

Biblical Women

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Lighthouse Outreaches Publishing
PO Box 832
Limuru, Kenya

THE MINISTRY OF WOMEN

A summary of the views expressed on this subject by South Australian Pastors of the CRC and compiled by Pastor Ken Chant.

Firstly let us consider those Scriptures which favor the ministry of women...

1. The Example of the Old Testament

It must be conceded that women have no less freedom in the New Testament than they enjoyed under the Old Testament. In examining the pattern of the Old Testament, we find that, while women were not permitted to officiate in the Temple, nor to act as priests, they were certainly able to expound the Word of God and by every means within their authority to lead the people to better serve the Lord.

A. MIRIAM

"And Miriam the prophetess, the sister of Aaron, took a timbrel in her hand; and all the women went out after her with timbrels and with dances." (Exodus 15:20)

She is described as a "prophetess"; that is, "an inspired woman", one who spoke or sang by inspiration of God; either in prediction or in simple discourse.

B. DEBORAH

"And Deborah, a prophetess, the wife of Lapidoth, she judged Israel at that time." (Judges 4:4)

She is described as a "prophetess"; that is, she spoke, sang, prophesied and preached under inspiration from God. She is also described as a "judge"; that is, she had authority to pronounce sentence for or against, to govern, to defend, to rule. The Bible indicates that Deborah was richly anointed of the Lord and greatly honored by the whole land.

C. HULDAH

"So Hilkiah the priest, and Ahikam, and Achbor, and Shaphan, and Asahiah, went unto Huldah the prophetess, the wife of Shallum the son of Tikvah, the son of Harhas, keeper of the wardrobe; (now she dwelt in Jerusalem in the college) and they communed with her." (II Kings 22:14)

"And Hilkiah, and they that the king had appointed, went to Huldah the prophetess, the wife of Shallum the son of Tikvah, the son of Hasrah, keeper of the wardrobe; (now she dwelt in Jerusalem in the college) and they spake to her to that effect." (II Chron. 34:22)

She was a "prophetess" and dwelt in Jerusalem at the College of the Prophets. Undoubtedly she was used of God in instructing those young men in the way and knowledge of the Lord.

D. JOEL 2:28-29

"And it shall come to pass afterward, that I will pour out my spirit upon all flesh; and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, your young men shall see visions: And also upon the servants and upon the handmaids in those days will I pour out my spirit."

In this passage it says "your daughters shall prophesy"; that is, by inspiration of God they will speak forth the Word of God; they will utter predictions; they will exhort the people to follow God.

E. EZEKIEL 13:17

"Likewise, thou son of man, set they face against the daughters of they people, which prophesy out of their own heart; and prophesy thou against them."

Though this passage speaks of women who prophesied falsely, it none-the-less indicates that the prophetic (and preaching) ministry of the women was generally accepted in Israel.

F. II SAMUEL 20:14-22

"...Then cried a wise woman out of the city, Hear, hear; say, I pray you, unto Joab...hear the words of thine handmaid...then she spake (and Joab listened to her counsel)...then the woman went unto all the people in her wisdom (and the city of Abel of Beth-maachah was saved because of her wise words and actions)."

(Compare also II Samuel 14:2,20)

Joab should have enquired of God before besieging the city (Deut 20:10,11; cf I Sam 23:2; 30:8), but, when he failed to do so, God used a woman to set him right and to save the city. She was called a "wise" woman. The word means to be wise in mind, word or act; to be able to teach wisdom, to be intelligent.

G. LUKE 2:36-38

"And there was one Anna, a prophetess, the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Aser: she was of a great age, and had lived with an husband seven years from her virginity; And she was a widow of about fourscore and four years, which departed not from the temple, but served God with fastings and prayers night and day. And she coming in that instant gave thanks likewise unto the Lord, and spake of him to all them that looked for redemption in Jerusalem."

Though this is a New Testament reference, it deals with Old Testament circumstances, and a woman, Anna, who was a "prophetess".

Notice...

(a) She served God in the temple; that is, she ministered before the Lord.

(b) She "spake" of Christ to all who looked for redemption. The word "spake" means to talk, to preach, to give an extended discourse or to make a random speech to a large assembly. That is, Anna witnessed constantly of Jesus to the vast crowds who came to the Temple.

From these Scriptures, it is evident that, in Old Testament days, while women could not officiate as Priests nor establish any new principle of worship, they were certainly used of God to bring the people back to holy service, to expound the Law, to utter prophecy, to teach, to rule in temporal matters, to guide, to correct faults, to give instruction. It is certain that the New Testament will not allow them less liberty than this.

