



# The Ryburn Christian Clarion

BIBLICAL STUDIES RESOURCE

*Upholding the Accuracy of the God-Breathed Word*

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## *The Clarion presents...*

### **“Women In The Lead For God”**

#### **Parts One, Two, And Three**

*by Nathan R. James*

#### **Part One:**

[**Editor’s Note:** *The following article begins a three-part series on the role of women in ministry. In this first part, we focus on Old Testament women.*]

**T**HROUGHOUT HISTORY, women have often served God and His people in spiritual roles, and in leadership capacities. Although this may differ from some traditions and assumptions, the pattern in scripture is clear. God’s intent, from the beginning, was for men and women to be spiritual people, having a relationship with Him.

#### **Genesis 1:26-28**

*And God said, Let us make man in our image, after [or “according to”] our likeness: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth.*

*So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them.*

*And God blessed them [male and female], and God said unto them [male and female], Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it: and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth.*

These verses speak of the creation of mankind in the image of God. God emphatically stated His intent; both male and female were created in the image of God, and given dominion over all the Earth. God made no distinction between the male and the female. To be sure, there *are* differences, but the differences are not found here. Instead, God created men and women to have fellowship with Him: to have a close, personal relationship with Him. That was part of the plan, and it has always continued to be His desire, but the catastrophe of sin altered the course of things.

After the catastrophe, God, in His great wisdom and mercy, placed His spirit upon certain individuals. Examples spring readily to mind, including men like Moses, and Samuel, and Elijah. Others, like Jethro, Shemaiah, and Gad, are, perhaps, not as well known, but whether well known or unknown, God called each to serve Him, and communicated His will to them, and by them.

In the same way that He has called men, God has also called many women throughout history. Women like Miriam, and Deborah, and Huldah were female prophets of the Lord. Others, too, walked with God, like Rebekah, Abigail, and the unnamed wise woman of the city of Abel.

When God brought His people out of Egypt, they were led by three siblings: the prophet, Moses; the high priest, Aaron; and the prophetess, Miriam. Miriam was one of Israel's top spiritual leaders. According to Exodus 15:20, the Lord called her, "...Miriam the prophetess..." having it recorded for His people. Furthermore, in Micah, He reminded Israel of how He had provided such quality leadership for them.

#### **Micah 6:4**

*For I brought thee up out of the land of Egypt, and redeemed thee out of the house of servants; and I sent before thee Moses, Aaron, and Miriam.*

Deborah is a stunning example of the sort of things God may call a woman to do. She was a wife, a mother, a prophetess, and a ruler. In Judges 4:5, it says, "...the children of Israel came up to her for judgment." She did not judge things by her five senses, but by the spirit of the Lord. The nation had great respect for her, and the people sought her out when they needed justice. Her Godly leadership was instrumental in bringing Israel forty years of peace during the turbulent times recorded in Judges.

Before God brought Israel this great deliverance by Deborah's hand, the nation was under the oppression of Jabin, the king of Canaan. When the Word of God came to Deborah, she was ready to act. She called for Barak, the son of Abinoam, and he obediently came. Then, she gave Barak the commandment of God to take ten thousand men and go out to fight the army of Jabin (Judg. 4:6 and 7). What was Barak's response?

#### **Judges 4:8**

*And Barak said unto her, If thou wilt go with me, then I will go: but if thou wilt not go with me, then I will not go.*

He must have thought highly of this woman, this prophet and judge of Israel! He didn't have much confidence in himself, or in the ten thousand men, or in his own relationship with God, but he did have confidence in Deborah's relationship with the Lord. She did go with him, and the rest is history, for Israel prevailed (Judg. 4:9-15).

Now, what of Huldah and some of the others? In II Kings 22:14-20, Huldah prophesied concerning Judah and its king, faithfully delivering the message God gave her to speak. Evidently, she elicited great respect, for even Hilkiah, the priest of God, went to her for guidance.

Abraham, too, knew the importance of a Godly woman, trusting the Lord to find one for his son, Isaac. No doubt God was working in Rebekah's heart when she undertook the long journey to become the wife of Isaac, a man she'd never met. Her wisdom saw to it that Isaac later blessed their son, Jacob, whom God favored, rather than his twin, the miscreant, Essau.

Then, there's Abigail, whose goodness saved the life of her husband, and every man in his household, from the wrath of a formidable man, the leader of a band of "outlaws." Who knows what further calamity was prevented, for that outlaw leader was David, the man God had chosen to be king of Israel?

