

A Biblical Basis for Women in Ministry Pt. 1

Peter's Announcement

Acts 2: 14-21

To say that the culture of the ancient Near East was male-dominated would be an understatement. In many societies women had no rights at all, so when we open the Bible and read about the significant roles certain women played in Israel's history, we recognize that the Bible's view of women has always been radically different from the other religions of its day. A person needs to read no further than the account of creation to see the dignity and equality God originally gave to both men and women. He created both in His image (Ge 1:26-27) and walked with both in the garden in the cool of the day (Ge 3:8). There is no sense whatsoever in the creation account that women are inferior to men in their spiritual capacities. Sin later damaged the relationship these first humans had with God and with each other, but God never departs from His original purposes because all that He wills is perfect and cannot be improved upon. As the Bible progresses, we discover that even though sin has intervened, God never stops pursuing His original intention. He simply achieves it by another way. The cross is the foundation stone that makes that possible.

Though the Bible records only a few examples of women who exercised spiritual leadership over men, because those passages were written in a male-dominated cultural context, they become all the more meaningful to our discussion. They expose the heart of God. It's important to note that the Bible openly acknowledged that there were women who led the people of God and who served in the office of prophet. And the biblical writers felt no shame in reporting this nor hid the fact that God showed His approval of these women by empowering them in their ministries. They were clearly appointed to lead; they were not out of order, nor was what they ministered in any way unauthentic. Here are several examples of such women:

- ~ Miriam, Moses' sister, was called "the prophetess" (Ex 15:20) and was one of the three main leaders who were "sent before" Israel by God to lead them out of Egypt (Mic 6:4).
- ~ Deborah, a prophetess, sat under a palm tree between Ramah and Bethel "and the sons of Israel came up to her for judgment" (Jdg 4:4-5). Barak, the leader of Israel's army, submitted to her authority because he recognized her gifting and calling (Jdg 7:6-9). In the song Deborah and Barak sang to commemorate the victory God gave them over their enemies, Deborah stated that the people of Israel were afraid to travel in their own land "until I, Deborah, arose, until I arose, a mother in Israel" (Jdg 5:7).
- ~ When Hilkiah, the high priest, discovered the lost book of the Law in 621 B.C., King Josiah chose to inquire of the Lord through the prophetess Huldah who then advised both the high priest and the king about their future (2Ki 22:14-20).
- ~ Esther, a Jewish woman who had become the queen of the Persian empire, saved the lives of her people by her bravery and established the 13th and 14th of Nisan as days on which the nation was to celebrate their deliverance. The Feast of Purim is still observed to this day.
- ~ Isaiah described his wife as "the prophetess" (Isa 8:3), showing full acceptance of her gift and

calling.

Each of these stands as a challenge to those who would interpret certain passages in the New Testament in such a way that they forbid women to lead men and claim that they have no right to speak publicly in a service at which men are present. The contrast between that interpretation and these women in the Old Testament is obvious. How is it possible that the Old Covenant can celebrate women leaders while the New Covenant, that Jesus has introduced, is said to remove even the liberty given women by the Old? One would expect that the freedom and dignity that Jesus has restored to all who follow Him would release women to a greater dimension of ministry, not subordinate them further.

The source of this problem is that there are passages in the New Testament which, if read without recognizing the pastoral situations they were meant to address, appear to close the door to any form of women in leadership beyond the care of other women or children. So as we progress through our study, we will examine those passages and attempt to answer some of the important questions they raise.

Did Paul agree with Peter concerning Joel's prophecy?

According to Joel 2:28-31 one of the wonders that would accompany the arrival of the "day of the Lord" would be the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on all of God's people, men and women alike, and that impartation would transform them into Spirit-empowered ministers. On the day of Pentecost Peter quotes Joel:

"And it shall be in the last days,' God says, 'that I will pour forth of My Spirit on all mankind; and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams; even on My bondslaves, both men and women, I will in those days pour forth of My Spirit and they shall prophesy'" (Ac 2:17-18).

When that day arrived, the Spirit would produce in believers supernatural levels of ministry which include prophecy, prophetic dreams and visions. And that promise fits quite well with a theme that runs through the Bible: that it is God's desire that His people become "a kingdom of priests" (Ex 19:6; 1Pe 2:5, 9; Rev 1:6; 5:10). His goal is to have many more people ministering, not restrict ministry to a few. The special insight Joel's prophecy gives us into God's plan is to show us that before the final tribulation and return of Christ, God will give prophetic gifts to all His people regardless of their gender or age.

Prophecy is authoritative by its very nature. It is spoken so that others can hear and obey. It is essentially God speaking through a human being. So a person who is prophesying is, at that moment, leading those to whom he or she is speaking. If the Bible says that a woman is prophesying to a nation or a king or a church, then it is acknowledging that she is doing so from a position of spiritual authority. She has become God's representative in that situation, and Joel's prophecy says God intends to give that gift to all His people, women as well as men, before the concluding events of the last days (Joel 2:30-3:3). On the Day of Pentecost the apostle Peter said that day had arrived. Listen to what he says in Acts 2:

"But Peter, taking his stand with the eleven, raised his voice and declared to them: 'Men of Judea and all you who live in Jerusalem, let this be known to you and give heed to my words. For these men are not drunk, as you suppose, for it is only the third hour of the day; but this is what was spoken of through the prophet Joel: "And it shall be in the last days," God says, "That I will pour forth of My Spirit on all mankind; And your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, And your young men shall see visions, And your old men shall dream dreams; Even on My bondslaves, both men and women, I will in those days pour forth of My Spirit

And they shall prophesy. “And I will grant wonders in the sky above. And signs on the earth below, Blood, and fire, and vapor of smoke. “The sun will be turned into darkness and the moon into blood, Before the great and glorious day of the Lord shall come. “And it shall be that everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved”” (Ac 2:14-21).

