

In What Ways Are Women Restricted From Speaking in Church?

A brother in Christ wrote to ask:

I would like to ask you a question on women's roles in the church setting. I agree with you that women should not teach men, even in cyberspace. You are a brave man to say something so bold and "contentious" as this. Let God be true and every man a liar. You will be aware of Paul's instructions to the Corinthian church and Timothy about women remaining silent in the church. 1 Cor 11v5 indicates that Paul allowed women to pray and prophesy in the church however. I for some time have tried to resolve this apparent inconsistency. 1 Chronicles 25v 3 says ".....under the supervision of their father Jeduthun, who prophesied, using the harp in thanking and praising the Lord."

In coming to a workable church practice, which is obedient to the scriptures, could the following be an acceptable practice? No women is permitted to teach, but they are permitted to pray and prophesy (i.e. words of thankfulness and praise with their heads covered) aloud... I know you have been an elder before – what are your views?

Dear Brother,

I have often been greatly edified by hearing a Christian woman give a testimony, prophecy, or prayer. And yes, I have even been instructed, and gained some insight into truth, through the testimony of a spiritual woman. I have often shared with others that it is apparent from Scriptures that some of the women around Christ during the time of His ministry were more spiritually perceptive than some of the men. Yet Christ never appointed any of these women to be apostles or leaders of the church. This was not because women had nothing valuable to say or contribute, but rather because God had established in His divine government that women should be subject to man, and they should not usurp the authority of man.

I have often pondered the many admonitions of Paul regarding a woman's role in the church. I have truly wanted to understand what the mind of the Spirit of Christ is in this matter. I have no axe to grind, and I am certainly not a hater of women. My own daughter is now (the year is 2008) 20 years old, and is gifted with much spiritual insight, and I would not want to hinder her in ministering the life and wisdom of Christ that is present within her. At the

same time, I do not want to transgress the will of the Father, but to know His mind and His pleasure in all things.

I will share with you some things I have discerned as I have meditated upon this subject. I will begin with a passage of Scripture that is often brought up in support of women teaching men.

Acts 18:24-26

Now a Jew named Apollos, an Alexandrian by birth, an eloquent man, came to Ephesus; and he was mighty in the Scriptures. This man had been instructed in the way of the Lord; and being fervent in spirit, he was speaking and teaching accurately the things concerning Jesus, being acquainted only with the baptism of John; and he began to speak out boldly in the synagogue. But Priscilla and Aquila hearing him, took him aside and explained to him the way of God more accurately.

The statement here seems pretty plain, and I would conclude from it that both Aquila (a man) and Priscilla (a woman) were involved in explaining to Apollos (a man) the way of God more accurately. What occurs to me is that explaining a matter is not necessarily an act of usurpation, for it need not touch on issues of authority at all. Now if Priscilla had commanded Apollos, giving him specific instruction in what he must do, then there would have been issues of authority involved. However, the context of the passage does not indicate that this was the case.

I would point out, however, that this passage was not given to instruct the church in male/female roles. We are merely told what happened, and no specific endorsement or judgment of Priscilla's role is mentioned. It is not the same as the account of Ananias and Sapphira, another husband and wife team whose actions and words are spoken of in another passage of Acts. We are clearly told from the context of that passage that their actions were ones of disobedience. Here we are given no similar indication of a divine judgment or endorsement. We are simply told a snippet of history from the lives of these three people.

This passage might be used to support that which is clearly taught on in another place, but by itself it could not be used to establish a doctrine. I have heard some use this passage to say, "See, it is okay for women to teach men." They would rather establish their doctrine upon something as weak as this than to accept the apostle's doctrines where they teach specifically on this

matter and give very plain instruction. Another example that some cite is the following:

Acts 21:8-9

On the next day Paul and his company came to Caesarea, and entering the house of Philip the evangelist, who was one of the seven, we stayed with him. Now this man had four virgin daughters who were prophetesses.

That women may prophesy as well as men is well established in the Bible. The Word of God speaks of prophetesses as well as prophets. This was true in the Old Testament as it is in the New Testament.

Joel 2:28-29

And it will come about after this that I will pour out My Spirit on all mankind; *And your sons and daughters will prophesy, your old men will dream dreams, your young men will see visions. And even on the male and female servants I will pour out My Spirit in those days.*"

Women are as much partakers of the Holy Spirit as are men. It is only in government that there are differences. Woman was created for man, not man for woman. Man is the head of woman, and therefore woman is not to usurp authority over a man. Evidently, however, prophesying is not an act of usurpation.

