

**What the
Christian Woman
Can Do in the Church**



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Front Cover

WHAT CAN A CHRISTIAN WOMAN DO IN THE CHURCH?

“For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, the is neither slave nor free, the is neither male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus” (Galatians 3:26–28).

CHRISTIANITY HAS EMANCIPATED WOMEN

By this statement, I believe Paul meant a number of things. Christianity has released women from virtual bondage, extricating them from the base position of a man's holdings or property and set them at liberty. Christianity gives the most exalted place for women of any religion or system of social ethics the world has ever known.

Judaism did not give the freedom that Christ did, however under Judaism women's position was very much higher than that of her counterpart in the world about her. She was honored as a mother. Great respect was paid to her. She was not an article of personal property, as chattel—furniture, livestock—although there was a bride price which was part of the transactions of marriage. Under Judaism, marriage was the transfer of authority over her from one man, her father, to another man, her husband.

Her husband could initiate divorce. He could give her a writing of divorcement. “When a man takes a wife and marries her, and it happens that she finds no favor in his eyes because he has found some uncleanness in her, and he writes her a certificate of divorce, puts it in her hand, and sends her out of his house, when she has departed from his house, and goes and becomes another man's wife ...” (Deuteronomy 24:1–2).

The Jewish school of Hillel believed and taught that *some indecency* could be just about anything the husband did not like about his wife, whereas the school of Shammal took the position that the *indecency* was a reference to adultery only. Whatever was the meaning of *indecency*, the command was issued to send her out of the house for the protection of the woman. In other words, the Jewish husband could not treat his wife like a slave and hold her in bondage.

1

The Position of the Woman in Paganism

In other cultures and religions, the woman was, and is, abused as the weaker vessel. The Koran, the sacred scriptures of some 580,000,000 Moslems in the world, does not accord women the important and dignified position shown her in

the New Testament. Look at these comparisons: "Men stand superior to women in that God has preferred some of them over others ..." (Koran, Sura 4:38). "But those whose perverseness you fear, admonish them and remove them into a bedchamber and beat them ..." (Koran, Sura 4:38f).

The New Testament says, "In truth I perceive that God shows no partiality ..." (Acts 10:34). "Husbands, likewise dwell with them with understanding, giving honor to the wife, as to the weaker vessel, and as being heirs together of the grace of life, that your prayers may not be hindered" (I Peter 3:7). The original Greek words which describe the attitude of the husband toward his wife and his treatment of her are understanding and honorable words which mean something of value and precious things. So, the apostle is saying to Christian husbands to "*treat your wives as precious possessions.*"

There is considerable difference in the character of a religion that instructs a husband to consider his wife as a *precious possession* and as an *heir together* with him of the grace of life, and a religion which says if you doubt your wife, *remove her into a bedroom and there beat her!*

In many places in the world, the woman's rights are decidedly reduced, her status is unconditionally and shamefully lowered, and enormous burdens are placed on her. In many cultures, she carries the heavy loads, becoming little more than a beast of burden in miserable drudgery and wretched toil. I have taught young men in other countries and in schools of preaching and Biblical studies that husbands should treat their wives with the greatest respect and consideration. Husbands must give their wives the assistance they need in caring for the children and in managing the domestic affairs of the home.

It is lamentable that the wife is made a plaything and a slave of the husband and, being the weaker vessel, is nearly always exploited.

2

WHAT IS WOMAN'S PLACE?

In spite of what has just been said about woman's treatment in some cultures and under some religions, we must face the fact that a woman is not a man. Clamoring for a man's place and position in life does not secure it for her. A woman has her own divinely appointed role and sphere in which God intended her to serve, and into which a man intrudes only when he is a fool. A man has a station also appointed by God, into which it is folly for a woman to intrude.

Woman's Place is Not Inferior Nor Less Honorable

A woman's place is not less honorable or less influential than that of a man. The station a woman occupies in the home and in society is seen in the attitude towards, and treatment of, her husband. "Husbands, love your wives, just as

Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her, that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word" (Ephesians 5:25–26).

She is said, by inspiration, "as being heirs together of the grace of life" (I Peter 3:7). Our text in this study declares that "in Christ we are all the children of God by faith," and that in this relationship, "... there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus" (Galatians 3:28).

The passage to which we gave attention earlier, I Peter 3:7, literally says, "Continue rendering honor to her." Accord her all the consideration and thoughtfulness that God intended the husband to give to his wife in her wifely relationship.

Both Peter and Paul assert that the wife must be in *subjection* to her husband. "Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord" (Ephesians 5:22). "Therefore, just as the church is subject to Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in everything" (Ephesians 5:24). Peter puts it into this language: they were "submissive to their own husbands" (I Peter 3:5).

