

QUESTIONS WE WANT ANSWERED

91.2 What Does the Bible Say About Women?

Part II

Scripture: I Corinthians 11:3-16, 14:34-36; I Timothy 2:8-14; Titus 2; Romans 16:1-3, 6, 12-13, 15

Several observations concerning the Christian view of womanhood have already been made in an earlier study. We have considered the fact that Christianity is a friend to women, that there is a spiritual reason for women's oppression, that men and women reflect the image of God though created differently by Him, and that women have an equality with men as believers.

Today we want to refer to the passages of Scripture noted above which are reference points having to do with certain questions often asked regarding the role of women in the church. What role did women have in the early church? Must women cover their heads while in the act of worship? Must women keep silent in the church? Is it proper for women to teach men? These are the issues we will address ourselves to

V. THE ROLE OF WOMEN IN THE NEW TESTAMENT CHURCH WAS AN ACTIVE ONE:

The first passage of Scripture I want to direct your attention to is Romans 16. This is Paul's "thank you" passage and he mentions 27 people, nine of them women. The women commended are Phebe (1), Priscilla (3), Mary (6), Tryphena (12), Tryphosa (12), Persis (12), Rufus' mother (13), Julia (15) and Nerous' sister (15). Some question has arisen concerning Julia mentioned in verse 15. Because the word is in the accusative case is not possible to tell if the source is Junia, which is feminine, or Junias, which would then be masculine. The consensus is that Julia belongs in this longest list of commendable women in the New Testament.

The first woman mentioned, Phebe, is given worthy mention. Paul trusted her to deliver his Roman letter to believers living in the imperial city. Doubtless she was responsible and devout or else he would not have chosen her. When you think of the influence the Roman letter has had on the course of Christianity, it is easy to conclude that our debt to Phebe is not a small one. Another important

point here is that Phebe is called a “servant” and a “helper” (2) of many. The word “servant” is actually the Greek word “diakonos” or deacon. Incidentally, the rules of Greek grammar apply here and no gender is distinguishable. The word is not deaconess any more than we would use the word teacherness or doctorness to identify a woman. Phebe was a deacon in the primitive church. The word means one who executes the bidding or command of another.

It is interesting to note that the very same word is used in I Corinthians 3:5 where we read, *“Who then is Paul, and who is Apollos, but ministers (diakonos) by whom ye believed.”* Biblical vocabulary is very exact here and the word definitely has to do with describing a person who was a special functionary in the church. The masculine form of the word can be found in the Old Testament. It is used in I Chronicles 28:1, 26:12 and II Chronicles 8:14.

Priscilla is the second woman mentioned. An early church father, Tertullian, wrote of her as “the holy Prisca, who preached the gospel.” Her teaching ministry is described in Acts 18:26 although the King James version places Aquila's name first although the original does not support this. Priscilla did teach Apollos and the act is significant even though it was a one on one situation.

It is written of Junia in verse 7 that she was of note among the apostles. This long has puzzled the scholars. The RSV reads, *“who are men of note.”* The word “men” is actually not there at all. The more literal translation is *“well known to the apostles.”* It is from this verse that women were either known by the apostles or distinguished as apostles. Chrysostom wrote, “How great is the devotion of this woman (Junia) that she could be counted worthy of the name of an apostle.” This is not a clear cut text and we will not take upon ourselves to introduce women into the apostolate this morning.

There were other women Paul mentions. In Philippians 4:2 he writes, *“I ask you true yokefellow, to help these women (Euodia and Syntyche) who worked hard together with me in the gospel; with Clement, too, and the rest of my co-workers.”* Paul's rebuke of these women in verse two is revealing as to their role. He admonishes them to be of the same mind in the Lord. To single them out as he did would suggest their role in the Philippian Church was known and their compatibility all the more important. These women worked with Paul in the gospel and it would seem that they were doing more than such things as waiting on tables. Some commentators feel they were leaders.