In every instance where women are prohibited from speaking the issue of authority is in view. Women are not to exercise authority over men. I believe the apostles taught that women are not to PREACH to men in the assembly of believers. To do so provides too much of an opportunity for a woman to stray into areas of usurpation. I will show you how Paul's words declaring that women are not to "speak" in the assembly can be understood to mean they are not to "preach." There is sufficient evidence in other passages to establish the right of a woman to pray and prophesy in the assembly, so I do not take Paul's words to be a blanket call to complete silence.

As I mentioned, to pray and to prophesy is not an act of usurpation, for it does not involve taking authority over the man. The issue Paul is addressing is very clearly predicated upon issues of authority and headship, so we must always keep this in mind as we seek to arrive at the mind of Christ in looking at this topic. Prophecy is not intended to instruct or command, but rather to edify, exhort and console.

I Corinthians 14:3-4

But one who *prophesies* speaks to men for *edification* and *exhortation* and *consolation*. One who speaks in a tongue edifies himself; but one who prophesies edifies the church.

We are further told that prophecy is given as a sign. That is to say, it reveals something that was hidden.

I Corinthians 14:22-25

So then tongues are for a sign, not to those who believe but to unbelievers; but *prophecy is for a sign*, not to unbelievers but to those who believe. Therefore if the whole church assembles together and all speak in tongues, and ungifted men or unbelievers enter, will they not say that you are mad? But if all prophesy, and an unbeliever or an ungifted man enters, he is convicted by all, he is called to account by all; the secrets of his heart are disclosed; and so he will fall on his face and worship God, declaring that God is certainly among you.

In these passages which speak of the role of prophecy, we see that the word "instruction" is not mentioned. Prophesying is not the same as instructing, nor does it involve commanding a person or exercising authority over them. The office of a prophet and the office of a teacher are mentioned distinctly from one another in the New Testament. Women may teach, and are even commanded to do so in some instances, as in the older women teaching the younger women, and mothers teaching their children. It is only teaching men that a woman is prohibited from doing in the assembly of believers.

Let us look at Paul's instructions to the churches in this matter as it is found in the following Scriptures:

I Corinthians 14:34-35

The women are to keep silent in the churches; for they are not permitted to speak, but are to subject themselves, just as the Law also says. If they desire to learn anything, let them ask their own husbands at home; for it is improper for a woman to speak in church.

I Timothy 2:11-12

A woman must quietly receive instruction with entire submissiveness. But I do not allow a woman to teach or exercise authority over a man, but to remain quiet.

These are perhaps the two most pointed passages that speak to this issue. It is clear from the passage in I Corinthians that authority is the main issue bearing upon Paul's instructions. He says women "are to subject themselves." This reveals that what is said is based upon an understanding of the government God has established among men and women. Again, in I Timothy Paul uses the word "submissiveness" as well as the words "I do not allow a woman to... exercise authority over a man." This is what is forbidden. It is unseemly for a woman to exercise authority over a man. There is a great temptation for women to begin straying into areas of usurpation when they are given a position of instruction over men. Instructing and exercising authority over others are closely intertwined, and we see these related to one another from the time of our childhood.

As children we are instructed by our parents, and we also know they are our authority and we are to obey them. In school we are instructed by our teachers, and they exercise authority over us. Those in the military are given instructors whom they must obey. On the job we are often instructed by our superiors. Thus we see that instruction and authority are very closely related.

This need not always be the case. There are certainly instances where instructors have no authority over those they teach. They may instead be looked upon as servants to those they teach. I believe a teacher in the church should always seek to maintain a servant's heart. At the same time we are told that teachers are to be accounted worthy of honor.

I Timothy 5:17

The elders who rule well are to be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who work hard at preaching and teaching.

In this passage we see that "preaching and teaching" among the body of Christ is related to honor. Honor is itself related to authority in that it is an act of showing deference to another. A younger woman should honor an older woman who provides spiritual instruction by showing deference to her. In the same way, young men should show the same deference to older men who work hard at preaching and teaching. It would create some confusion for women to act as the teachers of men, for then the women would expect the men to show them deference, or to defer to them. The word deference means "humble submission or respect."

Throughout the Scriptures when we read of male/female relationships, such

as that between husband and wife, we are told that husbands are to love their wives, and wives are to respect their husbands. Love is at the heart of both of these admonitions, but a woman respecting her husband also implies an acknowledgment of his authority, and position of headship.

Some have taken the apostle Paul's words about a woman being silent as a blanket admonition, suggesting she is to never speak in the church. We must ask, "When would she pray or prophesy if she is to be silent among the congregation of believers? Is not prophecy valuable only where there are others to hear it?"

