

## Church Structure

### The Church – Part 5 (Women)

1. ***Has anybody here ever changed their mind or their position on a biblical topic or even a conviction you once had? (Show of hands)***
2. ***Why did you change your mind?***
  - a. Culture sometimes plays a role...and so do relationships (DIVORCE)...
  - b. Sometimes, we're overtaken by just plain old common sense...
  - c. Sometimes the main reason people change their minds is because of new information...
  - d. For instance, there was a time when I had very different understandings and convictions on...
    - Whether Xians can take an oath in court
    - How the HS dwells in the believer
    - Whether or not God operates apart from the Word in the life of the believer
    - Singing during communion
    - Prayers may be addressed to Jesus
    - Whether a man who has one child can serve as an elder
    - Whether God hears the prayers of people in any other denomination than the Church of Christ
    - Whether the Church of Christ is a denomination
    - What angels do.
    - Open vs closed communion

The list goes on and on...
  - e. Usually, I changed my mind because I came across new information or was taught better information...
  - f. Sometimes what was new was learning how to read the text of Scripture...
  - g. I came across a better way to read the Bible...

- h. For instance, maybe I began to realize that there were definitely some cultural components to Scripture that don't apply to us today (e.g., women praying with heads covered in **1 Cor. 11:2ff**)...
    - i. Or maybe I realized that the point I thought was being made in a particular text was not really the point at all (e.g., eating in the church building, also from **1 Cor. 11:22**)...
  3. Now, it doesn't always work that new information changes behavior...
    - a. Most of us have been conditioned educationally to think in terms of moving from information to application, or to move from theory to practice.
    - b. We understand what it means to be human primarily in relation to reason.
    - c. We are reasoning creatures, so what changes things is the information we receive.
    - d. But sometimes, in practice, change (particularly change in shared practices) involves more than just changing our minds about things.
    - e. Sometimes, this requires deeper, cultural change – a paradigm shift.
  4. In any event, my point is that our understanding and interpretation of Scripture does sometimes change...
    - a. And the point of good Bible Study is to try to allow the text of Scripture to lead us wherever it may...right?
    - b. Because our first allegiance is to God and to the text, right?
    - c. Not tradition...but the text...
  5. I'll tell you that's always my goal...
    - a. I try to keep an open mind...
    - b. And I keep asking myself, **“Is there another way to look at this that I'm missing? I bring my own baggage to the text. What are they?”** And so I want to keep studying.

6. And that's pretty much been my attitude about the role of women in the church... still trying to study and think...
7. I shared with you last week that there are three possibilities on how to interpret "In the same way, their wives" in reference to Deacons in **1 Tim. 3:11**...
  - Because "their wives" is literally "women" (gyne) – must be interpreted to get "wives"...
  - a. Could be the wives of deacons (as NIV and other vss interpret)...
  - b. Could be women assistants to deacons...
  - c. Could be women deacons (RSV; NIV note)...
8. Now, my point was simply that we often assume a level of certainty in the interpretation of the text (and so, our conclusions), where there may not be complete certainty – there be other possibilities we've just not considered...
  - a. And in the case of women deacons, I think honest, God-honoring people can come to different conclusions...
  - b. So we need to be careful about being too dogmatic...
9. Now, in a similar way, I want us to spend a little time thinking about the role of women in the church...
  - a. Because we're studying Pauline Theology and that's where we generally get our perspective on what women can and can't do in the church...
  - b. Two primary passages:
    - 1 Corinthians 14:33b-35** – "As in all the congregations of the saints,<sup>34</sup> women should remain silent in the churches. They are not allowed to speak, but must be in submission, as the Law says.<sup>35</sup> If they want to inquire about something, they should ask their own husbands at home; for it is disgraceful for a woman to speak in the church."
    - 1 Timothy 2:9-15** – "I also want women to dress modestly, with decency and propriety, not with braided hair or gold or pearls or expensive

clothes,<sup>10</sup> but with good deeds, appropriate for women who profess to worship God.<sup>11</sup> A woman should learn in quietness and full submission.<sup>12</sup> I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man; she must be silent.<sup>13</sup> For Adam was formed first, then Eve.<sup>14</sup> And Adam was not the one deceived; it was the woman who was deceived and became a sinner.<sup>15</sup> But women will be saved through childbearing--if they continue in faith, love and holiness with propriety.”

c. So, tell me how we're traditionally interpreted these passages...

