

LOOKING AT WOMEN'S ROLE FROM THE GREEK

Although Jesus' apostles were all men, no one should think that Jesus did not associate with women.

In His earthly family, Jesus had His mother and several sisters (Mark 6:3). Further, women were among those whom He healed (Matthew 9:20-22) and among those to whom He forgave sins (e.g. Luke 7:47). Some of those from whom He cast out demons were women (Luke 8:2), and women were among those who came to hear Him preach (Matthew 14:21). Jesus used all the opportunities that presented themselves to teach women (e.g. John 4:7-41).

There were women in the group that traveled around the country with Jesus and His disciples (Luke 8:2-3). They helped take care of some of His and His apostles' physical needs (Matthew 27:55). We know the names of some of those women: Among them were Mary the wife of Zebedee, Mary the mother of James and Joses, Mary Magdalene, Joanna, and others.

Among His closest friends were Mary and Martha, who were sisters of His friend Lazarus; and Jesus visited in their home from time to time.

Women were (and are) important to Jesus. He was (and is) important to them. In fact, Jesus is the best friend that women ever had. He taught that women should no longer be looked upon as sex objects, and He taught that marriage should be for life. Jesus also taught that a man should not divorce his wife simply by giving her a document of divorcement.

Jesus' first appearance after His resurrection was to a woman. Women were among His followers, and women were members of the early church. They had (and have) an important role to play in the church, even though men and women play different roles in the church.

We may not fully understand why the roles of men and women are different, but we should recognize that they are. It would be unwise to ignore what the New Testament says about how the roles of men and women differ.

A woman's role is so many-sided and so important that I do not presume to be able to comprehend it fully or to describe it adequately. I can only point to the Scriptures with the confidence that they will shed light on the subject.

DORCAS Acts 9:36-42

(36) "At Joppa there was a certain disciple named Tabitha, which is translated Dorcas. This woman was full of good works and charitable deeds that she did. (37) But it happened in those days that she became sick and died. When they had washed her, they laid her in an upper room. (38) And since Lydda was near Joppa, and the disciples had heard that Peter was there, they sent two men to him, imploring him not to delay in coming to them. (39) Then Peter arose and went with them. When he had come, they brought him to the upper room. And all the widows stood by him weeping, showing the tunics and garments which Dorcas had made while she was with them. (40) But Peter put them all out, and knelt down and prayed. And turning to the body he said, 'Tabitha, arise.' And she opened her eyes, and when she saw Peter she sat up. (41) Then he gave her his hand and lifted her up; and when he had called the saints and widows, he presented her alive. (42) And it became known throughout all Joppa, and many believed on the Lord." NKJV.

Dorcas (also called 'Tabitha') lived at Joppa, on the Mediterranean coast. She is a good example of what discipleship means for a woman.

Luke, who wrote the book of Acts, described Dorcas as being "*full of good works and charitable deeds.*" Her deeds brought her much love from the people, whom she helped; but unfortunately, Dorcas took sick and died.

Whereupon, her friends sent for Peter, who was at Lydda, nearby; and he came quickly. When Peter arrived, he found all the widows whom Dorcas had helped standing around weeping. They showed him the "*tunics*" (chitonas) and "*garments*" (himatia) Dorcas had made for them.

Then Peter ushered the widows out of the room, knelt down, prayed to God, and said to Dorcas, "*Tabitha, arise.*" She opened her eyes and sat up. That this happened became known far and wide.

The result was that Dorcas' godly life, along with her death and restoration to life, resulted in many people believing on the Lord Jesus. Thus, by means of her faithful service, Dorcas was able to accomplish more for the Lord than she could perhaps have done had she been a famous gospel preacher.

AQUILA AND PRISCILLA

Acts 18:2,18-19,26; Romans 16:3; 1 Corinthians 16:19; 2 Timothy 4:19

Aquila and his wife Priscilla worked for the Lord as a team. They took the apostle Paul into their home when Paul came to Corinth. They also allowed Paul to ply his trade with them (Acts 18:1-3).

Paul showed his appreciation for Aquila and Priscilla by taking them with him when he departed from Corinth. He left them in Ephesus while he made a quick trip to Antioch and Jerusalem.

While Aquila and Priscilla were in Ephesus, they met a man named Apollos, whom they taught "*the things of the Lord*" (Acts 18:24-26). Both Aquila and Priscilla were active in teaching Apollos (Acts 18:25). They provide an example of how a husband and wife can work together as a team in leading people to Jesus.

Even if Aquila and Priscilla had done nothing other than host the apostle Paul in Corinth and lead Apollos to the truth in Ephesus, they would still have been a great blessing.

Yet, following these events, Aquila and Priscilla returned to Rome, whence they had come. To them, the Apostle Paul sent greetings in a letter to the saints in Rome (Romans 16:3).

Paul mentioned Priscilla before he mentioned Aquila (the husband) in his letter to the Romans. This makes one wonder if

perhaps Priscilla were not the more prominent of the two in Paul's thinking. If she was, it might have been because of the nature of their ministry, which might be called a "hospitality ministry." In a hospitality ministry a wife would naturally be assumed to play a prominent role, since she is the hostess of the home.

The apostle Paul said that Priscilla and Aquila were his "*fellow workers in Christ Jesus*" (Romans 16:3). He also said that they had risked their own necks for his life. He said, further, that he and all the churches of the Gentiles were grateful to them (Romans 16:4).

Paul sent greetings to the church that met in the home of Aquila and Priscilla in Rome (Romans 16:5). This shows that in Rome they were still opening their home to others.

PHOEBE "OUR SISTER"

Romans 16:1-2

In his letter to the saints in Rome, the apostle Paul introduced to them a certain sister from Cenchrea. Her name was "Phoebe." Paul called her "our sister." She was either already in Rome or on her way to Rome at the when Paul wrote.

The apostle Paul had some very nice things to say about Phoebe. He said that she had been "*a servant*" (diakonon) of the church in Cenchrea. The Greek word that Paul used for "*servant*" (diakonon). It is in the masculine gender, not feminine. Therefore, she was not a "deaconess" of the Cenchrean church (Romans 16:1). Instead, this dear sister was--as all Christians should be--a faithful servant (diakonon) of Christ.

The apostle Paul encouraged the Roman brethren to render to Phoebe whatever assistance she might need (Romans 16:2). They should render her assistance, especially in view of the fact that she herself had helped so many people, Paul included.

Phoebe's name is recorded in Scripture for subsequent generations to read. As a result, nearly two thousand years later, we still speak of her and hold her up as an example. By doing

good deeds and helping others she was able to bring more honor to herself and glory to God than if she had been a great preacher.

A HEAD COVERING FOR WOMEN 1 Corinthians 11:1-16

(1) "Imitate me, just as I also imitate Christ. (2) Now I praise you, brethren, that you remember me in all things and keep the traditions just as I delivered them to you. (3) But I want you to know that the head of every man is Christ, the head of woman is man, and the head of Christ is God. (4) Every man praying or prophesying, having his head covered, dishonors his head. (5) But every woman who prays or prophesies with her head uncovered dishonors her head, for that is one and the same as if her head were shaved. (6) For if a woman is not covered, let her also be shorn. But if it is shameful for a woman to be shorn or shaved, let her be covered. (7) For a man indeed ought not to cover his head, since he is the image and glory of God; but woman is the glory of man. (8) For man is not from woman, but woman from man. (9) Nor was man created for the woman, but woman for the man. (10) For this reason the woman ought to have a symbol of authority on her head, because of the angels. (11) Nevertheless, neither is man independent of woman, nor woman independent of man, in the Lord. (12) For as woman came from man, even so man also comes through woman; but all things are from God. (13) Judge among yourselves. Is it proper for a woman to pray to God with her head uncovered? (14) Does not even nature itself teach you that if a man has long hair, it is a dishonor to him? (15) But if a woman has long hair, it is a glory to her; for her hair is given to her for a covering. (16) But if anyone seems to be contentious, we have no such custom, nor do the churches of God." NKJV.

