

Women in the Five-Fold Ministry

The apostle Paul writes to the Ephesian church (4:11-13) that Christ "gave some as apostles, some as prophets, some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers." It is through these members of the body that Christ will equip and build his church into a mature body that measures up to his full stature. Based upon the words used, there are either four or five different types of people. Neither Paul, nor the rest of scripture, presents these roles as mutually exclusive. In fact, when the meanings of the words are examined, it seems obvious that a single individual could and would fulfill several roles.

The meanings are as follows (these definitions are based solely upon the Greek word used): 1) Apostle comes from ἀπόστολος [apostolos] and is a person who is sent as a messenger; 2) Prophet come from προφήτης [prophētēs] and is a person who possesses insight into God's will and proclaims this will on God's behalf--one who speaks for God by means of God's inspiration; 3) Evangelist comes from εὐαγγελιστής [euangelistēs] and is a person who bears and preaches the good news of the gospel; 4) Pastor comes from ποιμήν [poimēn] and is a person who tends, rules, and cares for the church as a shepherd for sheep; 5) And finally, Teacher comes from διδάσκαλος [didaskalos] and is a person who instructs. The church will be equipped and built through those who are sent with a divine message, with divine insight into his will, speaking for God and under his inspiration both the good news and doctrine.

Now the real question: Will God use women to equip and build his church? Did God use women within Paul's churches to bring his church to maturity? Do women have a place in the five-fold ministry? To answer these questions, I would like to (re)introduce you to some women from Paul's churches: Junia, the women of Corinth, Euodia and Syntyche, Phoebe, and Priscilla. May their place within the early church allow us to understand how our Lord views his body and the place women have within it.

In his letter to the Roman church, the apostle sends greetings to a number of people, including Andronicus and Junia. He describes them as kinsmen (perhaps fellow Hellenistic Jews) and fellow-prisoners. He further describes them as being in Christ before him and well-known among the apostles. It seems this passage is describing a man (Andronicus) and a woman (Junia) as apostles. While this meaning is contested based upon Junia not being a woman (clearly and definitively refuted) and them being well-known to the apostles (totally dependent upon the general context and the specific collocation of the word with its adjuncts), the testimony of the early church is unequivocal. Junia was an apostle and even the misogynistic church father John Chrysostom does not hesitate to call her an apostle, even a distinguished apostle.¹

Paul instructs the Corinthian church in his letter of correction on the importance of proper prayer and prophecy, particularly with regard to men having short, cut hair and women having

¹ Eldon Jay Epp. *Junia: The First Woman Apostle*. (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2005) 79-81.

long, uncut hair. The obvious assumption on Paul's part is that this instruction was necessary because women were intended to be active members of the body as prayers and prophets.

In his letter to the Philippian church, Paul speaks of Euodia and Syntyche. He describes them as workers with him in the work of the good news of the gospel with Clement. This description is unambiguous in meaning. Euodia and Syntyche are clearly evangelists, bearers and preachers of the good news of the gospel.

In the same letter to the Romans in which he addresses Andronicus and Junia as prominent apostles, Paul asks the church at Rome to welcome Phoebe and provide her any needed assistance. He describes her as a great help to him and a deacon from the church in Cenchrea, the eastern port of Corinth. In the early church, deacons were ministers who helped care for the church in both shepherding them and in teaching. In many urban centers, as the church grew, the many home churches were presided over by a bishop with the assistance of presbyters and deacons. In fact, at a later time in Rome, the bishop was assisted in each of seven districts by a deacon. It is also important to recognize that Paul does not refer to Phoebe as a deaconess (a female form of deacon invented by the later church) but rather as a deacon. As such, most scholars agree that she is entrusted to bear the important letter to the Roman church. In fact, many scholars of ancient media believe she not only bore the letter but also performed (spoke) it as the voice of Paul to the Roman church.

Finally, again in his letter to the Romans, Paul greets Priscilla and Aquila as co-workers in the ministry of Christ. This is the same couple who, when they heard Apollos speaking eloquently in Ephesus, took him aside and instructed him in the way of God more accurately. It is significant that in both the Acts narrative and in Paul's letter, the convention of addressing the husband first and then the wife is not followed. Instead Priscilla is addressed first. While the specifics of their marriage and ministry relationship cannot be described, Priscilla is presented as an equal of both Paul and Aquila in the ministry and teaching. It seems likely that Priscilla, along with Aquila, instructed Apollos.

Based upon these examples from the women within the Pauline churches, it seems improbable, even impossible, that women did not and do not have place within all of the roles of the five-fold ministry. But what about 1 Corinthians 14 and 1 Timothy 2? I would submit that given the evidence reviewed, we should revisit our understanding of these passages in light of the clear practice of women in the five-fold ministry within the Pauline churches.