2. The example of the New Testament

A. MATTHEW 28:19-20

"Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world."

Jesus commanded the apostles to go and "make disciples" (lit) of all nations, teaching them to practice everything that Christ commanded these apostles to practice - a very broad commission which must include women. Therefore, women are able to preach, to pray for the sick and to fulfil many other aspects of the ministry for the gospel.

B. MARK 16:17-20

"And these signs shall follow them that believe; In my name shall they cast out devils; they shall speak with new tongues; They shall take up serpents; and if they drink any deadly thing, it shall not hurt them; they shall lay hands on the sick, and they shall recover. So then after the Lord had spoken unto them, he was received up into heaven, and sat on the right hand of God. And they went forth, and preached everywhere, the Lord working with them,, and confirming the word with signs following."

Both men and women who have believed and have been baptized are here given a commission to cast out devils and heal the sick - a commission which must be associated with preaching as, in fact, it always was by Jesus - Matt 10:7-8; Luke 9:1-2,6; Luke 10:19 etc.

C. JOHN 4:39,42

"And many of the Samaritans of that city believed on him for the saying of the woman which testified, he told me all that ever I did. And (they) said unto the woman, Now we believe, not because of thy saying: for we have heard him ourselves, and know that this is indeed the Christ, the Savior of the world. The Lord, well knowing the character and background of this woman, was yet pleased to have her testify of him and to make of her one of the first "evangelists". Jesus used her witness to bring a whole city to trust him.

Notice...

(a) The city believed on Christ because of the "saying" of the woman: that is, they believed on Christ because of the "subject of her discourse", "her reasoning", "her doctrine", "the treatise she set forward". The word "saying" here is the same word as is used in Acts 1:1 (treatise) and see Luke's own explanation of this word in Luke 1:1-4.

(b) The men of the city later said to the woman, "We believe not because of they saying..." Here the word "saying" is the same as "spake" in Luke 2:38; that is, the woman, when she went into the city, called out to the crowds and at great length preached to them the wonder of Jesus' knowledge of her past life and his claim to be the Messiah.

(c) It says she "testified"; that is, she bore witness of Christ, gave record of his knowledge and power.

D. ACTS 1:8

"But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall bear witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth."

Women are included in this commission (compare verses 14,15). Therefore, women are able to be "witnesses" of Christ. The word "witness" means to "bear testimony of", "to give evidence concerning", to attest to the truth of". The Greek word also carries the sense of "martyrdom", to so witness as to give one's life for the sake of the gospel.

E. ACTS 2:1-4

"And when the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all with one accord in one place. And suddenly there came a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting. And there appeared unto them cloven tongues like as of fire, and it sat upon each of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance."

We see that women-folk were filled with the Spirit and spoke in other tongues in a public assembly.

F. ACTS 2:17-18

"And it shall come to pass in the last days, saith God, I will pour out of my Spirit upon all flesh: and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see vision, and your old men shall dream dreams: And on my servants and on my handmaidens I will pour out in those days of my Spirit; and they shall prophesy."

Peter lays hold upon the prophecy of Joel and says that both "sons and daughters, servants and handmaidens shall prophesy"- that is, "shall speak or sing by inspiration of God, either in prediction or in simple discourse."

G. ACTS 18:26

"And Apollos began to speak boldly in the synagogue: whom when Aquila and Priscilla had heard, they took unto them, and expounded unto him the way of God more perfectly."

Aquila and his wife, Priscilla, expounded the Word of God more definitely and accurately to Apollos. "Expound" means "to explain", "to lay open the meaning of", "to interpret". See the use of the same word in Acts 11:4; 28:23.

H. ACTS 21:9

"And the same man (Philip) had four daughters, virgins, which did prophesy."

The evangelist Philip had four daughters who "did prophesy"; that is, they spoke forth the Word of God. They addressed the people under inspiration of the Lord. They brought exhortation and edification to the Church of God.

I. ROMANS 12:6-8

"Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, whether prophecy, let us prophesy according to the proportion of faith; Or ministry, let us wait on our ministering: or he that teacheth, on teaching; Or he that exhorteth, on exhortation: he that giveth, let him do it with simplicity; he that ruleth, with diligence; he that showeth mercy, with cheerfulness."

(N.B. "Brethren" and "men" - vs 1 and 3 - are all-inclusive terms).

If we are correct in taking this chapter to refer to women as well as men, then women may prophesy; minister (that is, act as deacons, preach, attend to various matters in the church, give aid); teach (it means teach in a broad sense - to instruct or to give information); exhort (that is, encourage or urge to Godly living); rule (that is, give aid in various ways, to superintend); show mercy (do acts of mercy or of charity).

