

Women in leadership

Introduction: Authority from the Scriptures

My subject today is women in leadership within the local church. What leadership positions can women hold according to the scriptures? What does the New Testament say concerning leadership of women in the local church. The two letters that deal specifically with this are First Timothy and Titus.

Now, some of the things I say may sound contentious, but Paul writes to the Corinthians in 1 Corinthians 11:16, "If anyone is contentious or argumentative, well, we have no such custom." So, it is not the purpose to be contentious or argumentative, but simply to show what the scriptures say. Sometimes the scriptures can be as a sword. The Bible says that the Word of God is quick and powerful, sharper than any two-edged sword. But as Bible believing Christians we want to follow what the scriptures say. We do not follow what society says, or what the world says with its agenda. We don't even follow what other churches say, because our authority does not come from other churches. It certainly doesn't come from society. **Our authority comes from the scriptures.**

The Divine Order: 1 Timothy 2:12-15

I want to begin by reading from 1 Timothy chapter 2, verse 12 to the end of the chapter. Paul writes: *1 Timothy 2:12-15 "I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man, but to be in silence. For Adam was formed first, then Eve. And Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived, fell into transgression. Nevertheless, she will be saved in childbearing if they continue in faith, love, and holiness, with self-control."* Paul says here that he would not put a woman into a position of authority over a man in the church, and he gives two reasons why.

The first reason is: "For Adam was formed first, then Eve." Paul's reasoning goes back to before the fall of mankind. Adam was created first, and Eve was created out of Adam. The headship of Adam over Eve is from creation not from the fall. There is a divine order. This order must also be seen in the church. Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 11:10 regarding the head covering of the women, that it is necessary "because of the angels". The only way I can understand this verse is that the angels are ministering spirits sent to help those who are the heirs of salvation. It is therefore essential that what the angels see in the church reflects the design and order of God. A woman's head covering had great significance in Corinth in the 1st century, it does not have the same significance today. Women were involved in the ministry of the local church in Corinth, 1 Corinthians 11:3, but this did not mean they could take over leadership from men. They were to be submissive and godly in character.

It can be good to mention here the characteristics of a godly woman.

A godly woman is submissive, has a gentle and quiet spirit, is not contentious, lives in the fear of the Lord, is not covetous, has inner beauty and a modest lifestyle, she is caring and diligent in service, seeking the spiritual welfare of her family and those she can serve in the local church. In addition to all these things she is prayerful, strong in faith, and diligent in knowing the scriptures. She is an example to others as the fruit of the Spirit is her lifestyle.

These scriptures show that women who are called “pastors” and who have authority over men whom God has raised up to be overseers in the church is rebellion against the word of God. But there are many men who are called “pastors” who are not servants seeking to build up the church through the word of God, prayer, and ministry, nor do they stand for holiness and righteousness, and they will do all they can to prevent those who are strong in faith, exemplary in life, and well equipped to teach the scriptures from ever being in leadership. They are also in rebellion against the word of God. It is a tactic of the devil to ensure that those who should be in leadership are prevented from being there.

The second reason is: "Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived fell into transgression." The deception of Eve was a direct consequence of Eve bypassing the headship of her husband. Men and women are created different. A husband must care for and protect his wife; a wife is to respect and honour her husband. Satan was cunning, he knew that Eve was easier to deceive than Adam, and it was because of Eve that Adam fell. Satan could not have achieved this by confronting Adam. He did it by confronting Eve. When Eve was deceived in Genesis, she was perfect, yet the devil was still able to deceive her. The teaching that everything changed after the death and resurrection of Christ does not apply in this case because Eve was deceived before the fall. Adam was not able to protect his wife because she moved independently without consulting him. If Adam had been there in the leadership role that he should have been in, then perhaps things would have been different.