It is also significant that many women held church in their homes. In Colossians 4:15 we read, *“Salute the brethren which are in Laodicea, and Nymphas, and the church which is in his house.”* In Philemon 1:2 we have a husband and wife team. Paul wrote, *“And to Apphia, and Archippus our fellow soldier, and to the church in thy house.”* In Romans 16:5 Paul speaks of the house of Priscilla and Aquila. We may conclude from these and other passages that women did have a role in the early church, the question remaining is to the extent of that role. I was interested this Easter to note that the risen Lord chose a woman as the first witness to his resurrection, (John 20:17b) and that women did play an important role in the Easter event. We may also note that Jesus encouraged the woman at the well to go and share with others her discovery. (Matthew 28:1-10) In the face of cultural prejudices which discounted a women's witness in court, Jesus approved of their sharing the good news.

VI. THE SCRIPTURES SPEAK OF PROPER DRESS AND ADORNMENT FOR WOMEN:

Some women today feel they must cover their heads in church services. The Scriptural basis for this is found in I Corinthians 11:3-16. A reading of these verses would certainly seem to indicate that Paul was commanding women to wear veils and to cover their heads, women of all time. However, a closer reading reveals certain important qualifying factors. The first reason Paul gives for head covering is found in verse 5. “But every woman that prayeth or prophesieth with her head uncovered dishonoureth her head.” The issue here is not a women issue, it is a husband and wife issue. The veil and head covering were a symbol of subjection to her husband. Paul does not say she dishonors God, but her husband, the head who was present. The Oral Law decreed that if a Jewish woman did not cover her head, she should be shorn. A Jewish man might even divorce his wife if she was seen without her head covered.

The word translated **power** I Corinthians 11:10 is **exousia** and may also mean authority, liberty and in the plural, **potentates**. The verse may be paraphrased, “For this reason ought the wife to have a sign of her husband's authority, a covering on her head, because of angels.” A wife, then, covers her head out of respect for her husband and also out of deference for the angels who were respected as being present at public worship. A.S. Worrell comments concerning angels on this text, “The angels are ministering spirits, and as being present in their ministry, they would be shocked if a wife should get out of her place and attempt to assume lordship over her husband in the church.”

The second reason Paul gives for women appearing with heads covered is mentioned in verse 16. He writes, *"we have no such custom."* To appear without her head covered amounted to the same thing as appearing with her hair cut or head shaved. In Corinth women customarily appeared with covered heads. Marcus Dodd writes, "Among the Greeks it was a universal custom for women to appear in public with their heads covered, commonly with the corner of their shawl drawn over the head like a hood. It was the recognized badge of seclusion. It was the badge which proclaimed she was a private, not a public person, finding her duties at home, not abroad; in the household, not in the city." Because of this custom, a woman appearing in Paul's time in Corinth with head uncovered would have scandalized the church coupled with the reflection it would have had on her husband.

These are the reasons for head covering according to I Corinthians 11.

Concerning the one, that of the customs of society, Charles M. Laymon writes in the Interpreter's One-Volume Commentary On The Bible, pp 805-6, "Libertines .of the church may have argued that the Christian woman is freed from the unwritten laws of society and of all places should be able to express this freedom in church. But Paul reasons that women should not come before God in a manner considered indecent elsewhere." Concerning submission to one's husband, Ro Jamisson, Fausset & Brown's **Commentary On the Whole Bible**, pp. 1211-1212, discloses, "Paul conceives the head covering to be a sign of exercising delegated authority under man. He probably had in mind the root connection between the Hebrew terms for covering (radid), and submission (radad). Even though the woman had long hair which was a natural covering, yet the wearing of an additional covering over her hair showed that she of her own will had chosen to wear a token of her inner submission."