The apostle Paul praised the brethren in Corinth for having kept certain "*traditions*" (*paradoseis*) that he had delivered to them (1 Corinthians 11:2). The Greek word "*paradosis*" (*traditions*) means a teaching, or a custom, that is handed down (or over) from one person or group of people to another. Paul was specifically concerned about the "*tradition*" of women wearing a covering of some kind on their heads when they prayed or prophesied. Let us look at this rather long passage (1 Corinthians 11:1-15) verse by verse.

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN MEN AND WOMEN

Before the apostle Paul got into a discussion of a covering for women, he explained certain things in general about the relationship between men and women.

Paul wanted the Corinthian brethren to know that Christ is the rightful head of every man. He also wanted them to know that,

the rightful head of every (married) woman is her man (husband). This is similar to the relationship between Christ and God. Paul said,

*“The head of every man is Christ,
the head of woman is man,
and the head of Christ is God.”*

1 Corinthians 11:3

Paul did not think that the fact that Christ is subject to God lessened Christ's honor in any way. Nor did he think that a man's being subject to Christ lessens a man's honor in any way. Similarly, a woman's being subject to a good man does not lessen her honor in any way. To the contrary, it increases her honor.

SHOULD A MAN TAKE HIS HAT OFF WHEN HE PRAYS OR PROPHECIES?

Before the apostle Paul got into a discussion of whether or not a woman should wear a covering when she prays or prophesies, he discussed what men should do, as regarding a head covering. He said,

*“Every man praying or prophesying,
having his head covered (kata kephalees echon),
dishonors his head.”*

1 Corinthians 11:4

The Greek expression “kata kephalees echon” means to have something on the head. This expression does not identify what type of covering the apostle Paul had in mind that a man might have on his head. Paul may have been thinking of the possibility that a man be wearing some kind of a hat or shawl when he prays or prophesies.

What Paul said was that if a man prays or prophesies (presumably in public) with a covering (shawl, hat, or whatever it

was), he “*dishonors* (kataischunei) *his head.*” That is, he “*dishonors*” Christ, who is a man's head.

How serious an infraction would that be? Well, the word “kataischuno” (I dishonor) is a composite word, composed of the verb “aischuno” (I shame) and the preposition “kata.” The word “kata” intensifies the negative implication of the word “aischuno” (I shame). So it sound pretty serious.

Today, in Western countries, even people who have no knowledge of Bible knowledge would think it strange of a man to addresses an assembly (of any kind) with his hat on. Some people might think that a man who did this was showing disrespect to the ladies present. But that is not the reason that the apostle Paul gave, as to why a man should remove his head covering when he prays or prophesies. The reason Paul gave is that it would dishonor Christ if he did not remove his head covering.

SHOULD A WOMAN HAVE A COVERING WHEN SHE PRAYS OR PROPHESES?

Just as a man should not have a covering on his head he prays or prophesies, so a woman should have a covering on her head when she prays or prophesies. The apostle Paul said,

*“But every woman who prays or prophesies
with her head uncovered (akatakalupto)
dishonors her head.”*

1 Corinthians 11:5

Whom does she dishonor? She “*dishonors*” her husband. I am not sure that I know just why her praying or prophesying without a head covering dishonors her husband. Perhaps it is because she would be sending an unclear signal as to whether or not she is in subjection to her husband, but that is just a guess on my part.

If a wife were to make a public display of her piety by praying or prophesying in a more public way, it might put her husband "in the shade," so to speak, unless she gave some signal of her submission to him.

If she does not give some signal that she is under her husbands' authority, people might ask, "Why is she out there praying and prophesying, instead of her husband? Does she not respect him?"

Or, people might ask, "Where is the '*gentle and quiet spirit*' (1 Peter 3:4) that a Christian woman is supposed to display?" So as to avoid such questions being asked may be the reason why Paul said,

"But every woman who prays or prophesies with her head uncovered (akatakalupto) dishonors her head."

1 Corinthians 11:5

DID THE APOSTLE PAUL WANT WOMEN TO WEAR A VEIL?

Paul did not define the type of covering that he had in mind for a woman to wear. Perhaps, it didn't matter to him what kind of covering she wore. Some people think he was speaking of a "veil," and for that reason they discount the whole idea of a covering, as being merely an oriental custom.

I doubt, however, that Paul was necessarily thinking of a veil. I don't recall ever having seen a picture (or a statue) from antiquity of a Greek woman wearing a veil. (I do not say that no such picture or statue exists but that I do not recall ever having seen one.)

My son-in-law, Tom Black, recently showed me a photograph of a statuette of a Greek woman wearing a kind of a shawl that was draped, not around her face, but over her head and around her shoulders. The statuette was made in the fourth century

BC. It is kept in the Amphipolis Museum in northern Greece. The apostle Paul may have had something like this in mind.

In India I have seen Indian women come into the assembly, who, as they enter the assembly, drape the end of their colorful saris over their head. Since women in antiquity wore flowing robes, Paul may have had something like this in mind.

WHAT IS WRONG WITH A WOMAN PRAYING OR PROPHESYING WITHOUT A HEAD COVERING?

The apostle Paul felt that it would be inappropriate for a woman to step forth in public with her head uncovered. It would be as inappropriate as it would be if she were to step forth with her head shaved. Paul said,

*“For if a woman is not covered,
let her also be shorn.
But if it is shameful for a woman
to be shorn or shaved,
let her be covered.”*

1 Corinthians 11:6

Paul recommended (I think he said so, facetiously) that a woman who insisted on praying or prophesying with her uncovered head should “*be shorn.*”

What does all this add up to? A good wife is (as the apostle Paul said) “*the glory (doxa)*” of her husband (1 Corinthians 11:7). The word “*doxa*” can mean “glory, splendor, or grandeur.” It can also mean “praise, honor or pride.” It can even mean “brightness or brilliance.” If a wife is all (or any) of these things to her husband, she is an adornment for him. Therefore, she should do her best to cast a good light on him.

THE GIFT OF PROPHECY

It seems quite clear that certain women in the early days of Christianity had the gift of prophecy. Philip the evangelist, for example, had four daughters that prophesied (Acts 21:9).

Prophecy can be thought of in, at least, two ways: It can be thought of as a foretelling the future or as a speaking out for God.

The fact that certain women in the early days of the church could foretell the future and speak for God does not necessarily mean that women (or men) have the gift of prophecy today. The apostle Paul said,

*“But whether there are prophecies,
they will fail (katargeetheesontai)”*
1 Corinthians 13:8

The word “katargeetheesontai” is a future passive form of the verb “katargeo,” which means “to render ineffective, nullify, cancel, destroy, abolish, or do away with.” Paul did not simply say that prophecies would cease. He said they would be stopped. The future passive form shows that he meant that someone would do away with them.

Who would do away with the prophecies? Obviously, it would be the One who inspired prophecies in the first place. He would be the one who would do away with them. That is, God would stop them.

