

# Women Speaking in Church

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by Terry Moore

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All Scriptures are from the New King James translation unless otherwise noted.

A woman's role in the Church is important and of great value. Women are encouraged to serve in a variety of ways. However, the instructions of the Torah, as well as the gospel records of Jesus' life, indicate that God selected only men to openly teach and preach the gospel. The book of Acts shows that those men God had called continued to select only men as leaders of the Church. There is nothing in the Bible indicating that women are allowed to assume the responsibilities of elders who serve the Church as pastors, bishops, evangelists, priests, and apostles. Nonetheless, many organizations allow women to hold such offices. The Eternal Church of God has been asked to clarify God's guidelines, and specifically Paul's instruction to women in the Church:

Let your women keep silent in the churches, for they are not permitted to speak; but *they are* to be submissive, as the law also says. And if they want to learn something, let them ask their own husbands at home; for it is shameful for women to speak in church (1Corinthians 14:34-35).

The Apostle's reference to "the law" is speaking of the books of the Old Testament—particularly the first five books known as the Torah. This law began in the first book when God designated the structure of family. God said, "*It is* not good that man should be alone; I will make him a helper comparable to him" (Gen. 2:18). This meant that a woman was to support her husband's role as head of the family. She was to aid and protect him—just as he was to do the same for her. Clarification was given after Eve had chosen to disobey God and lean to her own decision about fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. God said, "Your desire *shall be* for your husband, and he shall rule over you" (Gen. 3:16).

There are many ways in which these principles apply to all women whether married or not. One of those ways is positions of authority in the family, society, and the Church. Women were not designed to have offices of authority over men. This is evident when God declared that only Aaron and his sons would minister to the holy things as priests (Exo. 28:1). It is also evident when God spoke of qualifications for civil leader of Israel (Deu. 17:14-17).

However, Paul did not indicate that women are never to utter a word when they go to a church service. In some cases, a woman's husband may not be committed to the Church, or she may be single, or a widow. She may need to consult an elder. This is appropriate as long as it does not take place during the delivery of a sermon, sermonette, or a Bible reading. A woman seeking advice, counsel, an answer to a biblical question, or even desiring to express her opinion, is not within the context of Paul's instructions for women to remain silent in the Church. He was talking about having a leading role in the Church. This is what led the apostle Paul to also write:

Let a woman learn in silence with all submission. And I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man, but to be in silence. For Adam was formed first, then Eve. And Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived, fell into

transgression. Nevertheless she will be saved in childbearing if they continue in faith, love, and holiness, with self-control (1Timothy 2:11-15).

None of these verses indicate that women are substandard to men, or that a woman's only purpose is to bear children, prepare meals, and do laundry. In fact, when we consider Christ's description of greatness, the greatest in God's Kingdom will be those who serve others (Luke 22:26). Men and women are to reflect the hierarchical relationship of family where the husband and wife work together as a team, but the man will always have the leading role. This relationship was not an afterthought after Eve had sinned. It was predetermined before the foundation of the world, and was designed to reflect the relationship between Christ and His future bride—the Church. As the apostle also wrote:

Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband is head of the wife, as also Christ is head of the church; and He is the Savior of the body. Therefore, just as the church is subject to Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in everything. Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her, that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word, that He might present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish. So husbands ought to love their own wives as their own bodies; he who loves his wife loves himself. For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as the Lord does the church. For we are members of His body, of His flesh and of His bones. For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh. This is a great mystery, but I speak concerning Christ and the church. Nevertheless let each one of you in particular so love his own wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband (Ephesians 5:32-33).

A little background information can help us to understand another reason why God inspired Paul to make these statements about a women knowing their place in the Church. The apostle wrote many letters of encouragement, instruction, and correction during the early years of the fledgling New Testament Church of God. At that time, many gathered in homes and some of those homes were owned by women who were active in serving brethren. Clearly this principle applies to women whose husband was the head of household, but it also applies to single women, those divorced, and widows.

It must also be understood that the admonition does not imply that women are of less value than men. For example, Paul paraphrased an older book of the Bible and was inspired to write of God, "I will be a Father to you, and you shall be my sons and daughters, says the Lord Almighty" (2Cor. 6:18). Philip was the father of four unmarried daughters who prophesied (Acts 21:8-9). Paul's message is also clear to all Christians when he explained, "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus" (Gal. 3:28).