Another wise woman, according to II Samuel 20:15-22, saved the entire city of Abel from destruction, when she negotiated the end of a ferocious siege. Although this woman goes unnamed, her cool head, wisdom, and walk with God saved the lives of many.

Throughout the Old Testament, and the whole Bible, the record is clear. God calls individuals on the basis of their hearts, not their gender. Women have filled leadership roles for God's people throughout history. These heroic women have served the Lord, leading His people by purity of heart, and with the obedience with which they believed His Word.\*

## **Part Two:**

[**Editor's Note:** *In this second part of this series, we examine certain New Testament verses that have been misapplied for centuries, thus denying women full access to everything God has made available in Christ.*]

**T**HERE APPEAR TO BE many contradictions between I Corinthians 14:34 and 35 and other verses regarding our subject. We can, however, see a consistent pattern throughout the Scriptures showing women

serving in ministry.

### **I Corinthians 14:34 and 35**

*Let your women keep silence in the churches: for it is not permitted unto them to speak; but they are commanded to be under obedience, as also saith the law.*

*And if they will learn any thing, let them ask their husbands at home: for it is a shame for women to speak in the church.*

Several women prophets are mentioned in the Old Testament. Indeed, the Book of Acts and the Epistles list many women who walked by the spirit of God, and ministered in the First Century Church. It is, therefore, certainly an oddity that these verses in I Corinthians 14 seem to forbid this activity. Even the Apostle Paul, by revelation, wrote that, “in Christ Jesus,” there is no difference between men and women.

### **Galatians 3:28**

*There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus.*

All “in Christ Jesus” have received the same gift of holy spirit, and each is called to function in the Body of Christ. Only a few particular scriptures are addressed to *women* and not men, or to *men* and not women, but these are always explicitly stated. Women are certainly included where we read, “I would that ye all spake with tongues, but rather that ye prophesied...” (I Cor. 14:5a)

Furthermore, in I Corinthians 11:3-12, the Apostle Paul instructed the believers as to how a married woman ought to pray and prophesy. In this chapter, we see particulars addressed to men and women separately, but the difference is only in whether one prays and prophesies with a covered or uncovered head. The covered head was a cultural symbol of marriage. Similarly, in our culture, we use rings worn on the third finger of the left hand. Unlike our custom, however, the symbol of the covered head was reserved for wives only. Husbands did not wear such a covering, so the apostle’s instruction was that wives ought to pray and prophesy with their heads covered, but husbands should not. Now, let’s consider verse 16 of chapter 11.

### **I Corinthians 11:16**

*But if any man seem to be contentious, we have no such custom, neither the churches of God.*

Rather than fight about this subject, simply let it go. Then, why bring it up at all? While the physical covering of the head is not spiritually significant, what it symbolizes is. Covering the head symbolized the husband’s loving protection and headship of his wife. God intends the husband and wife to be “one flesh,” as His Word says in Genesis 2:24. They should thus act in concert, moving together with the things of God.

When Paul wrote to the Corinthian women not to put aside the symbol of their marriage, it was the marriage that was on his mind, not the symbol. The wife should not ignore her responsibility to her husband. Her believing and ministry should not in any way contradict her role as a wife. Her responsibilities as minister and wife are not to conflict with each other. The Godly arrangement set forth in The Word allows her to fulfill both roles.

If we consider I Corinthians 14:34 and 35 in light of these scriptures from chapter 11, it should be obvious that God would not explain in one place how a woman ought to prophesy and, a few chapters later, forbid her to do so! We can thus see that any interpretation of I Corinthians 14:34 and 35 forbidding women to prophesy (or speak) must be in error. If a woman prophesies in a meeting of the church, the applicable verse is I Corinthians 14:31, which is addressed to both men and women.

### **I Corinthians 14:31**

*For ye may all prophesy one by one, that all may learn, and all may be comforted.*

The prohibition against women “speaking” in the church from I Corinthians 14:34 and 35 must then be concerning something else. The first thing to realize is that the word “women” in the King James Version should be translated “wives.” The Greek word used here may indicate either, and only the context determines what it should be. Reading the context, we see that these women must be married if they are to carry out the instruction

in verse 35 to "...ask their husbands at home...." Now, if wives may never speak, how can they pray and prophesy? This prohibition must apply to only a particular form of speech by wives. Indeed, a wife may be a prophet (See Judges 4:4.), and thus be addressed, not by verses 34 and 35 but, by verse 29, where it says, "Let the prophets speak...."

