

Understanding Paul and Obeying Jesus

By Dianne D. McDonnell

For many people, being told that women can be called by God to any form of church leadership without limitations causes an instant “does not compute” reaction! Surely that can’t be true, they think! The women must be mistaken in thinking God is leading them into church leadership—especially leading them into the ministry.

First, I understand your feelings. In past years I’ve listened to the same sermons you have. Usually they started with Eve didn’t they? It was Eve’s fault that we’re in such a mess. Sarah was always in the “women’s role” sermon for showing respect. They left out that Sarah also stood up to Abraham and demanded that Hagar leave! Abraham wisely put it in God’s hands and then did as his wife insisted when he realized it was also God’s solution. That is the way it should be—a husband and wife freely express their opinions, talk over their options, and then they pray to God for His help, and for Him to guide their decision and to give them His own wise solution.

The sermon middle was always 1Tim. 2:9-14. We skipped through the first chapter of Paul’s letter which revealed that Timothy was left behind in Ephesus to stop “tisin” meaning “ones”—not necessarily men— from teaching false doctrines, myths and genealogies, 1Tim. 1:3,4. This point is a very important part of understanding this passage! Something had happened that caused Paul to tell the men, “...lift up holy hands in prayer without anger or disputing.” What had made the men angry? Then Paul rebuked some of the women for their low-cut immoral clothing decorated with pearls. Ephesus was the center of the worship of Artemis (see Acts 19:28), and her priestesses dressed just as Paul described. Paul stressed good deeds “appropriate for women who PROFESS to worship God”. Paul personally had doubts about the motives of these women! Next Paul advises that he lets wives/women learn quietly and submissively. The Greek word for women and wives is the same word so it is hard to tell for sure whether Paul meant a group of unconverted wives Timothy had told him about, or all the women. The wives/women in question obviously hadn’t been learning quietly, and from studying the entire two chapters we can tell that some were teaching false doctrines either publicly or privately.

In the critical verse 12, Paul writes, “I do not permit a woman (or wife) to teach or...(and what it is that he doesn’t want them teaching?) The phrase “to usurp authority over the” is all translated from only ONE Greek word: “*authentain*.”

This word is only in this one verse in the entire New Testament! Translators are still arguing about what “*authentain*” meant at the time of Paul, as word meanings change over time. The word “gay” meant something very positive in 1800 and means something very different today. Charles Trombley wrote, “It was long *after* Paul wrote his epistle to Timothy that *authentain* came to mean ‘to exercise authority,’ ‘to bear rule over,’ or ‘to domineer.’ John Chrysostom (347-407) was one of the dominant Greek Church Fathers

and Patriarch of Constantinople. In his commentary on 1 Timothy 5:6 he used *authentia* to express ‘sexual license,’ nearly two centuries after Paul wrote Timothy. *Authentein* had not yet taken on the meaning ‘to usurp authority.’”[1] A teacher in the second century, Moeris, tells his students not to use the word “authentein” as it is too coarse for polite company![2]

So the latest scholarly translation of “authentein” is that it was a coarse sexual word that had nothing to do with authority at the time of Paul! These women in question were not to teach or “to _____ (a coarse sexual word) men”. Remember, Paul was not writing directly to the church at Ephesus in this letter, but to Timothy as man to man. He does not use the word again in any of his other letters! Were these women teaching coarse sexual practices? Certainly Ephesus was inundated with wrong sexual practices as Artemis was a fertility goddess and was worshipped in a sexual manner by both men and women.

Another proof that Paul was not discussing authority in 1 Tim. 2:12 is that Paul mentions authority in the same chapter we are discussing-- 1Tim. 2:2, “kings and all those in authority” and he uses an entirely different Greek word—not the mystery word “authentein”!

So the main scripture quoted to tell women they can’t teach (give Bible studies and sermons during services) is based on a scripture that contains a word that no one knows FOR SURE what it means! In many other scriptures Paul praises women in active ministry! Does it make sense to hinge an entire doctrine affecting 60% of the church on an uncertain verse that contradicts Paul’s other writings and the words of Jesus Christ?

Paul was dealing with women teaching false doctrines about a fertility goddess. In addition, Ephesian women believed they were descended from Amazon women, and even some Greek histories recorded that Ephesus was founded by Amazon women. This explains Paul’s references to myths and genealogies in 1Tim. 1:4. Amazons were an early group of women that taught that women were SUPERIOR to men—not equal, but better than men! Paul refutes this by saying, “Adam was formed first, then Eve. And Adam was not the one deceived...” Here Paul argues against Gnostic teachings that Eve was formed first and then Adam was created second. This Gnostic belief grew from ideas of female superiority that the Ephesian women had inherited from the Amazons.

