

## **Questions I get asked: Women in church and ministry? 1 of 2 - 20210619**

Hi all,

This is a very common question I receive, so let's get started by laying the scriptural foundation.

### **The foundation**

In Galatians 3:28 Paul said this: "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female: You are all one in Christ Jesus."

In Christ there is no race, no social status, no gender to differentiate us, for we are all one in Christ Jesus because this is on our spirit-man's level. The power of God is based on our spirit man, which is born of the Father's Spirit. On the level of our spirits we are equal and one in Christ.

But that equality in our spirit is housed in our human body which lives in the natural realm where people are judged based on gender, race, and socio-economic level. The question then: How do we handle equality in Christ in our spirit while we live in societies that do not recognize equality of gender, race, or socio-economic status?

The great question facing the early church as it is now involves to what degree do we walk in our freedoms in Christ, if they run contrary to local culture and customs? Because freedom and equality in Christ are true, do we flaunt our freedom in front of others? Or do we refrain from sharing our freedom to follow local customs that shackle that freedom to one degree or another? Before we can answer that, let's look at how Paul balanced spiritual truth of equality with local customs and culture.

### **The women in Paul's life**

Recognizing there is neither race, social status nor gender in Christ, Paul lived this way in ministry. In Romans 16:2 Paul greets a woman named Phoebe of Cenchrea (a town near Corinth) who he calls a deaconess in the church there. In 16:7 he writes this of a husband and wife: "Greet Andronicus and Junia....who are of note among the apostles, who were also in Christ before me."

(Junia was a well known apostle outside of Romans 16:7. John Chrysostom in the 300's AD wrote of how well known she had been in her day.)

Philip's four daughters are recognized prophets in Acts 21:9, and Lydia, a single woman at the time, was the hostess and leader of the church in Philippi. Though my point here isn't to fully document this truth that in Christ Paul considered men and women, race and social standing equal, but to share just enough to provide a glimpse of the practice of the early church.

Perhaps the most well known example would be Priscilla and Aquila, the husband and wife leaders and (house) church hosts in Rome and then in Ephesus. Tradition says Aquila was one of the original 70 disciples mentioned as being sent out by Jesus in Luke 10:1, and those 70 tradition says, were among the 120 in the upper room at Pentecost. Priscilla is mentioned first 4 of the 6 times Paul writes of them, grammatically indicating she is the main speaker.

Having a woman apostle, a woman 'deacon', and noted female teachers are not exceptions to a rule, for in Colossians 4:15 Paul greets a woman named Nymphas: "Greetings to all the brethren in Laodemia, and to Nymphas and the church that meets in her house." The 'she' was changed to a 'he' in the KJV because they did not agree with women in leadership in the days the King James Version was published.

Women were known as bishops and all the other leadership roles as seen in grave markers via archaeological artifacts unearthed, as well as church history. When the church moved out of homes in the middle 300's and especially into the 400's AD, men took over in the auditorium structure and relegated women to lesser roles, if any.

### **Paul wrote his letters to men and women together**

Paul wrote his general letters to the whole church, men and women together as equals:

"To all that are in Rome, beloved of God, called to be saints..." Romans 1:7

"To the church of God at Corinth, to those sanctified in Christ, called to be saints..." I Corinthians 1:2  
"To the church of God at Corinth, with all the saints..." II Corinthians 1:1  
"To the churches of Galatia..." Galatians 1:2  
"...to the saints in Ephesus, to the faithful in Christ Jesus..." Ephesians 1:1

That's enough of the list to understand Paul was writing to both men and women. This is supported by internal evidence in his letters as well. For instance in I Corinthians 14:26 Paul wrote this:

"How is it brethren when you come together? Every one of you has a Psalm, a revelation, a teaching, tongues and interpretation. Let everything be done decently and in order."

Every one of you. Participating, sharing revelation, sharing something learned, moving in the gifts of the Spirit. In case it isn't clear, the word 'brethren' can mean just men, but in general use referred to men and women together, the way we might say 'you guys' but including men and women together. An example would be his closing in Galatians 6:18: "Brethren, the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. Amen." He opened by addressing his letter to the churches of Galatia, and he closes in the same inclusive way.