We have read of Philip having daughters who were prophetesses. Where were they prophesying? We are told that Paul and his companions came to Philip's house. While there, other Christians came and joined with them. Wherever the people of God are assembled, there we will find the church. A church is never defined by a meeting inside a building that is called a church. The New Testament never referred to any building as a church. It is the people of God who are called the church (literally, the eklessia, the called out ones.)

I do not doubt that Philip's daughters prophesied in his house when other believers were gathered. In doing so they were speaking among the congregation of believers. In the following verse we read of Agabus and others coming to see Paul at Philip's house.

Acts 21:10-12

As we were staying there for some days, a prophet named Agabus came down from Judea. And coming to us, he took Paul's belt and bound his own feet and hands, and said, "This is what the Holy Spirit says: "In this way the Jews at Jerusalem will bind the man who owns this belt and deliver him into the hands of the Gentiles.'" When we had heard this, we as well as the local residents began begging him not to go up to Jerusalem.

All of this occurred in Phillip's house where he resided with his daughters who were prophetesses. The following Scriptures reveal that the church is often congregated at someone's house.

Colossians 4:15

Greet the brethren who are in Laodicea and also Nymphas and the church that is in his house.

Philemon 2

And to Apphia our sister, and to Archippus our fellow soldier, and to the church in your house:

So, if Philip's daughters are prophesying in his house while saints are gathered, then they are speaking in the church. Since God did grant to women the gift of prophecy, and prophecy is given to edify the church, we must conclude that women are permitted to do so among the congregation. The following words of Paul also appear to confirm this.

I Corinthians 11:5, 13

But every woman who has her head uncovered while praying or prophesying disgraces her head, for she is one and the same as the woman whose head is shaved... Judge for yourselves: is it proper for a woman to pray to God with her head uncovered?

Paul is writing to the church in Corinth about their meeting together. He mentions women praying and prophesying, so I would conclude that it was the custom of the apostles to allow them to speak publicly in this way. I know some would contest this because Paul says he does not permit a woman to speak, but let us examine more closely the word that is translated as "speak." The word can hold the meaning of simple speech, but it also holds the meaning of "to preach." It comes from a root word that means "to lay forth," and I believe this is speaking of teaching and preaching. We can see this word translated as "preach" in a number of instances in the New Testament.

Mark 2:2

And straightway many were gathered together, insomuch that there was no room to receive them, no, not so much as about the door: and he *preached* the word unto them.

KJV

Acts 13:42

And when the Jews were gone out of the synagogue, the Gentiles besought that these words might be *preached* to them the next sabbath.

KJV

Acts 14:25

And when they had *preached* the word in Perga, they went down into Attalia:

KJV

Acts 16:6

Now when they had gone throughout Phrygia and the region of Galatia, and were forbidden of the Holy Ghost to *preach* the word in Asia,

KJV

In every one of these instances the same Greek word is used that Paul employed when he said the women were not allowed to "speak" in church. We can see then that the understanding could be that women are not allowed to "preach" in church. They can pray and they can prophesy, they can give testimony, the older women can teach the younger, but they cannot preach to men, for this would be to usurp the authority of man.

So, in answer to your question, the conclusion I am drawn to as I examine Scriptures is that a woman is permitted to both pray and prophesy in church, even in the presence of men. However, she is prohibited from preaching and teaching. This finds a harmony with all of the Scriptures presented here, and I know of none which this understanding violates.

May you be blessed with peace and understanding in these days,

Joseph

Junias and Female Apostles

I am adding another answer to a question to this post to provide further insight. Very often I have had men and women pick out individual Scriptures that they believe provide justification to discount the instructions of the apostles, and to adopt views opposite of those which the apostles declared. In this particular writing a sister had asked me about Junias, whom some contend was both a woman and an apostle. Junias is mentioned but once in Scripture in the following passage.

Romans 16:7

Greet Andronicus and Junias, my kinsmen, and my fellow prisoners, who are outstanding among the apostles, who also were in Christ before me.

Dear Sister,

I was very willing to examine carefully the articles you sent me links unto regarding the identity of Junias (Junia) in the New Testament. I do not shy

away from looking at alternative points of view, even contradictory points of view, for I believe that if there is error it will be evident, and if I have erred, I will benefit by the instruction.

The writer of the article is approaching the matter with a pre-defined point of view. As a woman who is a teacher in the body she is seeking to defend a woman's right not only to teach, but to hold the very highest offices in the church, including that of an apostle. She makes this clear in her following statement:

Apostle is listed first by Paul as one of the most important of the spiritual gifts because these individuals are responsible for evangelizing, setting up churches, organizing them, handling the problems that arose, ordaining elders for each church and generally coordinating, supervising and serving a number of congregations. Again, it is God that gives these individuals the ability—as a spiritual gift—to do a certain job...