Some have interpreted this to be inferior, but subjection is not inferiority. One can be subject to another and still be equal. Jesus was always subject to the Father, but He is said to be equal with God. "Who, being in the form of God, did not consider

3

it robbery to be equal with God" (Philippians 2:6). Jesus Himself said, "I and My Father are one" (John 10:30).

Long years later the writer of the Hebrew letter said concerning Jesus, "Who being the brightness of His glory and the express image of His person ..." (Hebrews 1:3). The term *express image* is from the Greek word *charakter* and it means "an engraving, an imprint, an exact expression; the essential quality, nature or kind."

Although Jesus was one with the Father, and of the same essence, He said, "for My Father is greater than I" (John 14:28). One may ask, "How can God be greater than Jesus, if they are equal and one?" It may be said that *officially* God is greater. Jesus frequently made statements to show that this is true. "I must work the works of Him who sent Me while it is day ..." (John 9:4). "My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me, and to finish His work" (John 4:34). "Nevertheless, not as I will, but as you will" (Matthew 26:39).

SUBJECTION IS NOT INFERIORITY

Let me give some emphasis to this thought by illustrating it. In my growing up, I was subject to my parents. Never, at any time, did they endeavor to make me feel that I was of less worth than they were. In fact, they had a way of making me perceive that I had an excellence and importance which they never attached to themselves. Despite this grace of theirs to make me know that I was someone of

value, I was still subject to them. I did not disobey them, nor did I ever show disrespect for their authority. I was subject, but not inferior.

In public school and, later, in the university, I was subject to my teachers and professors. It was in rank or office that I was subject to them, but this had nothing to do with my equality to them, and had no bearing on my value as compared to them. My rank or office did not indicate that I was defective or second-rate.

Ever since I have attained the age of accountability, I have been in subjection to civil authorities. I have respect for law and I hold in esteem those we are appointed to enforce it, but no one counts me inferior to civil government, as far as I know. I am

4

subject to civil government as the Bible teaches me to be. "Let every soul be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and the authorities that exist are appointed by God" (Romans 13:1). Because I am not inferior to civil government does not mean that I would be justified to make a loud, noisy, and clamorous demand that I be free to say and act in any way that pleases me.

This discussion about the role of the Christian woman in the church is not a question concerning her worth or her importance. Her excellence is already well known and established. It is her sphere of service to which we will give attention. This topic is not about her *intrinsic value*. It has to do with her usefulness and the boundaries of her function. Does her boundary differ from man's? Is the area of her service to God the same as that of man in the church?

SOME THINGS SHE CANNOT DO IN THE CHURCH

There are some things a Christian woman is restricted from doing. You may say that this is the spirit of male chauvinism and an unreasoning belief in the superiority of men over women. Indeed, it is not. It simply means that God has a place for the Christian woman in service to Him and this post of duty is not always the same function as that to which man has been assigned. We need to understand that certain restraints are placed upon both men and women. Yes, men are restrained also. "But if there is no interpreter, let him keep silent in church, and let him speak to himself and to God" (I Corinthians 14:28).

Some Things She is Restricted From Doing

1. **She Cannot be the Head of Man.** "But I want you to know that the head of every man is Christ, the head of woman is man, and the head of Christ is God" (I Corinthians 11:3).

The noun *head* is translated as the Greek word *kephale*. It is defined in the standard Greek dictionaries as "Chief, principal, one to who others are

subordinate." The chain of command is this: God, Christ, man, woman. In other passages the chain of command is continued. The parents are the head over the children (Ephesians 6:1-4).

5

In a society where slavery is practiced, the servant is to be in subjection to the headship of his master. Christianity does not condone slavery, but tells the Christian how he should conduct himself in such a culture. "Bondservants, obey in all things your masters according to the flesh ..." (Colossians 3:22). The master was given instruction regarding his attitude toward, and his treatment of, his slaves. "Masters, give you bondservants what is just and fair ..." (Colossians 4:1).

The principle is that of *headship* and, in simple terms, he is saying that the woman cannot be *the head over man*. "Wives, submit to your own husbands, in the Lord" (Ephesians 5:22). This verbal noun in the Greek is translated *submit* in English. This is an accurate translation of the word *hupotasso* and is defined "to place or arrange under." Inasmuch as this is in the **middle voice**, it carries the idea of *submitting one's self*. In other words, that bringing one's self under the state or influence of another has to be a voluntary matter. The person is not forced or coerced to do so. The teaching in this is that in God's arrangement for service rendered by both men and women, the woman cannot be the head over the man.

2. She Cannot Exercise Dominion Over Man. "And I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man ..." (I Timothy 2:12). These are two verbs, *teach* and *exercise authority*, and they are in the infinitive form. So, literally, they are rendered *to teach* and *to exercise authority*. But, verbs of *ruling* carry the genitive case, which says, "The woman cannot *teach over* or *exercise dominion over* the man."