When we read verse 29, it is immediately obvious as to what this refers. It deals with a prophet exercising his or her ministry by prophesying. This verse does not address prayer, teaching, or small talk. It is concerned only with prophecy, which is why the people here are referred to as "prophets." They could have been called believers, saints, sons of God, or any of several other things, but they are not. It means literally, let the prophets, when they speak as prophets, speak.

The purpose of I Corinthians 14 is to clear up confusion as to how a meeting of the church should proceed. It is written at length so the Corinthians, and the rest of the Church of God, may understand how to "...let all things be done unto edifying....," doing so "...decently and in order." (verses 26 and 40) It is not meant to prevent anyone from operating manifestations of holy spirit, or fulfilling a God-given ministry.

Now, let us look at verses 34 and 35 again, using the same logic we used in verse 29, remembering that the word for "women" should be the word "wives." It thus says, in verse 34, "Let your wives keep silence in the churches...." This no more includes wives prophesying than verse 29 includes prophets discussing sports or the weather. Rather, it is concerned only with wives speaking as wives. That is why it calls them "wives." They, too, could have been called believers, or saints, or sons of God, but they are not, because this section does not apply to believers praying, saints singing, or sons of God exhorting one another. Instead, it is only concerned with a wife addressing her husband with something that ought to wait for another time.

This fits perfectly with the instruction from verse 35 to "...ask their husbands at home...." We can carry this understanding all the way through, thus, when we read, "...it is a shame for women ["wives"] to speak in the church....," we know that it means that it's a shame for wives to speak as wives in a meeting of the church. They ought not to interrupt the edifying of the saints with questions for their husbands, nor think that their position as wives allows them any special privileges in the meeting. Can you imagine a wife calling out during a meeting to her husband who is teaching, "Honey, why don't you read that other verse"? What if she constantly asked her husband, "What does that mean"? It's one thing to do that at a movie theatre; it's something else to interrupt the teaching of The Word that way. Remember, too, that in the First Century, there were no microphones or amplifiers. If people in the assembly didn't keep quiet, they would drown out the one speaking for God at that moment. How embarrassing!

That is why the Scriptures say it is a shame for wives to speak in their capacity as wives during a church meeting. There is a time for a believing wife to prophesy, and there is a time for her, *as a wife*, to speak to her husband. If she can't tell the difference, it's embarrassing. A woman's role as a wife and her role as a child of God are perfectly laid out in the Bible, and should never contradict or interfere with one another.\*

## Part Three:

[**Editor's Note:** *In this final part of this series, we shall see how a single mistranslated word has affected believing women for centuries.*]

**I**N THIS SERIES, we have been considering how God has included women in the spiritual leadership of His people. With logic and careful attention to scripture, we've seen that God has not limited speaking roles in The Church to men, nor has He made a distinction between men and women when handing out spiritual gifts and callings. Perhaps the most clear verse on this subject is Galatians 3:28.

### Galatians 3:28

*There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus.*

Jesus Christ, in John 17:17, prayed that His followers would be sanctified by the truth. If we accept false doctrines and myths, we will not demonstrate the purity that we should as God's people, thus, throughout the epistles to Timothy and Titus, the Apostle Paul gave instructions for guiding The Church. He frequently addressed what should and should not be taught, for what is taught as truth is of vital importance to the well-

being of The Church, including the topic we are considering. We, therefore, often see many verses such as the following.

### **I Timothy 1:3 and 4; and 6:3, 4a, and 20**

*As I besought thee to abide still at Ephesus, when I went into Macedonia, that thou mightest charge some that they teach no other doctrine,*

*Neither give heed to fables and endless genealogies, which minister questions,...so do.*

*If any man teach otherwise, and consent not to wholesome words, even the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, and to the doctrine which is according to godliness;*

*He is proud, knowing nothing,...*

*O Timothy, keep that which is committed to thy trust, avoiding profane and vain babblings,...*

### **Titus 1:10 and 11**

*For there are many unruly and vain talkers and deceivers, specially they of the circumcision:*

*Whose mouths must be stopped, who subvert whole houses, teaching things which they ought not, for filthy lucre's sake.*

Now, we shall turn our attention to a section in the epistle of I Timothy that has caused much difficulty. The wording in the King James Version (KJV) has contributed to the ungodly and shameful treatment of women in The Church.

### **I Timothy 2:12 and 13**

*But I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over [authenteo] the man, but to be in silence.*

*For Adam was first formed, then Eve.*

This appears to say that women cannot teach, but nothing we have studied in this series suggests this. The key here is Paul's exhortations about doctrine. Just as I Corinthians 14:34, where The Word says, "Let your women keep silence in the churches...", hinges not on who speaks but on what is spoken, even so the proper understanding and application of these verses hinge on what is taught, rather than on who is teaching. The phrase, "I suffer not," is an obsolete expression that means, "I do not allow." Something is being forbidden here, and it is very important that we recognize just what that something is.

