

# The Role of Women in Ministry

Understanding that women play a vital role in the New Testament church.

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Throughout Scripture, both in the Old Testament and the New Testament, we find God placing women in leadership roles and releasing them to minister to God's people.

## OLD TESTAMENT EXAMPLES

- Miriam is called a prophet (Exodus 15:20).
- Deborah was both a prophet and a judge over the nation of Israel (Judges 4:4-5).
- Esther gave direction to Mordecai and the Jews of Susa (Esther 4:15-17)
- Huldah was a prophet who lived in Jerusalem (2 Kings 22:14).
- Athaliah ruled Judah (2 Chronicles 22:10-12).

## NEW TESTAMENT EXAMPLES

- Anna was at the Temple in Jerusalem and was called a Prophet (Luke 2:36).
- Philip the Evangelist had four daughter who prophesied (Acts 21:9).
- Priscilla, with her husband Aquila, taught Apollos and others God's Word (Acts 18:24-26)
- Phoebe has the title and office of deacon in the church in Cenchreae (Romans 16:1).

I commend to you our sister Phoebe, a deacon (or deaconess) of the church in Cenchreae. – Romans 16:1

Many English translations refer to Phoebe as a "servant". However, the Greek word in this text is DIAKONOS (dee-ak'-on-os) which is the same word used in 1 Timothy and throughout the New Testament to describe a deacon or a minister. We discover that God sovereignly chose to highlight that this woman had an official leadership (diakonos) role in the local church.

## SPIRITUAL GIFTS

The New Testament plainly indicates that both men and women receive the gifts of the Holy Spirit without distinction and irrespective of gender. These gifts of the Spirit include the gift of teaching, prophesy, exhortation, and the word of wisdom and of knowledge.

From the viewpoint of spiritual gifts, it seems clear that "in Christ there is neither male nor female" as it says in Galatians 3:28 and that God expects every woman to have a ministry as much as he expects every man to have one.

## HEADSHIP

However, we must recognize the role of biblical headship. In 1 Corinthians 11, we encounter women engaging in ministry, praying and prophesying, but Scripture delineates that this ministry is supposed to take place under the spiritual covering of men.

First, the Apostle Paul reminds the church of biblical headship.

But I want you to realize that the head of every man is Christ, and the head of the woman is man, and the head of Christ is God. – 1 Corinthians 11:3

And then, Paul discusses how women, when they are praying and prophesying, should do so only under the covering of a man.

But every woman who prays or prophesies with her head uncovered dishonors her head—it is the same as having her head shaved. – 1 Corinthians 11:5

A "covering" on a woman's head is used as an illustration of the order, headship, and the authority prescribed under God. The primary covering for a woman is her believing husband (Ephesians 5:23). And so, Paul is indicating that women have a role within the context of praying and prophesying as long as they are doing so under the covering, the spiritual authority, oversight, and protection, of the man who is under the authority of God.

Furthermore, as we look at ministry roles within the church, we understand that Scripture speaks clearly to the role of Elder/Overseer as being a role set apart for men (1 Timothy 3). However, Scripture also has spoken clearly that there has always been a place for women in other roles of ministry and leadership. We celebrate that God uses us all to build up His church.

Finally, the precept and practice of Biblical headship should not hold women back; rather, headship should lift women up, encourage their anointing, provide protection, and ultimately make room for their gifting.

*Note: For more information concerning the biblical precept of headship, you are encouraged you to listen to Pastor Eric's teaching titled, "Biblical Headship." [https://www.evidentlife.org/resources/sermons/?sermon\\_id=101](https://www.evidentlife.org/resources/sermons/?sermon_id=101)*

## **WOMEN TEACHING THE BIBLE**

However, should a woman teach the Scriptures, and specifically, should a woman teach men, or should she teach when men are present?

In his letter to Titus, the Apostle Paul instructs older women to teach younger women.

Likewise, teach the older women to be reverent in the way they live, not to be slanderers or addicted to much wine, but to teach what is good. – Titus 2:3

And so, we quickly discover that women are not only allowed to teach, but they are encouraged to teach and recognized for their teaching abilities. But let's look closer at the subject of women teaching men or teaching when men are in the room?

Let's look at the example of Priscilla. Priscilla and her husband Aquila worked closely with the Apostle Paul in the work of teaching the Gospel in Corinth and in Ephesus. It is widely held that Priscilla was the more gifted and capable teacher since her name is most often listed before her husband. Together, they instructed the mighty Apollos in his early years of preaching. Priscilla is portrayed in Scripture as a knowledgeable woman being used in the teaching of a man with no hint of an objection from the Apostle Paul.

He (Apollos) began to speak boldly in the synagogue. When Priscilla and Aquila heard him, they invited him to their home and explained to him the way of God more adequately. – Acts 18:26

Priscilla, along with her husband Aquila, instructed or taught Apollos Scriptures. Notice, Priscilla was teaching a man and also notice that Priscilla was under the headship covering of her

husband. And so, in this example we discover a woman explaining Scripture to a man.

Following are two passages that, on the surface, appear to prohibit women from teaching men or even speaking when a man is in the church meeting.

As in all the congregations of the saints, women should remain silent in the churches. They are not allowed to speak, but must be in submission, as the Law says. If they want to inquire about something, they should ask their own husbands at home, for it is disgraceful for a woman to speak in the church. - 1 Corinthians 14:33b-35

A woman should learn in quietness and full submission. I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man; she must be silent. - 1 Timothy 2:11-12

Independent of context and without referencing the entirety of Scripture, these two passages appear to prohibit any kind of public teaching ministry for women within the church if a man is present. But let's dig deeper and look for greater understanding as this is the same Apostle who permitted, approved, and encouraged women to minister within the church context. After all, the Great Apostle Paul wouldn't teach one thing and practice another.

If, in 1 Corinthians 11, Paul speaks with approval of a woman praying or prophesying in public under the covering of their husband or other male leadership, then surely in 1 Corinthians 14 he does not contradict himself by forbidding women even to open their mouths in any circumstance in the public meeting of the church. This should cause us to read the prohibition of Chapter 14 as applying to something other than the ministry of women permitted in Chapter 11.

If there is an issue of order or error while a woman is ministering, then the man is charged with stepping in and correcting the situation. In the end, the responsibility lies with the woman's husband and with the church elders. This headship does not prevent ministry but provides protection for all involved.

## **CONCLUSION**

The body of Christ, the local church, is strongest and most effective when all of its parts are fully functioning as designed. Women play a vital role in the New Testament church. And under the structure of biblical headship, some women are anointed and called to share God's Word.