To put it in our language, "I will not leave the control and management of the Lord's house to the woman." It certainly does not say that the woman cannot teach, for there are many passages which tell us that she most assuredly can; but it just as explicitly says she cannot *teach over him*, and she cannot *exercise dominion over him*.

3. She Cannot Lead Public Prayer. "I desire therefore that the men pray everywhere, lifting up holy hands, without wrath and doubting" (I Timothy 2:8). The most common word for *man* in the New Testament is *anthropos*. This is a generic or general term for man and simply means a *human being* and has reference to

6

both male and female. This word is used 516 times in the New Testament. The word used in this text, however, is *aner*. It is used 150 times in the New Testament and most often refers to man in contrast to woman. And, as far as I am

able to tell, it is always used in contrast when it has the *articulate noun*. Paul said, "I desire—that **the men pray everywhere...**" in contrast to women.

The Living Commentary observes: "Paul's use of **the men** is emphatic to women, and this emphasis continues through verse 15. All men could pray in the assembly, as in the synagogue. The phrase **in every place** probably signifies the public gathering of the church" (page 45–46). *The Pulpit Commentary* makes this statement "He gives further directions as to the persons who are to make the prayers ... viz., **men**, not women." The stress is clearly upon **the men**. Then, he comments in verse one that the prayers had already been offered. The additional detail that they were to be offered by men is not added.

Lenski, in his comment on the verse, says, "The men only and no women whatsoever are to do the praying in public worship of the congregations. ... In ever congregation only men are to lead in public prayer and not women." This is not restricting the woman from praying, but it prohibits her praying in public worship.

4. She Cannot be a Public Preacher or Teacher of the Word of God. "Let your women keep silent in the churches" (I Corinthians 14:34). This was a long established principle. Even the Law forbade it. What Law? God's law established in creation and to which Paul refers in I Timothy 2:13, "For Adam was formed first, then Eve." And then he said, "For Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived, fell into transgression" (I Timothy 2:14).

I do not understand all about this—the reason or the purpose, but I believe it because God said it. The rule is positive, explicit, and universal. Of this one thing I can be sure: there is no ambiguity in the expression "And I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over the man, but to be in silence" (I Timothy 2:12). How far reaching is this prohibition to be a public preacher or teacher of the gospel? Does this restrict her from singing in the public worship? Can she confess in public that she believes that

7

Jesus Christ is the Son of God? Or, can she acknowledge her sins as an erring child of God? I believe that the Bible teaches that she can do all these things (Colossians 3:16; Ephesians 5:19; Matthew 10:32–33). Rather, she is to be governed by that long established principle, to which we have already given attention, viz., *she cannot be man's head, not can she teach over, or exercise dominion over, the man.*

5. She Cannot be an Elder in the Lord's Church. In setting forth the requirements which would qualify a man to be an elder, bishop, or overseer, Paul, in his letters to both Timothy and Titus said, "the husband of one wife" (I Timothy 3:2; Titus 1:6). Literally, the expression is *one wife's husband*.

It has not been uncommon for women in denominational churches to be appointed to the office of elder. I preached for some time some years ago for a church in

Central Africa, which, after I left the country, appointed a woman to their eldership. However, for man to take such action does not guarantee that God recognized her as an elder. What I am saying is that simply because man may call a woman an elder and go through some process or ceremony to appoint her, does not mean that she is, indeed, an elder. One may say, "I am a Christian," but that may not be so. I may tell you that I am the President of the United States or the king of England, but that is not true. So, to appoint a woman to be an elder does not make it so!

A Christian woman, the wife of an elder, has tremendous influence on him. She can help him function properly and grow to his potential of great service in the local congregation. Her life is melded with his and may God bless her in this important role.

WHAT THE CHRISTIAN WOMAN CAN DO

We have been examining the negative side of this question—what the Christian woman is not permitted to do in the church. Now, I would like to look at the positive side of this important and challenging question.

1. **She Can Expound the Word of God.** "So he began to speak boldly in the synagogue. When Aquila and Priscilla heard him they took him aside and explained to him the way of God more

8

accurately" (Acts 18:26). In the King James or Authorized Version of the New Testament, the word which is used here is translated *explained*. In the New International Version, it is *expounded*.

The Greek word is *ektithemi*, and the lexicons define it "to explain, set forth, declare." The example we have of this Christian woman explaining or declaring the word of God more accurately to a man, was in the presence of her husband in a private situation.

In addition to her having the God-given prerogative of teaching a man in a private setting, she may teach her husband. "... even if some do not obey the word, they without a word, may be won by the conduct of their wives, when they observe your chaste conduct accompanied by fear" (I Peter 3:1-2).

