

## "Women in the Church"

In the beginning God created us male and female. He made us in His image and in His likeness. But does God give the same role to women that He gives to men? Hello, I'm Phil Sanders, and this is a Bible study "In Search of the Lord's Way." And today we're going to explore the role of women in the church.

Welcome to In Search of the Lord's Way! We're here to search the Scriptures for God's will. God said in Isaiah 55 verses 8 to 9, "'For My thoughts are not your thoughts, Nor are your ways My ways,' declares the LORD. 'For as the heavens are higher than the earth, So are My ways higher than your ways, And My thoughts than your thoughts.'" God's ways are not always our ways, but God's ways are always right. We may not understand God's ways or even agree with them, but God's wisdom far exceeds our own, and through time God's wisdom proves right every time. So we follow the One who is utterly trustworthy. Psalm 19 verse 9 says, "The judgments of the LORD are true; they are righteous altogether." Thanks for taking time with us today. We want to be a part of your life each week.

Where in the world would any of us be without the women in our lives? They are indeed precious in so many ways and a blessing to the church. I've been blessed with a godly mother who has passed and has gone to be with the Lord, I now have a faithful and loving wife for more than forty years, with four precious daughters who are all well- educated and very talented. I also have eleven delightful granddaughters. Well, do I care about all the females in my life? Of course I do! I want every good thing for them and want them to serve God and to go to heaven.

The best thing that you can do is to love and serve God faithfully and to help others to love and serve God. Obeying God is an act of love. The Lord Jesus said in John 14 verse 15, that "If you love Me, you will keep My commandments." If you want to bless your family, lead them in loving the Lord. Lead them to love the Lord in every way. Don't pick which laws you like and ignore the others. We are to "observe all things" that Jesus commands us. And this touches every aspect of our lives.

Now, we offer this study about women free. And if you'd like a printed copy or a CD and you live in the United States, then mail your request to In Search of the Lord's Way, P.O. Box 371, Edmond, OK 73083 or send an e-mail to [searchtv@searchtv.org](mailto:searchtv@searchtv.org). Or you can call our toll-free telephone number. That number is 1-800-321-8633. We also have materials free on our website at [www.searchtv.org](http://www.searchtv.org).

The Edmond church will now worship in song, we'll read from 1 Corinthians 14 verses 33 to 37, and we'll explore the topic of women in the church.

Our reading today comes from 1 Corinthians chapter 14, verses 33 to 37. "For God is not a *God* of confusion but of peace, as in all the churches of the saints. The women are to keep silent in the churches; for they are not permitted to speak, but are to subject themselves, just as the Law also says. If they desire to learn anything, let them ask their own husbands at home; for it is improper for a woman to speak in church. Was it from you that the word of God *first* went forth? Or has it come to you only? If anyone thinks he is a prophet or spiritual, let him recognize that the things which I write to you are the Lord's commandment." That's a reading from God's holy word. Let's pray together. Father we're so grateful that You have given us Your love, and that You've given us Your word so that we might know truth from error. And Father we pray that you will bless our study. And may Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. In Jesus name, Amen!

Oh what a wonderful song, one of my favorites. When God created Adam and Eve, He created the male first and the female later. God created her to be a "helper fit for him" (Genesis 2 and verse 18). 1 Corinthians 11 and verse 9 says, "for indeed man was not created for the woman's sake, but woman

for the man's sake." Now the distinctive roles the Scriptures place on men and women are not cultural traditions of bygone eras but God's plan for humans made in His image.

When Adam and Eve sinned in the garden, God said to the woman in Genesis 3 and verse 16, "I will greatly multiply Your pain in childbirth, and in pain you will bring forth children; Yet your desire will be for your husband, And he will rule over you." This declaration from the beginning applies to God's order in the home and in the church. This is God's declaration for all time.

Now God's word, thousands of years later, says in I Corinthians 11 and verse 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." Now some have assumed that because man is the head of woman, that this makes women inferior to men. The relationship, however, between Christ and the Father is like the relationship of woman to man; consequently, being in subjection does not mean being less than equal. Paul said the Lord Jesus was equal with the Father but took the form of a servant in the book of Philippians chapter 2 verses 5 to 8. Now just because a woman is to be in subjection to a man does not make her less than him. Now any man who treats women with disrespect is failing as a Christian.

When the Lord chose people to lead and teach the church, Christ chose men. The twelve apostles were all men, not six men and six women. The seven servants chosen to feed the Grecian widows in Acts 6 were all men. When the Scripture lays down the qualifications for elders and deacons in 1 Timothy 3 verses 1 to 14, they are required to be husbands. Now the absence of females in this matter is no accident.

The Scripture gives women in the New Testament various, praiseworthy roles of teaching and service. Women may evangelize privately as Priscilla and Aquilla did with Apollos in Acts 18 verses 26; and in Philippians 4:2 to 3 that describes Euodia and Syntyche as fellow-laborers with Paul in the gospel. Paul instructed older women in Titus 2 verses 3 to 4 to teach and to train the younger women to love their husbands and their children. Acts 9 and verse 36 describes Dorcas as a woman "full of good works and acts of charity (or kindness)." Some women had spiritual gifts; Acts 21 verse 9 says that Philip the evangelist had four daughters who prophesied. Women were the first at the tomb of Jesus, and the Lord sent them to tell the apostles of His resurrection. Women often traveled with Jesus and His disciples and supported His ministry.