Ten days after Jesus’ ascension into heaven about 120 believers gathered in an upper room for prayer (Ac 1:13-15; 2:1). It was the day the nation of Israel celebrated the Feast of Pentecost which meant they were dedicating the new wheat harvest to God. Luke mentions that this group of disciples included women, one of whom was Jesus’ mother, Mary (Ac 1:14). He says when “they were all together in one place” (Ac 2:1), the Holy Spirit came upon them suddenly and powerfully. First, they heard a sound from heaven that seemed to come toward them as if it were being carried along by a strong gust of wind, and then that sound filled the house where they were sitting. Next, they saw what appeared to be flames of fire hovering over each person’s head, and that symbolism would have been meaningful to Jews who had been taught the Torah since they were children. Those “tongues of fire” were a sign that the Holy Spirit had come to abide in them. Just as the pillar of cloud and fire had proclaimed that God’s presence dwelt in the tabernacle in the wilderness (Ex 40:34-38), those flames over each head meant that these disciples had now become living “tabernacles” in whom the Spirit dwells. And what Luke records next proved that this had indeed happened. All of them began to proclaim the “mighty deeds of God” in foreign languages they had never learned, and as they did so, a diverse crowd of pilgrims from many different nations gathered to listen. Some misunderstood the spiritual event they were watching and assumed the disciples were drunk. Others were confused and asked, “What does this mean?” Their comments prompted Peter to stand and address the crowd of thousands. Without the slightest hesitation he told them that what they were seeing was not the result of drunkenness but the arrival of the new era of the Spirit promised by the prophet Joel. He quoted to them from Joel 2:28-31, and there is no mistaking the point he made that day: He announced that the “last days” in which the Spirit would be poured out on men and women, young and old, had arrived (Ac 2:16). That was why these men and women were prophesying in such miraculous fashion. He then went on to warn the crowd that they were being given the opportunity to repent and call on the name of the Lord (Ac 2:21) which, he said, is Jesus Christ (Ac 2:38). And he said if they did, they would receive the same gift of the Holy Spirit. He said Joel’s promise was being offered by God to all of them, including their children, and would continue to be given to all those in the future who heard the gospel and called on the name of Jesus (Ac 2:39).

Application

If we acknowledge that Peter was inspired by the Spirit to announce that “this is what was spoken of through the prophet Joel...” (v16), then we must also acknowledge that at that moment God began a new season of His work on earth. As the book of Acts progresses, it becomes quite evident that the apostles (including Paul) did not consider the arrival of Joel’s prophecy at Pentecost to be a once-for-all-time event; they saw it as the beginning of a new spiritual potential for all believers (Ac 2:39; 4:31; 8:14-17; 10:44-48; 11:15-18; 19:1-7). The Holy Spirit’s power for supernatural ministry was now being given indiscriminately to all of God’s people: male and female, young and old, alike. And they expected this availability and inclusiveness to continue until “the great and glorious day of the Lord...” (Ac 2:20).

These two biblical passages (Joel 2:28-31 and Acts 2:14-21) present a challenge to those who would say that the apostle Paul forbade women to minister in any gathering that includes men. Because if that were true, it would mean that Paul rejected the announcement Peter made on the day of Pentecost; it would mean that Paul believed Joel’s prophecy had not yet arrived. This point needs to be made very firmly because if it were true that Peter and Paul disagreed on such an important revelation in the Bible, then we

who read the New Testament would be forced to choose whether we will follow Peter or Paul in this matter. And that suggestion immediately conflicts with the fact that God inspired every word of the Bible. So of course, there is no contradiction between the teachings of these two great apostles. We can be absolutely certain that Paul did not reject Peter's application of Joel's prophecy but completely agreed that the promised era of the Holy Spirit had arrived, that men and women, young and old, were all empowered for ministry. As we will soon see, Paul's admonishments to women "to keep silent" in church services (1Co 14:34) and to not "teach or exercise authority over a man, but to remain quiet" (1Ti 2:12) were not refusals to acknowledge a woman's spiritual potential but pastoral solutions to specific problems facing those to whom he was writing.

In the next section of our study we will examine two passages concerning women found in Paul's first letter to the Corinthians.

A Biblical Basis for Women in Ministry Part 2

Pastoring the Corinthian Church

I Corinthians 11:2-16; 14:33-35

Paul was the founding pastor of the church in Corinth. He remained with them for the first year and a half of their existence, and it was through him that they learned the basic truths of Christianity. That year and a half had been long enough to introduce them to the gospel and the power of the Holy Spirit but not long enough to develop a solid core of mature believers. So after Paul left, his teachings began to be distorted. People remembered the words he said but forgot why he said them. Certain statements were taken out of context and used to justify attitudes and behaviors he would never have approved had he still been present. That's why as we read this letter, we often hear him dealing with reports he had received about them and trying to correct their misunderstandings. He was pastoring them from a distance, and in chapters 11 through 14 we hear him focusing on four problems that were occurring when they gathered for worship: 1) uncovered heads; 2) selfish communion; 3) chaotic speaking in tongues; and 4) disruptive side conversations. Each of these must have been patterns of behavior that were consistent enough that they were damaging their services and their reputation. So issue by issue, we hear him correcting each one. He states why the behavior was wrong and shows them the spiritual principle that would guide them into the right behavior. His goal was for their gatherings to reflect the character of God and be done in such a way that the unbelieving community would respect the church. Visitors ought to be able to attend their services and not be shocked by behaviors that were socially embarrassing, grossly loveless, frighteningly chaotic or thoughtlessly distracting. But when Paul wrote this letter, some portion of the Corinthian church was doing each of those things. So Paul patiently taught them how to function properly when they gathered together to worship.

