

Position on Women in Leadership

Community Gospel affirms women pastors and leaders. While some consider this unscriptural, we believe that it is the preponderance of Biblical evidence that led us to the conclusion that women who are gifted and anointed by Holy Spirit can hold these positions alongside men. Here is our argument from scripture.

Eve

The argument for women in church leadership starts in the beginning with Eve.

Genesis 1:26 Then God said, "Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals, and over all the creatures that move along the ground."

*27 So God created mankind in his own image,
in the image of God he created them;
male and female he created them.*

While the King James Version of the Bible says, "Let us make man in our image," the NIV uses a more appropriate word here, "mankind." God created one human - both male and female - in His image. Later in Genesis 3, God separated woman from man creating two people, Adam, meaning "human," and Eve, which means "life." It is the combination of the two in unity together which reflects the unity of the Godhead.

When He separated Eve from Adam, God had this to say:

Genesis 2:18 The LORD God said, "It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him."

This word "helper" is used 21 in the Hebrew Bible. Two of them are used in Genesis 2 of Eve. Of the remaining 19 times it occurs in the Old Testament, 17

refer to the Lord and His help for his people. Eve was more than a helper - “ezer,” this word in the Greek, refers to *saving help*. Eve complimented Adam, and was equal in position and in image-bearing. When God gave the blessing and command in Genesis 1:28, it was to both of them.

Genesis 1:28 God blessed them and said to them, “Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground.”

Miriam

When God established the nation of Israel and called them out of Egypt to the promised land, He called Moses to lead the people as their prophet. Yet it wasn't only Moses who was called to lead.

*Micah 6:4 I brought you up out of Egypt
and redeemed you from the land of slavery.
I sent Moses to lead you,
also Aaron and Miriam.*

Moses was not alone in the leadership position. His brother and sister were there to both support him and lead alongside him.

Deborah

As the nation of Israel entered the land promised to His people, God raised up judges to lead the people in His theocracy. These judges were often fallible, making mistake after mistake in their time of leadership, (think Samson or Gideon.) But there is one judge who is spoken of only positively, and that is Deborah.

Judges 4:4 Now Deborah, a prophet, the wife of Lappidoth, was leading Israel at that time. 5 She held court under the Palm of Deborah between Ramah and Bethel

in the hill country of Ephraim, and the Israelites went up to her to have their disputes decided.

Under Deborah's leadership, the Canaanite king Jabin and his commander Sisera were soundly defeated. God makes no distinction between Deborah's rights, privileges, and abilities to settle disputes or to lead an army from any male judge in Israel's history.

Huldah

In the time of the kings, prophets were raised up to lead the people and call them to true worship and service to the Lord as well as counsel and guide the kings. In the time of Josiah, king of Judah, the book of the law which had long been missing and had not been taught or heeded for some time was found in the temple. The words rocked Josiah's world as he realized the kingdom was in big trouble for not obeying the Word of the Lord.

2 Chronicles 34:19 When the king heard the words of the Law, he tore his robes. 20 He gave these orders to Hilkiah, Ahikam son of Shaphan, Abdon son of Micah, Shaphan the secretary and Asaiah the king's attendant: 21 "Go and inquire of the LORD for me and for the remnant in Israel and Judah about what is written in this book that has been found. Great is the LORD's anger that is poured out on us because those who have gone before us have not kept the word of the LORD; they have not acted in accordance with all that is written in this book."

22 Hilkiah and those the king had sent with him went to speak to the prophet Huldah, who was the wife of Shallum son of Tokhath, the son of Hasrah, keeper of the wardrobe. She lived in Jerusalem, in the New Quarter.

King Josiah could have called the renowned prophets Jeremiah or Zephaniah, who were active in that day. Instead he chose to call Huldah, the prophetess. The king trusted a woman to hear from the Lord and recommend next steps for the

kingdom. He makes no distinction between her ability to hear from Holy Spirit or any man's.

New Testament

We now turn to the New Testament, the New Covenant, to see whether Jesus and early church leaders established a distinction between men's and women's leadership. We begin with Jesus' mother, **Mary**.

After the resurrection and ascension, Mary was one of those who went, as Jesus commanded, to the upper room to await Holy Spirit.

Acts 1:12 Then the apostles returned to Jerusalem from the hill called the Mount of Olives, a Sabbath day's walk from the city. 13 When they arrived, they went upstairs to the room where they were staying. Those present were Peter, John, James and Andrew; Philip and Thomas, Bartholomew and Matthew; James son of Alphaeus and Simon the Zealot, and Judas son of James. 14 They all joined together constantly in prayer, along with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brothers.