Since Junia was given this highest spiritual gift along with her husband Andronicus, it is obvious that women can also be given the calling (spiritual gift) of serving God as a prophet, teacher, or any of the other spiritual gifts. In the scriptures that explain spiritual gifts there is no indication that any gift is limited to males only.

Before I go on to the matter of Junias' identity, let me speak to a thought espoused in the words above. The author (Diane D. McDonnell) has confused a governmental appointment with a spiritual gift. She states that an apostle is "this highest spiritual gift," and in doing so she has erred. Apostolic calling is not a gift, it is a ministry, a governmental appointment that Christ alone can make. We see this truth in a large number of Scriptures.

I Corinthians 1:1

Paul, called as an apostle of Yahshua Christ by the will of God...

Galatians 1:1

Paul, an apostle (not sent from men, nor through the agency of man, but through Yahshua Christ, and God the Father, who raised Him from the dead)...

Ephesians 4:11-12

And He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as

evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ...

All of these verses, and many more, reveal that being an apostle is not a spiritual gift. It is a commissioning for a specific ministry. It is a granting of authority and responsibility among the flock of Christ. That there is authority that is granted in this commissioning is observed in Paul's following words.

II Corinthians 10:8

For even if I should boast somewhat further about our authority, which the Lord gave for building you up and not for destroying you, I shall not be put to shame... But we will not boast beyond our measure, but within the measure of the sphere which God apportioned to us as a measure, to reach even as far as you.

Paul is declaring to the church in Corinth that God has appointed to him as an apostle a measure of authority to coincide with the scope of his duties. As an apostle Paul was called to edify the body in many ways. This included, reproving, rebuking, instructing, and instituting discipline. The New Testament provides abundant evidence of Paul doing all of these things. To do so Paul was granted a measure of authority. This alone should provide evidence that God would not appoint a woman to the role of an apostle, for we have these very clear words.

I Timothy 2:12

But I do not permit a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man...

If Christ were to appoint women as apostles, or place them in leadership positions among the body of Christ, He would be sowing confusion for this would be a violation of the headship order of the Father.

I Corinthians 11:3

But I want you to understand that Christ is the head of every man, and the man is the head of a woman, and God is the head of Christ.

The woman was created for the man, not man for the woman. This is a matter pertaining to creation order and the original purposes of God. For this reason a woman is to be subject to man. The instructions of the apostles never violate this principle. Instead, it is supported repeatedly.

I Corinthians 14:34-38

Let the women keep silent in the churches; for they are not permitted to speak, but let them subject themselves, just as the Law also says. And if they desire to learn anything, let them ask their own husbands at home; for it is improper for a woman to speak in church. Was it from you that the word of God first went forth? Or has it come to you only? If anyone thinks he is a prophet or spiritual, let him recognize that the things which I write to you are the Lord's commandment. But if anyone does not recognize this, he is not recognized.

If one truly wanted to understand what the mind of Christ is in this matter of a woman's role in the church, would they not carefully collect all of the instructions of Christ's apostles and examine them closely? Yet this woman who has written this writing espousing a woman's right to act as an apostle has not cited a single passage on women's roles in the church. Instead she pulls out one passing comment given as a salutation, and builds an entire doctrine upon it. It does not seem to concern her that her doctrine violates the very clear instruction of the apostles. She simply ignores these instructions as if they have no purpose or relevance.

But regarding the name Junias (Junia) being a female, Ms. McDonnell writes authoritatively that this person was a female, even as she writes authoritatively (and incorrectly) that this person was a female apostle. I have shared with you that there is much dissension in this matter of identifying the gender of Junias. A look at the various ways in which Bible translators have rendered the name reveals that there is no consensus in the matter.

Feminine renderings:

Tyndale, Cranmer, Great Bible, Geneva Bible, Bishops Bible, Rheims ("Julia"), King James Version, Weymouth, Lamsa (NT), New American Bible, New King James Version, New Jerusalem Bible, New Century Bible, New American Bible, Revised English Bible, New Revised Standard Version (NRSV), Oxford Inclusive Version, New Living Translation, the Bible in Basic English, the Holman Christian Standard Bible, Today's New English Version, and the Webster Bible.

