

## Women in Christian Leadership

By Rebecca S. May

- *Should a woman be a pastor, elder, or deacon?*
- *Should a woman be a Sunday school teacher or Bible study leader?*
- *Should a woman lead a public assembly if there are no men available?*
- *Should a woman pray in public?*

It must first be stated that there are no distinctions between men and women in Christ (Galatians 3:28). However, as there are different roles within the Godhead (1 Corinthians 12:4-7), Christ has given specific roles to both men and women so that they might function properly together within the body of Christ. For example, just as women have been granted the role of child bearing, men have been given the job of headship (Ephesians 5:23). One is not more important than the other, both are essential in the Christian life.

The purpose of this brochure, therefore, is to deal with four specific areas of Christianity in which women, by acting in obedience to the role God has both granted and commanded them, can become leaders within the body of Christ.

### Teaching

**A woman should receive teaching.** *Let a woman quietly receive instruction with entire submissiveness* (1 Timothy 2:11). The Bible commands that a woman be taught. That is, she should be a student of the Bible, receiving teaching in an obedient manner.

**A woman should not teach a man.** *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* (1 Timothy 2:12-14). The Bible is very clear that females are not to teach males. That is not to say women could not advise men of the Word of God. Priscilla, for example, gave instruction to Apollos helping him to have a better understanding of the Word of God (Acts 18:26). Deborah advised Barak of God's command that they go to war (Judges 4:6-10). Abigail persuaded David not to sin against God (1 Samuel 25). Mary Magdalene delivered the Word of God to the disciples that Christ had risen (John 20:11-18). Anna spoke of Christ, *to all those who were looking for the redemption of Jerusalem* (Luke 2:38). These women acted in response to men and did not have a teaching agenda, nor did they instruct men from a leadership position. They provided biblical truth to men personally, who were either unaware of God's Word, or ignoring His commands in a particular situation.

**A woman should be able to teach.** The Bible encourages all servants of the Lord, including women, to *not be quarrelsome, but be kind to all, able to teach, patient when wronged, with gentleness correcting those who are in opposition ...* (2 Timothy 2:24-25).

Women should use their biblical knowledge and godly character to *teach what is good* (Titus 2:3-5).

### Prayer

**A woman should pray.** In the Bible, prayer is not specifically commanded for women, although there are many instances in which it occurred. Hannah prayed, dedicating her son to the Lord (1 Samuel 2:1-10). Mary prayed after hearing she was to become the mother of Christ (Luke 1:46-55). Anna, a prophetess when Christ was dedicated as a child, *served night and day with fastings and prayer s... giving thanks to God* (Luke 2:37-38).

**A woman should not lead in public prayer.** *Therefore I want the men in every place to pray, lifting up holy hands, without wrath and dissension* (1 Timothy 2:8). The original Greek word Paul is using for “place” (*topos*) refers to a public place, that is, an assembly open to all people whether in a city, village, building etc. The “men” Paul is referring to in this verse is the Greek word for males (*andras*). Paul, therefore, states that in a public place, males are to lead the gathering or congregation in prayer.

**A woman should pray in private.** *But you when you pray, go into your inner room, and when you have shut your door, pray to your Father who is in secret, and your Father who sees in secret will repay you* (Matthew 6:6). Prayer is only between you and God. Christ exalts prayer which is done in private. This removes the temptation to pray for self-glorification, as the Pharisees did when they would pray in public (Matthew 6:5-7).

## Service

A woman should serve. Within the context of male servant leadership, instructions are given to women who qualify for a position of service. *Women must likewise be dignified, not malicious gossips, but temperate ...* (1 Timothy 3:11). The word “women” in this verse refers either to the wives of deacons or to a separate office of service. A woman does not need a position in order to serve. *Serve the Lord with gladness* (Psalm 100:2). If, however, she should desire a position of service, she should be faithful in all things (1 Timothy 3:11).

**A woman should not hold an office of overseer or deacon.** *An overseer, then, must be above reproach, the husband of one wife ...* (1 Timothy 3:1-9). *Deacons likewise must be men of dignity ...* (1 Timothy 3:8). A woman is not to hold a position of overseer or deacon within the body of Christ because Paul describes an overseer and a deacon as a man, husband, and father, all of which a woman can never be. The Bible also does not permit a woman to ... *exercise authority over a man* (1 Timothy 2:12). The offices of overseer and deacon are positions of administrating others. Women, therefore, do not qualify.

**A woman should pursue servant leadership.** Many women, by pursuing organizational positions of leadership, are overlooking the great need and opportunity for female character leadership which maturing women can model. *Older women likewise are to be reverent in their behavior, not malicious gossips, nor enslaved to much wine, teaching what is good, that they may encourage the young women to love their husbands, to love their children, to be sensible, pure, workers at home, kind, being subject to their own husbands, that the word of God may not be dishonored* (Titus 2:3-5).

## Appearance

**A woman’s appearance will reflect her character.** On the positive side, Abigail was both ...*intelligent and beautiful in appearance* (1 Samuel 25:3; see also Esther 2:7). On the negative side, Jezebel ... *painted her eyes and adorned her head...* (2 Kings 9:30). This is not saying that jewelry, expensive clothing, or a certain hair style, are by themselves wrong, but they become wrong when value is placed on them for the purpose of enhancing quality and character. For this reason, women should dress in a moderate and reserved manner. ... *I want women to adorn themselves with proper clothing, modestly and discreetly, not with braided hair and gold or pearls or costly garments* (1 Timothy 2:9).

**A woman should focus on her inward adornment.** *And let not your adornment be merely external ... but let it be the hidden person of the heart, with the imperishable quality of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is precious in the sight of God* (1 Peter 3:3-4). A woman’s appearance, therefore, should have an eternal focus rather than a worldly agenda so that she may be recognized by means of good works, as is proper for women making a claim to godliness (1 Timothy 2:10).

When a woman dresses, therefore, she should not simply ask herself, “How does this look on me?” but, “How will others view my character which is reflected in my outward appearance?”

## Questions and Answers

**Q:** *Should a woman be a pastor, elder, or deacon?*

**A:** No. The Bible clearly says an overseer must be a “husband” (1 Timothy 3:2). She may function in service positions as long as she does not exercise authority over a man (2 Timothy 2:14).

**Q:** *Should a woman be a Sunday school teacher or Bible study leader?*

**A:** If the group consists of women or girls, yes, of course! If there are men in the group, no. If it is a mixed group of children, each woman will have to decide if 1 Timothy 2:12 applies to that group.

**Q:** *Should a woman lead a public assembly if there are no men available?*

**A:** There is no biblical example of it so the general answer is no (1 Timothy 2 and 1 Corinthians 11). A woman should, however, present biblical truth to men personally as Abigail, Deborah, Anna, and Priscilla did.

**Q:** *Should a woman lead in public prayer?*

**A:** No. In public, that is, a gathering open to all people, prayer is reserved for men (1 Timothy 2:8).