Understanding the overall purpose of this section of Paul's letter will help us understand why he addresses these particular subjects and what changes he's trying to bring about. The danger that arises when we lose sight of his overall purpose is that we generalize comments that were meant as pastoral corrections to specific problems. Without reconstructing the problem he was correcting, we can't rightly interpret his solution. And because this step has often been overlooked, great damage has been done in each of these areas. Wrong interpretations have led to harsh, legalistic policies that still harm churches today. And no part of the church has been more affected by them than women. Believing that the apostle forbids women to speak in church, Bible-believing people have felt constrained to disqualify women from most areas of ministry. In this section of our study we will examine two passages from Paul's letter to the Corinthians that are at the center of this discussion.

Did Paul allow women to pray and prophesy in 1 Corinthians chapter 11, and then forbid them to speak in church in chapter 14?

To begin, let's review what he said in 1 Corinthians 11:

“Now I praise you because you remember me in everything and hold firmly to the traditions, just as I delivered them to you. But I want you to understand that Christ is the head of every man, and the man is the head of a woman, and God is the head of Christ. Every man who has something on his head while praying or prophesying disgraces his head. But

every woman who has her head uncovered while praying or prophesying disgraces her head, for she is one and the same as the woman whose head is shaved. For if a woman does not cover her head, let her also have her hair cut off; but if it is disgraceful for a woman to have her hair cut off or her head shaved, let her cover her head. For a man ought not to have his head covered, since he is the image and glory of God; but the woman is the glory of man. For man does not originate from woman, but woman from man; for indeed man was not created for the woman's sake, but woman for the man's sake. Therefore the woman ought to have a symbol of authority on her head, because of the angels. However, in the Lord, neither is woman independent of man, nor is man independent of woman. For as the woman originates from the man, so also the man has his birth through the woman; and all things originate from God. Judge for yourselves: is it proper for a woman to pray to God with her head uncovered? Does not even nature itself teach you that if a man has long hair, it is a dishonor to him, but if a woman has long hair, it is a glory to her? For her hair is given to her for a covering. But if one is inclined to be contentious, we have no other practice, nor have the churches of God" (1Co 11:2-16).

It seems that confusion rather than rebellion was the reason some women in Corinth had ceased covering their heads with a shawl during church services. By opening this section of his teaching with the affirmation: "Now I praise you because you remember me in everything and hold firmly to the traditions [teachings that had been handed down], just as I delivered them to you" (v2), Paul indicates that people in the church had been trying to obey him but had misunderstood some of the principles that he had taught them. He doesn't say which principle caused the misunderstanding he's about to address, but it may have been an overzealous application of the truth that "in Christ" believers are set free from observing the requirements of the Law of Moses. Undoubtedly Paul had taught them the same truths he had taught the churches in Galatia, and the following passage might well contain the truth they were trying to live out:

"Therefore the Law has become our tutor [to lead us] to Christ, so that we may be justified by faith. But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a tutor. For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. 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" (Gal 3:24-28).

While it is true that the Law, by showing us our inability to obey it, has led us to trust Christ alone as our righteousness, there are still social norms which ought to be observed so as to not unnecessarily offend the culture in which we live. By removing the shawl that customarily covered a woman's head, some of the women in the Corinthian church were making an unintended social statement.

11:3: Speaking to them as their pastor, Paul instructs them to restrict this portion of their freedom so as to not present an unnecessary offense to a husband or a temptation to someone who was vulnerable. By this point in his letter he had already applied this theme of believers restricting their freedom for the benefit of others to several situations (1Co 6:7; 8:9-13; 9:5-6, 12, 19-23; 10:23-11:1). So now he will list several reasons why a woman should cover her head with a shawl. The first reason is drawn from the order God placed in His universe. Paul appeals to the fact that God created certain roles that apply even to the relationship of God the Father and Jesus His Son. By using the example of the Father and the Son, he is showing us the spirit in which these relationships should function. Each should be filled with the same love and honor that the Father and Son show toward each other. The word "head," as Paul uses it here, is best explained by Paul himself. The word can have several different applications, but based on his explanation in verses 8-12, he is most likely using the word "head" to mean the source of something, in this case the

source of another's existence. And from that idea comes the implication that the person who comes forth from another is intended to bring honor to their source. By saying "Christ is the head of man," he is saying Adam was fashioned from dust by the pre-incarnate Son (Ge 2:7; Jn 1:3, 10; 1Co 8:6; Heb 1:2), and therefore all who are descended from him are intended to bring honor to Christ. By saying "the man is the head of a woman," he is referring to the creation of Eve. Since the pre-incarnate Son took a rib out of Adam and formed the woman, Adam became the physical source of Eve (Ge 2:21-24). She was to be a partner to him and help complete what was lacking in him (Ge 2:18). At this point we should note that this creation event in Genesis describes the formation of a husband and wife; it does not address the relationship of men and women in general. And finally, by saying that "God is the head of Christ," he is saying that even Christ has a Source whom He honors. The Father is His eternal Source, and therefore He honors the Father by faithfully carrying out His part of God's plan. This last example, drawn from the Father and Son, shows us the proper attitude in which all relationships are to function. Though the Father is the head of the Son, their relationship is marked by love and mutual respect. There is no tyranny and no jealousy. The Son freely chooses to honor the Father, and the Father delights to honor the Son (1Co 15:28). And it is Christ's attitude that Paul is asking wives to show toward their husbands by covering their heads with a shawl during worship services. The reason the shawl mattered will become clearer in the next three verses.