Followers of Artemis believed women needed the help of Artemis to get safely through childbirth. To counter this, Paul tells Timothy, “Women will come safely through childbirth” (Phillips Bible, 1Tim. 2:15) if they continue in faith, love and holiness with propriety. The phrase translated by the King James, “saved in childbearing” can also be translated “saved throughout childbearing”—saved from death during the entire process of bearing a child. Again proving that Paul is fighting false doctrines, not the teachings of dedicated Christian women! For more details and additional research about this passage see “Paul and Women Teachers” in the women’s role section.

In those “women’s role” sermons we were not told about Priscilla going on one of Paul’s missionary journeys were we? Acts 18:18. If someone mentioned that Priscilla (listed

before her husband) had taught the minister Apollos, he always added that it was in their home. Yet the Greek has no mention of a house or home in Acts 18:26, and the verb used implies public teaching rather than private teaching.

The major premise of these sermons was that all women are to be subject or controlled by all men. It's a faulty premise. Wives yielding graciously, lovingly to the gentle, caring leadership of Christian husbands is set in a family context. Nowhere are all women subject to all men! See the paper "Head and Headship: Men, Women and Marriage".

Deborah never made it into the "women's role" sermon because she summoned Barak and he came—she didn't go to him. Deborah, a wife and mother, led and judged the entire nation of Israel! That was all God's will! God's doing! Deborah praised the "princes" who went to war under her leadership by the command of God, Judges 5:2 and 9. Apostle and prophet top the list of spiritual gifts in 1Cor. 12:28. A minister, listed simply as a teacher in the list, is listed beneath the spiritual gift of prophet. Of course all spiritual gifts are important in the church, but some have greater responsibility before God. Prophets such as Deborah received direct words of God—and being married didn't stop God from selecting Deborah or Huldah (2 Chron. 34:22) as prophets. God doesn't change. If we can have women prophets we can have women teacher/ministers as they "rank" below prophets. Yet rank is not a concept that God promotes, for all leadership must be loving servant leadership, Matt. 20:26.

There were female leaders such as Phoebe in Romans 16:1, and Junia or Junias ("Greetings to those outstanding apostles, Andronicus and Junias..." Romans 16:7, New Jerusalem Bible); and Nympha-- who had a church meeting in her home and is the only leader mentioned by name in her town, Col.4:15 NIV. See the Articles "Junia, A Woman Apostle" and "Traveling Through Time" for much more information about Phoebe and Junia.

All of these women and many more, didn't make it into those sermons about women's role. Neither did Euodia and Syntyche, who Paul said, "contended at my side in the cause of the gospel", Phil. 4:2-5, NIV. The Greek phrase mentioning these two women is originally a reference to wrestling side by side in the cause of the gospel! Paul praised these women for publicly verbally wrestling for God's Truth! Two women were publicly teaching God's truth right beside Paul and Paul praised them for it!

Jesus said WHOSOEVER practices and TEACHES these commandments will be called GREAT in the Kingdom of heaven! Matt. 5:19. Jesus never placed limits on His women! Jesus does not forbid women from teaching and achieving greatness along with the men who teach His commandments. In the past we have not understood the context of Paul's writings or exactly the culture he was dealing with. Almost two centuries later, Paul's letter to Timothy is indeed difficult to understand. But however we interpret Paul, we must remember that **our understanding of Paul's writings cannot contradict the words of our Savior, Jesus!** The words of Jesus are clear and apply to "whosoever". Both men and women must be allowed to obey Jesus and be allowed to teach His ways and commandments without limitations.

We are not in any way against men or advocating that women disrespect their husbands. Yet it is clear from 1 Cor. 12:11 that God gives spiritual gifts to both men and women as He pleases. A man is not lessened in God's eyes because he acknowledges his wife's spiritual gifts or the spiritual gifts of any woman. Did Aquilla hold back Priscilla from her role of leadership? Did Barak refuse to obey Deborah? Did Deborah's husband prevent her from being a prophetess and the leader of Israel?

The church needs more love today. If we walk daily in God's Spirit we will have love for each other and treat each other kindly even when we disagree. Joel predicted in the last days we would see God's spirit poured out on "my servants, both men and women"... "and they will prophesy", Acts 2:16-18. Do you think that we are in the last days? If so, then you should EXPECT women to be serving God in a mighty way! God predicted it and IT WILL HAPPEN! My brothers and sisters in the faith, no matter how many times you have heard-- or preached-- the "women's role" sermon, realize that **there were women leaders in the New Testament!** And God Himself promises us that there will be women called by God to the second highest spiritual gift—the very difficult job of "prophet" in the last days! Get ready. Women leaders are coming! If you are fighting against them when GOD Himself personally sends them, will God be pleased with you?

[1] Charles Trombley, *Who Said Women Can't Teach*, Bridge Publishing Company, 1985. Page 176.

[2] Charles Trombley, Page 175.