Now faithful Christian men should treat their wives then with honor and respect. 1 Peter 3 and verse 7 says, that "You husbands in the same way, live with your wives in an understanding way, as with someone weaker, since she is a woman; and show her honor as a fellow heir of the grace of life, so that your prayers will not be hindered." When men treat women with disrespect, it's clear that this behavior hinders their prayers to God. Godly men honor women; ungodly men mistreat them.

The New Testament, however, limits the roles women may play in the assembled church and in the leadership of the church. The Bible says in 1 Corinthians 14 verses 33 to 37, "as in all the churches of the saints. The women are to keep silent in the churches; for they are not permitted to speak, but are to subject themselves, just as the Law also says. If they desire to learn anything, let them ask their own husbands at home; for it is improper for a woman to speak in church. Was it from you that the word of God first went forth, (Paul says)? Or has it come to you only? If anyone thinks he is a prophet or spiritual, let him recognize that the things which I write to you are the Lord's commandment." It is clear women are not to speak to the whole church to impart teaching.

Paul gives four reasons for this restriction on women. First, the Law says this. It may refer to Genesis 3:16 as we noted a minute ago, or it could be that the female's subordination is due to the sin in the garden. It possibly could come from man's priority in the creation: the Bible says "Then the rib

which the LORD God had taken from man, He made into a woman, and He brought her to the man" (Genesis 2 and verse 22). Numbers 30 verses 3 to 12 also notes that a woman's vow must be approved either by her father or by her husband. And if he opposes the vow, then her pledge will not stand.

Second, "it is shameful for women (not just wives) to speak in church" (1 Corinthians 14 and verse 35). "Church" here refers to the assembled body as in I Corinthians 11 and verse 18. Paul calls the act of a woman speaking in church "shameful" or "disgraceful." While some hold that culture is the source of the shame, it likely means this shame instead arises from "God" and his Law. In fact, the pagan cults of both Corinth and Ephesus had women as their high priestesses and teachers, according to Bruce Morton in his book, *Deceiving Winds*. The Lord's commandment was actually counter to the pagan culture of Corinth! God's teaching came to change the world; and we must not let the world change the church.

Third, "Let your women keep silent in the churches." Mmm, plural. This practice was not merely to be kept in Corinth, but in all of the churches of Christ across the way. They were to "keep silent." And this phrase "keep silent" is from the Greek word *sigao*, which means to hold one's peace and say nothing. The instruction to "keep silent" is given three times in this chapter. First, a tongue speaker (even if he was a male) is to "keep silent" when no interpreter is present (verse 28). Second, if one prophet is speaking and another receives a revelation, "the first one must keep silent" (verses 29 to 30). And third, he says "Let your women keep silent in the churches, for they are not permitted to speak" (verse 34). Now "speaking" here is a general term which would apply to public talk: that is leading prayer, and preaching, and prophesying, tongue-speaking or interpreting, they were not to do that.

Fourth, Paul says this is "the commandment of the Lord" (chapter 14 verse 37). Some gifted Christians likely objected to Paul's instructions, so Paul boldly declares the source of this "commandment" is the Lord himself. There's nothing cultural or temporary about the Lord's command to the churches.

Some object, "Well what about the women who were praying and prophesying in 1 Corinthians 11 verses 4 to 5?" Well the primary subject of chapter 11 has to do with wearing veils and not the speaking in church. The "custom" or practice of the day was for women to have long hair and wear a veil. Breaking this custom was, in that day, "disgraceful" and against nature. Now some gifted women may have thought that their spiritual gifts gave them the right to speak in the assembled church. If the women were speaking in the assembled church in chapter 11, Paul eventually tells them to stop it in chapter 14. Women likely spoke in other settings than the assembled church, such as gatherings of women or in private. Whatever the case, the command of the Lord was to end the practice of women speaking in the assembled churches as a whole.

Now we have this teaching confirmed in 1 Timothy chapter 2. Paul said in 1 Timothy 2 and verse 8, "I desire then that in every place, (that is in every place of worship), the men should pray, lifting holy hands without anger or quarreling." Now Paul chose "men (that is adult males) in every place to pray." The phrase "in every place" is a specific term, a technical term speaking of the place where congregations assembled to worship. 1 Corinthians 1 and verse 2 uses the term to describe the place where the church assembled. Clearly, God wanted males to take the lead in prayer and worship.

If women are not permitted to lead prayer, surely they are also forbidden to preach. Women are to learn in quietness, and not teach! 1 Timothy 2 verses 11 to 12 says, "Let a woman learn in silence with all submission. And I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man, but to be in silence." Now asserting his apostolic authority, Paul did not permit women to be public teachers of

men or to exercise authority over a man at church. She cannot rule or subjugate men to her will at church. Paul does not permit her to take these roles, even if elders, preachers, and other men allow it, God does not. No person has a right to ask or to permit any female to do what is contrary to God's instructions.