11:4-6: The custom of a Jewish man covering his head with a shawl during prayer was a practice that apparently had not yet begun in Paul's day. He considered a man's uncovered head to be a symbol that God was His Source. By standing before God with a bare head a man acknowledged that God was His covering (vs4, 7, 14). So in a church service if a man covered his head, it would be a wrong spiritual statement. But apparently some of the women in the Corinthian church had decided that if the men didn't have to cover their heads during worship, then neither did they. And of course, they were right. They were not under the Law, and they could uncover their heads. But in the culture of that day, removing the shawl that covered their hair made an unintended social statement. Jewish women would normally braid their hair and cover it with a shawl in public or in worship as a symbol of modesty (Alfred Edersheim, Sketches of Jewish Social Life, Hendrickson, 1994, p.142). In this way a woman was covering her beauty so that she would not attract undue attention. A married woman was also acknowledging by this action her commitment to her husband. For a woman to untie her hair and allow it to hang free in that culture was a sight only her husband should see. In Jewish weddings after the ceremony, the couple was led to the bridal chamber with the bride's hair unloosed and hanging freely. In that setting her uncovered hair was a beautiful expression of marriage. But for the women of Corinth to sit in church that way was to press cultural sensitivities too far. Inadvertently, they were making a statement that labeled them as immodest, and if married, disrespectful toward their husbands. So Paul is trying to explain that though they are free from religious requirements about what they must wear, they still need to consider the impact of their behavior on others. His statement about a woman having her hair cut off or her head shaved proves that this is his concern. Only a woman accused of adultery had her hair "shorn or shaved" (Edersheim, p.142).

But there is one more observation from this passage that is very important to our discussion. In verse five Paul specifically mentions women praying and prophesying in the formal gatherings of the church. It is especially while doing those things that he wants them to cover their heads. And he refers to women performing those ministries in a matter-of-fact way and gives no hint of disapproval. His sole concern is the inappropriate statement being made by that uncovered head. This acknowledgment by Paul of women praying and prophesying in a public service needs to be kept in mind as we turn to his statement in 1 Corinthians 14:

"for God is not a God of confusion but of peace, as in all the churches of the saints. The women are to keep silent in the churches; for they are not permitted to speak, but are to subject themselves, just as the Law also says. 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” (1Co 14:33-35).

As we noted earlier over the course of chapters 11-14, Paul addresses four problems that were occurring when the church gathered for worship. Here, beginning at verse 33, he deals with the fourth problem of disruptive side-conversations. He begins by stating a foundational principle about the character of God. He says, “God is not a God of confusion [disorder, anarchy], but of peace...” (v33). In other words, if God is really in charge of a gathering, it will express His personality, and for that reason it will not degenerate into noisy confusion. And then he added these words: “...as in all the churches of the saints.” He was making the Corinthians aware that their loud, tumultuous services were very unlike the gatherings of believers in other cities. And at that point in time it is unlikely that there was anyone in the world who had been in more church services than Paul. With those few words he informed them that they were the only ones behaving that way. If what they were doing was really under the Spirit’s control, as they claimed, then why didn’t the Holy Spirit cause similar disorder elsewhere? Instead, church services in other cities were well-ordered and peaceful, and the dignity of their gatherings stood as a testimony against the confusion in Corinth.

14:34: Paul wanted order and peace restored there. Having just dealt with the chaotic way they were speaking in tongues (vs23, 27-28), he moves to another aspect of their gatherings that was producing noisy disorder: Apparently, disruptive conversations were being held primarily between wives and husbands. In this verse Paul says, “Let the women/wives in the gatherings be quiet, for it is not permitted to them to speak, but let them submit just as the Law also says” (literal). And then he adds, “But if they wish to learn anything, let them question their husbands at home; for it is a shame for a woman/wife to speak in church” (literal). Clearly, from certain women there must have been either a constant flow of questions or disrespectful challenges about things that had been said. Paul’s concern is focused on the disrespect that was being shown, and that disrespect must have been primarily between wives and husbands, because his statement about being submitted “as the Law says” does not apply to women in general. There is no law that says all women are to be submitted to all men, only that wives are to respect their husbands. And the only passage in the Law of Moses to which he could be referring in this matter is the creation account that he drew on earlier (1Cor 11:3, 8-9).

If these verses were intended as a pastoral correction meant to quiet down disruptive side-conversations or disrespectful exchanges between wives and husbands, then Paul’s admonition: “Let women/wives in the gatherings be quiet...” was not meant to censor women who were ministering properly in the services. He wasn’t imposing a new law that prohibits women from ministering as the Holy Spirit leads them. He was bringing order, not bondage. But sadly, if these verses are taken out of context, ignoring the fact that Paul has already acknowledged the possibility of women praying and prophesying in church services, then they can be used to forbid women to minister or participate in the spoken gifts during any type of meeting where men are present.

In the next section of our study we will examine a passage in which Paul explains the miracle that takes place when a person is joined by faith to Jesus Christ.

A Biblical Basis for Women in Ministry Part 3

Clothed with Christ

Galatians 3: 26-28

Paul was dismayed to learn that the churches he had planted in Galatia (central Turkey) were being deliberately led away from the foundational truth of the gospel: that righteousness is a gift given by God to those who repent and believe, not a reward for having kept the requirements of the Law of Moses. He had evangelized and gathered his converts into congregations in Pisidian Antioch, Iconium, Lystra and Derbe (Ac 14:1-23), but after he left, members of the church in Jerusalem had come up to the region to try to convince his disciples that he was not an authentic apostle and that he had taught them a false gospel. Their goal was to separate the Jewish believers from the Gentile believers. They hoped to persuade the Jews to return to observing the Torah and the Gentiles to become Jews who believed that Jesus was the Messiah. Above all else, they wanted the Gentile men to become circumcised, so they tried to convince them that a person couldn't become a real Christian without first becoming a real Jew (Ac 15:1, 5). And the motive that drove them to come all the way up to Galatia was not a spiritual concern for Paul's converts; it was self-preservation (Gal 6:12-13).

