

United Church of God, *an International Association*



The Biblical Role of Women *Doctrinal Study Paper*

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Chapter One—In the Beginning...

Genesis 1:26-28 lays the foundation for understanding male and female roles and relationships. Here we find God's description of the origin and destiny of human beings.

“Then God said, ‘Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.’ So God created man in His *own* image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them. Then God blessed them, and God said to them, ‘Be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it; have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over every living thing that moves on the earth.’”

The term “man” should properly be understood as “mankind” rather than the male gender.¹ This passage tells us that humankind, both men and women, is made in God's image.

What is the significance of the designation of male and female at the end of verse 27? The pronouns “him” and “them” offer significant clues to understanding God's instructions. The wording, “God blessed them, and God said to them, ‘Be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it; have dominion...’” shows that God intended for Adam and Eve to work together as a husband-and-wife team to rule over all creation.

God designed the man and the woman for different gender-based roles to fulfill His purposes. This distinction is explained further in Genesis 2:18-25. Here again, the ideal of a two-fold team appears—husband and wife forming a union of “one flesh.”

This detailed account of man's creation refers to Eve as a “helper.” The context shows that Eve's role was supportive of Adam's and that his was the leadership role. As we will see later in this paper, Paul refers to the creation accounts to show that God intended the husband to be the leader in the marriage. However, a support role in no way implies or suggests inferiority, as is borne out by the fact that both male and female were made in the image of God and by additional scriptures that we will examine later. In fact most of the other Old Testament usages of the same word refer to God as a helper.

The Genesis text further describes Eve as “comparable to” Adam. The Hebrew word *neged* means “a front, i.e. part opposite; specifically a counterpart, or mate” (*Strong's*). In other words she would offer an added dimension of complementary qualities that Adam lacked. She would also be a companion so Adam would not be alone. God inspired the writer of Genesis to explain the roles for men and women in the context of marriage and family. Mankind was designed to marry for life, to reproduce and rear children within a stable family, which reflects

¹ “The Hebrew word *adam* means in the great majority of its occurrences *mankind* or *humanity* in general. Only in Chapters 2 and 3 of Genesis where it is tantamount to a proper name for the male partner in the first human pair does it carry a strong masculine nuance. The normal word in Hebrew for man in the sense of ‘male’ is *ish* (as for the woman it is *ishah*)” (*The Daily Study Bible Series*, 1:69).

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the nature of God, because God is a family. This profound spiritual truth serves to guide us to proper understanding of everything written in the Bible about the roles for men and women.

More insights on the implications of these creation accounts can be gleaned from the example of Jesus and from passages in Paul's epistles. But first we must consider the biblical record of Adam and Eve's sin.

Consequences of Adam and Eve's Sin

Unfortunately, Adam and Eve fell far short of God's intended ideal for them. Satan managed to seduce Eve into partaking of the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil, disobeying God's command. Adam also ate of the tree, joining in the sin. Their disobedience brought tragic results.

Genesis 3:14-24 enumerates the curses or consequences to Adam, Eve and the deceiver. The man would thereafter experience greater hardship than God had intended. The woman would suffer greatly increased pain in childbirth. "This sorrow seems to extend to all the mother's pains and anxieties concerning her offspring."²

Verse 16 describes a major change in the husband-wife relationship: "Your desire shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you." The phrase "your desire shall be for your husband" forecasts a change in Eve's approach toward her husband.

Of the last two lines of Genesis 3:16, *The Nelson Study Bible* offers a paraphrase: "You will now have a tendency to dominate your husband, and he will have the tendency to act as a tyrant over you" (1997, notes on Genesis 3:16).

What consequence was brought on by Adam's sin? For that, we need to consider what is meant by "he shall rule over you." The likely explanation is that this refers to the predicted power struggle, from the male side of the relationship. The expression "rule over" refers to domination, not the kind of loving leadership that God originally intended for Adam to exercise in his role as a husband. So, God is telling Eve that the consequence of this sin would be an oppressive form of ruling over her.