Masculine renderings:

Dickinson, Emphasized Bible, Revised Version (1881), Rheims (American

Edition), American Standard Version (ASV), Goodspeed, Complete Bible (1903), Modern Reader's Bible, Moffatt, Ronald Knox, Revised Standard Version (RSV), Phillips, Amplified New Testament, New English Bible, New American Standard Bible (NASB), Jerusalem Bible, Good News Bible, Living Bible, New International Version (NIV), The Message, Contemporary English Version, the Darby Bible, the English Standard Version, God's Word to the Nation Version, New English Translation (NET), and Young's Literal Translation.

One argument set forth for a masculine name suggests that Junia was actually a Hebrew name, for Paul did say these were his kinsmen, and Paul was a Hebrew of the tribe of Benjamin. I will quote an excerpt from an Internet article on this matter.

Bruce K. Waltke, in his book, An Old Testament Theology (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007), p. 241 said: "Al Wolters of Redeemer College (Hamilton, Ontario) in personal communication makes a convincing philological argument that Junia (Gr. Iounia) in Rom. 16:7 is a Jewish name; Yehunniah ("Yah is gracious"). If so, the name is masculine, not feminine."

[End Excerpt]

If the name is Hebrew in origin, then all the arguments for a feminine interpretation based upon its Greek origin fall to the ground. If it is truly a Greek name, the matter is still debatable, for the Greek rendering passed down to us is inconclusive. In his commentary on Romans (Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, 1992), James E. Edwards wrote (p. 355):

Andronicus and Junias (v. 7), both Greek names, were doubtlessly Jewish since Paul calls them my relatives (literally in Greek, "fellow-countrymen"). Depending on the Greek accenting of Iounian (a form of the name which unfortunately obscures its gender), the name could be either male (Junias) or female (Junia).

It is likely impossible that we could come up with a bullet proof argument one way or the other, but we really need not try. It is really of little value to the discussion of women's roles to identify the gender of Junias, for the name does not occur in conjunction with any apostolic teaching on women's roles. It is merely mentioned as part of a salutation. If we want to learn about women's roles, we should most definitely avoid the example of those who fail to examine a single apostolic instruction on the matter.

Let me put this another way where we might see the fallacy of this practice. The Scriptures teach very clearly on the topic of adultery, condemning it in every instance in which it is taught upon. Yet suppose that I was wanting to justify an adulterous lifestyle. In order to do so from Scripture I would necessarily need to avoid all direct teaching on the matter, including the ten commandments where adultery is strictly prohibited.

If I did as many are doing concerning women's roles, I would look for an example in Scripture where someone committed adultery and something positive resulted from it. I could then use that example to bolster my supposition that adultery was really allowable. For example, I might cite the example of David and Bathsheba coming together in adultery, and how God put away their sin and later blessed them with Solomon as a son. Or perhaps I could cite the occasion of Judah going into Tamar thinking she was a prostitute and her giving birth to Zerah and Perez, by which a blessing is pronounced.

Those who approach the topic of women's roles and continually trot forth the examples of Deborah, Junias, and others, while ignoring the numerous apostolic teachings that explicitly lay forth the matter, are doing the same thing. A person is able to justify anything their heart wishes.

Jeremiah 17:9-10

The heart is more deceitful than all else and is desperately sick; Who can understand it? "I, Yahweh, search the heart, I test the mind, Even to give to each man according to his ways, according to the results of his deeds."

When we come to the Scriptures to understand a matter, we must lay aside our prejudices, and biases. We must desire only to know the mind of the Father. If we have some bias we will surely be influenced by it and be led willingly into error.

Dianne's second writing you sent me is filled with even more error. She seeks to overturn the apostolic commands by use of false arguments. She refers to the Oracle of Delphi and the babble of the women there as the reason that Paul commanded women "like them" to be silent and not babble. However, a CAREFUL EXAMINATION of Scripture reveals that Paul never based his commands upon such cultural phenomenon. He ALWAYS points back to the order of creation as the basis for his instructions.

I Corinthians 11:8-9

For man does not originate from woman, but woman from man; for indeed man was not created for the woman's sake, but woman for the man's sake.

I Timothy 2:12-14

But I do not allow a woman to teach or exercise authority over a man, but to remain quiet. *For it was Adam who was first created, and then Eve. And it was not Adam who was deceived, but the woman being quite deceived, fell into transgression.*

These verses reveal the basis for Paul's teaching. It has nothing to do with the Oracle of Delphi, it is all about creation order. Any woman who wants to find something in the Scriptures to support her personal desires in the matter will certainly be able to come up with something, no matter how twisted it is, even as Dianne McDonnell has demonstrated. It is my hope, however, that you truly desire only to know the will of the Father that you might perform His will to His satisfaction.

May you be blessed with peace and understanding in these days,

Joseph Herrin