We are able to summarize by saying **(1)** Paul does not teach it is irreverent or displeasing to God for women to appear with the heads uncovered, **(2)** while he does say that it was the custom of the day and **(3)** an expression of submission to one's husband. Applying these principles to our day there is nothing in the passage which prevents women from appearing in public with uncovered heads. An uncovered head in our culture does not imply a lack of submission, the covering no longer being a badge of submission. The head covering no longer reminds women of their God ordained role. The greatest covering today is that of inner submission to the Lord and therefore to her husband. If however, the

covering of the head continues to remind some of their place as servants of Christ, it may continue to serve a purpose.

VII. WOMEN ARE TO BE KNOWN FOR THEIR QUIET AND SUBMISSIVE DEMEANOR IN CHURCH:

We come now to the issue of women keeping silent in church as mentioned in the crucial verses of I Timothy 2:8-11. Must women keep silent in the church?

I think not. I understand that Paul is not condemning the manner as much as he is controlling the method.

Paul instructs in verse 8 that men are to pray everywhere (public prayer) having met certain qualifications inwardly. Prayer is not the time to make a speech or to doubt God and the life is to be pure. In like manner, Paul continues, women are to adorn themselves in modest apparel. What does the apostle have in mind here? What is to be the similarity of conduct? There is no likeness in the men speaking and the women keeping still. The intended likeness lies in the lifting up of holy hand and the adorning in modest apparel. Paul is discerning the delicate situations in which men and women may find themselves in prayer. The men are to pray without vindictiveness and the women when leading in prayer are to be careful of orderly clothing, that they will not draw attention to themselves as can be done in public prayer. The emphasis of the passage is basically with the male's inward preparation in prayer and the woman's outward preparation. The girls are to be careful about identifying with their culture in terms of dress. Women who profess to know God will show it in their demeanor.

The more difficult verse is verse 11. *“Let the woman learn in silence with all subjection.”* The Scripture has precious checks and balances which help us understand heavy instruction. One check is to know that every Scripture must be interpreted in the light of what other Scripture says. The word **silence** here is used in other places and it means quietness. We find the exact word in II Thessalonians 3:12, Acts 22:2, and 21:40. The word means stillness and has to do with an attitude. One cannot build a case for women keeping silent in the church from this passage in Timothy. There is also the key passage found in I Corinthians 14:34-35. This instruction was based on the Jewish ordinance that women were not permitted to teach in the assemblies or even to ask questions. This was the case until Pentecost when evidentially the Spirit of God came upon women as well as men so that according to I Corinthians 11:5. I believe that verse 35 is the qualifying verse which indicates Paul is attempting to correct the habit

some women had fallen into of asking questions and dictating in the assemblies. Adam Clarke's Commentary, Baker Book House, p.1119, indicates Paul felt it was indecorous for women to be contending with men in public assemblies, on points of doctrine. All he opposes here is their questioning, finding fault, disputing and not exercising good manners in public situations.

VIII. WHEN WOMEN TEACH THEY ARE TO SUBMIT TO PROPER AUTHORITY:

The verses most often quoted in reference to women teaching men are 1.Timothy 2:11-14. Nestles Greek text may be translated, "*But I do not permit a woman to teach nor to exercise authority of a man.*" The word **teach** here is a familiar one and used over 100 times in the New Testament. Paul usually connects the word with admonish as in Colossians 1:28 and 3:16, and I Timothy 4:11. The expression "to exercise authority" is unique and appears nowhere else. Many translations use the word "usurp" which means to seize and hold, as the power, position, or rights of another, by force and without legal authority. I believe that the passage is instructing woman to refrain from an admonishing role in their instruction and sharing of knowledge. The woman is not to act as if she has the same authority as the man in the church. Here again we have the functional subordination of spiritual equals. There is a certain sphere wherein the women of the church may operate. The word **teach** in Paul's time (*didasko*) also meant to disciple, to develop a group of followers. We may assume Paul would not have wanted a woman to disciple a number of men. We may conclude this by saying that when a woman teaches, she is to be submitted to male leadership and she is not to usurp the place of the man or attempt to rule over him.

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