## **I. Two Perspectives on these passages...**

- A. One is to start with these verses and hold them up and say, “This is what the Bible says.”
1. And truthfully, that's what many churches (including the churches of Christ) do...
  2. We've tended to focus on “proof-texts” to establish authoritative practices.
  3. We've done the same thing with countless other issues...
  4. And if you take these passages out of their greater context in **1 Cor.** and **1 Timothy** and in the NT and the Bible and run your theology through them, you come to one conclusion about what women can and can't do.
  5. But even then, we're often not consistent...
    - a. **1 Cor. 14:34** – “**women should remain silent in the churches.**”
      - That word “silent” means just that – silence...
      - sigao* – to keep (the mouth) closed, to keep silent, not a peep
      - That means women cannot utter a sound...
      - And we don't do that (singing, comments in class, in African-American churches women talk all the time!)

- b. **1 Timothy 2:11-12** – “A woman should learn in quietness and full submission. <sup>12</sup> I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man; she must be silent.”

-The word for “quietness” or “silence” here is not “total silence”...

-*hesuchia* – means “quietfulness” – “to be controlled, reserved, and restrained”

-Same word Paul uses in **2:2** to say that Xians should live peaceful and quiet lives in their cultures...

-The word just doesn't mean “silence” like **1 Cor. 14:34**...

-Still, Paul says “**I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man**”

-Good so far, but again, we're not consistent...

-We take part of the passage to be cultural (**vv.9-10**)...

-Also, the word “woman” and “women” in this passage is the same word usually translated “wives” in **1 Tim. 3:11** (“their wives”)...

-If it's “wives,” then this passage would not refer to single women (neither would **1 Cor. 14** since it is specifically addressed to married women)...

-If it's not “wives,” then that puts our translation/interpretation of **1 Tim. 3:11** in question (and we end up picking and choosing how to translate the word to fit our preconceived ideas)...

6. Anyway – if we take these out of context and run our theology of women through them, we might overcome some objections and translation issues and come to one conclusion...

7. And we come away with the idea that God doesn't think much of women...
8. The question is, **“Is there another legitimate way to look at these passages?”**
9. Well, that's the other perspective...

**B. What if, instead of starting with these passages, we start with the whole of Scripture?**

1. That's what good Bible study does...it starts with the Bible as a whole and then begins to peel away layers (like an onion)...
  - a. We start with the Bible as a whole...
  - b. And then we start peeling...what's the first major division? (Old/New Testament)...
  - c. And then what's next? (The Book – 1 Cor. or 1 Tim.)...
  - d. Then we peel further to the completed thought within the letter...
  - e. And then the verses...and then the words...
  - f. We just keep peeling it away...
2. But we have to start with the whole...
3. So what if we start with the whole of Scripture and we start by asking, **“What does God think of women?”**
  - a. We might start in Genesis where God created male and female, BOTH in His image and gave BOTH men and women dominion over the earth (**Genesis 1:26-27** – **“Then God said, ‘Let us make man in our image, in our likeness, and let them rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the livestock, over all the earth, and over all the creatures that move along the ground.’ So God created man**

**in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.”)**

-So humankind begins male and female as co-heirs in creation...

-Man and woman are perfectly suited for each other (*ezer kenegdo*)

(1) **Ezer – helper**

-Used of God in **Psalm 10:14** (helper of the fatherless)...

-**Psalm 10:5** – King David’s helper

-**Deut. 33:29** – Israel’s helper

-The phrase simply does not have a hint of “subordination” in it!

(2) **kenegdo – “of the same nature;” “suitable;” “perfectly corresponding to”**

(3) So *ezer kenegdo* does not mean that woman is lesser or subordinate – it means someone who “fits perfectly” or “corresponds perfectly” and implies *mutuality and harmony*...