To be quiet or silent (it's the Greek word *hesuchia*) here means to be at rest, a spirit and an attitude of tranquility arising from within so that she causes no disturbance. They were to focus on learning not teaching and to remain quiet, to say nothing. This learning was to take place with "entire submissiveness." Now "entire submissiveness," is a complete, voluntary surrender of one's rights or will. It is to give precedence to others; she is to "subordinate herself in every respect." This is not speaking merely of subjection to her husband; this is speaking broadly of women subjecting themselves to the leadership of men in the functions of the church. "Submission" does not mean that one is inferior, or has inferior value or worth but rather that one recognizes one's role in a relationship. As we noted, Jesus was not inferior to God according to Philipians 2 verse 5 to 8, but he willfully subjected himself to his Father.

Now the theological basis for saying women cannot preach arises from the beginning with Adam and Eve, not a cultural bias from Paul himself. "For Adam was formed first, 1 Timothy 2 says, then Eve. And Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived, fell into transgression." (1 Timothy 2 verses 13 to 14). You see, this teaching reveals God's order of life, God's way. Now according to historian Everett Ferguson, the writers in the early church history gave evidence that "Women were not appointed as elders, nor did they take public speaking roles in the assembly as prophets, teachers, or leaders in the assembly. Where women did take these roles in some of the heretical and schismatic groups, this practice was a basis for objection to these groups." While times change and cultures change, God's word, God's Bible does not change.

We should use our talents for the Lord, but we shouldn't assume that talents permit us to engage in activities and roles that God never meant for us. Now King Saul was not a priest and he sinned when he presumptuously made a burnt offering at Gilgal, rather than waiting for the high priest Samuel to come (and that's found in 1 Samuel 13 verses 8 to 14). And even though he was king, Saul had no right to make this sacrifice. By presuming that he could act without authority, Saul lost his place with God. You remember King Uzziah also became proud and transgressed against the LORD by "entering the temple of the Lord to burn incense on the altar of incense" (2 Chronicles 26 and verse 16). Now Uzziah was not a Levite, so Azariah the priest and eighty others rightly withstood him. God punished Uzziah for his sin. God will not let an unmarried or childless man be an elder either. So it's not a matter of gender, it's a matter of qualifications.

Even Jesus, as the Son of God, could not serve as a Levitical priest in the temple because He was from the tribe of Judah (Hebrews 7 and verse 14). You see, Jesus didn't feel cheated because he couldn't function as a Levitical priest in the temple. You see, giftedness does not grant the right to overrule God's laws. The Scriptures demand that anyone who leads must meet the qualifications. And so, rather than feeling cheated over what we aren't permitted to do, we should focus on the things that we can and should do to serve God. And so with joy and thanksgiving let's follow His will and not our own. Let's pray together. Oh Father, may each of us find our place in service toward You. And may Your will be done on earth even as it is in heaven. In Jesus name, Amen!

Someone objects, "Well isn't being limited unfair to women?" The answer to that question is no. God has given women marvelous roles in virtually every other area than in the leadership of the church. God has given women some roles that men will never be able to fill. Should men object and

feel cheated? Well the answer is no. Our task is to pursue the work that God has given us to the best of our ability rather than envy what God has given to someone else. In God's eyes, every member of the body, that is the church, is valuable though they have different functions.

1 Corinthians 12 verses 14 to 19 says, "For the body (that is the church) is not one member, but many. And if the foot says, 'Because I am not a hand, I am not a part of the body,' it's not for this reason any the less a part of the body. And if the ear says, 'Because I am not an eye, I am not a part of the body,' it's not for this reason any the less a part of the body. If the whole body were an eye, where would the hearing be? If the whole were hearing, where would the sense of smell be? But now God has placed the members, each one of them, in the body, just as He desired. If they were all one member, where would the body be?" Yes, God has a place and a purpose for every single one!

Please let Jesus be Lord of your life. Trust His ways; they are higher than our ways. Believe in the Lord Jesus, turn from sin and selfishness to serve Him, confess Jesus Christ as the Son of God, and be baptized. Baptism is an immersion in water in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of sins. And when you're baptized, God washes away your sins and makes you His child. Oh become a Christian today!

Well we hope that today's study about women has stirred you to consider what God says. If you live in the United States and want a free printed copy or a CD of this message, then mail your request to In Search of the Lord's Way, P.O. Box 371, Edmond, OK 73083 or send an e-mail to [searchtv@searchtv.org](mailto:searchtv@searchtv.org). Or you can call the Search office toll-free at 1-800-321-8633. You can download these lessons or our newsletter online at our website: [www.searchtv.org](http://www.searchtv.org). There's also a schedule of our programs and a map with the location of churches in your area. We also offer free Bible Correspondence courses. Now don't worry, if you write to us we won't exploit you. We're here to help you draw close to God.

Please get involved with a church of Christ in your area. And if you're looking for someone to talk to about Christ, we'll help you find somebody. We'll be back next week, Lord willing. So keep searching God's Word with us and tell a friend about this program. As always we say to you, God bless you and we love you from all of us at In Search of the Lord's Way.