Word Biblical Commentary says: "It is therefore usually argued that 'rule' here represents harsh exploitive subjugation, which so often characterizes woman's lot in all sorts of societies. 'To love and to cherish' becomes, 'to desire and to dominate.'"³

The history of Adam and Eve remains an indelible demonstration of what happens in a marriage when sin enters. The consequences are the same for all men and women who sin—a

² *Barnes' Notes*, 1997.

³ Gordon Wenham, *Word Biblical Commentary*, Vol. 1.

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way of life that is fraught with an inability to get along in the way that God designed men and women to harmonize. Eventually, of course, the way of sin ends in death (Romans 6:23).

Having looked at the role of wives in the creation account, we turn our attention to a broad overview of the role of women in the Old Testament.

Chapter Two—Women’s Roles in the Old Testament

This section of the paper will look at the biblical record of the lives of several women, briefly summarizing what God inspired to be written about them. Then, we will draw conclusions from the collective record of the Old Testament.

Miriam

The first example we will study is Miriam. In Exodus 15, verses 20-21, we read, “Then Miriam the prophetess, the sister of Aaron, took the timbrel in her hand; and all the women went out after her with timbrels and with dances. And Miriam answered them: ‘Sing to the LORD, for He has triumphed gloriously! The horse and its rider He has thrown into the sea!’”

Miriam is called a prophetess in Scripture (see the section regarding prophetess below). She led the choir of women who sang the triumph song after the crossing of the Red Sea. The recorded songs are considered one of the earliest songs in Hebrew literature. Miriam is the first woman singer on record. God used her in a complementary way. She used her talents to fill a gap that Moses did not fill, and that did not obstruct male leadership.

In Micah 6:4 we read: “For I brought you up from the land of Egypt, I redeemed you from the house of bondage; and I sent before you Moses, Aaron, and Miriam.” It’s evident that Miriam was a leading personality of her time in ancient Israel. Miriam worked with her two brothers in serving the people of God. We don’t know the specifics of her leadership role but from Micah we see that she was certainly a part of the team. Later on, God taught Miriam some lessons in Numbers 12:6-8. Both Aaron and Miriam had to learn that Moses was in authority over them.

Huldah

This prophetess, who lived in Jerusalem during the reign of Josiah, was consulted regarding the “Book of the Law” that was discovered by the high priest Hilkiah (2 Kings 22:14-20). The standing and reputation of Huldah in the city are evident by the fact that she was consulted when the book of the law was discovered. The king, high priest and counselors appealed to her and her word was accepted by all as a message from God.⁴ She powerfully spoke the words that God inspired her to speak and people trusted her godly insight.

Deborah

We are introduced to Deborah in Judges 4, verses 4-5: “And Deborah, a prophetess, the wife of Lapidath, was judging Israel at that time. And she would sit under the palm tree of Deborah between Ramah and Bethel in the mountains of Ephraim. And the children of Israel came up to her for judgment.”

⁴ *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, “Huldah.”

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During this time Jabin, the king of Hazor, held Israel in degrading subjection for 20 long years. The spirit of patriotism had practically vanished from the nation. In this national emergency Deborah roused the people from their discouragement and consequently her fame spread far and wide.

She viewed herself as a “mother in Israel” (Judges 5:7). This particular analogy can be instructive to us concerning feminine leadership. A woman who is both a wife and a mother submits to her husband, and yet, she definitely is an authority figure to her children. She leads, directs, teaches and comforts them daily, and God instructs children to obey the father *and* mother (Proverbs 1:8, “...the law of your mother”). Additionally, a woman can lead all people, men and women alike, by her example. If she is married, hers is a supportive role that complements her husband’s role, but doesn’t usurp it.

At Deborah’s direction, preparations were made throughout the land for the great effort to throw off the yoke of bondage. She summoned Barak from Kadesh to take the command of 10,000 men of Zebulun and Naphtali and lead them to Mount Tabor. With his aid she organized this army. She gave the signal for attack, and the armies rushed down on the army of Jabin, which was commanded by Sisera, and gained a great and decisive victory. The Canaanite army almost perished. That was a great day in Israel.