Even though prophetic revelations from God and the ability to foretell the future in a prophetic way have stopped, women can still speak out for God in various ways. They can, for example, share with others what God has said in the Bible. Therefore, their ability to speak effectively for God today may depend upon their familiarity with the Holy Scriptures.

WHERE DID THE WOMEN IN NEW TESTAMENT TIMES USE THEIR PROPHETIC GIFTS?

There are two unnecessary assumptions that are sometimes made.

It is not necessary to assume that the women in the early days, who had prophetic gifts, used their gifts to preach in the assembly of the saints. To be sure, some of the women in Corinth may have been preaching in the assembly; but if they were, it was improper for them to have been doing so, for the apostle Paul said,

*“Let your women keep silent in the churches,
for they are not permitted to speak.”*

1 Corinthians 14:34

The other unnecessary assumption is that women with prophetic gifts spoke publicly before groups of men and women outside of the assembly.

Those women that had prophetic gifts may have found ample opportunity to exercise their gifts by speaking privately with friends and neighbors, as they met them on the streets or at the market place. Or, they may have spoken with their family members and acquaintances in the privacy of their own homes, or in the homes of others.

The assemblies in those early days may have been quite different from the carefully planned and sometimes highly orchestrated “church services” of today.

We should not picture in our minds those early Christians sitting in neat rows in beautiful church buildings. Church buildings had not been built yet. Early Christians came together wherever they could find a place to meet. Sometimes they met in homes. Sometimes they met out in the open, perhaps under a tree, if the weather were good. Or sometimes they met in caves for the sake of safety.

Those meetings of early Christians appear to have been very informal and very unstructured. In fact, the apostle Paul encouraged the Corinthians to bring a little more structure into their meetings. He said,

*“Let all things be done decently
and in order.”*

1 Corinthians 14:39

In addition, people in those days did not have wristwatches, as we do today. They told time by looking at a sundial or by observing the sky. So brethren showed up at different times for their gatherings. Those that were slaves could not always get off from their work whenever they chose. So the apostle Paul told the brethren,

*“When you come together to eat,
wait for one another.”*

1 Corinthians 11:33

Indeed, they may not have set a time for when their meetings were supposed to begin, or to close. Their meetings were so informal that some of the brethren felt free to unpack food they had brought and to eat it (1 Corinthians 11:33-34).

During the time before the meetings began, and after they were over, there would have been plenty of opportunity for women to use their gifts to encourage and instruct the brethren and others, who may have been present. While doing this, they needed to have a covering of some kind.

COULD WOMEN SPEAK IN THE ASSEMBLY IF THEY WORE A HEADDRESS?

Godly women, who were aware of their propensity for dropping a comment here and there, would likely come to the

assembly prepared, wearing a shawl or a headdress, so they could share with others their prompting from the Spirit.

Still, there is no indication that either the gift of prophecy or the wearing of headdress gave them license to speak publicly in an assembly. Even with a headdress, their admonitions were to be given to others privately--one on one--and not to the whole assembly.

A SYMBOL OF AUTHORITY

The apostle Paul said that a women should have "*authority*" (or "*a symbol of authority*," as the NKJV and other say) on her head "*because of the angels*" (1 Corinthians 11:10).

Leading up to this verse, Paul enumerated the reasons why a woman should have a covering when she prays or prophesies. Here are the reasons that he gave:

1. A woman should wear a covering when she prays or prophesies because she "*is the glory of man*" (*doxa andros*). Paul said,

*"For a man indeed ought not
to cover his head,
since he is the image and glory of God;
but woman is the glory of man."*

1 Corinthians 11:7

To be sure, everyone knows, even today, that women are special, even glorious. They are glorious in a lot of ways. For one, they are usually far more beautiful than men. In addition, God has endowed them with certain attributes (such as gentleness and kindness) that most men have to strive to attain.

2. The Apostle Paul's second reason why a woman should wear a covering when she prays or prophesies is because she is "*from man*" (ex andros). Paul said,

*"For man is not from woman,
but woman from man."*

1 Corinthians 11:8

Paul's wording reflects the fact that God created Eve from a bone taken from Adam's side (Genesis 2:21-23).

3. The apostle Paul's third reason as to why a woman should wear a covering when she prays or prophesies is because woman was created "*for the man* (dia ton andra)." Paul said,

*"Nor was man created for the woman,
but woman for the man."*

1 Corinthians 11:9

This reflects the words that God spoke when He said, "*It is not good that man should be alone; I will make him a helper comparable to him*" (Genesis 2:18), and truly, a good wife is a "*help*" to a man.

4. The apostle Paul's fourth reason as to why a woman should wear a covering when she prays or prophesies is because she ought to have a "*symbol of authority on her head.*" Paul said,

*"For this reason the woman ought
to have a symbol of authority
on her head,
because of the angels."*

1 Corinthians 11:10

A woman should have authority (or a symbol of authority) on

her head “*because of the angels* (dia tous aggelous).”

WHAT ABOUT THE “ANGELS?”

Paul did not recommend that a woman wear a covering because he thought that either the Jews or the Gentiles might think it improper for a woman to be talking with a man unless she wore a headdress. Rather, He seemed more concerned more about “*the angels.*”

The suggestion has been made that Paul was concerned lest angels be tempted to lie with Christian women in a carnal way, but that is a silly suggestion. God's holy angels would not be interested in human women in that way.

A better suggestion would be that women (and men, too) should live in a godly way that would not disappoint or discourage those magnificent creatures (angels) whom God has ordained to watch over them.

A still better suggestion would be that those evangelists who brought the gospel to people are also “angels” (meaning messengers) of the gospel. Those are ones who need encouragement and who might be tempted by human women.

CHRIST'S TEACHING ELEVATED MARRIAGE TO A NEW HEIGHT

Christ brought an enhanced perception of the mutual dependency of a man and his wife (Galatians 3:28). The apostle Paul said,

*“Neither is man independent of woman,
nor woman independent of man,
in the Lord.”*

1 Corinthians 11:11

That is to say, men and women need each other. Neither of them is complete without the other, and neither of them is more important in the eyes of God than the other. Paul said,

*“For as woman came from man,
even so man also comes through woman;
but all things are from God.”*

1 Corinthians 11:11-12

LONG HAIR FOR WOMEN

Sometimes men can be seen today with long hair, and women with short hair. Generally speaking, however, it is more natural for men to have short hair and for women to have long hair. The apostle Paul said,

*“Does not even nature itself teach you
that if a man has long hair,
it is a dishonor to him?”*

1 Corinthians 11:14

Paul also said,

*But if a woman has long hair,
it is a glory to her;
for her hair is given to her for a covering.”*

1 Corinthians 11:15

The apostle Paul seems to have been pointing to a woman's hair as an argument that would bolster his point of view that it is natural for women to have a head covering of some kind. He does not seem to have been saying that a woman's hair is a replacement for a covering.

SHOULD A WOMAN WEAR A COVERING IN THE ASSEMBLY?

The answer as to whether or not a woman should wear a covering at the assembly of the church seems to turn on whether or not she is thought to be “*praying*” in the assembly. We know from what Paul said (1 Corinthians 14:33-35) that she should not be prophesying (teaching) in the assembly, but can she be considered to be praying?

If she is thought to be “*praying*,” then these following remarks from the apostle Paul should be considered. Paul said,

*“Judge among yourselves.
Is it proper for a woman to pray (proseuchesthai)
to God with her head uncovered?”*

1 Corinthians 11:13

The word “*proseuchomai*” (from which “*preseuchesthai*” is an infinitive) usually means to pray out loud, but it may not always imply a spoken prayer. Surely, a silent prayer is also ‘praying,’ just as saying “Amen” to a prayer is ‘praying.’

