

Women in Ministry? Pt. 1
Biblical Examples of Women in Leadership

I. Principles and Praxis

A. We should not form doctrines without considering the way those doctrines are actually employed in the biblical narrative. To divorce doctrine from demonstrated biblical practice will cause us to come to inaccurate conclusions. Simply said, the biblical narrative should inform our theology, rather than our theology being formed apart from the biblical narrative.

B. In the biblical narrative there are biblical principles and there are biblical practices. The practices we see administered by leaders in the Old and New Testament should line up with our understanding of the principles those very leaders taught. If somehow what we understand as the principles of Scripture do not line up with the praxis of those in leadership, it is likely that our understanding of the principles is incorrect.

II. Twelve Biblical Examples of Women Preaching, Teaching or Giving Leadership in the Bible

A. Deborah was declared by God to be a prophet and was the leader over the entire nation of Israel for a period of time (Judges 4-5). Although she was a married woman, we are told that it is Deborah, not her husband, who was the judge of Israel (4:4). The entire 5th chapter of the Book of Judges is a prophetic song co-authored by Deborah.

B. Miriam is also called a prophet and is named as having been “sent before” the nation of Israel alongside Moses and Aaron (Exo 15:20; Mic 6:4).

C. In 2 Kings 22:8-20, Huldah is identified as a prophet of God. When King Josiah is presented with the Book of the Law, he sends the high priest and some of his governmental leaders to “inquire of the Lord.” Rather than going to Jeremiah, Zephaniah, or Habakkuk, all of whom were contemporaries of Josiah, the high priest and leaders go to the prophetess Huldah. Huldah then gives instruction to these men and gives a prophecy for the king, which includes judgment and revival.

D. Abigail humbly instructed David not to sin by murdering Nabal and offering to him and alternate way to deal with him (1 Sam 25:23-31).

E. In the New Testament, Anna is identified as a prophet. As an old woman and a widow, she served as an evangelist as she “spoke about the child to all who were looking forward to the redemption of Jerusalem” (Luk 2:36-38).

F. Contrary to the prevailing culture of the day, which thought it a disgrace for a woman to be taught the Torah, Jesus gave focused instruction to Mary of Bethany. When Mary's sister Martha tried to get Jesus to tell Mary to attend to domestic duties instead of being instructed by Him, Jesus corrected Martha and told her that Mary had chosen the good part (Luk 10:38-42).

G. The Samaritan woman at the well became the first evangelist to Samaria, leading both men and women to believe in Jesus (John 4).

H. When Jesus was resurrected, Mary Magdalene and "the other Mary" received an angelic visitation, an encounter with the resurrected Jesus, and a directional prophetic word to give to the men. In fact, it could be rightly stated that these two Marys were the very first ministers of the resurrection. Both the angel and Jesus told these women to instruct the men as to what they were supposed to do ("go to Galilee").

I. Priscilla, alongside her husband Aquila, instructed the great Apollos, teaching him the way of God more adequately than he had previously understood (Act 18:27).

J. It is noted that Philip's four unmarried daughters prophesied (Act 21:9).

K. There were both men and women in the upper room (Act 1:13-15) on the day of Pentecost when the Spirit was poured out on all of them and they all began to speak in tongues. Peter even explains to the crowd that Joel had previously prophesied that the Spirit would be poured out on all flesh, male and female, and that both sons and daughters would prophesy (Act 2).

L. Phoebe was commended by Paul as a deaconess of the church of Cenchrea, one who served Paul and the believers

III. Key Questions

A. The above examples require us to think through what we actually believe about the role of women in the Church.

B. Does your interpretation of the Bible regarding women's roles preclude:

1. Deborah from judging, leading, and prophesying to Israel?
2. Miriam from being sent before Israel alongside Moses and Aaron?
3. Huldah from giving instructions about the Book of the Law to the High Priest and governmental officials?
4. Abigail from instructing David?
5. Anna from serving as a prophet and an evangelist to both men and women?

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6. The Samaritan woman from being the first evangelist in Samaria, proclaiming Jesus to both men and women?
7. The two Marys from teaching the men that Jesus had been resurrected?
8. Priscilla from teaching Apollos?
9. Philip's four unmarried daughters from prophesying?
10. The women from the upper room going into the streets and speaking in tongues to be heard and interpreted by men?
11. Any of these women who have been used as God's mouthpiece to author the eternal word of God from preaching in a pulpit at a church service, instructing men, or leading men and women in a church as they led in various capacities in days of old?

C. If God used women to author portions of Holy Scripture, which is authoritative in all ages to instruct both men and women, how would we now believe that women cannot be used to teach those very Scriptures to both men and women?

11:15 Notes Below

Women in Ministry? Pt. 2

Does 1 Timothy Chapter 2:9-15 Prohibit Women from Teaching in Church?