The testimony from the earliest Christian churches speaks loudly. Surely we can also affirm with the apostle Paul his declaration to the Galatians (3:28), "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female - for all of you are one in Christ Jesus." In conclusion, Jesus views his body as a reflection of his image, an image he created male and female. He embraces both men and women within the church and calls us to also embrace them as he calls each individual into their place within the body.

The Voice of Women within the Church

Given the clear practice of women participating in the five-fold ministry within the Pauline churches cited in the article entitled "Women in the Five-Fold Ministry" in the September issue of the Pentecostal Herald, it is incumbent upon us to revisit our understanding of 1 Corinthians 14 and 1 Timothy 2. In this article I will examine 1 Corinthians 14 and the long-standing tradition that Paul is commanding women to be silent and prohibiting them from speaking in church.

It is a fair summary to characterize the first letter to the Corinthians as a letter of correction. The church of Corinth was disorderly due to factions, immorality, and inappropriate use of the spiritual gifts. Paul is stern, if not harsh, in his correction of this church located in one of the Roman Empire's most bustling seaports. In chapter 11 he offers one of his few affirmations of the Corinthian church, while still cautioning them that men and women should publicly pray and prophesy properly with clear gender identification. The men are to be identified by their cut hair (and thus uncovered head) and the women are to be identified by their uncut hair (and thus covered head). In chapter 12 he addresses the Corinthians' lack of understanding regarding the spiritual gifts and the appropriate use of these gifts within their assemblies. His correction is long and theological, spanning several chapters. It culminates in the end of chapter 14 with practical and precise instruction concerning order within the Corinthian gatherings.

Paul describes the disorder as each member coming with a song, a lesson, a revelation, a tongue, an interpretation. He responds by instructing them in the appropriate contribution of these various elements to the service. "Let all these things be done for the strengthening of the church." He first addresses the inappropriate use of the spiritual gift of tongues. He has already shamed them in the first few verses of chapter 14, stating that they should be eager to prophesy rather than speak in an unknown tongue because prophecy was understandable and strengthened, encouraged, and consoled the church. Further, the one who prophesies is greater than the one who speaks in tongues because he builds up the church. There is, however, one exception. When the tongues are interpreted, then they also strengthen the church. It is to this exception that Paul turns in chapter 14 with the mandate that the gift of tongues is to be followed by interpretation. But if there is no interpretation after two or three speak in tongues, those speaking should be silent (this word comes from *σιγάω* [*sigāō*] and means to keep, be, or become silent; to stop talking). Paul is very clear: the solution to the inappropriate use of the gift of tongues that leads to disorderly assemblies is for those speaking in tongues to be silent.

Having earlier directed them toward prophecy, Paul now turns to the appropriate operation of this spiritual gift within their gatherings. Two or three may prophesy but one after the other because each prophet is subject (this word comes from *ὑποτάσσω* [*hupotassō*] and means to put in subjection, to be subject or subordinate) to the other prophets. In fact this subjection of the body to itself is to be carried out in such a radical manner that when one prophet is prophesying and another receives a prophecy, the first prophet is to be silent (same

word as used previously regarding those speaking in tongues). This act of mutual submission is Paul's answer to the pride and spiritual arrogance of the Corinthian church. The reason the body is to be mutually subject to one another is because "God is not characterized by disorder but by peace."

Paul now turns to another source of disorder within the Corinthian assemblies--questioning women. Again, his instruction is crystal clear. They are to be silent (same word as used previously regarding those speaking in tongues and the prophets) and they are to be in submission (same word as used previously regarding the prophets' mutual submission). Further, this submission is in accordance with the law. But to which law is Paul referring? No biblical scholar has been able to locate any law from the Hebrew Scriptures that stipulates this submission. No biblical scholar or historian of the Greco-Roman world has been able to locate any secular law stipulating this submission. So to what is Paul referring? But before answering this question, another important item must be noted. Paul does not stipulate to whom the women are to be in submission.

But isn't it obvious? The next verse speaks of asking their husbands if they want to find out about something. Doesn't this mean they are supposed to be in submission to their husbands? But this is precisely the point we miss. Paul does not instruct the women to be in submission to their husbands in this passage. Instead, he instructs them to ask their husbands at home when they have a question. He is not addressing husband-wife relations and their mutual submission to one another as he does in Ephesians 5. Rather, he is addressing the disorderly services within the Corinthian church. Like the prophets, the women are to be in mutual submission to the body. The source of their disorderliness is their desire to ask questions. Paul's answer is the same as before. Be silent. The role of the husband is only to serve as a source of answers. And lest we persist in thinking Paul has actually moved on from these disorderly gatherings to husband-wife relations, he concludes, "So then, brothers and sisters, be eager to prophesy, and do not forbid anyone from speaking in tongues. And do everything in a decent and orderly manner."

