

WOMEN AND GOD'S ORDER FOR THE NEW TESTAMENT CHURCH

With so much pressure being applied across the broad spectrum of Christianity for the ordination of women to public ministry in the church, the question needs to be asked; "do scriptures permit women to lead, to teach, to exercise authority over men in the New Testament church?" What do scriptures teach – they alone have the answer, which we are duty-bound to humbly accept.

There are numerous references to women in the New Testament, but nowhere does scripture permit them to teach or exercise authority over men in the church (CP 1Cor 14:34-35). Paul is dealing with the disruption of worship by wives in the church here. He is forbidding them talking over the top of their husbands and asking questions which could be more appropriately asked at home. The women were obviously out of control, having no regard for their husbands' headship over them, for Paul had to rebuke them for not being submitted to their husbands as God had commanded after the fall (CP V35 with Gen 3:13-16; 1Cor 11:2-10; Eph 5:22-24; Col 3:18; Tit 2:5; 1Pe 3:1). The Corinthian believers – both men and women – behaved as though God's word started and finished with them, and they were not accountable to God for their behaviour. Paul rebuked them and told them that if they really were spiritual they would know that what he said was a divine command and had to be obeyed (CP 1Cor 14:36-38).

Although Paul was dealing with wives in particular in a specific situation in 1Cor 14:34-35, he was nonetheless laying down a principle of submission commanded by God that is binding on all women in the church in all situations, in all ages (CP 1Ti 2:8-15). Paul is dealing with the general conduct of all women in the church here. It has to do with church order and the position of men and women in the church and work. Many in the church believe that Paul's prohibition of women teaching and exercising authority over men here only applied to the women of his era because of their cultural background. But that is not correct.

What Paul says here has nothing to do with the cultural background of the women of his era, which many in the contemporary church claim to justify the ordination of women in the church today. What Paul is dealing with here has to do with church order and the position of men and women in the church for all time. In V 8 Paul wants men, as opposed to women, to conduct public worship in the church. *Men* here is from the Greek word **aner**, which refers specifically to a male person. In V12 Paul forbids women holding down any position of authority over men in the church. The word *teach* here means "teacher" (CP Ac 13:1; 1Cor 12:28-29; Eph 4:11-12; 1Ti 4:13). Women cannot be teachers to instill doctrine and instruct men. They can teach other women, girls, children (boys and girls), and they can assist their husbands and others in their ministerial duties (CP Ac 18:24-26 with 1Cor 16:19; Ro 16:1-15; Php 4:3; Tit 2:3-5). Women can also educate, proclaim the truth, exhort, pray and prophesy (CP Ac 2:17-18; 21:8-9;

1Cor 11:5). But women cannot be ordained to public office in the church and exercise authority over men (CP 1Ti 2:11).

Being silent "with all subjection" means that women must submit themselves to God's order for the church which Paul is laying down here. In V13-14 Paul explains his opposition to women in leadership positions in the church is found in the original order of creation, and in the circumstances of the fall of man (CP 1Ti 2:13-14). Man (Adam), was formed first, then woman (Eve). Man was not deceived but woman was, and it is as a result of women's vulnerability to deception, and her subordinate role to man in the divine order, that prohibits women from exercising authority over men in the New Testament church (CP Gen 2:18; 3:1-6, 13-16). Women's subordinate role to men in the church was not decided by Paul due to the culture of the day. It was established by God as part of His divine order of creation (CP 1Ti 2:15).

This is one of the most intensely debated scriptures in Christendom. It provides a rationale for Paul's prohibition of women in leadership positions over men in the New Testament church. The salvation spoken of in V15 is not salvation in the ordinary sense of the word, as when repentant sinners put their faith in the atoning work of Christ to be saved from eternal damnation. Here it means that childbearing, rather than occupying a position of leadership in the church, is women's primary function in God's eternal order. It is in the discharge of that function, through the faithful performance as a wife and mother in raising up Godly children, that a woman will find fulfillment in God's purpose for her. (CP 5:14). Being a wife and a mother is a more important role for a woman to fulfill in God's order than occupying a leadership position exercising authority over men in the church. Women still have to work out their own salvation though "... if they continue in faith and charity and holiness with sobriety" (CP Php 2:12-13 with Jn 6:27 and 2Pe 1:10-11).