There is no question of the leadership ability of Deborah and the strength of her faith in God. She was used by God to reveal His will in regard to details of the impending battle. What is clear is that Barak had such faith in her as a representative of God that he asked her to come with him to battle. She did not usurp leadership for herself but carried out God’s instruction to tell Barak to perform his task. When Barak refused to lead Israel into battle without Deborah, she delivered God’s message to him that there would be no glory in Israel’s victory for him. Rather, that glory would go to a woman, Jael, who killed Sisera, the commander of the enemy’s troops. Deborah did not seek or receive the glory of victory. Her service to her country was selfless and honorable.

The Expositor’s Bible Commentary includes this revealing insight about Deborah: “Her presence as a prophetess would assure contact with the Lord, just as the presence of Moses and the ark of the covenant brought victory in battle (Num 10:35) while their absence meant defeat (Num 14:44)” (Vol. 3, p. 404, notes on Judges 4:4-5).

Another interesting section adds: “God brought these ‘judges’ (as the term is used in this book and in I Sam 1-7) to deliver Israel from oppression... Also ‘judging’ or ‘leading’ Israel was one woman, Deborah, to whom the people brought their disputes for a decision (4:4-5). Only in this last case is the concept of judicial decision applied to a judge, though this may have been a common function of these leaders after their military triumphs” (p. 375, Introduction, Title).

God used Deborah in a very powerful way in terms of leadership and inspiration. He used her to decide judicial cases among the people. The people valued Deborah’s insight, wisdom and counsel. Deborah was God’s spokesperson to whom generals and commoners alike listened. She was a strong leader through whom God guided the strongest in the land. Her humility was evident as she gave God the credit for the victory over the enemy. It was this unshakable

confidence in God that allowed her to use her God-given talents in public service in ancient Israel.

What Is a Prophetess?

Holman Bible Dictionary states that a prophetess is a “female prophet; [prophetesses are] women serving as God’s spokesperson[s]” (“Prophetess”). Four women are explicitly identified by name as prophetesses in the Old Testament: Miriam, Deborah, Huldah and Noadiah, who is identified as a “false prophetess” in Nehemiah 6:14.

How prophetesses served, as we have seen, varied somewhat in the Old Testament. Miriam called upon Israel to celebrate God’s deliverance and to lead women in public worship and praise to God. Huldah spoke God’s words of judgment in 2 Kings 22:16-17 and forgiveness in 2 Kings 22:18-20 to King Josiah. Deborah served in a way that combined the roles of prophetess and judge.

God did not often call a woman to serve in the role of prophetess; but the women that served in this role did so with great skill, wisdom and effectiveness.

Abigail

We are introduced to Abigail in 1 Samuel 25:1-42 as the wife of a stubborn and evil man, Nabal. After his death, she became one of David’s wives. We first meet her as a longsuffering woman, in a very challenging situation that took great wisdom and love on her part because of her churlish husband. She also dealt brilliantly with a powerful military leader—the future king David, who was angry with her foolish husband for his offensive treatment of David and his men.

David was hiding from Saul in the wilderness of Paran, an extended tract along the southern border of Canaan adjoining the Sinai desert. With him were about 600 followers, all fighting men. The presence of David and his small army undoubtedly discouraged thieves and marauders from pillaging Nabal’s flocks and herds. Although David would have been justified in taking some of Nabal’s livestock for provisions in return for protecting them, he did not.

Instead, David sent messengers to Nabal, respectfully requesting provisions for his men, pointing out the benefit Nabal received from their presence. In a rude and condescending fashion, Nabal dismissed David’s request and sent the messengers away empty-handed. Nabal’s curt refusal infuriated David, who immediately determined to destroy Nabal and his household. Upon learning the foolish and potentially deadly blunder her husband had committed, Abigail prepared and hurriedly delivered a substantial store of foodstuffs and provisions to David as a peace offering. She demonstrated leadership, maturity, wisdom and discretion in defusing a potentially deadly situation. Her example made a deep impression on David.