The Church of God has never been without significant female contribution to support the work. Many women have served in similar positions to that of a deacon, but with somewhat different tasks and responsibilities as men. The following verses demonstrate this when Paul commendations to a number of people who served, beginning with a woman:

I commend to you Phoebe our sister, who is a servant of the church in Cenchrea, that you may receive her in the Lord in a manner worthy of the saints, and assist her in whatever

business she has need of you; for indeed she has been a helper of many and of myself also. Greet Priscilla and Aquila, my fellow workers in Christ Jesus, who risked their own necks for my life, to whom not only I give thanks, but also all the churches of the Gentiles. Likewise *greet* the church that is in their house. Greet my beloved Epaphroditus, who is the firstfruits of Achaia to Christ. Greet Mary, who labored much for us (Romans 16:1-6).

Paul commends the work of both men and women who served in the Church of God. He called Phoebe as “servant” which is translated from the Greek *diakonos*. This word is also translated as “minister” and “deacon” 30 times in the New Testament. The Greek *diakoneo* is nearly identical in its use and definition and is used in a similar way 38 times in the New Testament to describe people and acts of service. The latter term is only used twice by the Apostle Paul when refer to an office of a deacon. This appears to indicate that term “deacon” we are familiar with was an adaptation describing the office of a male servant in the Church while “deaconess” has been used to describe a female.

In all of the aforementioned verses, Paul reminded us that God is orderly and delegates authority so that all things will be done in a prearranged manner. Therefore, we find the apostle stating, “Let all things be done decently and in order” (1Cor. 14:40). This orderly way is how we learn to submit to a higher authority. It is of supreme importance to learn our place within the body of Christ—the Church. As Paul also wrote:

For as we have many members in one body, but all the members do not have the same function, so we, being many, are one body in Christ (Romans 12:4-5).

For an organization to be upright and orderly, there must be levels of authority. God’s hierarchical government exists right now in heaven, it will be implemented on the earth when Christ returns, and will continue for eternity. That government is practiced right now in the family and in the Church.

The man is to be the head of the family. Only men are to hold offices of authority as elders, pastors, bishops, and kings. This is not to separate men from women, but to unite them as a family of believers where each person knows what is expected of them. When the wife looks to her husband for leadership, he feels respected, and in turn, his desire must be to show loving care for his wife, family, and the Church. Children learn to respect their parents as they witness firsthand how this divine institution is to function. That doesn’t mean that all will be perfect, but it is the right path to peace and order.

For this reason, there is order by God’s design for the family and the Church. Women are not to assume a leading role in family, Church, or state. This does not mean that women are never to teach. Certainly, they are to instruct their children and can join in discussion among brethren before and after Church services. Subsequently, Paul said that mature women should advise the younger women about their place in the body of Christ:

The older women likewise, that they be reverent in behavior, not slanderers, not given to much wine, teachers of good things—that they admonish the young women to love their husbands, to love their children, to be discreet, chaste, homemakers, good, obedient to their own husbands, that the word of God may not be blasphemed (Titus 2:3-5).

The Eternal Church of God follows the Biblical examples that only men are ordained as elders to serve priestly positions. Only men lead the formal portion of Sabbath and holy day

services, including song leading, Bible readings, sermons, sermonettes, and prayer. And yet we recognize the fact that God gave women have an important role to play in the family and the Church. They have much to contribute and can participate as deaconesses. They are also encouraged to add their perspective in Bible discussions. We do not believe that it was God's intent for women to never utter a word when brethren congregate.

For this reason, after the formal portion of services have concluded, our fellowship is followed by an informal discussion where questions may be asked, and comments made, by anyone who attends our Sabbath services. Others who join our service remotely can also participate in this discussion that is aired on a private conferencing number. The discussion is moderated by the song leader who calls on people in an orderly manner. If you are interested in joining this discussion, you may contact us for more information.

It may also be helpful to listen to the following sermons that can be accessed in our Sermon libraries. *The Christian Man, The Christian Woman, and Roles of Men and Women in the Church.*