Those who had become followers of Christ in Israel, especially those who lived in the city of Jerusalem, were being severely persecuted by the religious authorities. And one of the main issues that caused that persecution were reports coming in from other cities that Jews were openly fellowshiping with Gentiles in the Christian churches. The idea that Jews had set aside rabbinical restrictions and had begun eating with Gentiles and were coming into physical contact with people who were ceremonially unclean was intolerable. The fear was that the Jews who fellowshiped with Gentiles would leave those church services and carry that uncleanness back to their Jewish family and friends. And no one was more responsible for creating this crisis than Saul of Tarsus (Paul) after his conversion. Everywhere that former Pharisee went, he left churches with mixed congregations of Jews, whom he had persuaded when he preached in their synagogues, and of Gentiles, whom he had won in the market place. And as reports of his activities poured into Jerusalem, persecution against the church there grew.

So certain individuals from the Jerusalem church took it upon themselves to visit Paul's churches to try to stop this mixing of Jews and Gentiles which was causing such an offense. If that behavior could be stopped, some of the fury in Jerusalem might calm down. Their plan was simple: They must convince Paul's converts that he had misled them and that the gospel he preached was false. The approach they took was to try to convince them that the old distinctions of Jew and Gentile, slave and free, and male and female were still operative. Undoubtedly they told them that Jesus never intended to change those categories, that behind all of His preaching was the assumption that the Levitical rules governing food, childbirth, touching anything dead, blood, disease, the sabbath, etc. would remain in place. They must have pointed to passages that said that the commands of the Law of Moses would never pass away. And of course, to succeed they had to attack Paul personally. They had to "prove" that he wasn't really an apostle and had no authority to say what he was saying. If they could persuade the Jewish believers in Paul's churches to separate themselves from the non-Jews, and the non-Jews to become Jewish proselytes, they could go back to Jerusalem and announce that the offense that Paul had created had been stopped, and hopefully the pressure on the church there would ease.

Paul's letter to the Galatians, then, is his reply to these charges. He admits that he was not taught the gospel he preached by any human being but says it was given to him by means of a "revelation of Jesus Christ" (Gal 1:12). And then he makes a statement about that revelation that gives us an important insight. He says when God called him, He revealed "His Son in me so I might preach Him among the Gentiles" (Gal 1:16, emphasis added). In other words, at that moment he understood that the Lord Jesus had come to live within him by His spirit, and that insight was foundational to what he would proclaim to Gentiles and Jews. He would proclaim a gospel that offered them not only forgiveness for sins but a spiritual union with Jesus Christ which would radically transform their relationship with God and each other.

Based on that revelation, Paul explains to the Galatians why the Law of Moses was no longer necessary: Something much greater had taken its place. Every one of them now stood before God "clothed... with Christ" (Gal 3:27). And that meant that Jesus' righteousness had become their righteousness, and His inheritance had become their inheritance. That spiritual union was so real that they now had a new identity. Regardless of their history, their ethnicity, their social status or their gender, God saw all as "sons of God" because He saw all of them clothed with His Son. And then Paul warned those who were being persuaded by the false teachers from Jerusalem that if they put their faith in the Law of Moses, they were selling themselves back into slavery to a Law they were not capable of fulfilling, and they would forfeit the righteousness which their faith in Christ had given them. He said it was not possible to trust both the Law and Christ; they must choose one or the other.

At the end of this letter, Paul summarizes the basic truth he's been trying to explain in one simple statement. He says, "For neither is circumcision anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new creation" (Gal 6:15). And it is this "new creation" that we will now examine more closely.

Our union with Christ (Gal 3:26-28)

In the passage leading up to his announcement about the new identity that God gives to those who believe in Jesus Christ, Paul makes it very clear that no one has ever been saved by keeping the Law, not even Abraham. To prove his point he reminds us that God proclaimed Abraham righteous (Ge 15:6) four hundred and thirty years before the Law of Moses was written (Gal 3:17). It had no part, whatsoever, in his receiving the gift of righteousness. And when the Law was written, Paul says it was never able to save people because of sin. He says its purpose was twofold. First, God gave it to Israel to restrain sin so that His presence could remain upon the nation and preserve it until the Messiah ("seed") was born (Gal 3:19). He, and He alone, was the One to whom all the promises of Abraham were given (Gal 3:16). So only by being joined to Him by faith could anyone in the Old or New Covenant become righteous. And second, Paul says the Law was given to show people the high standards of God so that we would realize our desperate need of His mercy (Gal 3:22). It was a means by which He would prepare the human heart to understand why it was necessary for God to send His Son to die for us (Gal 3:24). It was designed to lead people who had discovered that they were sinners to His mercy. And finally, in this passage Paul also explains that by His death on the cross Jesus made it possible for Gentiles, as well as Jews, to receive the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit (Gal 3:14). Now, with these truths in mind, let's listen to Paul describe our new identity in Christ in Galatians 3:

"For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. 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" (Gal 3:26-28).