### **But society doesn't see it that way**

This is the principle that is helpful in many areas of life. Though men and women are one in Christ we live in societies and cultures that DO see differences. The cultures in which we live don't recognize equality of the genders, races, or social standing. So we must live among them with this higher knowledge. That is why in ministry and within the church Paul allowed men and women to function equally, but when it came to living in a culture that did not have this higher knowledge, Paul advised caution and adhering to the local customs and traditions.

Once we know men and women in Christ are equal, how does that function in marriage? Paul defers to creation order, that Adam was created first, then Eve. Therefore though equal, the husband is the spiritual head of the union with the understanding he is to lay down his life for his wife as Christ did for the church. While that can mean literally laying down his life if called upon to do so, in day to day life it means honoring her, honoring her opinion as equal to his, and treated her as one in Christ. It is an equality through mutually serving and honoring one another as in Ephesians 5:21: "Submit yourselves one to another."

I'll add this: Submission is a condition of the heart, obedience is an action. A husband or wife can be obedient to one another without being in submission, or can be submitted but not in obedience. The best case is when they are mutually submitted in their hearts, thus both are in obedience to the Lord's guidance in their union. Paul tells husbands and wives to be submitted to one another, but does not say obey one another. He does tell children and 'employees' to obey their parents and bosses however.

And with that we'll stop for today, starting next week about veils, women being told to 'ask their husbands at home', and what about braiding the hair and teaching? Until then, blessings,  
John Fenn

[www.cwowi.org](http://www.cwowi.org) and email me at [cwowi@aol.com](mailto:cwowi@aol.com)

### **Questions I'm asked: Women in church, women in ministry 2 of 2 - 20210626**

Hi all,

Having laid the foundation that in Christ there is neither male nor female, there is neither Jew nor Greek, neither bond nor free, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. Let us go on to see how Paul taught to implement this equality and freedom within cultures and customs that don't recognize Christ.

### **The issue of veils**

In I Corinthians 11:1-16 Paul addresses the issue that some of the wives were discarding their veils when the church came together in a meeting. In the second half of chapter 11 he dealt with rich people not wanting to fellowship and eat with the lower classes. Before that he dealt with a man in chapter 5 who had a sexual relationship with his step mother and not a single person confronted him about it. In chapter 6 there were 2 men suing one another in civil court and Paul told them to deal with

in within the church. Chapters 8 and 10 were about some who felt free in Christ to eat meat that had earlier been sacrificed to idols, while others thought it a sin to do so. In chapter 9 though he had spent so much time with them and they owed him their spiritual lives, no one thought to support his ministry.

In chapter 12 he dealt with the gifts of the Spirit in a meeting, chapter 13 is about their love for one another which should guide all things. And chapter 14 is about the order of a meeting itself as well as one's personal 'prayer language'. Each of these issues involved people being free in Christ yet feeling no sense of responsibility nor accountability for their actions. It had to do with what we might call today, hyper-grace. They had such freedom in Christ they felt no obligation to anyone but themselves.

The reason in part is the local culture. Corinth had a city motto: "Freedom and knowledge". Basically if it feels good, do it. No wonder Paul had to deal with 10 separate issues involving 'freedom' in his first letter to them.

They were experiencing equality in Christ and seeing only freedom without restraint. Paul taught grace always has boundaries and expectations. God so loved the world that He gave His only Son, which is grace. That all who believe on Him will have eternal life, is the condition, the boundary, the way that grace may be received. Grace always has structure and accountability, and purpose.

### **Put your wedding ring back on**

Can you imagine a married woman removing her wedding ring as she walks through the door of her church when she 'goes to meeting'?

In that region in that day veils were the wedding ring for a wife. The Corinthian wives were finding their freedom in Christ and removing their veils when they came to Justus' house for the gathering of the saints. (See Acts 18:7-8 to see that Jews, Romans, and Greeks all met in Justus' house)

Paul addresses the issue first by explaining creation order and how man's 'covering' is God and therefore to have a husband covering his head when praying or prophesying dishonors the Lord, his 'covering'. But the wife has her head covered to honor her husband, her 'covering'.

There is no Greek word for 'wife' so we rely on context to distinguish between women in general or a wife. Here, when Paul is talking about a man 'covering' a woman, it is a clear reference to marriage. You may recall the ancient Jewish wedding ceremony called 'the veiling of the bride'. The groom is accompanied by the rabbi and the groom's and bride's fathers, as the groom covers his bride with a veil. This signifies both his covering and protection of her, and her dedication to him and their marriage. .