The third thing Paul mentions concerning the woman is that she shall be saved through childbearing, "Nevertheless she will be saved in childbearing if they continue in faith, love, and holiness, with self-control." In the Jewish religion, every male child was circumcised after 8 days. This was a sign of the covenant God made with Abraham (Genesis 17:12), that in him all nations of the earth would be blessed (Genesis 12:3). This is the Old Covenant that was fulfilled in Christ. This has been replaced, not by baptism, by the institution of the bread and the wine, where we give thanks and where we are continuously reminded of the new covenant in Christ. Also, in the Jewish religion the firstborn son who opened the womb belonged to the Lord and had to be redeemed by payment of five shekels. Circumcision and redemption of the firstborn were male only ordinances, but of course the importance of women childbearing cannot be overestimated. Paul is not putting women down, when he says, “they will be saved in

childbearing”, rather he is showing the important role women have in the church. It was through childbearing that the Messiah came. It is through childbearing that we have Christian families. The book of Malachi says that God seeks for godly offspring in the family. *Malachi 2 15 “And did not he make one? Yet had he the residue of the spirit. And wherefore one? That He might seek a godly seed. Therefore take heed to your spirit, and let none deal treacherously against the wife of his youth.”*

Women have a great responsibility in bringing up their children in a godly manner. This can be seen regarding Timothy. Paul makes mention of how both Timothy’s mother and grandmother were women of sincere faith. *2 Timothy 1:5 “When I call to remembrance the unfeigned faith that is in thee, which dwelt first in thy grandmother Lois, and thy mother Eunice; and I am persuaded that in thee also.”*

The Ministry of Women in the Old Testament

The question arises, "Well, what ministry can a woman have in the church?" Women have always been in ministry both in the Old Testament and in the New. In the Old Testament we can mention a few, there were prophetesses Miriam, Deborah, Huldah, and the wife of Isaiah. Four others are considered prophetesses, but they are not called prophetesses, they are important for other reasons, Sarah, Hannah, Abigail, Esther.

The prophetic word of Abigail.

1 Samuel 25;23-31 “And when Abigail saw David, she hasted, and lighted off the ass, and fell before David on her face, and bowed herself to the ground, And fell at his feet, and said, Upon me, my lord, upon me let this iniquity be: and let thine handmaid, I pray thee, speak in thine audience, and hear the words of thine handmaid. Let not my lord, I pray thee, regard this man of Belial, even Nabal: for as his name is, so is he; Nabal is his name, and folly is with him: but I thine handmaid saw not the young men of my lord, whom thou didst send. Now therefore, my lord, as the LORD liveth, and as thy soul liveth, seeing the LORD hath withholden thee from coming to shed blood, and from avenging thyself with thine own hand, now let thine enemies, and they that seek evil to my lord, be as Nabal. And now this blessing which thine handmaid hath brought unto my lord, let it even be given unto the young men that follow my lord. I pray thee, forgive the trespass of thine handmaid: for the LORD will certainly make my lord a sure house; because my lord fighteth the battles of the LORD, and evil hath not been found in thee all thy days. Yet a man is risen to pursue thee, and to seek thy soul: but the soul of my lord shall be bound in the bundle of life with the LORD thy God; and the souls of thine enemies, them shall he sling out, as out of the middle of a sling. And it shall come to pass, when the LORD shall have done to my lord according to all the good that he hath spoken concerning thee, and shall have appointed thee ruler over Israel; That this shall be no grief unto thee, nor offence of heart unto my lord, either that thou hast shed blood

causeless, or that my lord hath avenged himself: but when the LORD shall have dealt well with my lord, then remember thine handmaid."

Huldah the prophetess speaks the word of the Lord to Josiah the king.

2Ki 22:14 "So Hilkiah the priest, and Ahikam, and Achbor, and Shaphan, and Asahiah, went unto Huldah the prophetess, the wife of Shallum the son of Tikvah, the son of Harhas, keeper of the wardrobe; (now she dwelt in Jerusalem in the college;) and they communed with her." See also 2Ch 34:22.

The wife of Isaiah is called a prophetess. The prophecy of Isaiah and the birth of the child are combined.

Isaiah 8:3 "And I went unto the prophetess; and she conceived, and bare a son. Then said the LORD to me, Call his name Mahershalalhashbaz."

Although women played an essential role in Jewish life, it was the responsibility of men to lead. Women generally had more menial tasks, this is why Jewish men gave thanks they were not born a woman because they were able to do many things a woman could not, But the importance of childbearing, child-rearing and child caring cannot be over-estimated.

Sarah is listed among the heroes of faith.