(4) Hierarchy doesn’t happen until AFTER the Fall (**Gen. 3:16** – “Your desire will be for your husband, and he will rule over you.”)

b. And then, we keep going and we see Miriam, Moses’ sister, in Exodus...

-She’s called a prophetess and apparently helped lead Israel in worship (**Exodus 15:20-21** – “**Then Miriam the prophetess, Aaron's sister, took a tambourine in her hand, and all the women followed her, with tambourines and dancing.**”<sup>21</sup> **Miriam sang to them: ‘Sing to the Lord, for he is highly**

exalted. The horse and its rider he has hurled into the sea.”)...

-**Micah 6:4** – says that Miriam was one of the three leaders God sent to bring Israel out of Egypt – **“I brought you up out of Egypt and redeemed you from the land of slavery. I sent Moses to lead you, also Aaron and Miriam.”**

- c. And then in Judges you discover that one of Israel’s leaders was Deborah...

-This was a violent and turbulent time after Joshua led Israel to conquer the Promised Land but before the time of the Kings...

- **Judges 2:16** – **“Then the Lord raised up judges, who saved them out of the hands of these raiders.”**

- **Judges 4:4-5** – **“Deborah, a prophetess, the wife of Lappidoth, was leading Israel at that time. <sup>5</sup> She held court under the Palm of Deborah between Ramah and Bethel in the hill country of Ephraim, and the Israelites came to her to have their disputes decided.”**

-Deborah is both a prophetess and a Judge

- d. **2 Kings 22** talks about **Huldah**...

-During the time of Jeremiah, Zephaniah, Hahum and Habakkuk, King Josiah chose Huldah, a prophetess in Jerusalem to help confirm the discovery of the long-lost Book of the Law and to interpret it...

- e. In the book of Ruth, we learn about this Moabite woman who was bold and hatched a plan to snag Boaz and became an ancestor of Jesus Christ Himself...
- f. And then there’s Esther who saved all of Israel!
- g. There’s also Sarah, Rebecca, Tamar, Leah, Abigail...on and on in the OT...(just skipping a stone – not a comprehensive list)...



- h. Women played significant and important roles... even as prophets!
- i. And then you come to the NT and you read about Mary of Nazareth, chosen by God to be the vessel through whom Jesus would be born...
- j. And Martha, who became one of Jesus' closest friends and disciples...
- k. And her sister Mary who sat at Jesus' feet (**Luke 10:39**) ...

-To "sit at a Rabbi's feet" in the 1<sup>st</sup> century meant to be taught to become Rabbi!

- Rabbi Eliezer wrote in the first century that, **"Rather should the words of the Torah be burned than entrusted to a woman ...Whoever teaches his daughter the Torah is like one who teaches her obscenity."**

- l. Luke speaks of "some women" who followed Jesus and financed his ministry

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

- m. Mary Magdalene is the first witness of the empty tomb...
- n. And then you come to the Book of Acts...

-And right there in the sermon that Peter preached on the Day of Pentecost in **Acts 2**, he starts the sermon by quoting **Joel 2:28-32** and he talks about how in the last days (referring to the Messianic Kingdom), God would pour out His Spirit on all people and sons and *daughters* will prophesy...

-**Acts 9** mentions Tabith (Aramaic – Dorcas is Greek – means “Gazelle”) a well-known Philanthropist (always doing good and helping the poor, **v.36**) who was raised from the dead...Only woman to be called a “disciple” (feminine form of mathetes – mathetria)

-**Acts 18** mentions Priscilla and Aquila – in **vv.18, 19 and 26**, she’s mentioned first, which was unusual in the ancient world...

-Paul usually refers to her first as well and he says in **Rom 16:3** that all the churches of the Gentiles were grateful for them...

-Aquila and Priscilla were an evangelistic TEAM – taught Apollos in **Acts 18**, they planted churches, taught new converts...

-We looked last week at **Romans 16:1** that perhaps calls Phoebe a deaconess in the church in Cenchrea...Paul says in **Romans 16:2** that she had been a great help to him and others...

-Here’s another interesting thing – Phoebe was most probably the one who delivered Paul’s letter to the Romans...