3:26: A miraculous change takes place when a person puts their faith in Jesus Christ. He or she becomes a “new creation” (2Co 5:17). That person is not merely forgiven and improved but is lifted up to an entirely new level of existence. Our identity changes dramatically. A new spiritual union, similar to that which takes place when two people are married (Eph 5:29-32), is formed between the individual and Jesus. His identity becomes our identity; His righteousness becomes our righteousness, and His inheritance becomes our inheritance. And the result of this union, Paul says, is that the old human categories that separated and disqualified people pass away. Faith in Christ brings us into a new relationship with God and each other. He becomes our Father, not in a metaphorical sense, but in a literal sense. By being joined spiritually to His only-begotten Son, we become His adopted children, and all of us, whether male or female, are given the same titles: “sons of God.” Paul uses the term “sons” not to disparage the role of a daughter but to emphasize the fact that there is not a lesser status for women. “In Christ” women stand before God, along with men, as “sons” because all of us are joined to Jesus, the Son. Everyone stands on the same level, inherits the same promises and can do the same kinds of ministries.

3:27: Paul points to water baptism as an illustration of how completely each believer is placed into Christ. Just as we have been plunged into water, we have been immersed into Christ. His righteousness and presence envelops each one of us to the point that Paul can say, “...all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ.”

3:28: Then, so there can be no mistaking the diverse range of human categories to which he is referring when he uses the plural pronoun “you,” Paul lists categories that were likely at the center of controversy in Galatia: Jews and non-Jews, slaves and free, and men and women. And in each case he says those categories no longer limit a person’s spiritual potential. Our union with Christ supersedes all other categories. Whether a person was a Jew or a Gentile before that union took place makes no difference. God pays no attention to such distinctions. Nor does it matter if a person came from a high position in society or a low position. And then he addresses the final category of men and women. He says, “...there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus.” The flow of his logic is clear: just as the first two categories do not limit a person’s spiritual capacity, neither does a person’s gender. Joined to Christ, men and women inherit everything Christ has inherited (Rom 8:32; 1Co 3:21-23; Eph 1:18). And both have been given the same assignment by their Lord to “Go... and make disciples of all the nations...” (Mt 28:19).

Application

This truth releases every Christian. It means that every one of us is free to serve the Lord in whatever way He calls us to serve Him. He forbids us to look at our sinful past or our religious history or our ethnicity or our social position or our gender and disqualify ourselves. There are no second-class citizens in the kingdom of God. When we fellowship in the church, or when the Holy Spirit prompts us to minister in one of the spiritual gifts, or when He calls us to step out and serve Him in the harvest field, these distinctions play no part. All that matters now is that we seek to fulfill God’s plan for us, that we accomplish the purpose for which He designed us in our mother’s womb (Ps 139:13-16). We may still look the same on the outside as we did before we were joined to Jesus, but the truth is: We’re a “new creation.” Each of us is clothed with Christ and indwelt by Christ (Gal 2:20). He surrounds us and fills us.

Paul would have been furious if he had heard that there was a church where Jews were forbidding Gentiles to speak in a service. And he included the categories of slave and free in his list because that horrid institution was still part of that ancient society. And there is no doubt that his purpose in mentioning slavery was to say that slaves were not to be treated any differently than those who were free. In the church, all are equals (Phm 1:15-17). So when he added the words “male and female” to the same list, he was making

the same point. Women were not to be treated any differently either.

At different times and places all of Paul's statements about equality have been explained away. Ethnicity and religious backgrounds have been allowed to prevent people from church membership. Slavery was actually encouraged from certain pulpits. And in some denominations women have been and still are prevented from ministering to anyone except other women and children below a certain age. In our final study we will examine the key passage that has been used to support those limitations and to nullify what we just heard Paul say to the Galatians.

A Biblical Basis for Women in Ministry Part 4

Timothy in Ephesus

1 Timothy 2: 9-14

Luke finished writing the book of Acts while Paul was still awaiting trial in Rome (Ac 28), but when we read the letters Paul wrote to Timothy and Titus, we discover that there must have been one more chapter in the great apostle's life. If so, it may have looked something like this: Either Paul finally went to trial before Caesar and was found innocent, or his accusers never arrived, and his case was dismissed because these letters reveal that he was set free and returned to his ministry for several years. During that time he visited some of the churches he had founded including Corinth and Ephesus (2Ti 4:20). But sadly he discovered that during the years he had been a prisoner, certain false teachers had taken advantage of his absence, particularly in Ephesus. That church was in such a bad condition that he felt he must leave Timothy in charge while he visited churches in northern Greece (1Ti 1:3). And it was from northern Greece (Macedonia) that he wrote the first letter to Timothy. Sometime after that he went to the island of Crete and evangelized all of its cities. Titus was his traveling companion on that occasion, and Paul asked him to stay behind to "...set in order what remains and appoint elders in every city..." (Titus 1:5). From Crete Paul made his way toward Nicopolis, a city on the west coast of Greece, where he had decided to spend the winter (Titus 3:12). It appears he wrote the letter to Titus before he arrived (Titus 3:12). In that letter he gave him instructions about how to handle certain problems, and when we read it, we recognize that some of the problems in Crete were very similar to those in Ephesus. We don't know where Paul went after that, but sooner or later he visited Troas, and it seems likely that it was there that he was arrested so suddenly that he was not able to take his cloak and books with him (Ac 20:6-12; 2Ti 4:13). Alexander the coppersmith, from Ephesus, may have been the person responsible for his capture (Ac 19:33; 2Ti 4:14-15). He was then taken to Rome and imprisoned for a second time, and it was from there that he wrote the second letter to Timothy who was still pastoring in Ephesus. That final letter was written from a dungeon while he was waiting to be executed. He urged Timothy to "come before winter" (2Ti 4:21) and to bring the cloak and books he'd left behind (2Ti 4:13).