It may appear as though this is a broad prohibition against teaching by females, but few would take the widest possible interpretation of it. If women should not teach at all, then they should not teach Sunday school, or the third grade, or voice lessons. Surely, there must be qualifiers, for even the epistle to Titus indicates that women should be teachers.

### **Titus 2:1 and 3**

*But speak thou the things which become sound doctrine:*

*The aged women likewise, that they be in behaviour as becometh holiness, not false accusers, not given to much wine, teachers of good things;*

The context here again relates to "...sound doctrine..." What, then, is the qualifier that explains what sort of teaching women are not allowed to undertake? In the King James Version, it is the phrase, "...nor to usurp authority over the man..." Many individuals and churches have taken this to indicate that women may not teach men. This certainly would make it difficult for women like Junia, from Romans 16, to fulfill many leadership roles in The Church.

### **Romans 16:7**

*Salute Andronicus and Junia, my kinsmen, and my fellowprisoners, who are of note among the apostles, who also were in Christ before me.*

Junia is a feminine name. She was a woman and a noteworthy apostle in the First Century. How could she answer God's call to be an apostle if she could never teach? God does not limit Himself that way, nor does He limit the women He calls to service.

The simple truth is that there is a mistranslation in I Timothy 2:12. The words, "...to usurp authority over..." are a translation of a single Greek word, *authenteo*. This word is a verb that appears only once in the entire Bible, making its proper rendering essential to sound doctrine. A couple of Greek lexicons give an alternate definition that can solve our dilemma. Liddel and Scott's *Greek-English Lexicon* gives one possible translation as, "to be the author of." Similarly, *Thayer's Greek-English Lexicon Of The New Testament* says one definition of *authenteo* is, "one who does a thing himself, the author." Now, let's consider which rendering best fits this context.

First of all, from what we've seen in the previous two studies in this series, there is nothing in the Bible that gives men *general authority* over women. The husband is the "...head of the wife..." as indicated in Ephesians 5:23, however, this is within the marriage relationship. Over and over again, scripture instructs wives to be subject to their own husbands (Eph. 5:22), not to every man who happens to walk by. What husband would appreciate that? Furthermore, the reason often given that women should not usurp authority is that man was formed first (I Tim. 2:13). How does that fit? Weren't the animals formed before man? Yes, they were, but to whom did God give the dominion? It was given to Adam and Eve.

### **Genesis 1:25-28**

*And God made the beast of the earth after his kind [or "according to its genus"], and cattle after their kind, and every thing that creepeth upon the earth after his kind: and God saw that it was good.*

*And God said, Let us make man in our image, after [or "according to"] our likeness: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth.*

*So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them.*

*And God...said unto them [male and female],...have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth.*

The cultures from which we come exert tremendous influences over us, thus, when searching the Scriptures, we must be on guard against such cultural assumptions and biases. Part of the culture of the First Century that Timothy came up against included the myths of pagan religions that held sway throughout the eastern Mediterranean region. One of the prevalent myths was that the first human being was a woman, and that she, herself, made man. You can see how this teaching would be directly opposed to the Word of God. Paul was simply forbidding women in The Church to teach this false doctrine. The verse in question may be rendered as, "I do not allow a woman to teach or claim authorship of man...." To teach that doctrine would be contrary to God's Word, having a corrupting influence over The Church.

When we understand that I Timothy 2:12 is a prohibition against women teaching a specific false doctrine that was rampant in the First Century, this verse fits the overall pattern of scripture. It now harmonizes very well with other verses that concern women and their roles in The Church, as well as other subjects addressed in the epistles to Timothy and Titus.

God calls both men and women to serve Him. In Christ, there is no difference between male and female. Only within marriage has God set different roles for men and women. No matter what culture may say about these subjects, God's Word is truth, offering the best plan for any society, church, or individual. God is no respecter of persons, and we should imitate Him in that regard. Men can lead and women can lead; men can teach and women can teach. The Church will be much richer for recognizing the gifts and calling of God in both men and women.\*

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*\*Articles and columns submitted to **The Ryburn Christian Clarion** are edited to ensure correct spelling and punctuation, proper grammar, and clarity of expression. Furthermore, no article or column herein should be construed to be a comprehensive study of the subject under consideration.*

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