-In the ancient world, couriers were charged with the responsibility of explaining the letters they delivered...

-So it’s very possible that Phoebe read Paul’s letter aloud and answered questions the Romans Xians had...

-She very well may have been the first “commentator” on the letter to the Romans...

-**Romans 16:7** refers to “Andronicus (male) and Junias (female)” and Paul says they were “outstanding among the apostles...”

-Now, apostolos means “messenger” or “one who is sent as a delegate of another”

-And you can explain this away by saying there were “Apostles” (big “A”) and “apostles” (little “a”) – one group was the “Big 12” and the others were run-of-the-mill messengers...

-But if you’re fair and someone said, “There were women Apostles,” you couldn’t very well contradict them *based on the text!*

-**Philippians 4:2** talks about “Euodia” and “Syntyche” who were these two women who were probably causing all the problems in Philippi...

-Paul says in **v.3** that they “**contended at my side in the cause of the gospel**”

-They had “**contended at**” Paul’s side (**v.3**) in the cause of the gospel...

-The word is **sunathlein** – lit.: “**to fight together side by side**” – a metaphor drawn from the gladiatorial arena...

-Apparently, to Paul, preaching the gospel was a coed task ...and women were helping him spread the gospel in Philippi...

-And used here and in **1:27** (“contending as one man for the faith of the gospel”) it implies a united struggle in preaching/teaching the gospel on the one hand, and sharing in the suffering that results from the struggle, on the other.

-Paul considered these women “co-workers” (NIV – “fellow workers” – **sunergos**) – there is no hint of subordination here...

- C. So let’s go back to the original question – **“How does God view women?”**
1. If you look across the panoply of Scripture you get a clear message...
  2. Women are valued and coequal with men and are useful and were used in significant ways to bring about God’s plan for all humankind!
  3. Women were prophets and teachers and evangelists and leaders, used by God in HUGE and small ways...
  4. And then we get to **1 Cor.** and Paul begins his discussion of what was going on when the church met...
    - a. Paul recognizes that both men and women were praying and prophesying (**11:4-5**) and he calls men and women equal (**vv.11-12**)...
    - b. He says in **12:7** that every person in the church had been given a manifestation of the Spirit for the common good...
    - c. He says in **12:12ff** that every part of the body of Christ is equally important...and that everything should be done to build up the body
    - d. And then in **14:34** he says, **“Let the women keep totally silent.”**
    - e. Wait...women haven’t been a problem all through God’s history...and now all of a sudden they are...

- f. Could it be that something is going on that was out of the ordinary that led Paul to say what he said?
- g. In fact, Paul tells THREE GROUPS to be totally silent – to “shut up” completely...
  - Tongue speakers (if there is no interpreter) (**14:28**)...
  - Prophesiers (if someone else is speaking) (**14:30**)...
  - Women (wives who were being disruptive by constantly interrupting – it was bringing down the church – do you know what it’s like to be constantly interrupted?!) (**14:34-35**)

- 5. Or you get to **1 Timothy 2** (turn there)...
  - a. And Paul tells everyone to live peaceful and quiet and respectful lives in their culture...
  - b. He tells men to lift up holy hands in prayer...
  - c. Then he says women should dress modestly (no braided hair, gold, pearls, or expensive clothes)...
  - d. And then that women should be reserved and to learn in quietfulness (“to be controlled, reserved, and restrained”)...
  - e. Not SILENCE...but quiet respectfulness (he’s already commanded *everyone* to live that way! – If in the culture, then you don’t have to do that when the church gathers?)...
  - f. **“teach or to have authority over a man”** is a Greek construction that can mean “authoritarian teaching”...
  - g. So maybe something was going on in Ephesus...something similar to Corinth?
  - h. Maybe there were some women who again were being disruptive or trying to teach in an authoritarian way, lording it over men and women...not displaying the Spirit of Christ...

6. Is it possible, based on an honest reading of scripture, to come to a different conclusion on what women can and can't do?
7. I think the answer is "yes."
8. You may not agree with the conclusion...but honest, God-honoring, Bible-believing people can come to a different conclusion.