

# A CHURCH WITHOUT WOMEN

By Dianne D. McDonnell

For decades we have all been taught that women should not offer prayers, lead the song service, give bible studies, sermonettes or sermons. We have a church without women. How did we get this doctrine? Did Jesus teach this doctrine? Jesus commands: “Go therefore and **make disciples** of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, **teaching** them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, **even to the end of the age.**” Matthew 28:19-20.

Jesus **commanded us all** to make disciples and **to teach** and He never placed limits on women. All of our present doctrine is based on **only two passages** spoken not by Jesus, but by Paul. Paul cannot negate the commands of Jesus. Since these two places contradict Jesus, they must be either **misunderstood or mistranslated.**

We have many scriptures written by Paul that praise women active in a teaching role and explain that there is no difference between males and females in the church. Paul teaches, “There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, **male nor female**, for we are all one in Christ Jesus.” Gal 3:28. He is saying in the Church **it makes no difference whether you are a female or a male!** If there is no difference between male and female then why aren’t converted women allowed to participate in our church services?

Most of our doctrines are based on many scriptures, here a little and there a little, throughout the entire Bible. Present doctrine on women is based on **only two passages** in the writings of Paul. The first is found in 1Cor.14. Notice the member participation in services and the **disorder** in the Corinthian church centering around prophesying:

1 Cor 14:26-40 (New King James)

26 How is it then, **\*brethren?** Whenever you come together, **\*\*each of you** has a psalm, has a teaching, has a tongue, has a revelation, has an interpretation. Let all things be done for edification. (\*adelphoi” 80, a fellow believer, Thayer’s Greek Definitions, \*\*Paul indicates that each member, male or female, could participate.)

27 If anyone speaks in a tongue, let there be two or at the most three, each in turn, and let one interpret.

28 But if there is no interpreter, **let him keep silent in church**, (Paul tells **men to “keep silent”** under certain conditions using the same verb “**sigatoo**” that he uses in vs. 34 addressing wives!) and let him speak to himself and to God.

29 Let two or three prophets speak, and let the others judge.

30 But if anything is revealed to another who sits by, let the first keep silent.

31 For you can **all** (again Paul indicates both male and female participation) prophesy one by one, that all may learn and all may be encouraged.

32 And the spirits of the prophets are subject to the prophets. (Paul is clearly dealing with disruptive outbursts. He explains that prophets can control their spirits and insinuates they should control themselves.)

33 For **God is not the author of confusion** but of peace, as in all the churches of the saints.

34 Let your women ( or wives “gunaikes” 1135) keep silent (“sigatoosan”4601, same basic verb “sigatoo” used in correcting the men in vs. 28) in the churches, for they are not permitted to speak; but they are to be submissive, as the law also says. (This refers to Gen.3:16 “...he will rule over you.” Indicating a wife’s submission to her husband within her marriage, not submission to all men. There is no other principle Paul could be quoting.)

35 And **if they want to learn** something, (These particular wives do not understand, and may not want to learn) let them **ask their own husbands at home**; (their believing husbands should teach them at home) for it is shameful for women (or wives “gunaiki” 1135) to speak in church. (These were unconverted wives and were not allowed to participate in services as converted women members were doing! These disruptive women were probably prophesying as pagan prophetesses did, because Paul asks sarcastically if God’s original words came from them!)

36 Or did the word of God come originally from you? Or was it you only that it reached?

37 If anyone (male or female) thinks himself to be a prophet or spiritual, (these wives considered themselves prophets) let him (male or female) acknowledge that the things which I write to you are the commandments of the Lord. (Paul sets a policy that the unconverted wives are not permitted to have a part in services!)

38 But if anyone is ignorant, let him be ignorant. (Ignorant of Paul’s decision on this.)

39 Therefore, brethren, desire earnestly to prophesy, and do not forbid to speak with tongues.

40 Let all things be done decently and in order. (Again, avoid disruption!)

When Paul writes in verse 31, “For you can **all** prophesy in turn...” He was saying, “You’ll each get your turn.” Both men and women **members** were participating, but some uproar had occurred, possibly pitting some of the Christian prophets against unconverted wives who considered themselves prophets sent by pagan gods to straighten out these Christians! Paul corrects first the men, and then the unbelieving women in I Cor. 14:35, “**If they want to learn something**, (*showing they do not yet understand, and may not really want to learn*) **let them ask their own husbands** (*indicating believing husbands*) **at home; for it is a shame for women (wives) to speak in church.**”