This passage clearly teaches by implication that a wife may instruct her husband in God's word, but, if he cannot or refuses to be won by her endeavor to teach him, it may be that the constancy and faithfulness of her Christian example will accomplish the task of converting him to Christ. I believe that one may deduce that she may teach a man as long as she does not violate the principle already enunciated—*usurping authority, exercising dominion over man*.

2. **She Can Pray and Prophecy.** "But every woman who prays or prophesies ..." (I Corinthians 11:5). We have previously learned that she could not do this in

the public assembly. That was a long established principle restated and given a new emphasis. We also learned that her praying and prophesying cannot be in a leadership role. Philip had four daughters who prophesied (Acts 21:9). The word in this text is *propheteuosal* and it means, "to set forth a matter of divine teaching."

In the first century, to prophesy was a special faculty. That is, it was a miraculous spiritual gift. There are no prophets in this sense now. One can still set forth a matter of divine teaching. A Christian woman can do so by opening the Bible to instruct someone in its everlasting truths.

3. She Can Guide the Home. "Therefore I desire that the younger widows marry, bear children, manage the home ..."

9

(I Timothy 5:14). The expression *manage the home* is from *oikodespotes*, and means "to occupy one's self in the management of a household. It is a term characteristic of the emphasis on family virtues" (Kittel). This, of course, would have to do with the teaching and guidance of children. The management of this household is not left to her hands without consideration of, or reference to, her husband who is the head of the family. It means that in consultation with her husband, and with his advice and council, her task is to guide and manage the home.

Some families seem to feel that it is the obligation of the church to see that their children are kept in line both morally and spiritually and, if their children go astray, the church has failed in its duty to them. It would be a grave mistake to delegate all of the child's spiritual development to the church and it would be foolish if the parents did not seek the help of Christians in the church in the child's spiritual development if it were needed.

4. She May School Others. "That they admonish the young women to love their husbands, to love their children, to be discreet, chaste, homemakers, good, obedient to their own husbands, that the word of God may not be blasphemed" (Titus 2:4-5). The word which is translated *teach* in some versions, and *train* in the New International Version comes from a Greek word, *sophronizo*, which, according to the New Testament language scholars, means *to make sober minded, to steady by exhortation and guidance* (Analytical Greek Lexicon).

In this verse, Paul is instructing Titus to use *older women to school the younger women* by, figuratively, *laying their hands on their shoulders to steady them*. This involves showing them the way, but it also involves teaching them to be *husband lovers* and *child lovers*, and to occupy themselves in the domestic affairs of the home. Let me emphasize that in such a role the Christian woman is required to do a great deal of teaching. In this instance it is that intense and careful teaching that is designated in this passage as *schooling*.

5. She Can be a Servant of the Church. "I commend to you Phoebe our sister, who is a servant of the church in Cenchrea,

that you may receive her in the Lord in a manner worthy of the saints, and assist her in whatever business she has need of you; for indeed she has been a helper of many and of myself also" (Romans 16:1-2).

There are several words in the New Testament which are translated by the single English word, *servant*. One of these words for *servant* means *a slave, bondsman*. Another word is *hired servant*, but this one is a *deacon* and he *renders service voluntarily, out of love, unselfishly and for the benefit of others*. The form of this Greek word is *deaconess*, here applied to Phoebe, and it means that she was the kind of servant who executed the commands of God and ministered to others unselfishly, voluntarily, out of love, and always for the benefit of other people. It says, "she was a great help to many people."

6. **She Can Teach and Admonish** (Ephesians 5:19; Colossians 3:16). The context of this *teaching and admonishing* is that of worship wherein she may accomplish the desired end by **singing**. It has been stated repeatedly in the course of this study that the Bible prohibits the Christian woman from *teaching over, or exercising authority over* the man in the Lord's church. This passage says that she can still *teach and admonish* without infracting the former prohibition, or without, in any way, violating this long established principle.

CONCLUSION

From what we have seen in the New Testament concerning the role of the Christian woman in the church, we may conclude that no one can better use their life and ability as an influence to lead others to Christ than can she. The husband who is not a Christian may be won by his wife's behavior. "Wives, likewise, be submissive to your own husbands, that even if some do not obey

the word, they, without a word, may be won by the conduct of their wives, when they observe your chaste conduct accompanied by fear" (I Peter 3:1-2). "For in this manner, in former times, the holy women who trusted in God also adorned themselves, being submissive to their own husbands" (I Peter 3:5).

There is no substitute for the example and influence of the Christian wife and mother. Abraham Lincoln once said, "No man is poor who has a godly mother." Thackeray wrote, "Mother is the name for God in the lips and hearts of little children." The Jewish Talmud asks, "Who is best taught?" Then answers, "He who first learned from his mother."



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