Hebrews 11:11 "Through faith also Sara herself received strength to conceive seed, and was delivered of a child when she was past age, because she judged him faithful who had promised."

The mother of Moses cared for him before he went to live in the house of the Egyptian princess. His association with the people of God was deeply rooted in him. His mother would have been responsible for this. It is beautiful that the Lord arranged that she was paid by the princess when she cared for Moses.

Exodus 2:8-10 "And Pharaoh's daughter said to her, Go. And the maid went and called the child's mother. And Pharaoh's daughter said unto her, Take this child away, and nurse it for me, and I will give thee thy wages. And the woman took the child, and nursed it. And the child grew, and she brought him unto Pharaoh's daughter, and he became her son. And she called his name Moses: and she said, Because I drew him out of the water."

Hannah presenting Samuel at the tabernacle.

1 Samuel 1:24-28 "And when she had weaned him, she took him up with her, with three bullocks, and one ephah of flour, and a bottle of wine, and brought him unto the house of the LORD in Shiloh: and the child was young. And they slew a bullock, and brought the child to Eli. And she said, Oh my lord, as thy soul liveth, my lord, I am the woman that stood by thee here, praying unto the LORD. For this child I prayed; and the LORD hath

given me my petition which I asked of him: Therefore also I have lent him to the LORD; as long as he liveth he shall be lent to the LORD. And he worshipped the LORD there.”

Jehoshabeath, the sister of Ahaziah rescued Joash, when Athaliah sought to kill all the royal descendants in Judah.

2 Chron 22:10-11 “But when Athaliah the mother of Ahaziah saw that her son was dead, she arose and destroyed all the seed royal of the house of Judah. But Jehoshabeath, the daughter of the king, took Joash the son of Ahaziah, and stole him from among the king’s sons that were slain, and put him and his nurse in a bedchamber. So Jehoshabeath, the daughter of king Jehoram, the wife of Jehoiada the priest, (for she was the sister of Ahaziah,) hid him from Athaliah, so that she slew him not.”

The Ministry of women in the New Testament

In the New Testament we see women in ministry, but it is the responsibility of men to lead.

Women can pray and prophecy in church. *1 Corinthians 11:5 “But every woman that prays or prophesies with her head uncovered dishonours her head: for that is even all one as if she were shaven.”* The requirement is that women do not abuse this authority. The head covering was a sign of submission. There is a divine order. Women must not usurp authority.

Philip’s daughters all prophesied. All of them remained unmarried. *Acts 21:8 “And the next day we that were of Paul’s company departed, and came unto Caesarea: and we entered into the house of Philip the evangelist, which was one of the seven; and abode with him. And the same man had four daughters, virgins, which did prophesy.”* Prophecy is for edification, exhortation, and comfort, which means they did not prophecy future events, they spoke words which were in one accord with the apostles’ doctrine.

In the Acts of the Apostles, we see this couple called Aquila and Priscilla. They had a church in their house, they ministered together. They took Apollos aside and explained the gospel more fully to him. That is beautiful seeing them working together and ministering together. But Priscilla is not usurping her authority.

In Romans 16:1, Phoebe is a deacon, a servant in the church of Cenchrea.

Should women be forbidden to speak in church?

1 Corinthians 14:34, “Let your women keep silence in the churches: for it is not permitted unto them to speak; but they are commanded to be under obedience, as also

saith the law. 35 And if they will learn any thing, let them ask their husbands at home: for it is a shame for women to speak in the church."

This verse must be taken in context with other verses. In 1 Corinthians 11:5, Paul mentions women praying and prophesying. In 1 Corinthians 14:5, Paul desires that all would speak in tongues and prophecy. When Paul writes everyone has a psalm, a doctrine, a tongue, a revelation, an interpretation (1 Corinthians 14:26), it can apply to both men and women. When Paul tells the women to be in silence, he is either referring to them being disruptive and calling out to their husbands to explain things they do not understand, which fits with Paul telling them to ask their husbands at home, or Paul is quoting what others have said and refuting it. *1 Corinthians 14:36-37 "What? came the word of God out from you? or came it unto you only? If any man think himself to be a prophet, or spiritual, let him acknowledge that the things that I write unto you are the commandments of the Lord."* Women prophesying and praying is permitted. This gives a lot of scope as prophecy is a word that can be judged by scripture or one that is from scripture. Forbidding women to speak in church on the basis of 1 Corinthians 14:34 is wrong exegesis, (eisegesis) of scripture, it isolates this text from scriptures instead of understanding the context in which it is written.