So what is the law Paul is referring to when instructing women to be in submission? I would submit that the law is the law of Christ (Galatians 6:2; 1 Corinthians 12:12). Each member is a member in particular of the body of Christ and yet that body is one. That oneness is fulfilled when the members of the body are in mutual submission to one another because of their submission to the head of the body, namely Christ and his Holy Spirit. When the members of the body are not submitted to each other, they are then in rebellion against the head. This leads to disorderliness in all aspects of the body and will evidence itself when the body gathers together. Paul is clear that this is not of God. Two or three should speak in tongues and then it should be interpreted. If it is not, then be silent. Two or three should prophesy by turn and in mutual submission, each becoming silent when the next is moved by the Holy Spirit. Any member who disrupts the service by questions should be silent. In Corinth this happened to be the women who, due to cultural conventions, had not been allowed to participate in public meetings and therefore were disrupting the church assemblies with their questions. They should ask their husbands at home, but they should be in submission to the body as demonstrated by their silence.

In conclusion, Paul's solution to orderliness within the Corinthian church is mutual submission of the body to itself through the members' submission to the head of the body. When this mutual submission is not present, Paul instructs the offending members of the body--whether those speaking in tongues, prophets prophesying (which would have included women as seen in 1 Corinthians 11), or women asking questions--to be silent. So all women are not required to be silent in church? No, only the disruptive ones; in fact, any member of the body, female or male, that is disorderly is to be silent. The principles are mutual submission of the body to itself through the head and silence as the way to bring one's self into submission. The particular problems that these principles were applied to in the Corinthian church were questioning women, long-winded prophets, and those speaking in tongues. In fact, in his final admonition to do everything in a decent and orderly manner, Paul does not even mention the women, just the prophets and those speaking in tongues.

So the long-standing tradition that Paul is commanding women to be silent and prohibiting them from speaking in church is false? Yes! Emphatically yes! As long as the members of the body are in mutual submission to one another--each particular member in submission to all other members of the body--then each member is free to fulfill his or her place in the body just as God has decided to place them. Thus the voice of women within the church is not silenced, any more than the gifts of tongues or of prophecy are silenced. Paul's instruction is simple: Let all who speak do so in a decent and orderly fashion. The evidence already examined concerning women in the five-fold ministry within the Pauline churches indicates that Paul expected the voices of women to be among those who would speak.

The Silenced Woman

First of all, then, I urge that **requests, prayers, intercessions, and thanks** be offered on behalf of all people, ²even for kings and all who are in authority, that we may lead a peaceful and quiet life in all godliness and dignity. ³ Such **prayer** for all is good and welcomed before God our Savior, ⁴since he wants all people to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth. ⁵ For there is one God and one intermediary between God and humanity, Christ Jesus, himself human, ⁶who gave himself as a ransom for all, revealing God's purpose at his appointed time. ⁷ For this I was appointed a preacher and apostle— I am telling the truth; I am not lying— and a teacher of the Gentiles in faith and truth.

⁸ So I want the men to **pray** in every place, lifting up holy hands without anger or dispute.

⁹ Likewise the women are to dress in suitable apparel, with modesty and self-control. Their adornment must not be with braided hair and gold or pearls or expensive clothing, ¹⁰but with good deeds, as is proper for women who profess reverence for God.

¹¹ A woman must learn quietly with all **submissiveness** (this word comes from ὑποτάσσω [hupotassō] and means the state of submissiveness, subjection, subordination).

¹² But I do not allow a woman to teach or **exercise authority over** (this word comes from ἀυθεντέω [authenteō] and generally means to assume a stance of independent authority, give orders to, dictate to) a man. She must remain **quiet** (this word comes from ἡσυχία [hēsuchia] and means the state of quietness without disturbance or the state of saying nothing or very little).

¹³ For Adam was formed first and then Eve.

¹⁴ And Adam was not deceived, but the woman, because she was fully deceived, fell into transgression. ¹⁵ But she will be delivered through childbearing, if she continues in faith and love and holiness with self-control. (1 Timothy 2:1-15 - New English Translation)

What is the subject of verses 1 - 8? **Prayer.**

Is the subject of verses 9 - 10 also **prayer** and the proper adornment during prayer (similar to Paul's concern in 1 Corinthians 11:1-16)?

In verse 11, what is the focus? A woman, learning, or submission?

authenteō is an hapax legomena. It appears only once in Paul's writings and only once in the entire scriptures. We do not have any certainty regarding what Paul meant by this word in this particular context.

In verse 12, what is the focus? A woman, teaching, or being quiet?

As he does so often, Paul refers to the creation story from Genesis. In verses 14 - 15, what is the focus? Man, woman, or deception?

Bio:

Dr. Steven J. Beardsley is husband to Regina, father to Vincent, Caleb, Marcus, Candace, and Cassandra (ages 16 - 9), pastor to Newark United Pentecostal Church, and professor of biblical studies and academic dean at Urshan Graduate School of Theology.