So the pertinent question seems to be, “Is a woman ‘praying’ (in the sense of ‘*proseuchomai*’) when she sits in the assembly and listens to some man speak a prayer and says, ‘Amen?’”

If a person comes to the conclusion that a woman is praying in the assembly when she quietly listen to a prayer and agrees with it, then the consistent view of 1 Corinthians 11:13 would seem to be that she should wear a head covering of some kind. If she is not “praying,” she would not need a covering.

A parallel question would be, “Is a man thought to be ‘praying’ (in the sense of ‘*proseuchomai*’), as he sits in the assembly and listens to a brother say a prayer? If he is, he should take his hat off. If he is not, he could presumable wear his hat in the assembly, as far as the Scriptures are concerned. If we conclude that both men and women are praying in the assembly

when they listen to the prayers of others and say (or think), "Amen," it would seem appropriate for a woman to wear a covering and for a man to take off his hat. The apostle Paul said,

*"Judge among yourselves.
Is it proper for a woman to pray to God
with her head uncovered?"*

1 Corinthians 11:13

This question seems to imply that it would not be proper for a woman to pray with her head uncovered.

NO SUCH CUSTOM

The apostle Paul brought his discussion of women's covering to a close by saying,

*"But if anyone seems to be contentious,
we have no such custom (suneetheian),
nor do the churches of God."*

1 Corinthians 11:16

Who did the apostle Paul think might be contentious about what he had said? Did he think the brethren who were in favor of women wearing a covering in the assembly would be contentious?

Or did Paul think that brethren who thought that a covering was unnecessary might be contentious with what he had said? This latter seems more likely

No one would expect Paul to turn around and say that a covering made no difference after he had just made an elaborate argument in favor of a covering.

**SHOULD A CONGREGATION PASS A LAW THAT
REQUIRES WOMEN TO WEAR A HAT IN THE ASSEMBLY?**

No, a church should not be in the business of passing laws. That would violate the freedom that Christians have in Christ. Let the women decide for themselves whether or not they should wear a hat in the assembly. Christian women are intelligent and they can make their own decision.

IN THE ASSEMBLY 1 Corinthians 14:26-40

“(26) How is it then, brethren? Whenever you come together, each of you has a psalm, has a teaching, has a tongue, has a revelation, and has an interpretation. Let all things be done for edification. (27) If anyone speaks in a tongue let there be two or at the most three, each in turn, and let one interpret. (28) But if there is no interpreter, let him keep silent in church, and let him speak to himself and to God. (29) Let two or three prophets speak, and let the others judge. But if anything is revealed to another, who sits by, let the first keep silent. (31) For you can all prophesy one by one that all may learn and all may be encouraged. (32) And the spirits of the prophets are subject to the prophets. (33) For God is not the author of confusion but of peace, as in all the churches of the saints. (34) Let your women keep silent in the churches, for they are not permitted to speak; but they are to be submissive, as the law also says. (35) And if they want to learn something, let them ask their own husbands at home; for it is shameful for women to speak in church. (36) Or did the word of God come originally from you? Or was it you only that it reached? (37) If anyone thinks himself to be a prophet or spiritual, let him acknowledge that the things which I write to you are the commandments of the Lord. (38) But if anyone is ignorant, let him be ignorant. (39) Therefore, brethren, desire earnestly to prophesy, and do not forbid to speak with tongues. (40) Let all things be done decently and in order.” NKJV.

Many of the early Christian men came to the assembly of the church prepared to make a presentation of some kind. Some of them had a “*psalm*,” others a “*teaching*,” others a message in a “*tongue*” (foreign language), still others a “*revelation*,” and some an “*interpretation*” (of Scripture) to present.

These presentations were permissible, and welcomed; but they should all be given within certain guidelines (1 Corinthians 14:26-33).

The presentations should not be given for show, or purely for entertainment, but for “*edification*” (oikodomeen) (1 Corinthians 14:26). The word “oikodomeen” is from “oikodomeo,” which

means "I build a house." The purpose of all these presentations should be to build up the people.

There were, no doubt, many different languages spoken in the city of Corinth, since it was a world-renown trade center. The apostle Paul set a limit on how many foreign-language speakers (tongue-speakers) should be allowed to speak in any given assembly. "*Two,*" he said, "*or at most three*" (1 Corinthians 14:27). (It is no joy to listen to someone speaking a language that is not understood.)

Paul also said that the foreign-language (tongue) speakers should not all speak at once, but "*each in turn,*" and someone should interpret (1 Corinthians 14:27). If no interpreter were present, Paul said that the foreign-language speaker should "*keep silent in the church*" (*sigato en ekleesia*) (1 Corinthians 14:28).

The verb "sigato" is in the imperative mood (command form). The command form indicates that Paul intended for the brethren to respect what he said. If a person had a message that could only be spoken in a "*tongue*" (foreign language), and if no interpreter were present, that person should deliver his admonition to himself privately (1 Corinthians 14:28).

What was true for those who spoke in tongues (foreign languages) was also true for the prophets: Only two or three of them should speak in the assembly (1 Corinthians 14:29) and the others should "*judge*" (*diakrinetosan*). "Diakrino" means "I evaluate," or "I consider," what is said.

It could happen that a brother might receive a divine revelation while he was seated in the assembly, and he might feel compelled to speak out, immediately. In such a case, the person that is already speaking should yield the floor, so that no two people speak at the same time. Paul said, "*Let the first keep silent*" (*sigato*) (1 Corinthians 14:30). Here, again, we see the verb "sigao" (*keep silent*) in the imperative mood (command form).

Paul was willing for all the brothers to speak, who had the gift of prophecy, but they should do it "*one by one,*" so that everyone could learn and be encouraged (1 Corinthians 14:31).

This shows that the assembly should be a learning experience for all and should provide an opportunity for all to *“be encouraged.”*

The apostle Paul made a very revealing remark, however, about the prophets. He said,

*“The spirits of the prophets
are subject to the prophets.”*

1 Corinthians 14:32

What this means is that, even though a person feels that he has received a revelation from God, he can still control how, when, and where he speaks it. In other words, he should not use his divine revelation as an excuse to disrupt the assembly, because *“God is not the author of confusion but of peace”* (1 Corinthians 14:33).

LET YOUR WOMEN KEEP SILENT IN THE CHURCHES

The apostle Paul laid his finger on another source of confusion in the Corinthian church. He said, *“Let your women keep silent (sigatosan) in the churches (en tais ekkleesiis)”* (1 Corinthians 14:34). The word “ekkleesia” means “assembly.” (An assembly is composed of those who have been “called out” to a gathering.)

This is third time that Paul has used the word “sigao” in these verses.

It is clear what “sigato” means regarding the tongue speaker if no interpreter was present: It meant that the tongue speaker should keep quiet (1 Corinthians 14:28).

It is also clear what “sigato” means regarding the person who yields the floor to the man who feels that he must immediately share the revelation that he has just received: The original speaker should keep quiet (1 Corinthians 14:30).

Likewise, it is also clear what “sigatosan” means with regards to women. They are to “*keep silent*” in the assembly. “Sigatosan” is also in the command form.