J. I CORINTHIANS 11:5

"But every woman that prayeth or prophesieth with her head uncovered dishonoureth her head: for that is even all one as if she were shaven."

Here it is indicated that women may pray or prophesy in the public assemblies. Notice also "every woman" which indicates it was a general practice for women to so behave.

K. I CORINTHIANS 14:5, 23-24, 26, 31

"I would that ye all spake with tongues, but rather that ye prophesied: for greater is he that prophesieth than he that speaketh with tongues, except he interpret, that the church may receive edifying.

"...For ye may all prophesy one by one, that all may learn, and all may be comforted."

From these verses, we learn that women may speak in tongues, prophesy, interpret, bring a Psalm, call the attention of the church to a doctrine, receive revelation from God and, by their ministry, bring learning and comfort to the church.

L. PHILIPPIANS 4:2-3

"I entreat and advise you, Euodia and Syntyche, to agree together and to work in harmony with the Lord. And I exhort you too, my genuine yokefellow, help these two women to keep co-operating, for they have toiled along with me in the spreading of the gospel, as have Clement and the rest of my fellow-workers whose names are in the book of life." (Amplified NT)

The implication is that the two women named actually worked with Paul in spreading the good news of the gospel. They were "fellow-laborers" with Paul; that is, they were his "companions", "assistants and fellow-helpers", "associates with him in his ministry". The word also carries the sense of being empowered or appointed to perform the duties of another. In other words, Paul delegated something of his ministry to them.

M. I TIMOTHY 2:8-9

"I will therefore that men pray everywhere, lifting up holy hands, without wrath and doubting. In like manner also, that women adorn themselves in modest apparel, with shamefacedness and sobriety; not with broided hair, or gold, or pearls, or costly array."

Paul here instructs women folk on how they should dress themselves for public prayer.

N. I TIMOTHY 2:10

"But (which becometh women professing godliness) with good works..."

Notice especially the phrase "women professing godliness". "Professing" means to assert, to declare openly, to make an open acknowledgment of, to make public declaration of. So the instruction is evidently to women-folk who were giving an open and public testimony of the Lord Jesus Christ and of godly living.

O. TITUS 2:3-4

"The aged women likewise, that they be in behaviour as becometh holiness, not false accusers, not given to much wine, teachers of good things; That they may teach the young women to be sober, to love their husbands, to love their children."

The older women were to be...

a) Teachers: that is, they were to give instruction in Christian living, to open up the meaning of the gospel to their hearers, to answer the questions of any inquirer.

b) They were to be teachers of "good things"; that is, of those things that are right and noble and proper for a Christian to observe and do.

c) They were to "teach the young women". This word "teach" is different in the Greek and means to make of a sound mind, to discipline, to correct, to train.

P. REVELATION 2:20

"Notwithstanding I have a few things against thee, because thou sufferest that woman Jezebel, which calleth herself a prophetess, to teach and to seduce my servants to commit fornication, and to eat things sacrificed unto idols."

Though Jezebel was a false prophetess, we may still infer that women-folk acting in the capacity of a prophet were accepted in the Church and that their message was acknowledged as of the Lord. It says that Jezebel "prophesied" and "taught", which implies that a woman who was a prophetess was permitted to preach the Word of God, to give forth prophecy under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, to break open the meaning of the gospel, to give instruction and information concerning the Christian walk.

Q. REVELATION 22:17

"And the Spirit and the bride say, Come. And let him that heareth say, Come. And let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take of the water of life freely."

"Let him that heareth say, Come" - which is a definite command of Christ to all those who hear the gospel to proclaim the gospel and to invite sinners to repent and to come to the cross. As women-folk are numbered amongst those who hear the gospel, they must also be numbered amongst those who hear the gospel, they must also be included amongst those who are commanded to proclaim the gospel.

The inference from all of these passages is that women-folk are permitted to expound the Word of God, to utter prophecy, to teach, to rule in temporal matters, to guide, to correct faults, to give instruction, exactly as in the Old Testament, the only difference being that their activity is now within the frame-work of the gospel and the Christian church instead of within the frame-work of the Law of Moses and the Temple.

OBJECTIONS

There are two other Scriptures we must now consider, both of which are used to preclude women-folk from preaching the gospel.

1. I CORINTHIANS 14:34-35

"Let your women keep silence in the churches: for it is not permitted unto them to speak; but they are commanded to be under obedience, as also saith the Law. And if they will learn anything, let them ask their husbands at home: for it is a shame for women to speak in the church."