False teachers

Paul wrote his pastoral letters to Timothy and Titus about fifteen years after he wrote the words: "...there is neither male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus" (Gal 3:28), and much had changed during that period of time. He still had to warn people about false teachers, but now they were teaching different doctrines for a different reason. Christianity had been around long enough to develop a culture of religious fraud. Whether he was writing to Timothy or Titus, in Ephesus or Crete, it seems there were always people present who were aggressively pressing into the community of the church to position themselves as teachers of "knowledge" (1Ti 6:20). Some were Jews by background, and some were Gentiles. Some based their teachings on Jewish myths and twisted interpretations of the Law of Moses (1Ti 1:3-7). Others, like Hymenaeus and Philetus, tried to combine Christianity with Greek philosophy. Paul says these two men were teaching the Ephesian church that the resurrection had already taken place (2Ti 2:17-18). They probably said that when believers die, our spirits join Jesus in heaven, and that will be our final state. Jesus will not physically return to rule on this earth, and believers will not be resurrected into immortal bodies (2Ti 2:18; 1Co 15:12; 2Th 2:2). There were other false doctrines being taught as well. There were those who forbade marriage (1Ti 4:3; 1Co 7:1), which may have been either a prohibition of Jews marrying Gentiles or simply a glorification of celibacy. There were those who were trying to teach the church to abstain from

certain foods, which probably was the issue of meat that had been sacrificed to idols (1Ti 4:3; 1Co 10:25-29). And these false teachers were also living ungodly lives and encouraging ungodly behavior in others (2Ti 3:1-9; Titus 1:16). And Paul repeatedly states that their motivation for "...teaching things they should not teach..." was money (Titus 1:11; see 1Ti 6:3-5). They were using these doctrines to draw followers after themselves so they could receive financial support. And some of them had gained a foothold among some of the women, particularly some older, wealthier women (1Ti 2:9-10; 4:7; 2Ti 3:6-7; Titus 2:3-5). So in writing to Timothy one of Paul's goals was to convince him to confront those women and to call them back to sound doctrine.

Timothy

In that environment the church services in Ephesus must have had tense moments of conflict that required Timothy to boldly confront people and teach the truth. But it appears he responded to this pressure by going silent. Paul repeatedly had to urge him to resume preaching and teaching because he had obviously stopped (1Ti 1:3, 18-19; 4:6, 12-16; 5:1, 20; 6:12-14; 2Ti 1:6-7, 13-14; 2:1-2, 14-15, 24-26; 3:14-15; 4:1-5). He reminded him of prophecies that had been spoken over him (1Ti 1:18; 4:14; 2Ti 1:6-7), and exhorted him to not be self-conscious about his relatively young age (1Ti 4:12). Even if he had to rebuke an older man or woman, he must do it but remember to speak respectfully (1Ti 5:1-2).

Yet who could blame Timothy for being "timid?" (2Ti 1:7). The Ephesian church was a well-established congregation in a wealthy city. It would have been full of people who would not submit to him easily. He was a poor missionary with a mother and grandmother at home but apparently no father. He was half-Jewish and half-Greek, and in Judaism that mixed ethnicity made him ceremonially unclean, so he had grown up as an outcast from the synagogue. And he had been with Paul through some terribly violent events on their missionary journeys, events which had left even Paul traumatized (Ac 18:9-10). Yet Paul needed him to overcome those feelings and "fight the good fight" (1Ti 1:18; 6:12).

Are women subordinated to men because of Adam and Eve?

The passage we're about to study is Paul's counsel to Timothy concerning women who were refusing to allow him to correct a false doctrine someone had taught them. To interpret it properly we must see it in light of the conflict in Ephesus that we just described. Yet this passage has often been used as "proof" that women, by nature, are more vulnerable to deception than men, and therefore, all the women in a church must spiritually submit to all the men. No woman, according to that interpretation, should ever correct a man or try to teach a man. In spite of the passages we saw in previous studies (Joel 2:28-29; Ac 2:17-18; 1Co 11:5; Gal 3:28) which teach that within the New Covenant distinctions such as ethnicity, social position and gender no longer have any effect on a person's spiritual capacity, the following verses have been interpreted to mean exactly the opposite: that gender still severely limits a person's role in a church. Here's what Paul actually says in 1 Timothy 2:

"Likewise, I want women to adorn themselves with proper clothing, modestly and discreetly, not with braided hair and gold or pearls or costly garments, but rather by means of good works, as is proper for women making a claim to godliness. A woman must 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 deceived, fell into transgression" (1Ti 2:9-14).

2:9-10: Paul begins by addressing the immodest clothing, ornate hairstyles and expensive jewelry worn by some of the women because those behaviors were bringing their own forms of strife into the church. Revealing clothing produced temptation, and expensive gowns and jewelry produced envy. He says if a Christian woman is to be noticed by others, it should be because the light of Christ's love shines through her as she carries out the ministry God has given her. This "clothes" her with a Christ-like beauty that belongs to every woman who demonstrates her reverence for God by her "good works."

