

Women in Church Leadership

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The issue of women in church leadership did not become controversial in the modern age of feminism. It was an issue in the early church as well. The acceptance of women in leadership is not a concession to the spirit of the feminist movement. Instead, it is a conclusion from a careful study of the scriptures. Scripture is our basis for doctrine. In studying the scriptures, we must consider a passage in light of the surrounding texts, the central message of the particular book, the original language, and the cultural setting and world view of the day.

Women served in leadership in both the Old and New Testaments. Some examples are:

Old Testament-

Miriam, a prophetess (Exodus 15:20)

Deborah, a prophetess (Judges 4 & 5)

Huldah, a prophetess (II Kings 22)

New Testament-

Philip's four daughters, prophetesses (Acts 21:8, 9)

Phoebe, "Diakonia" = deacon or deaconess

Chloe, leader of a house church (I Corinthians 1:11)

Euodia & Syntyche, leaders of house churches (Philippians 4:2, 3)

"Elect lady", leader of a house church (II John)

We also see many other illustrations of women in leadership in the church. Women were present in the upper room (Acts 1:14) and were received equally at Pentecost (Acts 2:17, 18). They also prayed and prophesied publicly (I Corinthians 11:4, 5)

There are instructions in the scriptures that appear to limit a woman's leadership in the church. They appear in Paul's first letter to the church in Corinth and his first letter to Timothy. In both texts, Paul is correcting cultural conflicts that had occurred.

I Corinthians 14:33-35: Men and women when gathered for worship would be seated in separate sections. Women were enjoying their new freedom in Christ and were breaking with cultural restrictions. They would ask their husbands questions which would verbally interrupt the worship. So Paul is addressing the resulting disorder. He was silencing disruption, not a woman's leadership.

I Timothy 2:15: The quietness or silence that Paul is referring to in the original language means- calmness of mind; not unruly. It is the same original word as in I Timothy 2:2, which encourages us to enjoy a "peaceful and quiet" life. The exhortation of not exercising authority over a man is a reminder of having a proper attitude of submission. Paul was not against women. Instead, he recognized that they tend to govern and be governed by their emotions.

As Paul addressed this issue, it is important that we understand both the cultural setting and the unique nature of women. This did not limit Paul from including women in church leadership. No one is to lead the church in a superior, dominating, selfish, or belittling way. All leaders are to be responsible, sacrificial, and loving in their service to Christ and His church. May the church...

"Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ." Ephesians 5:2