In Acts 2, we see that Jesus fulfilled His promise and sent Holy Spirit to empower the new church leaders. It is widely believed that Mary's presence in the room was confirmation of who Holy Spirit was, considering she was the only person there recorded to have had personal interaction with Holy Spirit previously (see Luke 1.) Her testimony to the disciples and those in the upper room was invaluable. After receiving Holy Spirit, those in the room spilled out to the streets where Peter quoted the prophet Joel:

*Acts 2:17 "In the last days, God says,
I will pour out my Spirit on all people.
Your sons and daughters will prophesy,
your young men will see visions,
your old men will dream dreams.*

*18 Even on my servants, both men and women,
I will pour out my Spirit in those days,
and they will prophesy.*

Both Joel and Peter prophesy that women will be an integral and authoritative part of establishing the church, and Mary's presence affirms this.

Anna

Luke 2:36 There was also a prophet, Anna, the daughter of Penuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was very old; she had lived with her husband seven years after her marriage, 37 and then was a widow until she was eighty-four. She never left the temple but worshiped night and day, fasting and praying. 38 Coming up to them at that very moment, she gave thanks to God and spoke about the child to all who were looking forward to the redemption of Jerusalem.

Anna the prophetess was one of the earliest to recognize who Jesus was. In fact, she could be called the first preacher of the gospel as her encounter with Jesus was when he was eight days old and she “*spoke about the child to all...*”

Mary, the sister of Martha and Lazarus

Luke 10:38 As Jesus and his disciples were on their way, he came to a village where a woman named Martha opened her home to him. 39 She had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet listening to what he said. 40 But Martha was distracted by all the preparations that had to be made. She came to him and asked, “Lord, don't you care that my sister has left me to do the work by myself? Tell her to help me!”

41 “Martha, Martha,” the Lord answered, “you are worried and upset about many things, 42 but few things are needed—or indeed only one. Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her.”

Jesus commends Mary for choosing what is better as she sat at his feet. The act of sitting at the feet of a rabbi and learning from him is what a disciple performed. Mary and many other women are recognized as disciples, that is followers and emulators of Jesus. A disciple was taught for the purpose of teaching what they learned to others.

Mary Magdalene

John 20:11 Now Mary stood outside the tomb crying. As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb 12 and saw two angels in white, seated where Jesus' body had been, one at the head and the other at the foot.

13 They asked her, "Woman, why are you crying?"

"They have taken my Lord away," she said, "and I don't know where they have put him." 14 At this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not realize that it was Jesus.

15 He asked her, "Woman, why are you crying? Who is it you are looking for?"

Thinking he was the gardener, she said, "Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have put him, and I will get him."

16 Jesus said to her, "Mary."

She turned toward him and cried out in Aramaic, "Rabboni!" (which means "Teacher").

17 Jesus said, "Do not hold on to me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father. Go instead to my brothers and tell them, 'I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.'"

18 Mary Magdalene went to the disciples with the news: "I have seen the Lord!" And she told them that he had said these things to her.

Mary Magdalene has been called "Apostle to the Apostles" for her act here. The fact that John the Beloved wrote that Jesus appeared first to a woman, revealed to her that He had been resurrected from the dead, and commanded her to "preach" the gospel to the disciples would have been scandalous and embarrassing in the Roman and Jewish cultures of the day. Nevertheless, it is a woman who is the first carrier of the Gospel!

Other Women Disciples

Luke 8:1 After this, Jesus traveled about from one town and village to another, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom of God. The Twelve were with him, 2 and also some women who had been cured of evil spirits and diseases: Mary (called Magdalene) from whom seven demons had come out; 3 Joanna the wife of Chuza, the manager of Herod's household; Susanna; and many others. These women were helping to support them out of their own means.

It is not disputed, though it is often ignored, that women were among the earliest followers and disciples of Jesus. As such, they would be trained in the ways of Jesus and expected to then teach others what they had learned from their master. The fact that these women not only followed and learned from Jesus, but supported him and the twelve is again a surprise, to say the least, and indicates that these women were held in high esteem by the Lord.

Thus far we have seen no evidence in scripture to indicate that women cannot hold leadership, pastoral, or teaching offices. In fact, there is no indication that God in the Old Testament nor Jesus in the Gospels had any intention of limiting the role of women in the family of Abraham, nation of Israel, or body of Christ. It is not until the apostle Paul and his correspondence with the early churches that

we see opposition to women in leadership and speaking positions. But did Paul really intend to sideline women? First we need to examine what Paul *did*, and then we will address what he *said*.

Priscilla

Acts 18:24 Meanwhile a Jew named Apollos, a native of Alexandria, came to Ephesus. He was a learned man, with a thorough knowledge of the Scriptures. 25 He had been instructed in the way of the Lord, and he spoke with great fervor and taught about Jesus accurately, though he knew only the baptism of John. 26 He 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.

Priscilla is, perhaps, the best example of a woman preaching and teaching in the early church. The fact that she taught Apollos, a man, is obvious here. And that she is listed several times in the New Testament before her husband Aquila is mentioned is a clear indication that she was likely the more gifted teacher, or at least as notable as her husband.