When Abigail returned home from her successful mediation effort, she was confronted with another challenge to her skills. Because of his oppressive, angry temperament, Nabal would not have been an easy man to live with. His drunken state at the time of her return made the

domestic situation potentially explosive. Abigail wisely chose when and how to inform her husband of her actions. Her wisdom and graciousness saved Nabal's life—for a time—and kept David from taking her husband's life. This remarkable woman kept "home and hearth" together in a terrible marriage, and she single-handedly prevented bloodshed! Hers is an outstanding example of feminine leadership.

Proverbs 31—A Virtuous Woman

The wisdom of King Lemuel's mother is recorded as a worthy challenge for generations of women yet to come.

"Who can find a virtuous wife? For her worth is far above rubies" (Proverbs 31:10). The challenge of finding such a woman in Solomon's day is certainly equaled in today's culture. A "virtuous" woman (wife and mother) is "priceless" in that her devotion, dedication and love toward her husband and family are the fruits of fulfilling her God-given roles. In effect, she lays down her life for those she loves, motivated by a deep, abiding love for her family. This is something no amount of money could purchase, that no "employee" could supply—loving care and concern that could only be provided by a loving wife and mother.

The Hebrew word translated "virtuous" in the NKJV is *chayil*. The connotations of this Hebrew word are far different than those of the modern English word "virtue" or "virtuous." *Strong's* defines it: "2428 chayil (khah'-yil); from 2342; probably a force, whether of men, means or other resources; an army, wealth, virtue, valor, strength: KJV—able, activity, (+)army, band of men (soldiers), company, (great) forces, goods, host, might, power, riches, strength, strong, substance, train, (+)valiant (-ly), valour, virtuous (-ly), war, worthy (-ily)."

These words provide a fuller and richer meaning to the phrase, "a virtuous woman," showing her to be a woman of many resources. The woman described in Proverbs 31 is of such character and strength that she eclipses the modern definition of virtuous, which Webster defines as "having or characterized by moral virtue; righteous."

Her primary focus is an unwavering devotion to her husband and her family. All the marvelous attributes ascribed to her relate to the fulfillment of her role as a wife and mother. She is clearly fully supportive of her husband's position as the family's provider and leader. The insertion of the statement, "Her husband is known in the gates, when he sits among the elders of the land" (verse 23) implies that her contribution is recognized in his public praise and the recognition he receives—in part, because of her.

This entire section of Scripture emphasizes her contribution to the quality of life enjoyed by her family and household. The woman in this chapter sews for her family, pays close attention to the quality and wholesomeness of the food they eat and generates some additional income that serves to enhance their standard of living and quality of life. Her endeavors in this regard appear to be carried out from the home or family setting.

Here is an excellent paraphrase of this portion of Scripture titled, "They Call Her Mother" by William J. Krutza:

“Who can find a virtuous woman? For the value of her life is beyond monetary calculations. Her husband has absolute trust in her so that he has no need of satisfaction from other women. She will do him good and not evil all the days of her life. She keeps his clothing up-to-date, clean and tidy. She willingly works around the house. She provides a variety at mealtime by wise selection and nutritious and delicious foods. She gets up early each morning to make his breakfast and sees that her children also eat properly. She knows a bargain when she sees one and is always concerned about the future stability and supply of her home. The strength of her character is shown in her attitude toward her household tasks. She takes pride in a job well done even if she must work late hours to accomplish it. She knows how to use a sewing machine and needle. She has a compassionate heart and hand toward those who have great needs. Those in her home especially benefit from her domestic talents. Her own clothing shows good taste and modesty. Even her husband is known by her concern for his wearing apparel. She often uses her household talents to provide extra income for her family. She is known as a woman of honorable character. The humble expression of this character gives her an inner joy. She is wise in her speech and especially knows how to say kind words. She is not a gossip or kaffee-klatscher. Her children are happy to talk about her to their friends. Her husband also praises her to others. Other women have done great deeds, but this type of mother and wife ranks highest. Popularity is deceitful and glamour is shallow, but a woman who has personal contact with the holy God, she shall be praised. She shall receive great satisfaction from her labors and others shall talk about her good deeds wherever they go.”⁵

This chapter gives a persona to many of the feminine qualities we find mentioned in the scriptural record thus far. Today’s virtuous woman would likely be described in different terms, but her priceless inner character would be the same.