Paul explained why women should “*keep silent*” in the assembly. He said, “*for they are not permitted to speak (lalein)*” (1 Corinthians 14:34). This does not mean that women may not even whisper a word to a brother, to a sister, or to a child sitting nearby. It also does not mean that they cannot sing with the congregation. The word “laleo” brings with it the idea of someone's speaking in continuous way, which means that women are not to make speeches in the assembly. Instead, they are to be “*submissive (hupotassesthosan)*.” This, too, is in the command form. In fact, all of the injunctions in these verses in 1 Corinthians 14:26-40, which say “*let*” someone do something, are command forms. (The English language, unfortunately, does not have a command form in the third person. Therefore, all direct commands in English can only be in the second person. We cannot say, for example, “He do something.” That would be baby talk. In English we need the helping word “let” to frame a command in the third person.)

Now, look at the verses in this passage (1 Corinthians 14:26-40) in which the helping word “*let*” is used to express a command:

“*Let all things be done for edification*” (Verse 26).

“*Let one interpret*” (Verse 27).

“*Let him keep silent in the church*” (Verse 28).

“*Let him speak to himself and to God*” (Verse 28).

“*Let two or three prophets speak*” (Verse 29).

“*Let the others judge*” (Verse 29).

“*Let the first keep silent*” (Verse 30).

“*Let your women keep silent in the churches*” (Verse 34).

“*Let them ask their husbands at home*” (Verse 35).

“*Let him acknowledge that the things which I write to you are commands of the Lord.*” (Verse 37).

“*Let him be ignorant*” (Verse 38).

“Let all things be done decently and in order” (Verse 40).

All these expressions are in the imperative mood (command form). They sound a little weak in English, yet they are still commands. Although the apostle Paul did not speak unkindly or harshly, it is clear that he intended for his instructions to be carried out.

The main reason why there must be order in the assembly is so that teaching can be done and encouragement given. In 1 Corinthians 14, heavy emphasis is placed on clear and intelligible teaching and encouraging.

The gathering of Christians should not be exclusively a “praise service.” It should be a teaching and learning experience as well. (All praise and no teaching makes for an uninformed congregation.)

The apostle Paul said that women in the church are to be “*submissive*” (hupotassesthosan) (1 Corinthians 14:34). The word “hupotassesthosan” is an aorest passive imperative form of “hupotasso.” “Hupotasso” means, “I put someone (or something) in subjection.” This injunction should also be translated as one of the “*let them*” phrases.

In addition, the apostle Paul said that the Law (of Moses) foretold that women would be in submission. He was referring, no doubt, to Genesis 3:16, which says, “*Your desire shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you.*” However, a Christian husband would be wise to make it as easy as possible for his wife to be in submission to him.

Early gatherings of Christians seem to have included a question and answer session. Some of the women in Corinth may have been taking undue advantage of the opportunity to ask questions. The apostle Paul said it would be better for them to ask questions of their own husbands at home rather than in the assembly (1 Corinthians 14:35). Unmarried women and women whose husbands do not know the Scriptures need help, of course, from another source. This is where the older women of the church

should step in. They should teach the younger women. See Titus 2:3-5.

In thinking about this passage, I asked my wife why it is “*shameful for women to speak in church.*” Her reply was, “Because it dishonors their head (husband).” That is, a woman’s speaking out in the assembly puts her husband to shame because he should be the one to speak out. For that reason, when the wife speaks out in the assembly, it shows that she does not properly respect her husband.

The apostle Paul anticipated that some of the brethren in Corinth would resist what he had said concerning their public assemblies. So he asked them, “*did the word of God come originally from you*” (1 Corinthians 14:36)? Obviously, it did not.

Then he asked, “*Or was it you only that it reached?*” Obviously, it had not, for the gospel had spread over the whole Mediterranean world and beyond.

The apostle Paul also anticipated that some of the brethren, both men and women, would want to ignore what he had said. They would seek an excuse to ignore what He said, on the basis that they saw themselves as prophets or as “*spiritual.*” So Paul said,

*“If anyone thinks himself
to be a prophet or spiritual,
let him acknowledge
that the things which I write to you
are the commandments (entolee) of the Lord.”*

1 Corinthians 14:37

Paul used the word “entolee” (command) “*of the Lord.*” Now, a command “*of the Lord*” is not to be lightly ignored.

The apostle Paul foresaw the possibility that some brethren might desire to remain “*ignorant*” (agnoei) of what he had just said regarding bringing order into the proceedings of the assembly (1 Corinthians 14:38). The word “agnoeo” (*ignorant*) means “I do

not know” or “I disregard.” Paul used the “agnoeo” to refer to a person who refuses to acknowledge what he (Paul) had said.

The ancient Greek manuscripts disagree among themselves as to what comes next in this verse. Some of the manuscripts say, “*Let him be ignorant (agnoeitai),*” meaning if a person persists in ignorance, there is nothing anyone can do about it. Others manuscripts say, “*He is (to be) ignored (agnoeito),*” meaning the church should pass him by. Whichever reading is the original one, the results are the same. If a person will not abide by the apostolic injunctions that are designed to bring order into the assembly, he is to be shunted to the side, out of a leadership role.

The apostle Paul recognized that there were people in the early church who were gifted in miraculous ways, but he taught that they needed to tame their wilder inclinations. Paul also taught that women are just as much members of the body of Christ as men (Galatians 3:28), yet he placed restrictions on what women should do in the assembly.

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN MEN AND WOMEN IN MARRIAGE Ephesians 5:21-33

(21) “submitting to one another in the fear of God. (22) Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. (23) For the husband is head of the wife, as also Christ is head of the church; and He is the Savior of the body. (24) Therefore, just as the church is subject to Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in everything. (25) Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her. (26) that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word, (27) that He might present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish. (28) So husbands ought to love their own wives as their own bodies; he who loves his wife loves himself. (29) For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as the Lord does the church. (30) For we are members of His body, of His flesh and of His bones. (31) ‘For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.’ (32) This is a great mystery, but I speak concerning Christ and the church. (33) Nevertheless let each one of you in particular so love his own wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband.” NKJV.

The central idea in this passage about marriage is that love is the key to the relationship. In spite of this, Paul introduced his thoughts about love in marriage by talking about submission. That

may seem strange to some people, but submission is the common duty of everyone, both men and women.

The necessity of submission comes from the fact that all humans are created beings. That means that they did not create themselves, and they do they own themselves. They belong to the One who made them and to the One who redeems them. Hence, they live at the pleasure of another.

Consequently, in their association in the church, they should act as befits a dependent status by “*submitting (hupotassomenoi) to one another in the fear of God.*”

Mutual submission is not only appropriate in the church but also in marriage. Since a Christian husband and his (Christian) wife are both brethren in the Lord, they are equal to each other before the Lord.

Therefore, they should submit to each other. Yet, while this is true, a wife occupies a position in marriage that is similar to the position of the church in its relationship to Christ. The apostle Paul said,

*“Just as the church is subject to Christ,
so let the wives be
to their own husbands in everything.”*

Ephesians 5:24

Being submissive to Christ does not demean the church. It is an honor for the church to be submissive to Christ, for the church belongs to Christ. Likewise, it is an honor for a wife to belong in marriage to a good man and to wear his name.

Further, a wife needs to be submissive to her husband so that her husband can look after her properly.

Every Christian woman that is thinking about marriage should be careful to choose a man, not solely for his money or his looks. She should think about whether or not he respects God and whether or not he will treat her properly. That is to say, before a woman entrusts herself to a man, she needs to be sure that he will

put her welfare above his own. The apostle Paul gave instruction to husbands, as follows. He said,

*“love your wives,
just as Christ also loved the church
and gave Himself for her.”*

Ephesians 5:25

How much did Christ love the church? He loved her enough to die for her. Yet Christ's concern for the church did not stop with His dying for her. He sanctifies her (makes her holy).