2:11: Judging from the force of Paul's statements in this passage, some of Timothy's strongest opposition was coming from women. There were some who were openly challenging his authority and rejecting the doctrines he was trying to teach. So Paul tells him to be bold and insist that they learn from him. First, he says in effect, "Let a woman learn quietly, without arguing, in genuine submission" (paraphrase). His first statement in this verse can be translated: "Let a woman learn in silence..." but the Greek word he uses does not mean the absence of sound. There are other Greek words which do mean the absence of sound or the muzzling of the voice, but Paul did not use those words here. He used "hesuchia" which has more to do with a person's attitude than their speech. It describes someone who calms down and stops arguing. In one form or another the word is used in the following passages: Luke 14:4; Acts 11:18; 21:14; 22:2; 1 Thessalonians 4:11; 2 Thessalonians 3:12; 1 Timothy 2:11-12; and 1 Peter 3:4. As we read these verses, a picture emerges of a person ceasing to be contentious, and that's Paul's goal for these women. He wants them to refrain from arguing with Timothy, particularly in the arguments taking place in the church services. The phrase which literally says, "...in all submission" describes someone who maintains the attitude of a student rather than becoming the teacher. He's asking them to trust Timothy and believe what he's teaching them. His words here are meant to establish Timothy's authority and calm a difficult situation, not define a woman's ministry potential.

2:12: Next, Paul says, "And I do not permit a woman [or wife] to teach or exercise [a self-taken] authority over a man [or husband] but to be in silence (hesuchia, literal)." In the flow of the sentence the words "teach" and "exercise [a self-taken] authority" seem to define one action rather than two. In other words, Paul is not talking about teaching and authority but teaching in a manner that exerts a particular kind of authority. And the kind of authority he wants these women to avoid is explained by the uncommon Greek word he chooses: "authentain." The common word for "authority" is "exousia," and Paul uses that word twelve times elsewhere in his letters. The word "authentain" is based on the personal pronoun for "self" (autos) and is used to describe someone who exercises a level of authority no one has given them. So by choosing this word, Paul reveals that his primary goal in this case is to restrain those who were putting themselves in a position of authority over Timothy and speaking to him as if he were their student. And since Timothy was Paul's representative, by disrespecting Timothy, they were disrespecting Paul himself. Naturally he would not want a man trying to exert autocratic authority over Timothy either, but that is not the issue he is addressing in this passage.

2:13-14: In verses 11 and 12 Paul told the Ephesian women to learn from Timothy peacefully, and of course, his implied message to Timothy was, "Don't back down when strong personalities confront you." Then, in verses 13 and 14, he warns those women who are being contentious that they have been spiritually deceived. His warning is based on the example of Adam and Eve because there is a striking similarity between the situation in Ephesus and the Garden of Eden. Adam was created first and lived in Eden for an unknown length of time prior to Eve. During that season when he was alone, God spoke to him and forbade him to eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil (Ge 2:16-17). He received that revelation directly from God Himself. However, Genesis does not record a similar incident involving Eve. It is certainly possible

to speculate that the topic of the forbidden fruit was discussed when the two humans walked together with the Lord “in the cool of the day” (Ge 3:8). But a literal reading of the text would indicate that Eve received her knowledge of this command from Adam rather than directly from God. And it is that literal scenario which Paul apparently had in mind because it turns these two verses into a powerful warning to the Ephesian women without disparaging them as a gender vulnerable to deception (“...but the woman being deceived,” v14). In fact, it turns this passage into a universally applicable principle, one which fits the crisis in Ephesus perfectly.

Here is that principle: If Eve heard the command about the fruit from Adam only, then an additional level of trust would have been required of her beyond what was required of Adam. So when she was tempted, she had to decide not only if she would obey the command but whether or not she actually believed that Adam’s report of what God said was accurate. So when she chose to rebel, she was rejecting both God’s command and the testimony of the person who relayed it to her. The serpent’s temptation may have planted a doubt in her mind that Adam had misunderstood what he heard (Ge 3:4-6). And in a similar way the Ephesian women had to choose whether or not to trust Paul’s report of the gospel which he claimed he had received directly from Jesus Christ. They had to trust that it was not a doctrine that he had invented or had been taught by another human teacher (Gal 1:11-12). Just as God spoke first to Adam, and then Adam spoke to Eve, God first spoke the gospel to Paul who then in turn spoke it to the Ephesians. By rejecting Adam’s report, Eve fell into deception, and by rejecting Paul’s report of the gospel, the women in that church would make the same mistake as Eve. She doubted Adam; they were doubting Paul and Timothy, his representative. Paul had taught Timothy the gospel and had placed him in charge of the Ephesian church. By listening to the voices of false teachers, the Ephesians were being deceived just as Eve had been deceived by the serpent. They needed to stop disrespecting Timothy and to trust that he was accurately presenting to them the gospel that leads to salvation. They needed to “learn quietly, without arguing,” with the attitude of a student rather than a teacher. And if they would do that, in time they would gain a solid, doctrinal foundation, and then they could rise to the levels of ministry to which God had called them.

We should be careful to note that in this discussion Adam and Paul are not simply representatives of men in general. They are humans selected by God to receive special revelation. Paul is not just another teacher, he is a true apostle, and in this case Timothy was his appointed representative. The analogy would not apply otherwise.

Transforming the heart

There is a remarkable theme that runs through Paul’s writings concerning women. On the one hand he tells them that gender restrictions have passed away, and they have become a “new creation,” but on the other hand he tells them to be respectful toward their husbands and humble in the way they deal with the men in the church. In saying both these things he is not being inconsistent; he is asking them to choose to live selflessly, in effect, to follow his own example (1Co 9:19) and ultimately Jesus’ example (Mt 20:26-28). Jesus focused, first of all, on winning the lost which is why He told His followers to “turn the other cheek” and “go the second mile” (Mt 5:39, 41). But He also understood the transformative power of the New Covenant that He was bringing. It would become like “leaven in a clump of dough” or like a “mustard seed thrown into a garden” (Mt 13:31-33). Changed hearts would change relationships, and changed people would transform the societies in which they lived. Paul’s goal was to change the hearts of both men and women, and when that happened, he knew both would be free to follow wherever the Lord leads.