Lessons to Draw From the Old Testament

These examples draw from a history that spans literally thousands of years. What principles and lessons can we glean from them?

- As wives, they offered wise counsel and support to their husbands.
- As mothers, they trained key leaders.
- As prophetesses, they delivered God’s prophetic messages to women and men alike, including a king and other leaders.
- God caused some of the prayers and sayings of His women servants to be added to the Scriptures, including Hannah’s prayer and the teachings of Lemuel’s mother, and they continue to benefit all who submit to His Word—men and women alike.
- Godly women served as leaders in a way that did not usurp authority from men, but rather enhanced and supported the leadership of men. Scripture does not indicate competition between male and female leadership in the congregation of Israel.

⁵ As quoted by Herbert Lockyer, *All the Women of the Bible*, 1995, p. 272.

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- God considered it proper for a woman to encourage, strengthen and give His inspired words to both men and women.

How do these lessons impact us today? We have no modern counterpart to the Old Testament prophetess. Nonetheless, the examples these godly Old Testament women set in faith, courage, wisdom and feminine leadership in difficult circumstances are models for godly women in any age. It is encouraging to recognize the unique contribution Christian women bring to the Church.

Before we turn to another section of the scriptural record, it's fitting that we take note of a special prophecy in Joel. The prophet Joel foretold the promise of God's Holy Spirit, a prophecy Peter later quoted on the Day of Pentecost, A.D. 31: "And it shall come to pass afterward that I will pour out My Spirit on all flesh; your sons *and your daughters* shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, your young men shall see visions. And also on My menservants *and on My maidservants* I will pour out My Spirit in those days" (Joel 2:28-29).

There is no difference between men and women in regard to their spiritual potential. The fulfillment of this prophecy began at the outset of the New Testament Church of God and continues on into and throughout the Kingdom.

Now, we turn to the New Testament.

Chapter Three—The Example of Jesus Regarding Women

One of the first persons the Gospels of Matthew and Luke focus upon is Mary, Jesus' mother. While we do not venerate Mary, we should nevertheless take note of her example to us in her response to God's message through Gabriel. After asking for and receiving an explanation of the prophesied virgin birth, Mary said, "Behold the maidservant of the Lord! Let it be to me according to your word" (Luke 1:38). Later, in a conversation with her cousin Elizabeth, Mary magnified God for His mercy and faithfulness in fulfilling the promise to Abraham and his seed (Luke 1:46-55). She did not take any personal credit for her role in this momentous event. Rather, she confirmed her faith with the words, "my spirit has rejoiced in God my Savior" (Luke 1:47). Her submission and praises to God are truly a marvelous example for all.

Jesus' encounter with the Samaritan woman at the well (John 4) offers significant insights. Being both a woman and a gentile, she had two strikes against her, as Jews considered both to be inferior creatures.

Barclay observes: "There is little wonder that the disciples were in a state of bewildered amazement when they returned from their errand to the town of Sychar and found Jesus talking to the Samaritan woman. We have already seen the Jewish idea of women. The Rabbinic precept ran: 'Let no one talk with a woman in the street, no, not with his own wife.' The Rabbis so despised women and so thought them incapable of receiving any real teaching that they said: 'Better that the words of the law should be burned than deliver to women.' They had a saying: 'Each time that a man prolongs converse with a woman he causes evil to himself, and desists from the law, and in the end inherits Gehinnom.' By Rabbinic standards Jesus could hardly have done a more shatteringly unconventional thing than to talk to this woman. Here is Jesus taking the barriers down."⁶

The incident regarding Mary and Martha recorded in Luke 10 illustrates another aspect of how Jesus treated women. Luke tells us that Mary "sat at Jesus' feet and heard His word. But Martha was distracted with much serving" (verses 39-40). The prevailing Jewish thought would have accused Mary of the distraction, because of the belief that women should not study the Torah. But Jesus said that "Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her" (verse 42, NIV).