The Ministry of Older Women: Titus 2:3-5

In Titus chapter 2, Paul talks first about the aged men, the elders (*πρεσβύτας*), and then he talks about the older women (*πρεσβύτιδας*). This refers to women in the church who are recognised as being able to teach younger women, not because they hold a particular office in the church, but because of their experience and example being strong in the faith. *"The older women likewise, that they be reverent in behaviour, not slanderers, not given to much wine, teachers of good things that they admonish the young women to love their husbands, to love their children, to be discreet, chaste, homemakers, good, obedient to their own husbands, that the word of God may not be blasphemed."* Titus 2:3-5

Women who are older in age or older in the faith are essential for teaching women in the church. Women understand women. It is also unwise for a man to take on this role. Many leaders have fallen into sin by being too closely associated with women in the church. Older women are able to teach the younger women from experience and from scripture. Women also are essential in teaching children and young people. So women are extremely important in ministry. The older women whose lives are an example to others can teach the younger women and children to love and to serve the Lord.

The problem in the church is that being a leader of a church can bring a lot of prestige. Not just among those in the church but also by being part of an elite group among a particular denomination. This makes leadership attractive to those who seek selfish

ambition. Many leaders who have begun in humility and with a heart for the Lord have become proud as the work grows. A leader should be characterised by love and humility. A woman may be used of the Lord to help build up a work but she should never take on the role of a pastor (which is the name generally applied to overseer) because this position must be filled by a man of godly character who is able to teach (1 Timothy 3:1-7).

Women as Deacons: 1 Timothy 3:8-11

But is there anything else that women can do in the church? I believe there is. First Timothy chapter 3:8, mentions deacons in the church. The word "deacon" means "servant." *"Likewise deacons must be reverent, not double-tongued, not given to much wine, not greedy for money, holding the mystery of the faith with a pure conscience. But let these also first be tested; then let them serve as deacons, being found blameless."* (1 Timothy 3:8-10). Deacons do all of the administrative work. They run the church. They do all the work that needs to be done. Without the deacons, the church cannot function.

But then it goes on to say in verse 11: *"Likewise, their wives must be reverent, not slanderers, temperate, faithful in all things."* (1 Timothy 3:11). The word "wives" can also be translated "women." It is not necessarily the wives of the deacons. The verse specifically mentions qualifications for service, which implies that these qualifications are for women who are also deacons. So, can women be deacons in the church? Yes, I believe they can. Women are needed for administrative work, and organisational work, and in many areas where work needs to be done. In fact, common sense tells us that women deacons are needed in the church. Women who are very active in ministering to younger women and children can also hold an administrative position in the organising these programs.

Conclusion

Women in ministry are essential in the church. But it is forbidden by scripture for women to usurp authority to fulfil their own ambitions. Should we have women pastors? No, we should not because for one thing, "pastor" is never used in the New Testament to describe somebody leading the church. So even men being called "pastors" is not right. It should not be used as a title. But a woman should not be the leader of a church because the scripture clearly shows that overseers must be men. Western culture has diminished the position of men and raised the position of women. Effeminate men and women without natural affection have become common. Anyone who speaks against this change in culture is called a misogynist or a sexist. Now this is evident in the

church, where to say women should not be pastors is regarded as attacking women. It is not.

Church ministry depends upon women in many ways, there are also many great women missionaries, also the church has long been blessed by song and hymn writers like Fanny Crosby. Women have stood boldly for the faith, and some have been martyred. There is no dispute regarding the importance of women in ministry, but scripture forbids women usurping authority and taking a position of leadership over men.

However, it is also not advisable to have churches under the authority of one person. A church should not be controlled by one person or one family. Leadership of a Bible believing church should be more than one, and they should be men who can teach scripture and are free from any form of scandal. *Acts 20:17* “*And from Miletus he sent to Ephesus, and called the elders of the church.*” It is the duty of elders (episkopos) to teach the scriptures, to warn against false teaching and to pray for the people God has put under their care.