Remember, some upset had occurred and Paul was setting guidelines to prevent further **disorder**. These unconverted wives were disrupting services, probably prophesying as pagan prophetesses did! Corinth was just across the bay from Delphi where female priests presented a famous “oracle”. Verse 37 reveals, “If any **think themselves** to be a prophet, or spiritual, (*these wives believed themselves to be spiritual*) let them acknowledge that the things that I write unto you are the commandments of the Lord.” **These wives were unconverted, untaught, and thus were not permitted to take part in services.** The earlier part of the passage tells us “...you may **all** prophesy one by one” and Paul is not changing that. The “**every one**” used earlier in vs. 26 shows **converted women** would continue to participate in an orderly manner. These unconverted wives were to be in submission to their husbands, even if they did consider themselves to be prophets! Untaught, they are not permitted to speak. Paul concludes in verse 40, “Let all things be done decently and in **order**.” Looking at one half of the correspondence is like hearing only half of a telephone conversation. We have greatly misunderstood what Paul was saying, and cannot continue to use this passage as “proof” in denying **converted** women participation in our services.

Paul praises “...**women who work hard in the Lord**” (Romans 16:12). How does one work hard *in the Lord* without teaching about Jesus? Paul records Pricilla going on an evangelizing trip and **teaching** the minister Apollos. He praises **Pricilla** (listed first) and Aquila as “fellow workers in Christ Jesus” to whom he owes his life and greets the church that meets at their house, Acts 18:18-26, Romans 16:3-5.

He praises a man and **woman**, Andronicus and **Junia**, saying, “They are outstanding among the **apostles**, and they were in Christ before I was.” Romans 16:7 NIV. How can a woman be “outstanding” as an **apostle** and yet never teach a man? Would God put such a restriction on her? Is it against God’s will for a woman to teach a man to better understand God’s truth? If so, why did Paul praise both Junia and Pricilla? It is vital to understand that Junia was imminent “among” the apostles and not just admired or noted by the apostles. Like Paul, they had been imprisoned for their active leadership roles.

Paul lists spiritual gifts including, “the message of wisdom”, and clearly explains these gifts are for **all** Christians, “Now **to each one** (“hekastos” 1538) the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good.” I Cor. 12:7 NIV. Also, “It was he (Christ) who gave **some** to be apostles, **some** to be prophets, **some** to be evangelists, and **some** to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God’s people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up.” Eph. 4:11-12. Here “**some**” the Greek “*tous*” 3588, **is used and not the word for “man”**. Christ gives these spiritual gifts to **both men and women!**

The female apostle Junia is further proof that **both men and women were serving in each of these offices** using their spiritual gifts! Early historians such as Origen (2<sup>nd</sup> century), John Chrysostom (4<sup>th</sup> century) and many modern scholars affirm that Junia was both female and an apostle. See U.S. News and World Report, August 10, 1998, page 52, “**A woman named Junia is called an ‘apostle.’**” Thayer’s also confirms Junia was female, “A Christian **woman** at Rome...” All spiritual gifts come from God as He sees fit to build and strengthen His Church. The gift given does not depend upon a person’s sex.

God is not opposed to women in leadership positions for God put **Deborah** in charge of Israel as a prophetess, judge and leader of his nation, Judges 4:1-8. God spoke directly to Deborah, told her who was to be the military commander under her, and went on to give a great victory. **God does not change**, He is the same in our era as He was then. “**For there is no partiality with God,**” Romans 2:11. God can call women leaders today.

The **second of the two passages** used against women is 1Tim. 2:11-12 NKJ, “11. Let a woman learn in silence with all submission 12. And I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man, but to be in silence.” Paul was writing to Timothy in Ephesus where there was a problem with false teachers as you can see by the first few verses of 1Timothy. Ephesus was dominated by the cult of Diana, also known as Artemis, and the city was believed to founded by Amazon women. The Amazons believed in female superiority, and in studying chapters 1 and 2 there are indications that unconverted wives were teaching false concepts of female superiority. Did Paul’s rebuke to the wives of Ephesus leave all women unable to follow Christ’s command to teach? Let’s study the Greek words and see what we can learn.

THE ORIGINAL ORDER OF THE GREEK WORDS of I Tim. 2:11-12

γυνη <i>Gunee</i> <b>1) Wife/Woman</b> 1135	εν <i>en</i> <b>in</b> 1722	ησυχια <i>heesuchia</i> <b>peacefulness</b> 2271	μανθανετω <i>manthanetoo</i> <b>2) I let learn</b> 3129
εν <i>en</i> <b>with/in</b> 1722	παση <i>pasee</i> <b>all</b> 3956	υποταγη <i>hypotagee</i> <b>obedience</b> 5292	διδασκειν <i>didaskain</i> <b>3) to teach</b> 1321
δε <i>de</i> <b>4) but</b> 1161	γυναικι <i>gunaiki</i> <b>5) wife/woman</b> 1135	ουκ <i>ouk</i> <b>not</b> 3756	επιτρεπω <i>epitrepo</i> <b>I am allowing</b> 2010
ουδε <i>oude</i> <b>6) not even</b> 3761	αυθεντειν <i>authentein</i> <b>7) to dominate</b> 831	ανδροζ <i>andros</i> <b>8) husband/man</b> 435	αλλ <i>all</i> <b>but</b> 235
ειναι <i>einai</i> <b>to be</b> 1511	εν <i>en</i> <b>in</b> 1722	ησυχια <i>heesuchia</i> <b>peacefulness</b> 2271	