Because some liberal theologians have attempted to characterize Christ's work as taking down "Old Testament barriers," we want to note that any barriers He took down were man-made. Christ's teachings maintained continuity with the Old Testament; they did not contradict or conflict with it. In the words of Isaiah, the Messiah would "exalt the law and make it honorable" (Isaiah 42:21). In His own words, "Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill" (Matthew 5:17).

It is wrong to portray Christ as a social revolutionary who sought to overthrow the teachings of Scripture. Rather, He simply practiced what the Bible reveals from the beginning,

⁶ William Barclay, 5:162.

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that men and women are equal. However, He chose men as apostles, while women served in support roles in His earthly ministry, a pattern He continued to inspire in the New Testament Church, as we will see.

The main lesson of these examples is that Jesus treated women as human beings, not inferior creatures. He conversed with them freely and without prejudice. He offered men and women, Jews and gentiles, and people from all social levels, the same opportunity to learn from Him. This stands in stark contrast to how the Jewish and Greek cultures treated women.

Now, we turn to the book of Church history—Acts.

Chapter Four—Role of Women in Acts

Church history offers one of the most compelling sources of information on the topic of a woman's role in the Church of God. What role have women filled in the past? God inspired Luke to write Acts, a record of the establishment of the Church of God in Jerusalem, throughout Judea, the Middle East and the surrounding Greco-Roman world of the first century.

After Christ ascended to heaven, His disciples returned at His direction to Jerusalem to wait for the gift of the Holy Spirit. Immediately following a list of the original apostles (minus Judas), we read: "These all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication, *with the women* and Mary the mother of Jesus" (Acts 1:14). Women disciples were with the men in the "upper room" where all awaited the promised Spirit of God.

We next read that Peter told the 120 to select a replacement apostle for Judas from "the men" (verse 21). "Men" means male exclusively. *Vine's Expository Dictionary of Biblical Words* says the Greek word for "men" "is never used of the female sex; it stands (a) in distinction from a woman..."⁷

In chapter 2, verse 18, "they shall prophesy" includes women. Does this mean that women will preach in the New Testament Church? This verse cannot justifiably be used to claim biblical authority for women preachers because prophesying is not the same as preaching. To "prophesy" refers to a spiritual gift (1 Corinthians 13:2; 14:1), which enables the recipient "to proclaim an inspired revelation."⁸ Commentaries link this with the daughters of Philip, whose service to the Church is important to our analysis of the book of Acts. Some point to the daughters of Philip as examples of women doing the work of an elder. We'll deal with this when we look at chapter 21.

Women First to Witness About Christ's Resurrection

Remember, women were actually the first to bear testimony of Christ's resurrection and to confirm the momentous news to the apostles (Luke 24:10). When Peter referred to those who witnessed about the resurrection of Christ in Acts 2:32, he most certainly includes women. However, only the 12 apostles did the teaching and counseling on the Pentecost of Acts 2.

Sapphira's story in chapter 5 is worth commenting on, for it confirms that the Church from the beginning treated women as equals in accountability. Her and her husband's conspiracy to inflate the value of their gift to the Church and their tragic deaths are well known in Church history. For the purpose of this paper, we observe that she was included with the disciples and that she was dealt with on the basis of her own sin. That is, she did not suffer because her husband had defrauded the Church, but rather, because she lied.

⁷ *Vine's Expository Dictionary of Biblical Words*, 1985, "Man."

⁸ Frederick William Danker, et al., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, p. 890.

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In a general statement about the burgeoning growth of the Church, God inspired specific mention of the fact that He was calling women disciples, as well as men. Acts 5:14 says that there were “multitudes of both men and women.” This demonstrates an ongoing theme in the history of the early Church—that God called both men and women disciples.