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1Ti 2:9-15 I also want the women to dress modestly, with decency and propriety, adorning themselves not with elaborate hairstyles or gold or pearls or expensive clothes, 10 but with good deeds, appropriate for women who profess to worship God. 11 A woman should learn in quietness and full submission. 12 I do not permit a woman to teach or to assume authority over a man; she must be quiet. 13 For Adam was formed first, then Eve. 14 And Adam was not the one deceived; it was the woman who was deceived and became a sinner. 15 But women will be saved through childbearing—if they continue in faith, love and holiness with propriety. (NIV)

IV. Principles and Praxis

A. If 1Timothy 2:11 is interpreted to mean that women are not allowed to teach or have authority over any adult male, then each of the following biblical scenarios should have never been allowed:

1. Deborah being a prophet and judging the entire nation of Israel;
2. Miriam being a prophet sent before the nation of Israel alongside Moses and Aaron;
3. Huldah instructing Josiah, the king, the high priest, and other male governmental leaders regarding the Book of the Law;
4. The Samaritan woman from the well preaching to both men and women about Jesus;
5. Mary Magdalene and “the other Mary” instructing the Apostles that Jesus had been resurrected;
6. The women from the Upper Room “declaring the wonders of God” to the men of various nations gathered in Jerusalem for Pentecost;
7. Priscilla teaching Apollos, “the way of God more accurately.”

B. Since the biblical narrative doesn’t support an interpretation that disallows women from all of the above occurrences, we have to come to the conclusion that such an interpretation is not consistent with the volume of Scripture.

C. Whatever Paul is saying in this passage must reinforce what the volume of Scripture teaches about the role of women.

D. If we consider Paul’s example we find that he affirmed and commended the ministries of several women: Phoebe, Priscilla, and Junia (Rom 16:1-7)

V. Paul’s Example

Romans 16:1-7 I commend to you Phoebe our sister, who is a servant of the church in Cenchrea, 2 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. 3 Greet Priscilla and Aquila, my fellow workers in Christ Jesus, 4 who risked their own necks for my life, to whom not only I give thanks, but also all the churches of the Gentiles. 5 Likewise greet the church that is in their house. Greet my beloved Epaenetus, who is the firstfruits of Achaia to Christ. 6 Greet Mary, who labored much for us. 7 Greet Andronicus and Junia, my countrymen and my fellow prisoners, who are of note among the apostles, who also were in Christ before me.

A. Paul described Phoebe as a deacon of the church in Cenchrea. A deacon was a church leader who had to meet certain qualifications in order to serve in the church (1 Tim 3:8-13). He encouraged the church at Rome to aid Phoebe because she had poured herself out, serving many of the believers, including Paul Himself.

B. Next, Paul affirmed Priscilla, naming her before her husband Aquilla. Some scholars see this as a reference to her being the senior spiritual teacher of the two. Otherwise, she may not have been mentioned at all. Paul names them both as his own “fellow workers” (Rom 16:3), describing how they both led the church in their own home and how the both risked their lives for himself and all the majority Gentile churches. As fellow workers, they were both involved in preaching, teaching, and leadership of the church.

C. Paul also affirmed Junia, along with her husband Andronicus, as ones who were imprisoned with Paul and, “outstanding among the apostles.” (Rom 16:7) It seems very likely that they were imprisoned for preaching the gospel, having been in Christ longer than Paul and respected by him. Commentators are split about the meaning of the phrase, “outstanding among the apostles.” Some take it to mean that the apostles respected Andronicus and Junia greatly. Others take it to mean that they were outstanding apostles themselves. John Chrysostom, John Calvin, and Martin Luther all held this view. I believe it is the more likely interpretation that Junia, being a female, was an apostle.

VI. Grammatical Considerations

A. There are several indicators within the language that Paul uses that narrow the scope of the passage considerably.

1. The Greek words that are sometimes translated “man” (Gr: Aner) and “woman” (Gr: Gune) in this passage can also be translated “husband” and “wife.”

a. When considering how Paul usually uses these terms in other passages (Rom 7:2-3; 1 Cor 7:2-4, 10-14, 16, 27, 29, 33-34, 39; 14:34-35; Eph 5:22-25, 28, 31, 33; Col 3:18-19; 1 Tim 3:2, 3:11-12; 5:9; Titus 1:6) as well as this one, it becomes clear that Paul had husbands and wives in mind when he was giving these specific instructions.

b. The mention of Adam and Eve in verses 13 and 14 further reinforces the idea that this was Paul’s intention. This minor clarification changes the overall thrust of his instructions quite a bit.

c. Paul wasn't addressing how women and men were to operate in the church at large; he was specifically addressing how Christian husbands and wives were to operate in the society.

B. Regarding the word "silent" in this passage, David M. Scholer, late Professor of New Testament at Fuller Theological Seminary, provides the following helpful insights:

1. "The word in verses 11 and 12 often translated as "in quietness" (11) and "silent" (12) is identical in Greek. The same term is used by Paul in 2 Thessalonians 3:12, which the NIV translates as "settle down." The point is that this term, which is often assumed to mean only "verbal silence," is better understood as an indication of proper order or acceptance of normal practice.

