

Role of Women in the Church Today

Part One

“And your sons and daughters shall prophesy . . . And on my servants and on my handmaidens I will pour out in those days of my Spirit; and they shall prophesy”
(Acts 2:17-18).

The Creator’s View of Women

The creation story depicts Adam and Eve, the first husband and wife, as partners. They were created in the image of God and given dominion over the earth (Genesis 1:27-28).

Man was created first and served in a leadership role in the family. The woman was his helper. This did not mean that she was less important or inferior to him. God is also described as our helper. (See Psalms 33:20; 70:5; 115:9.) The man and woman lived a life of interdependence (depending on each other). The woman brought balance to the man, making him complete.

Matthew Henry comments, “If man is the head, she (woman) is the crown, a crown to her husband . . . The woman was made of a rib out of the side of Adam; not made out of his head to rule over him, nor out of his feet to be trampled upon by him, but out of his side to be equal with him, under his arm to be protected, and near his heart to be beloved.”

“There are two kinds of women in the world:
Those who take a man’s strength and those
that give a man strength.”
(Ihre Freundin)

Adam and Eve sinned. One of the penalties of sin placed on Eve was “thy desire shall be to thy husband, and he shall rule over thee.” (Genesis 3:16) Because Eve attempted to liberate herself from God, she was placed under the headship of her husband and given a strong desire for him. This is reflected in the organization of the family, women’s role in society, and in the nations.

The Wise Man’s View of Women

“A virtuous woman is a crown to her husband: but she that maketh ashamed is as rottenness in his bones.” (Proverbs 12:4)

Read Proverbs 31:10-12, 25-30 for a clear picture of an honorable woman.

It’s a Man’s World

The ancient world was a man’s world. However, the position of a woman among the Hebrews was better than in the heathen nations. Many names of Hebrew women can be found in the

pages of the Old Testament. These women, used and recognized by God, had great character and lived godly lives.

Male domination in Old Testament times is seen in their roles in the family. Only men served as priests and occupied leadership positions in politics and religion. A woman's religious role during the time of Christ's birth was limited. Only men received advanced training in the Scripture.

In the Old Testament women were listed among a man's properties. She was always under the authority of a man—her father, brother, or husband.

Athaliah, a queen in Judah, is depicted as someone who usurped power. When she was overthrown, everyone was happy (2 Kings 11:1-20). Esther was a good example of a lady who had influence among her people. A problem surfaces, not when a woman uses influence, but when she usurps authority (assumes, seizes, grabs, or takes over the authority given to her husband or leader).

Sometimes women rose to positions of leadership through a prophetic role. Miriam had influence, but only alongside Moses and Aaron. Deborah was a prophetess and judged Israel. In battle (and perhaps even in administration), Barak took the lead. Anna was a well-known figure in the Temple, but she had no official status.

The Tradition of the Elders

In the Mishnah it was noted, "When a man and a woman were in danger of death, the man must first be saved." In the Babylonian Talmud a man was encouraged to "thank God that he had not been created a Gentile, a woman, or an illiterate." It might be noted that men wrote the Mishnah and Talmud.

It was to a woman that God gave the honor of bringing the Messiah into this world.

"But when the fullness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law" (Galatians 4:4).

Not only did an angel appear to a young woman, but he called her "highly favoured."

"And the angel came in unto her, and said, Hail, thou that art highly favoured, the Lord is with thee: blessed art thou among women" (Luke 1:28).

Jesus' View of Women

Jesus lived in this setting. However, He dealt with women differently than what was ordinary in His day. He displayed an open attitude of acceptance toward them and welcomed them as learners (Luke 10:38-42).

Women often traveled with Jesus. They quickly accepted His teachings (Luke 8:1-3).

Interestingly, women were among the last to leave the cross (Matthew 27:55-56), and they were the first to the tomb. (Matthew 28:1) A woman was the first messenger of the Resurrection (Matthew 28:8-10).

Jesus' understanding and consideration of women sets an example for normal Christian living.

There is no record in the Gospels of any woman ever opposing Jesus. They tended to be more sensitive to spiritual things.

The Early Church's View

Luke seemed to hold a high view of women. In his account of the early church in Acts, he indicated the remarkable role that women played in the church. He carefully brings us to an understanding that both men and women were converted.

Women were an important part of the early church. They gathered in the upper room with the others and waited for the baptism of the Holy Spirit. One of the purposes of the Holy Spirit is stated in Acts 1:8. "But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth." After the baptism of the Holy Spirit, the recipient (whether male or female) was expected to be a witness, beginning at Jerusalem and going throughout the world.

In Acts 2 Peter mentioned Joel's prophecy being fulfilled on the Day of Pentecost. This prophecy includes, "and your sons and daughters shall prophesy . . . And on my servants and on my handmaidens I will pour out in those days of my Spirit; and they shall prophesy" (Acts 2:17-18).

Several scriptures in Acts show that women energetically participated in the life of the early church.

Paul's View

"I beseech Euodias, and beseech Syntyche, that they be of the same mind in the Lord. And I intreat thee also, true yokefellow, help those women which laboured with me in the gospel, with Clement also, and with other my fellowlabourers, whose names are in the book of life" (Philippians 4:2-3).

Paul mentioned only three of his co-workers at Philippi by name. Two of these were women. Women played an important role on his leadership team.

"I commend unto you Phebe our sister, which is a servant of the church which is at Cenchrea: That ye receive her in the Lord, as becometh saints, and that ye assist her in whatsoever

business she hath need of you: for she hath been a succourer of many, and of myself also” (Romans 16:1-2).

Apparently Phebe was a servant in the church, working for the Lord. He asked others to “receive her in the Lord.”

Paul listed a total of twenty-seven people in Romans 16. These were his co-workers. Ten of the twenty-seven greeted were women. Paul valued those that worked on his team, both men and women.

Paul was not narrow-minded concerning women filling roles in the church. He concluded, “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” (Galatians 3:28.)

Study Questions

1. Who serves in the leadership role of the family? _____

2. According to Matthew Henry, why was the woman taken from Adam’s side? _____

3. Name four characteristics of a virtuous woman mentioned in Proverbs 31.

1) _____

2) _____

3) _____

4) _____

4. Adam and Eve (and other couples) should live a life of interdependence. What does this mean? _____

5. Name two types of women in the world.

1) _____

2) _____

6. How was the position of a woman better among the Hebrews than in heathen nations?

7. Comment on the woman's religious role during the time of Christ's birth. _____

8. According to this lesson, what was Athaliah's problem? _____

9. What is the difference between using influence and usurping authority? _____

10. How did Jesus treat women? _____

11. Name some positions that women occupied in the Old Testament. _____

12. How do we know women were important in the early church? _____

13. According to Acts 2:17-18, who can prophesy? _____

14. Paul lists twenty-seven of his coworkers in Romans 16. How many of these were women?