How many women were there? While there’s no way to know fully, the implication of the above and similar statements in Acts is that their numbers were large. The crisis that led to the selection of deacons illustrates this point. Chapter 6 begins with the comment that “the number of the disciples was multiplying” and then presents the controversy over widows being neglected “in the daily distribution.” Think of the implications of those words: Such a large number of widows had been called that their care became a major management consideration. A staff of seven was required to meet that significant need!

On a related point, we should take note of the fact that the apostles instructed that men (the word is the same as explained above from Acts 1:21, meaning exclusively males) be selected, although the job was dealing with women’s needs. This point is raised to answer those who argue that women must be ordained to work with women.

Women and the Spreading of the Gospel—Acts 8

There is a passage in the book of Acts that some have used to teach that members of the Church, including women, were actively and publicly preaching during the time of the New Testament. This passage is found in the eighth chapter of the book of Acts.

Acts 8:1-2, 4-5: “At that time a great persecution arose against the church which was at Jerusalem; and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles... Therefore those who were scattered went everywhere **preaching** [*euangelizo*] the word. Then Philip went down to the city of Samaria and **preached** [*kerusso*] Christ to them.”

The question is asked: Just who was doing the preaching in this scattering? Clearly not the apostles, as they were still at Jerusalem. Philip, referred to earlier, is here named, and the word *kerusso* (public proclamation) is used for what he was doing—as well as the word *euangelizo* (verse 12). Philip and six others had been specially ordained through the laying on of the hands of the apostles to serve the physical needs of the Church in Acts 6. But there is no biblical record that by the time of the scattering of Acts 8 he had been specially ordained to preach, as an elder or as an overseer. He is later referred to as having the special job of evangelist in Acts 21:8.

We are not sure why, in this account, Philip is singled out as having gone to the city of Samaria to preach Christ to the inhabitants. Yet, it would seem that in some manner he was “sent” or deemed qualified to do so.

Yet what of *those who were scattered*, in verse 4, who were preaching in Judea and Samaria? The word *euangelizo* is used to describe what they were doing—seemingly distinct from *kerusso* in the next verse as applying to Philip. However, as we have seen, it appears most

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likely that these terms can generally be used interchangeably when it comes to spreading the gospel. Who, then, besides Philip was preaching?

John Gill mentions in his commentary that these were likely those who taught within the congregation—possibly of the original 70 that Christ commissioned:

“...not all the members of the church, nor perhaps any of the private ones; for we afterwards read of devout men that carried Stephen to his grave; and of the church being made havoc of by Saul; and of men and women being haled out of their houses, and committed to prison by him; but all the preachers of the word, except the apostles; for they that were scattered, went about preaching the word. *They seem to be the seventy disciples*, and other ministers of the word, on whom the Holy Ghost fell at the day of Pentecost, or was since bestowed; among who were Philip, who went to Samaria; and Ananias, who was at Damascus; and others that went as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus, and Antioch: and particularly they are said to be dispersed... By reason of the persecution in Jerusalem: the seventy disciples, and other ministers of the word; or the hundred and twenty, excepting the apostles, **went every where**; or **went through** the countries of Judea and Samaria, as far as Phoenicia, and Antioch.”⁹

On the other hand, notice that Barnes’ commentary suggests that it might have been a larger group of lay Christians involved in this “preaching the word” in a particular way in Acts 8:

“Preaching the word. Greek, Evangelizing, or announcing the good news of the message of mercy, or the word of God. It is not the usual word which is rendered preach, but means simply announcing the good news of salvation. There is no evidence, nor is there any probability, that all these persons were ordained to preach. They were manifestly common Christians who were scattered by the persecution; and the meaning is, that they *communicated to their fellow-men in conversation*, wherever they met them—and probably in the synagogues, where all Jews had a right to speak—the glad tidings that the Messiah had come. It is not said that they set themselves up for public teachers; or that they administered baptism; or that they founded churches; but they proclaimed everywhere the news that a Saviour had come.”¹⁰

There are clearly differing opinions on what is actually being depicted by these few verses in Acts 8. However, they do not show that the membership were out actually preaching (as a public herald) in a manner that the elders and ministry were ordained to do.