He makes her holy by cleansing her with *“the washing of water by the word”* (Ephesians 5:26). Notice that Christ does not sanctify the church *“by the word”* alone, but by *“the washing of water,”* which is prescribed *“by the word.”* The *“washing”* here refers to baptism. A lot of people want to get rid of the *“water”* in this passage. They want get rid of it because they want to have a *“washing”* without *“water.”* That is to say, they want to have salvation without baptism, yet there is no compelling reason to get rid of the *“water.”* Instead, people need to come to an understanding of the importance of baptism in the process of becoming a Christian. Baptism is a part of the means that Christ uses to prepare worldly and unclean people for membership in His holy church.

The apostle Paul explained why Christ wants to sanctify the church. It is because He wants to present her to Himself as a *“glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish”* (Ephesians 5:27).

The apostle Paul said that a husband should be as deeply concerned about the welfare of his wife as he is about the welfare of his own body, for *“he who loves his wife loves himself”* (Ephesians 5:28). It is because of a man's love for his wife that he *“nourishes (ektrephei) and cherishes (thalpei)”* her, just as the Lord does the church (Ephesians 5:29). The Greek word *“ektrephei”* means *“he feeds”* his wife, and the word *“thalpei”* means he *“takes care”* of her.

The apostle Paul conceded that the relationship between a husband and his wife is a “*great mystery*” (musteerion) (Ephesians 5:32). A “*mystery*” in the New Testament is something that was once kept secret but is at last revealed. So the best explanation of what a marriage should be can be found by observing the relationship between Christ and His church, as it is revealed in the Scriptures.

Although the members of the church are married to Christ, that does mean that a man should not have his own wife or that a woman should not have her own husband (Ephesians 5:33). If a husband loves his wife and takes care of her properly, she will gladly submit to his lead. By the same token, if a wife respects her husband and follows his lead, he will find it easy to love and take care of her.

1 Timothy 2:8-15

(8) “I desire therefore that the men pray everywhere, lifting up holy hands, without wrath and doubting; (9) in like manner also, that the women adorn themselves in modest apparel, with propriety and moderation, not with braided hair or gold or pearls or costly clothing, (10) but, which is proper for women professing godliness, with good works. (11) Let a woman learn in silence with all submission. (12) And I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man, but to be in silence. (13) For Adam was formed first, then Eve. (14) And Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived, fell into transgression. (15) Nevertheless she will be saved in childbearing if they continue in faith, love, and holiness, with self-control.” NKJV.

The apostle Paul had a clear concept of how both men and women should function in the church.

Before Paul described a woman's role in this passage, however, he described what men should be doing. He said, “*I desire (boulomai) therefore that the men (tous andras) pray everywhere.*” The word “boulomai” expresses Paul's desire and intention: Namely, He wanted men to be praying “*everywhere.*”

Two things here show that the apostle Paul was thinking that the men should be doing the praying not the women. First, he used the word “andras,” which means “man.” He did not use the word “anthropoi,” which would have referred, perhaps, to mankind in

general. The word "andras," however, refers to men as distinct from women.

The second thing that shows that Paul was thinking of men doing the praying, and not women, is that Paul made a clear distinction in this chapter (1 Timothy 2:8-15) between the activities of men and women in general.

Praying seems to lie within the scope of a man's responsibility, while a woman has other responsibilities. This does not mean, of course, that women should not pray at all. Women can find many appropriate opportunities to pray. They can pray by themselves privately, or with other women, or with their own children. But when men are present, it is best for women to step back and let the men take the lead. If they do step back, and do it willingly, they will avoid the embarrassment of someone having to say to them, "Now, you ladies be quiet."

The apostle Paul wanted the men to take the lead in religious matters. This included public praying. In most cases, if the men (of a congregation) will shoulder their role as spiritual leaders, and live Godly lives, most spiritual-minded women will gladly let them take the lead. When women assume the leadership in a congregation, it is likely because they have become frustrated with the poor leadership that the men have been giving and feel obligated to do something about it.

The hands that men are to be "*lifting up*" (epairontas) in prayer should be "*holy (hosiuous) hands.*" The word "hosiuous" refers to hands of men, who do what is holy. Men who pray should be without "*wrath*" (orgees) and "*doubting*" (dialogismou). Unless they live without "*wrath*," they are not likely to have "*holy hands.*" Further, unless they pray without "*doubting*," their prayers are not likely to be answered (James 1:6-7).

The apostle Paul also had a clear concept of what women should be like. He wanted women to dress modestly, "*not with braided hair or gold or pearls or costly clothing, but, which is proper for women professing godliness, with good works*" (1 Timothy 2:9-10). Paul also wanted women to "*learn*

(*manthaneto*) *in silence.*” Rather, I should say that he actually “commanded” women to learn in silence, because the word “*manthaneto*” (let her learn) is in the imperative mode, a command. The Greek word “*heesukia*” would be better translated as “quietness” rather than “*silence,*” for Paul did not mean that she should not speak at all.

The apostle Paul also said that a woman should learn “*with all submission* (*hupotagee*)” (1 Timothy 2:11). The noun “*hupotagee*” is associated with the verb “*hupotasso,*” which means, “I subordinate.” The One who subordinated women to their husbands is the same One who subordinated men to Christ.

THE APOSTLE PAUL DID NOT PERMIT A WOMAN TO TEACH

Paul went on to say that he did “*not permit* (*ouk epitrepo*) *a woman to teach*” (*didaskain*) (1 Timothy 2:12). Paul did not actually say that a woman should never under any circumstance ever teach a man. The word “*didaskain*” (*to teach*) implies teaching in some official (or semi-official) capacity. We know that Priscilla helped her husband, Aquila, teach Apollos (Acts 18:26). Paul also said that he did not “*permit*” (*ouk epitrepo*) a woman to “*have authority over* (*authentain*) *a man*” (1 Timothy 2:12). One can identify in the word “*autos*” (self) in the word “*authentain.*” Paul did not permit a woman to exalt herself so as to exercise authority over a man in church affairs.

Did the apostle Paul have the authority from God to tell men and women what to do? Presumably, he did. He was an inspired apostle. His teaching about how men and women should function in the church was greatly needed in those days. How much did those men and women in the first century, some of whom had just come out of paganism, know about how they should serve Christ in His kingdom? Not very much, I suppose. Someone had to teach

them. Similarly, how much would men and women know today about the way in which they should serve Christ in the His kingdom unless they read it in the Bible? I think that wisdom lies on the side of caution. It would be better not to go against what the Bible says.

Now, we come to the crux of the matter. The apostle Paul said that women should be "*in silence*" (heesuchia) (1 Timothy 2:12). The King James Version and the New King James Version have caused a lot of confusion here. These two versions give the impression that a woman should not speak at all, but that is not right. The Greek word "heesuchia" does not say that she should not speak at all, but that she should be "in quietness."

Vines Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words explains this thought very well. It says that the Greek adjective (heesuchios) indicates a "tranquility arising from within, causing no disturbance to others." So Paul did not say that a woman should learn without ever saying a word. What he said was that she should keep a low profile in all that she does. She should not be loud, self-assertive, or raucous in the assembly or anywhere else. Instead, she should be meek, gentle, and show the spirit of Christ all the time and everywhere.

