

# ***Teaching Sound Doctrine***

## God's Role For the Woman in the Church

There is a great deal of confusion today as to woman's role both in the home and in the church. This uncertainty provides a good opportunity to study afresh what the Bible teaches on the subject. As the church is the pillar and ground of the truth (1 Tim. 3:15 Where Paul says *But if I tarry long, that thou mayest know how thou oughtest to behave thyself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth.*), it is most important that the church reflect Biblical truth about woman's role.

### HOW JESUS DEALT WITH WOMEN

A good place to begin a study of woman's role in the church is with the earthly ministry of Jesus. We understand, of course, the church did not begin while Jesus was on earth, but after he ascended into Heaven (Mark 9:1; Acts 1:8; Acts 2:1-4). Nevertheless, we can learn something about women's role in the church by studying how Jesus considered them during his earthly ministry.

We know that none of the apostles were women we know this from (Matt. 10:2-4) where he named his chosen Apostles. However, some of Jesus' closest disciples were women. Luke 8:2-3 mentions Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Susanna, and "many others" who helped provide financial support for Jesus and the apostles as they went about preaching. Later, when the apostles fled the crucifixion scene in fear, certain faithful and sorrowing women remained to watch his death on the cross (Matt. 27:55-56 *And many women were there beholding afar off, which followed Jesus from Galilee, ministering unto him: Among which was Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James and Joses, and the mother of Zebedee's children.* ).

From these and other references in the Gospels we learn that Jesus in no way dealt with women as being inferior to men as far as being his disciples was concerned. In selecting men rather than women to be his apostles, he did make some distinction in the roles men and women should fill. These two basic principles, are,

- (1) equality of worth in Christ's sight, and
- (2) difference in role assignments for men and women, were clearly taught in the

early church, and should, or course, be reflected in the church today.

### WOMAN'S ROLE IN THE CHURCH

When the church began on the Day of Pentecost, women, as well as men, came into it in great numbers (Acts 5:14 *And believers were the more added to the Lord, multitudes both of men and women.*). There were no distinctions made in conditions of membership between the sexes. Furthermore, the importance of women to the whole church is reflected by the concern which the early church had for widows who needed care and help (Acts 6:1-6).

The good works of women are frequently mentioned in Scripture. Dorcas is cited as an example of faithful, loving service (Acts 9:36-39 *Now there was at Joppa a certain disciple named Tabitha, which by interpretation is called Dorcas: this woman was full of good works and almsdeeds which she did. And it came to pass in those days, that she was sick, and died: whom when they had washed, they laid her in an upper chamber. And forasmuch as Lydda was nigh to Joppa, and the disciples had heard that Peter was there, they sent unto him two men, desiring him that he would not delay to come to them. Then Peter arose and went with them. When he was come, they brought him into the upper chamber: and all the widows stood by him weeping, and shewing the coats and garments which Dorcas made, while she was with them.*). Lydia is revealed as being a woman of great hospitality, "constraining" Paul and his company to abide in her house (Acts 16:1-15). Phoebe is described as a "servant of the church that is in Cenchreae". The many good works of women in the church is further reflected as Paul describes the qualifications for women who were to devote full time to Christian work and to be supported by the church. In (1 Timothy 5:9-10 *Let not a widow be taken into the number under threescore years old, having been the wife of one man, Well reported of for good works; if she have brought up children, if she have lodged strangers, if she have washed the saints' feet, if she have relieved the afflicted, if she have diligently followed every good work.*) these qualifications included widowhood, being sixty or more years of age, having no kin of their own to support them, and being "well reported of for good works." These good works were then stated as

- (1) bringing up children,
- (2) showing hospitality to strangers,
- (3) washing the saints' feet,
- (4) relieving the afflicted, and
- (5) diligently following every good work.

Woman's role in the private teaching of God's Word is also referenced in Scripture. In Acts 18:26 Priscilla, with her husband, Aquila, privately taught a good, but misinformed preacher (Apollos) "the way of God more accurately." Titus 2:4 commands older women to train younger women in Christian living.

A key verse in understanding the importance of women in the eyes of God is (Galatians 3:28, "*There can be neither Jew nor Greek, there can be neither bond nor free, there can be no male and female, for ye all are one man in Christ Jesus.*") In the world of Jesus' day, there were sharp distinctions among people by which they looked upon each other as inferior or superior and, because of these differences, separated themselves from each other. These differences included religious background (Jew and Greek), special status (slave or slave owner), or sex (male and female). Paul wrote that none of these distinctions was valid as far as worth is concerned. He did not mean, certainly, that when one became a Christian he or she ceased to be a man or a woman, a slave or a free man, a Jew or a Gentile. None of these, however, should cause separation, because all are of equal preciousness in Christ Jesus.

#### DIFFERING ROLES FOR MEN AND WOMEN

Although the church is to hold unswervingly to the view that women and men are equally valuable in the eyes of God, it must also reflect the New Testament teaching that men and women are to fill different roles in the church.

For instance, in the Lord's plan for church government each congregation is to be led by elders and deacons (Philippians 1:1). In listing the qualifications for elders (1 Tim. 3:1-7; Titus 1:5-9) and for deacons (1 Tim. 3:12) it is plainly shown being the "husband of one wife" is mentioned. This obviously excludes women from these roles; only men are to be elders and deacons.

Although women can teach privately, as we learned from the example of Priscilla, women are forbidden to teach men publicly (1 Tim. 2:12 *But I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man, but to be in silence.*). The common practice today of women being accepted as preachers is not a practice approved in the New Testament and should not be practiced in the church (1 Cor. 14: 34 *Let your women keep silence in the churches: for it is not permitted unto them to speak; but they are commanded to be under obedience, as also saith the law.*).

The great emphasis today on the rights of women should not cause Christians to question the Lord's forbidding women to assume certain roles in the church. Even if no reasons for this action were given we should accept by faith what God has revealed. Some reasons, however, were given. Consider the following:

1. Woman's role in the church reflects the original act of creation in which man

was first created (1 Tim. 2:13).

2. Woman's role in the church reflects that it was the woman who was first deceived by Satan and fell into sin (1 Tim. 2:13).

3. Woman's role in the church is closely connected to her unique role in the home. Woman alone can give birth to children (1 Tim. 2:15).

The man must care for and provide for his wife and love her as Christ loved the church (Ephesians 5:25). The woman's willing submission to her husband is to call forth the best of his care (Eph. 5:22,33). In order for there to be the greatest amount of happiness in the home, God has established different roles for men and women in the home. This difference is likewise to be reflected in the church.

### SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

In summary, we have found: (1) The church should teach what the Bible states about the role of women, regardless of what others are teaching and practicing. (2) Christ accepted women as his followers on the same basis as men, although he appointed no women apostles. (3) Women were among the earliest members of the church and an important part of its life. They were outstanding in their abilities to extend hospitality, to help provide for the needy and to express serving love which is to characterize the church as the family of God. (4) In God's sight men and women are to accept each other as being of equal value because God respects both equally. (5) God has ordained there are certain roles in the church which a woman cannot fill, and has given reasons why he made this distinction.