There are also some in the church who claim that *man* in 1Ti 2:12 refers to a husband, and *woman* to a wife. They believe that this teaching only concerns husbands and wives, as in 1Cor 14. But that is not correct. In 1Ti 2:12 Paul is referring to women generally, because all women who profess Godliness, regardless of their marital status, are to dress modestly and not draw attention to themselves in the assembly by any form of immoderate conduct (CP V9-10). This clearly proves that Paul is dealing with the general conduct of all women in the church in 1Ti 2:8-14, not with the relationship between a husband and wife, as in 1Cor 14 (CP 1Cor 14:34-35). Some in the church argue against this teaching on the basis of Paul's teaching in Ga 3:28, that there is no distinction between men and women; that they are all one in Christ. But that has nothing to do with what Paul is saying about women in 1Ti 2:8-15 (CP Ga 3:28). Paul is speaking in spiritual terms here. There will always be distinctions between the races, social

classes, and the sexes in the natural realm, but not in the spiritual realm. Men and women are one in Christ and equal in rights and privileges regarding gospel benefits. There is no longer any gulf between Jews and Gentiles, masters and slaves, and male and female. All are one in unity, in rights, and in privileges, and comprise one body, of which Christ is the head (CP Jn 10:16; 17:11, 20-23; Ro 3:22; 10:12:12:5; 1Cor 12:12-14; Eph 1:22-23; 2:11-22; Col 3:11). The only difference between Christians is their function within the body of Christ (CP Ro 12:4, 6-8; 1Cor 12:7-11, 28-31; 2Cor 10:13; Eph 4:11; 1Ti 2:12-15; 1Pe 4:10).

There is no mandate anywhere in scripture that permits women to teach or exercise authority over men in the New Testament church, regardless of their cultural background. What Paul forbade under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit in the first century church is forbidden in the contemporary church also – God's word stands forever (CP Psalms 119:89; Lu 21:33; 1Pe 1:23-25). There is no allowance in scripture whatever for God's word to be adapted to suit cultural changes in women that justifies their ordination to public office in the contemporary church, as many would have us believe (CP 1Ti 3:1-7; Tit 1:4-9).

These scriptures clearly teach that those to whom God has committed the government and direction of the New Testament church are men – bishops who are also called elders. Their names are interchangeable. The Greek words **episkopos** for bishop, and **presbuteros** for elder, both only refer to a male. This is further confirmed by the fact that anyone aspiring to the office of bishop or elder must be the husband of one wife, if married. There is no provision here for a woman to aspire to that office – they are excluded by scripture. Likewise deacons who assist the elders in their ministry, also can only ever be male. Like bishops, they too must be the husband of one wife, if married (CP 1Ti 3:8-13). *The husband of one wife* means literally a “one-woman man”, not given to infidelity. We learn here also that there is no authority for women deacons – so-called deaconesses – in the New Testament church either.

Those who argue for women deacons claim that the Greek word **gune**, referring to wives in V11-12, also means women generally – without reference to marital status – and that is correct. But whether it refers to a woman generally, or a wife specifically, is determined by the context in which it is used. Here it is clearly used in a husband and wife relationship (CP V12). This is not referring to women deacons, but the wives of men deacons if they are married. The same as 1Ti 3:1-7 refers to male bishops or elders and

their wives if they are married. This also refutes the teaching in the church that Phebe was a so-called deaconess in the church at Cenchrea (CP Ro 16:1-2). This simply teaches that Phebe was a servant of the church in Cenchrea. It does not mean that she was a deacon as outlined in 1Ti 3:8-13, as many Christians have been led to believe.

We get a better insight into Phebe's ministry in the church at Cenchrea from a study of the word *succorer* by which Paul described her in V2 (KJV). This defines her as caring for the affairs of others; who helps and aids them from her resources (CP Ro 16:2). *Succorer* is from the Greek word **prostatis**, which is the feminine form of patron, or protector. It was used by the Greeks to describe those who care for and entertain strangers in their home. Phebe was evidently a woman of means who ministered to the needs of others in the church at Cenchrea and looked after Paul and his companions on his apostolic mission journeys there.

Those who argue for women leaders in the New Testament church curiously interpret the fact that three times in scripture Priscilla's name is used before her husband, Aquila, as proof that she was more prominent in the first century church than he was. This is claimed despite the fact that the other three times she and Aquila are referred to in scripture, Aquila is named first. Suffice it to say, in accordance with scripture, she assisted both Aquila and Paul in their ministries. They were also tentmakers, like Paul (CP Ac 18:2, 18, 26; Ro 16:3-4; 1Cor 16:19; 2Ti 4:19). We see in these scriptures that Aquila and Priscilla also had a church in their home.

To sum up here, there are many women who served with great distinction in the first century church, but none in a leadership capacity. In searching the scriptures we can only find male leadership in the New Testament church as the model for relationship between the sexes, and we should accept that at face value as God's order for His church. We cannot supplant God's order and replace it with another. However admirable it may be for women to want to serve God in this capacity, it can never be. God has decreed the New Testament church to be under the authority of men only, and until He revokes that decree women who undertake leadership roles in the church are not in His divine order. It should be noted in closing here too that notwithstanding that the Old Testament bears record to God using women in leadership positions, it has no bearing on His purposes for women in the New Testament church. We must abide by New Testament teaching.