In one very wonderful way a woman's special gift trumps anything a man can do. She is designed by God to bear children. What a privilege God has given her in that she can bestow life on others! The apostle Paul said, "*She will be saved* (sotheesetai) *in childbearing* (teknogonias)." That is, she does not need to preach, to lead public prayer, to direct singing, to teach a Bible class, or to do any of those things that men do, in order to please God. She will be saved (and salvation should be enough for anyone) through doing what God has equipped her to do. If she brings children into the world and trains them up to love the Lord, she will be doing a great service to the world.

There has been some discussion concerning this passage as to whether or not a woman's salvation depends on the kind of life she

lives personally, or whether or not it depends on the kind of life her children live.

A discussion of this question has been brought to the fore because Paul said that “*she*” (singular) would be saved, “*if they* (plural) *continue in faith, love, and holiness, with self-control* (1 Timothy 2:15).” To whom does the word “*they*” refer? Does it refer to a woman or does it refer to their children? Opinions differ on this point. One cannot tell from grammar which way it is, yet it may not make any practical difference. For if a woman “*continues in faith, love, holiness, with self-control,*” her children will likely continue in the same vein, and the results will probably be that both she and her children will be saved.

Not every woman, of course, is married and has children. Some women were married at one time but are no longer married. Others are married but have no children. It would be unreasonable, therefore, to construe Paul's words as implying that a woman has to be married and have children before she can be saved. What Paul seems to have been describing is the general framework within which godly women serve. There are exceptions, of course. God is aware that there are women who are not married or who cannot bear children. He loves them all the same and makes provision for them. They serve God in the ways that their circumstances allow.

There is no reason to think, however, that unmarried women are free from the restrictions that have been placed on married women and that they are entitled to speak out in the assembly in a way that married women are not permitted to do.

HONOR WIDOWS WHO ARE REALLY WIDOWS

1 Timothy 5:3-16

(3) “Honor widows who are really widows. (4) But if any widow has children or grandchildren, let them first learn to show piety at home and to repay their parents; for this is good and acceptable before God. (5) Now she who is really a widow, and left alone, trusts in God and continues in supplications and prayers night and day. (6) But she who lives in pleasure is dead while she lives. (7) And these things command, that they may be blameless.

(8) "But if anyone does not provide for his own, and especially for those of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever.

(9) "Do not let a widow under sixty years old be taken into the number, and not unless she has been the wife of one man, (10) well reported for good works: if she has brought up children, if she has lodged strangers, if she has washed the saints' feet, if she has relieved the afflicted, if she has diligently followed every good work. (11) But refuse the younger widows; for when they have begun to grow wanton against Christ, they desire to marry, (12) having condemnation because they have cast off their first faith. (13) And besides they learn to be idle, wandering about from house to house, and not only idle but also gossips and busybodies, saying things which they ought not.

(14) "Therefore I desire that the younger widows marry, bear children, manage the house, give no opportunity to the adversary to speak reproachfully. (15) For some have already turned aside after Satan. (16) If any believing man or woman has widows, let them relieve them, and do not let the church be burdened, that it may relieve those who are really widows." NKJV.

A woman's being elderly and not having a husband does not necessarily qualify her to be honored as a "widow" and to receive financial aid from the church.

Of course, no person in the congregation should be neglected if that person is in need; but if a widow has children or grandchildren, they should feel responsible for taking care of their elderly relatives (1 Timothy 5:4-8,16).

The apostle Paul gave specific instructions about who should be enrolled (*katalegestho*) as a widow. The Greek verb "*katalegestho*" is the passive imperative form of "*katalago*," from which our word "catalogue" is derived. Paul seems to have envisioned that a list would be made up of the women who were worthy of financial help.

The apostle Paul described how to identify a widow that is worthy of financial help. She is one who is left alone, who trusts in God, and who continues in supplications and prayers night and day. It would be shameful for a congregation to neglect a woman such as this.

Paul had no intention, however, of enrolling old women who live in pleasure and who are dead spiritually (1 Timothy 5:6).

He said that the enrolled widows should:

1. Be at least 60 years of age.

2. Have been married to only one man.
3. Be well reported of for good works.
4. Have brought up children.
5. Have lodged strangers.
6. Have washed the saints' feet.
7. Have relieved the afflicted.
8. Have diligently followed every good work.

What did the apostle Paul intend that the women should be doing who qualify for financial help from the congregation? Certainly he did not intend that they should sit around idle and live off of the church.

Should women who are enrolled assume some role of authority within the congregation? There is no indication that Paul had such a thing in mind. No doubt, as enrolled women they should continue doing what they have always done. That is, they should lodge strangers, wash saints' feet, relieve the afflicted, and be diligent in every good work. What a blessing it would be to have a cadre of godly women doing such things as these!

The apostle Paul also had recommendations for younger women. He said:

1. They should marry.
2. They should bear children.
3. They should manage the house.
4. They should give no opportunity to the adversary to speak reproachfully of them.

Some "modern" women look down on such activities as these, but they should not look down on them.

REVERENT BEHAVIOR

Titus 2:3-5

(3) “the older women likewise, that they be reverent in behavior, not slanderers, not given to much wine, teachers of good things;(4) that they admonish the young women to love their husbands, to love their children, (5) to be discreet, chaste, homemakers, good, obedient to their own husbands, that the word of God may not be blasphemed.” NKJV

The apostle Paul wrote to Titus that he should “*speak the things which are proper for sound doctrine*” (Titus 2:1). Paul also told Titus to teach older women to be “*reverent (hieroprepeis) in behavior (en katasteemati).*” The word “katasteemata” (*behavior*)” refers to the way people do things, i.e. their habits. Older women should be “*reverent*” (hieroprepeis) in their habits. “Hieroprepeis” is a compound word, composed of “hieros” which means “sacred,” in the way that priests and the temple were sacred.

Thus, Paul meant for older women to handle their daily affairs in a manner that would remind people of the reverential way that priests served in the temple.

The apostle Paul told Titus to teach older women not to be “*slanderers*” (diabolous). The word for “*slander*” (diabolos) in the Greek language is the same as the word for “*devil*” (diabolos). The only difference between them is that the first of them is an adjective while the other is a noun. The devil is known as the “accuser” (or slanderer) of people.

Older women also should not be “*given (dedoulomenas) to much wine.*” The word “dedoulomenas” is a perfect passive participle from the word “douloo” which means “I enslave.” If a person is a slave to drink, you can be assured that it did not happen over night, hence, the use of the perfect tense in Greek, which indicates something of long standing.

Further, older women should be “*teachers of good things*” (kalodidaskalous). The word “kalodidaskalos” is composed of the word “kalos,” which means “good” and “didaskalos,” which means “teacher.” Obviously there are different kinds of teachers (didaskaloi), some of them teach what is good (kalos) and others teach what is false.

Nothing is more needful in churches today than for older women to teach younger women. Many times older women's

health and lack of education do not permit them to teach as they would like; but some older women are qualified and able to teach younger women, and they should do it. They can invite young women into their homes and teach them, or teach them at some other place. Younger women, who are making the transition from being foot-loose teenagers to being responsible wives and mothers, often have little or no concept of how to conduct themselves in their new role. They need the instruction and training, which older women can give.

It should not be necessary to “*admonish* (sophronidzosin) *the young women to love their husbands.*” Young women should naturally love their husbands, yet, sadly, they often do not. The Greek English dictionary that is in the back of The Greek New Testament put out by the United Bible Societies gives as translations for “sophronidzo” the words “train,” “teach,” or “advise.” The root meaning of “sophronidzo” is “I bring someone to his (or her) senses.” Older women should bring young women to their senses regarding their attitude toward their husbands.