Phoebe

Romans 16:1 I commend to you our sister Phoebe, a deacon of the church in Cenchreae. 2 I ask you to receive her in the Lord in a way worthy of his people and to give her any help she may need from you, for she has been the benefactor of many people, including me.

Phoebe is the carrier of the letter to the Romans. As such, many scholars believe that Paul would have taught her the content of the epistle, explaining all of his reasoning so that Phoebe could reiterate, instruct, and explain his thoughts and intentions.

Junia

Romans 16:7 Greet Andronicus and Junia, my fellow Jews who have been in prison with me. They are outstanding among the apostles, and they were in Christ before I was.

That Junia is mentioned as an apostle by Paul is a clear indication that he approved of her having this role and saw her operating in the office. He did not stop her; rather he lauded her.

Lydia

Acts 16:13 On the Sabbath we went outside the city gate to the river, where we expected to find a place of prayer. We sat down and began to speak to the women who had gathered there. 14 One of those listening was a woman from the city of Thyatira named Lydia, a dealer in purple cloth. She was a worshiper of God. The Lord opened her heart to respond to Paul's message. 15 When she and the members of her household were baptized, she invited us to her home. "If you consider me a believer in the Lord," she said, "come and stay at my house." And she persuaded us.

While Lydia is the last woman of Paul that we will look at, there are several more mentioned in Acts and in Paul's letters. Yet Lydia is worth a special look because of the influence she carried and the fact that it is likely that one of the first churches was established in her home, making it probable that she was the leader of the church. This is further backed by the fact that when she came to faith, her household followed her in baptism, and Paul stayed with her to train the new church of Thyatira.

Problem Passages

We cannot and will not ignore the passages that are used almost exclusively to deny women the honor of serving the church in leadership, preaching, and teaching roles. Still, before we begin, it is important to note that both Jesus

(Matthew 18:16) and Paul (2 Corinthians 13:1) admonish us that a case is not proven unless it is corroborated by two or three witnesses. The fact that these passages of Paul are not backed by another witness should be an obvious indication that we must be reading them incorrectly, that is, we do not understand what Paul intended by these passages. It is the only possible answer for why Paul would say what he says here. Not to mention, what he states here is clearly opposed to other things he said and, as noted before, opposed to what he did. Nevertheless, we will take a look at these passages and discuss our interpretation, noting that these are not the only arguments we could make against them - they are only the most succinct to note here.

1 Timothy 2:8 Therefore I want the men everywhere to pray, lifting up holy hands without anger or disputing. 9 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.

It is not lost on any woman who reads these passages that they sit in churches where they are not allowed to teach or have authority, yet the other things that Paul says here are not heeded. Men do not pray with holy hands lifted. Women wear gold jewelry, braid their hair, and are encouraged to dress nicely. These facts are enough to indicate to all of us that Paul is speaking to the church of Ephesians, where Timothy was pastor, in a specific context and to a specific culture.

In addition, the next words of Paul are not true, that is they are disputed by scripture, and therefore we have to assume we do not understand what he meant. Adam was not formed before Eve - they were formed simultaneously. Adam was deceived, just as Eve was. Women were not then nor are they now saved in

childbearing all the time. These facts prove that Paul was not saying what we think he is saying. While we do not claim to know the mind of Paul, there is sufficient evidence to indicate that Paul was speaking to an Ephesian church that had come out of worship of the goddess Artemis, whose worship involved women priestesses of fertility. It is likely that Paul was dealing with false worship practices in what he wrote to Timothy.

1 Corinthians 14:34 Women should remain silent in the churches. They are not allowed to speak, but must be in submission, as the law says. 35 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.

36 Or did the word of God originate with you? Or are you the only people it has reached? 37 If anyone thinks they are a prophet or otherwise gifted by the Spirit, let them acknowledge that what I am writing to you is the Lord's command. 38 But if anyone ignores this, they will themselves be ignored.

39 Therefore, my brothers and sisters, be eager to prophesy, and do not forbid speaking in tongues. 40 But everything should be done in a fitting and orderly way.

This second proof text for those who deny women leadership positions in the church is easier to dispute because we have vast knowledge of the rhetorical persuasion techniques of those trained in Greek rhetoric as Paul was. It was common for the opponent of an argument to first state the argument before stating a rebuttal. That is what Paul is doing here. The King James Version says in verse 36, "What? Came the word of God out from you?" This is an indication that Paul is arguing against the logic of the church of Corinth in verses 34-35. In fact three chapters before as well as in verse 39 clearly prove that Paul did not want the women to "remain silent." And the fact that there is absolutely no law that they should not speak, as he says in verse 34, means he cannot be saying his own argument, but rather rebutting theirs.

To close, let's look at a final passage, this one also from Paul.

Galatians 3:28 There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.

Christ makes no distinction between man and woman with regards to their roles in the body of Christ, and neither does Paul or any other early church leader. Neither should we.