2. Scholer's point is that the Greek term translated, "quiet" and "silence" should more likely be translated as "settle down" or "quietly". The use of these words are not to be considered as a universal prohibition on women speaking, but rather an appeal to women to carry themselves in modesty and propriety when speaking to their husbands publicly.

C. Scholer goes on to explain the term translated, "to have authority": "The term translated "to have authority" (authentein) occurs only here in the New Testament and was rarely used in the Greek language. It is not the usual word for positive, active authority. Rather, it is a negative term, which refers to the usurpation and abuse of authority. Thus, the prohibition (2:11–12) is against some abusive activity, but not against the appropriate exercise of teaching and authority in the church.

D. By comparing Scripture with Scripture we find that the terms translated "silent" and "to have authority" should more likely be interpreted "settle down", "quietly" and "usurp authority". It's far more likely that Paul was instructing the wives to maintain a settled attitude of quietness and submission so as not to upset the witness of the church with unbelievers in the city.

VII. Cultural Issues

A. When we look at the entire chapter of 1 Timothy 2, it's easy to see that beginning in verse 9 Paul begins to give specific instructions for how women are to govern themselves. While Paul's encouragement for modesty and propriety should be universally applied, most people recognize that the specific prohibitions are only culturally applicable to that time.

1. Unless we believe that these prohibitions apply universally to the church without regard to the culture of the day, we must see the prohibitions as culturally relevant in the first century.
2. If we agree that vs. 9-10 have an era-related cultural application then we must agree that the prohibitions of verses 11-12 have an equally era-related cultural application.

B. So why was Paul addressing the specifics of women's clothing and adornment?

1. At the beginning of 1 Timothy 2 Paul makes it clear that he has a specific goal in mind, that the believers, "may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness"(vs. 2).
2. In his epistles, Paul often encouraged the churches to operate in behaviors that conformed to the societal norms of the day for the sake of an "ethical apologetic" (1 Thess 4:11-12; Col 4:5; Phil 4:5; Titus 2:3-10; 3:1-8).
3. He emphasizes this very thing in chapter 3 when discussing the qualifications for overseers, stating that they must have, "a good reputation with outsiders" (1 Tim 3:7).

C. From verse 1-8 of 1 Timothy 2 Paul emphasizes the missional calling of believers to the society. In verse 9-10 Paul appeals to modesty, decency, and propriety as a means for the women to live lives in godliness and holiness.

1. The reason behind this instruction is that in Ephesus at the time temple prostitutes dressed in the manner he was discouraging. He didn't want the women of the church to be confused with the prostitutes of the day. Therefore, Paul gave the prohibitions regarding dress and hairstyles so that the women in the church would not be labeled as prostitutes and bring a reproach to the gospel.
2. At the same time women who were boisterous or loud would also be identified as acting improperly toward their husbands and seen as a stumbling block to the unbelievers. Paul's admonishment to be quiet and not act domineeringly was an encouragement for the women to live in accordance with the cultural norms of the day. He wanted the family unit to portray an appropriate stability that would draw unbelievers instead of repel them.

VIII. Conclusion

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A. Taking the societal context into account and considering some of the grammatical cues from the passage, it becomes clear that Paul's so called prohibition of women teaching in the church was actually an appeal for wives to abide by societal norms in the family. He wanted them to be able to witness the Gospel without unnecessarily being a stumbling block to unbelievers.

B. He comments on the creation order as a reminder of the reasoning behind appropriate headship in the home. (I recognize that a full discussion of biblical headship is needed. That will have to wait for another day) He explains that because of the sin of the fall and its subsequent curse, women are subject to their husbands. And though they receive increased pain in childbearing, they can be confident that the Lord will preserve and deliver them even through the difficulty of it as they live vibrantly in faith, love, and holiness.

C. In this light, I'm offering the following paraphrase of 1Timothy 2:9-15 as a reasonable alternative to understanding what Paul's intention was in these verses:

"Since it would be offensive to the unbelievers around you for wives to go around wearing the same attire that prostitutes wear, please don't wear elaborate hairstyles, gold, pearls, or expensive clothes. Likewise, since Greek culture finds it offensive for women to get out of alignment with societal norms, wives, make sure that you are peaceable when you are publicly receiving instruction from your husbands. Don't act in a domineering way toward him by being instructive with him. If you're wondering why I am saying that wives should submit to their husbands, I will remind you of two reasons: 1) Adam was created first, then Eve was created (this is a picture of the coequal Persons of the Trinity having distinct roles). 2) It wasn't Adam that was deceived first, it was Eve, and part of her punishment for that sin was that her "desire will be for your husband, and he will rule over you." So, just as Christ is Head over His Bride, your husband is to be head over you. By the way, now that we are talking about Eve's punishment for sin, if you are worried about this part of the curse, "I will make your pains in childbearing very severe," just remember that as long as you are walking in faith, love, and holiness, God is going to keep you safe during childbirth."