FAMILY
GOD
JESUS
HUSBAND
WIFE
CHILDREN

CHURCH ORGANIZATION
GOD
JESUS
SHEPHERDS
MEN WOMEN DEACONS CHILDREN TEACHERS MINISTERS

The church organization parallels that of the family which was instituted by God in the beginning, before customs were a factor. It is reasonable to assume that the organization is a plan of God, not a reflection of first century customs.

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We would suggest to you that a typical Christian woman is probably no more tempted to not be submissive to God's instruction than a Shepherd who is tempted to add or remove rules to or from God's word to help keep members in line. There is temptation at every level.

QUESTIONS:

1. Is the subordinate role of women strictly a custom of the first century like foot washing which does not apply today?
 - a. It is included in and justified by permanent organizational arrangements (i.e. I Cor. 11:3), therefore it appears to be permanent.
 - b. There were women judges in the Old Testament.
2. What are the churches of I Corinthians in which women were instructed to be "silent" 14:34?
 - a. It refers to "in the churches", meaning a physical grouping of saints rather than the saints themselves.
 - b. It is certainly the meeting of the saints in the situation which includes the celebration of the Lord's supper. It is probably any other time in which that same grouping meets together.
 - c. It is not the home of the individual Christians.
 - d. For the purpose of I Cor. 11:34, it could be considered to apply to any grouping of Christians large enough that for a woman to speak, she assumes authority over any man. I.e. a class small enough for all present to contribute would remove implication of authority if a woman spoke also. The class could be initiated and concluded by the man leader, but the discussion could be contributed to equally by all on an even basis.
3. Who are women? Married only? Single also? What of those who do not have a husband at home?
 - a. It is difficult to imagine that these teachings would apply to married women and not singles and/or widows.
4. Do we have to like what the Bible says for it to be true? No! The restrictions of the introduction to this lesson apply to all of us. Judgment Day will see how well each of us submit to the particular restrictions which apply to us. There is probably something we must all submit to that is now what we would prefer, or we would not be submitting.
5. Why does the Bible place these restrictions on women?
 - a. Perhaps because of the order of creation (I Cor. 11:9).
 - b. Perhaps because of the order of the original sins (Genesis 3).

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- c. Perhaps because of the basic need for organizational structure.
6. How can there be neither male nor female, but one in Christ when women are more restricted in options than men?
 - a. All have a common salvation in Christ.
 - b. All have the ultimate equality of being Christians who are subject to higher powers and have limited authority over others.
 - c. All have more work to do than can be done.
 - d. All have interesting work to do, if they chose to do it.
 - e. In the same way in which a man without the proper and specific qualifications can never be an Shepherd or a Deacon, a woman can never hold authority over a man in a church situation.
7. It is not a matter of custom, OT laws, or NT laws. I Timothy 2:11-15 defines it as God's plan from the beginning.

HOW SHOULD THE CHURCH HANDLE THIS?

1. There are more intelligent men available who cannot be Shepherds than some who will become Shepherds. There are more intelligent and more perceptive women available than some of the men who are teachers, preachers, and Shepherds. That doesn't change the teachings of the scriptures.
2. Those in overall leadership roles in the church must recognize the changing roles of women in society with the obvious impact it has on the perceptions and life styles of women. Every effort should be made to insure that roles of responsibility which are scripturally authorized for women are made available to women.
3. Ministries restricted to women should be instituted to allow women to invest their time, labor, and management talents. This can be especially beneficial to the church in this time when many talented women have more time available for the church than typical men do. Ladies Bible Class, Hospital Visitation Ministries, Clothing Room Ministries, Pantry Ministries, Food to Sick and Bereaved Ministries, Service Ministries for Retirement Homes, Youth Education Ministries, and Vacation Bible Schools are a few which can be totally delegated to the sisters in the church for both management and labor.
4. Women in the church should recognize the scriptural teachings on this and assist the Shepherds in determining appropriate roles to maintain the active involvement of women in the church. This should especially be a responsibility of women in the role of Shepherd's wives.

REFERENCE SCRIPTURES (NAS)

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Matthew 18:20 "For where 2 or 3 have gathered together in My name, there I am in their midst."

Acts 18:26 "And he (Apollos) began to speak out boldly in the synagogue. But when Priscilla and Aquila heard him, they took him aside and explained to him the way of God more accurately." (She instructed a man at least in private and in the presence of another man.)

I Corinthians 11:3 "but I want you to understand Christ is the head of every man, and the man is the head of a woman, and God is the head of Christ."

I Corinthians 11:5 "But every woman who has her head uncovered while praying or prophesying, disgraces her head; for she is one and the same with her whose head is shaved." ("for her hair is given to her as a covering" I Cor. 11:15)

I Corinthians 11:9 "For indeed man was not created for the woman's sake, but woman for the man's sake."

I Corinthians 14:34-35 "Let the women keep silent in the churches; for they are not permitted to speak, but let them subject themselves, just as the Law also says, and if they desire to learn anything, let them ask their own husbands at home; for it is improper for a woman to speak in church"

Galatians 3:28 "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus."

Ephesians 5:22 "Wives, be subject to your own husbands, as to the Lord."

I Timothy 2:11-15 "Let a woman quietly receive instruction with entire submissiveness. But I do not allow a woman to teach or exercise authority over a man, but to remain quiet. For it was Adam who was first created, and then Eve. And it was not Adam who was deceived, but the woman being quite deceived, fell into transgression. But women shall be preserved through the bearing of children if they continue in faith and love and sanctity with self-restraint."