- 1) “Gunee” can be translated either wife or woman, Strong’s Greek Hebrew Dictionary, 1135, “a woman;...a wife.”
- 2) The Greek ω ending indicates “I” just as “I am allowing” two lines below. Basic Greek in 30 Minutes a Day by Jim Found, Page 84. Most translations omit this.
- 3) **Jesus** uses a form of the same verb, “didasko” 1321: “Go therefore and **make disciples** of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, **teaching** (“didaskontes” 1321) **them** to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.” Matthew 28:19-20.
- 4) In Greek usage the particle “de” modifies the word that comes directly before it, and becomes “but to teach” in this case.
- 5) “Gunaiki” translated “**wife**” in I Cor. 7:3 and 27. Can be a wife or a woman, see 1).
- 6) “Oude” translated “not even” in I Cor. 11:14, “Doth **not even** nature teach...”
- 7) Vincent’s Word Studies of the New Testament I Tim. 2:12, “The King James Version ‘usurp authority’ is a mistake.” Strong’s: to act of oneself, **dominate**.
- 8) “Andros” can mean **husband** or man, Thayer’s Greek Definitions, 435. The same word is used in Luke 2:36, “Anna...lived with her husband seven years” .

“A wife, in peacefulness, I let learn in all obedience (not causing angry disputes), but to teach (a) wife I am not allowing (present indicative tense—he is not presently allowing a wife to teach), not even to dominate a husband, but to be in peacefulness.”

Paul is expressing his solution to a local problem of wives becoming false teachers. The Strong's numbers can be used to easily look up definitions. "Guneē" and "gunaiki" can be woman or wife. "Gunaiki" is translated "wife" in I Cor. 7:3, "Let the husband render unto the **wife**", and translated also in verse 27, "bound unto a **wife**". Paul writes first, a woman/wife **I let learn with all obedience** which indicates that the wives he is addressing are still in the learning stages and not yet ready to be teachers. Paul goes on in I Tim. 2:13 to talk about Adam and Eve, husband and wife. This is further indication that in I Tim. 2:12 he is instructing wives not to dominate their husbands. For a more in depth study of this passage and chapters 1 and 2, see the paper, **Paul and Women Teachers**, by this same author.

Remember Mary was allowed to learn at the feet of Jesus, Luke 10:42. Why did Jesus teach her? Someday she was to teach others, both male and female, the things Jesus had taught her! She was learning, and someday she would be ready to teach.

Christ commands his disciples **to teach** new disciples through the end of the age.

In Titus 2:3 NIV, Paul instructs, "Likewise, **teach the older women** to be reverent in the way they live, not to be slanderers or addicted to much wine, but **to teach** what is good." Here the original Greek translated "to teach" means "**a teacher of the right**" (Strong's 2567), the right way of life! Women are **to learn to teach** so they may become **teachers of the right way of life**. Scriptures that follow suggest they start by teaching the younger women, but does not limit their teaching to women only.

We have always said that we must study **all** of what the Bible has to say on a particular doctrine, here a little and there a little. Yet, in this case our focus has been narrowed to **only two passages** of Paul's letters. Our church doctrine, based on these two misunderstood passages, **conflicts with all the rest of Paul's writings** and **contradicts the words of Jesus!** We have **ignored all other scriptures** Paul and others wrote that show God is impartial and uses women as well as men to spread His gospel. Jesus never intended doctrinal restrictions be put on women who serve Him, restrictions preventing women from using all the spiritual gifts He has given them! Women in the early church served Him fully. **It didn't matter whether you were male or female!**

Paul wrote about two women who "**contended at my side in the cause of the gospel**" Phil. 4:2-3 NIV. These women were teaching both men and women, contending for the true gospel at Paul's side. Women hosted churches meeting in their homes, Col. 4:15 (NAS, NIV), Acts 16:14-40. The book of II John was written "to the chosen lady" (chosen by God) and loved by "all who know the truth," obviously a very well known female church leader. Romans 16 praises a woman traveling on church business, and praises many others serving the Lord, including one woman Paul calls an outstanding apostle! **Many women leaders served the New Testament church.** Did Jesus intend for our church today to be **operating at only half capacity** as we face the end times? Did He plan a church with fully 50-60% of its membership forced to work only in the background? Is He pleased that over half of His children are unable to fully use **all** their spiritual gifts? **Did Jesus intend for His Church to become a church without women?**