A. Notice in this passage Paul is dealing with the question of authority. And concerning the authority of women folk, he says, "They are commanded to be under obedience as also saith the Law (cf Gen 3:15 and I Cor 11:3,8-9 - "But I would have you know, that the head of every man is Christ; and the head of the woman is the man...for the man is not of the woman, but the woman of the man. Neither was the man created for the woman; but the woman for the man."

The many Scripture passages we have already dealt with adequately confirm the propriety of a woman speaking, even in the church. Here Paul is confirming that, while women-folk may be active in ministry, **THEY ARE STILL TO BE UNDER AUTHORITY.**

B. In this passage, the apostle is also dealing with the matter of asking questions - "If they will learn anything..." The Amplified New Testament renders it - "But if there is anything they want to learn, they should ask their husbands at home, for it is disgraceful for a woman to talk in church."

C. The prohibition given in this passage is also evidently addressed to married women - "Your women" and "let them ask their husbands at home". The passage therefore must have a limited and qualified application.

D. The direction "let your women keep silence in the churches" is particularly directed against women who have no authority (are not "permitted") to speak, and who must therefore be content to abide by the rules of the church, to be "under obedience".

Only those women-folk were permitted to speak who were impelled by the Spirit of God (I Cor 11:5; 14:30-31; Acts 2:18) and who had a recognized ministry (as Philip's daughters).

E. The subject of discussion in the whole chapter of I Cor 14 is "confusion" or "peace" in public worship. Bearing this in mind, we infer that Paul is not laying down a general prohibition of women preaching, but is insisting that only those with a recognized ministry speak, and then only as permitted by gossip, speaking out of turn, irrelevant questions etc.

As concerning love, fellowship, worship and service, women-folk have an equal standing with men; but they should remember that, as concerning office and authority, from the beginning God has ordained that they stand in a secondary and subordinate place - "man was not created on account of or for the benefit of woman, but woman on account of and for the benefit of man" (1

Cor 11:9, Amplified NT and Gen. 2:18). Especially does this hold true in respect of husband and wife (Eph 5:22-24).

2. I TIMOTHY 2:11-14

"Let the woman learn in silence with all subjection. But I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man, but to be in silence. For Adam was first formed, then Eve. And Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived was in the transgression."

A. In view of all that we have before discussed, it seems evident that this passage deals again primarily with the matter of authority. The woman is not to so teach that she usurps authority over the man; on the contrary, she is to learn in quiet submissiveness. That is, it is forbidden for a woman to lay down doctrine, to set a church in order, or to take authority over the heritage of God.

B. This is confirmed by I Timothy 5:17 where it is stated that it is the responsibility of the elders to "labor in the word and doctrine"; that is, to set forth the teachings of the church. And elders and bishops are men, as is evident from the qualifications of a bishop: he is to be the "husband of one wife" and to "rule well his own house" (I Tim 3:2, 4-5).

C. The reason for this restriction on the status of women is found in verses 13-14:

(i) "Adam was first formed, then Eve" - and so God established the natural order of precedence.

(ii) "Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived" - hence it is forbidden women to set forth doctrine or to lead the man. In allowing his wife to take the initiative and to "establish a doctrine", Adam caused his own downfall. (See also I Peter 3:1-8 and I Cor 11:1-11).

D. These thoughts are confirmed by Eph 4:11 where the five ministry gifts of Christ are listed. Three of these carry governmental authority, namely - apostles, pastors, teachers: women are excluded from these offices. The other two - evangelists and prophets - carry not governmental authority and are open to women-folk.

CONCLUSIONS

1. It is forbidden to women to originate doctrine, to claim authority in the formulation of basic policy and to hold office in the oversight of the church.
2. On the other hand, they are permitted, and encouraged, to be active in witness, "laboring in the gospel" and to serve in any capacity requested of them by the church - always subject to the authority of the church.
3. The inference from all the Scriptures quoted previously is that women-folk are permitted to expound the Word of God, to utter prophecy, to teach, to rule in temporal matters, to guide, to correct faults, to give instruction, exactly as in the Old Testament, the only difference being that their activity is now within the frame-work of the gospel and the Christian church instead of within the frame-work of the law of Moses and the Temple.
4. However, it is yet apparent from the passages we have considered that the calling of God will most usually direct women into private (that is, non-public) service in the church, and especially in the home. (See I Tim. 5:14; I Cor 7:2; I Cor 11:1-12; Eph 5:22-24; Col 3:18; I Peter 3:1-7; Prov 12:4; 14:1; 18:22; 19:14; 31:10-31).