Also, it should not be necessary to instruct young women “*to love their children.*” That, too, should come naturally, but sometimes it does not; for, sadly, some women abuse and neglect their children. Older women can help young women to learn what true love for children is. They can show them how to mold their children's character rather than cater to their children's whims.

Older women might, perhaps, spend their time more profitably in training young mothers to teach their own children, than in conducting children's Bible classes themselves. Let the mothers do that.

One of the most difficult things to teach young women is how to be “*discreet*” (sophonas). Discretion is the art of knowing what to do or what to say. I am not sure how this attribute can be taught, except perhaps by example.

Older woman should also teach young women to be “*chaste*” (hagnas), that is, to be “pure” and “holy.”

Further, they should teach them to be “*homemakers*” (oikourgous). Here is where practical instruction can help. Older women have learned many shortcuts about cooking and running a household, which young women need to learn.

God wants women, both young and old, to be “*good*” (agathas). That is, He wants them to do all kinds of good and useful things. Notice that the attributes that are suggested for women in this passage mostly concern practical matters. Men can afford to be more theoretical, but women need to have their feet on the ground.

It is not easy, of course, for a woman to be in subjection to her husband, if she knows that she has better judgment than he, yet she should try. The New King James Version says that older women are to teach young women to be “*obedient* (hupotassomenas) *to their own husbands.*” It is not necessary, however, to translate “hupotassomenas” as “*obedient.*” “Being in submission” would be an adequate translation. Women are supposed to be “*obedient*” to their husbands in some respects, I suppose, but the word “*obedient*” does not really characterize the full extent of their relationship with their husbands. It leaves out of account the affection they share with each other. In a proper marriage a husband usually does what pleases his wife just as often as she does what pleases him. Yet someone has to take the lead. In order for a husband to be able to lead, his wife needs to be submissive to him. Her submission is a gift that she bestows on him because she loves him. She gives it to him so that he can lead properly.

If Christian wives ignore the things mentioned above, non-Christian women might decide they did not want to be like them, and the word of God would be “*blasphemed.*”

1 Peter 3:1-7

(1) “Wives, likewise, be submissive to your own husbands, that even if some do not obey the word, they, without a word, may be won by the conduct of their wives, (2) when they observe your chaste conduct accompanied by fear. (3) Do not let your adornment be merely outward; arranging the hair, wearing gold,

or putting on fine apparel; (4) rather let it be the hidden person of the heart, with the incorruptible beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is very precious in the sight of God. (5) For in this manner, in former times, the holy women who trusted in God also adorned themselves, being submissive to their own husbands, (6) as Sarah obeyed Abraham, calling him lord, whose daughters you are if you do good and are not afraid with any terror. (7) Husbands, likewise, dwell with them with understanding, giving honor to the wife, as to the weaker vessel, and as being heirs together of the grace of life, that your prayers may not be hindered." NKJV.

The apostle Peter said that everyone should be submissive to the government under which he lives (1 Peter 2:13-17). He also said that slaves should be submissive to their earthly masters (1 Peter 2:21). Further, Peter reminded his readers that Jesus humbly submitted to the humiliations that were heaped upon him (1 Peter 2:21-24).

In a similar vein, he said to Christian wives, "*Be submissive (hupotassomenai) to your own husbands.*"

It may not be any easier for wives to submit to their husband than it is for slaves to submit to their masters, or for citizens to submit to their government, or for men to submit to God, but that does not diminish the need for it.

The Greek word for "*be submissive*" is "hupotassomai." It means to "take a subordinate place." Some modern women, alas, do not like the idea of being subordinate to their husbands or to anyone. If they are not submissive to their husbands, however, they will likely frustrate their husbands' efforts to take care of them properly.

A further reason why a Christian wife should be submissive, even to an unbelieving husband, is so that she can win Him for Jesus. It is hard to win a man for Jesus if his "Christian" wife does not respect him enough to submit to his leadership.

A Christian wife should not try to preach to her husband. The apostle Peter mentioned the possibility of a wife being able to win her husband "*without a word.*" Her husband will observe her "*chaste*" (hagneen) *conduct*" (anastropheen). The adjective "hagnos" (which is here translated "*chaste*") means "holy." It can even mean "saintly." The noun "anastrophee" means a "manner of

life.” So how a Christian wife lives can affect the eternal destiny of her husband.

The New King James Version says the good conduct of wives should be “*accompanied by fear*” (en phobo). To render “phobo” as “*fear*” may be a little too strong in this case. The word “phobo” can also mean to “respect,” which is better here. Wives should respect their husbands.

ADORNMENT

The apostle Peter spoke out strongly about women's adornment. He said, “*Do not let your adornment be merely outward; arranging the hair, wearing gold, or putting on fine apparel; rather let it be the hidden person of the heart, with the incorruptible beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is very precious in the sight of God*” (1 Peter 3:3-4). Peter cited the example of saintly women of the past, who adorned themselves with “*a gentle and quiet spirit.*” Sarah is a prime example of a woman's being subject to her husband. She called Abraham “*Lord*” (kurion) (Genesis 18:12). The Greek word “kurios” means “*lord*” or “*master.*”

Christian women can be considered Sarah's daughters if they do good and are not afraid of any “*terror*” (1 Peter 3:6). Sarah had plenty of things happen to her that could have caused her to be terrified; but she was not terrified, because she, like other holy women of old, “*trusted (elpidzousai) in God (eis theon)*” (1 Peter 3:5). The word “elpidzo” means “I hope.” The hope that Sarah and other holy women of old had was directed toward God (eis theon), and He took care of them.

The apostle Peter also had advice for husbands. He said that husbands should live with their wives “*with understanding (kata gnosis)*” (1 Peter 3:7). The word “gnosis” means knowledge. The expression “kata gnosis” can mean “with understanding” or “with consideration.” Husbands should realize that women are in some

ways weaker than men; and they should live with them accordingly, not expecting them to do things they cannot perform.

A husband also should be “*giving* (aponemontes) *honor to the wife*” (1 Peter 3:7). The word “aponemontes” is a present participle from “aponemo,” which means “I show.” It is not enough for a husband to honor his wife in his heart. He should show it. Since a present participle speaks of an ongoing action, a husband should keep on showing his wife that he honors her. If he does not, it is possible that their mutual prayers could be “*hindered*” (enkoptesthai). “Enkoptesthai” is a passive infinitive of “enkopto,” which means “I cut into” something. It gives the idea of slowing a person’s progress down by interrupting the road on which he is travelling. If a husband is not considerate of his wife, his marriage will be unhappy and this may diminish his desire to pray. It may also be difficult for him to get his wife to pray with him. Further, if he is not respectful of his wife, God may not answer his prayers. In the event that a man’s private prayers center on the conversion of his wife, how he treats her is especially important.

CLOSING COMMENTS

My purpose in making the above observations from the Greek text is not to limit the service that women render but to expand it. There are many things women can do that men cannot do, and women need to concentrate on those things. Nothing will energize a congregation more quickly than for its women to step up to their God-given responsibilities. Think what joy it would be for elders if they can oversee a congregation in which the women are doing all they should! Think what a joy it would give a preacher to speak to such a congregation! Think how young men and young women would be attracted to such a congregation!

I truly believe that the future of the Lord’s church is in the hands of the women. Women should not push men out of the leadership but build a fire under the men.