Therefore the wives of Corinth removing their veils when the church gathered, dishonored their husbands, the angels in charge of their family, and the Lord. He told them to put their veils back on. Yes they are equal in Christ, but Paul refers to the custom and tradition of the veil 2x. In v13 he asks them to judge it themselves. In v16 he calls it a custom. Yes they are free in Christ to remove the emblem of their marriage, but why upset the local customs?

### **Women in a 'church' meeting**

In the passage of I Corinthians 14:26-40, Paul deals with order in the house church meeting. Acts 18:1-8 reveals new believers were Jewish, Roman, and Greek all gathering in the home of the Roman, Justus. Now for the first time all 3 cultures were thrown together under one roof and the only thing they had in common was Christ in them, the hope of glory.

In I Corinthians 14:26 Paul writes that "each one of you may have a Psalm or a teaching or a revelation or a tongue and interpretation, but let all things be done to the edification of all." He then starts listing social skills some lacked, in their day as in ours:

If there are 2 or 3 who have a tongue needing interpreting, take turns and make sure there is an interpretation. If there is no one with the gift to interpret the tongue, then keep quiet and keep your message between you and God. (You haven't sinned, there is just no opportunity to give it, so keep it to yourself and God.) Let those with inspired messages speak, but let the others judge what they say. (This is a warning that anything you say may be rejected, or at least doubted, so don't take offense, you are among friends.)

If someone else has a word and you do too, defer to them and let them speak. Take turns, speak in order so you all may be comforted. Your spirit is subject to you, just because you have something from God doesn't mean you have to give it. For God is a God of order and peace, not of confusion. Let the wives be quiet in the meeting and let them be in submission as the law says, if they have questions they can ask their husbands at home.

Clearly the context is order and politeness in a meeting, these verses about the wives included. Paul doesn't say the law forbids them to speak, but says the law requires they be in submission to their husbands. Again we see Paul talking about order, and creation order in marriage.

Remember the Jewish wives in synagogue were separated from the men and not allowed to take part in a meeting, Here in Christ they were for the first time sitting next to their husbands in a meeting. They had many questions as a result, threatening the flow of what the Lord was doing in the meeting.

Balanced with the many women apostles, deacons, and church leaders Paul greeted in his letters, we see here the context is order in the meeting, and making sure things are done in an honorable way.

What do we see concerning women in church and ministry? We see throughout history women having important leadership roles just as we do in Paul's letters. From the Didache to Clement and Ignatius in the 1st and 2nd centuries, they do not place any restrictions on women in leadership. It was not until the middle of the 3rd century, when Christianity became legalized, that we see restrictions on women placed.

The early church determined leadership by the spirit gifts and character of each individual, seeing no difference between men and women - it was all about what the Holy Spirit had gifted them to become. But when called out of homes, the former pagan temple structure of the auditorium required a hierarchy, and it was a man's world suddenly. The thought of 'office' over 'gift' prevailed, and women were denied moving in their gifts and call in Christ.

In I Timothy 2:11-12: "Let the wives learn in submission with quietness, for I am not allowing a wife to teach or usurp authority over her husband but to be in quietness."

This is consistent with his message to the Corinthians, which was about marriage order and then order in a meeting. And again it is about learning while maintaining divine order. So it isn't a blanket doctrinal statement that all wives must be quiet, for the passages about veils, order in a meeting, and here all have to do with wives, without a mention about single women.

The Word and Spirit are always in agreement, and we can see in Paul's 3 passages where he addresses women in a meeting it is about marriage order, not a blanket doctrinal statement that all women, married or single, girl or teen, can't talk. This is confirmed by centuries of women in notable leadership positions, from apostle Junia and deacon Phoebe and others in Paul's time, to notable women prophets and teachers and pastors in our time. The Word and Spirit agree, we are equal in Christ, but we have to live in cultures that do not recognize equality among the genders, races, or socio-economic levels.

Hope this helps - food for thought at least. I'd also recommend Ank Kleinmeulman's book available on our web site on the subject. It's a good and short read, and the best book on the matter I've seen. New subject next week! Until then, blessings,

John Fenn

[www.cwowi.org](http://www.cwowi.org) and email me at [cwowi@aol.com](mailto:cwowi@aol.com)