We conclude that this example in Acts 8 was a rather special circumstance. Many in the Church felt compelled to leave their homes because of persecution. The implication is not that they were evangelizing the community as an ongoing initiative. No doubt the arrival of those who did go to new locations would prompt questions and lead to a natural opportunity to explain who they were and why they had recently relocated. It is easy to imagine the passion and boldness they carried since their faithfulness resulted in much personal hardship. The Bible

⁹ John Gill, *Gill’s Exposition of the Whole Bible*.

¹⁰ Albert Barnes, *Barnes’ Notes: The Bible Commentary*, 1983.

certainly supports all members including women defending their faith and explaining their beliefs: “Always be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you” (1 Peter 3:15). While this could be viewed as a type of preaching, one should be cautious in using these unique circumstances as an everyday *model* for the Church in considering the role of women.

Both Men and Women Were Called

As noted throughout the book of Acts, men and women repented and were baptized, because the gospel was preached (Acts 8:12).

In chapter 9, Saul (whose name was later changed to Paul) was struck down while spearheading a campaign of persecution against the men and women of the Church. He was sent to “a disciple” in Damascus to be anointed and baptized (verse 17-18). The one who Christ directed to lay hands on Saul is another man, Ananias.

Later in this chapter, we’re introduced to a noted disciple “full of good works and charitable deeds”—Tabitha or Dorcas, a woman (verse 36). High profiling a woman disciple isn’t an anomaly, but rather the continuation of a clear historical record of the prominent participation in and contribution to the New Testament Church by women. Verse 39 indicates that Tabitha had served the widows. She and her work were so widely known that her resurrection led to the conversion of many (verse 42)—a significant contribution to the Church and its work.

Church Inclusive Toward Women

What follows in this section of Church history is the storm of controversy precipitated by adding nonproselyte gentiles to the early Church. Debate continued on this issue throughout the early New Testament period. We raise this point to contrast it with the lack of debate over the evident involvement of women in the Church. Why was there no such discussion?

Some attempt to explain this silence by claiming that the early New Testament culture typically excluded women. We’ve already demonstrated amply from the book of Acts that God called women into His Church from the beginning. The lack of any controversy over that fact argues against any theory that the early Church resented or resisted their presence.

Chapter 11 reports continued rapid growth, which meant an ever-increasing need for ministers (Acts 11:19-21). Here is another critical point in Church history. Both men and women were among the new converts. Who should be sent to teach them? Jerusalem selected Barnabas, another man, to serve in this role. Growth continued, prompting Barnabas to select yet another helper—Saul (Paul), who wasn’t even one of the 120 original disciples (Acts 11:25-26)! Luke then introduces us to “prophets” who came from Jerusalem to assist Barnabas and Saul (Paul) (verse 27-28). Only one prophet is identified, a man, Agabus.

No Lack of Dedicated Christian Women

Acts 12:12 resumes the theme of the participation of women disciples in the early Church. Mary was a prominent disciple in Jerusalem, with a home large enough to host a congregation. Presumably, women, as well as men were praying there about the crisis of Peter's arrest. Mary's home was the first place Peter headed after his release from prison.

Shortly thereafter, another assistant to the elders is named—John Mark, another man. Dedicated Christian women were part of the Church, but the record consistently shows that Christ inspired that men should serve as elders.

Acts 13:1 lists all of the prophets and teachers at Antioch: all are men. Antioch is noteworthy, for women were prominent and influential in the community. The culture of Antioch clearly accepted and included women (verses 49-50). Note the following comment from *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*: "It was hence that Roman soldiers, officials, and couriers were dispatched over the whole area, and it was hence, according to Acts 13:49, that Paul's mission radiated over the whole region... The 'devout and honorable women' (the King James Version) and the 'chief men' of the city, to whom the Jews addressed their complaint, were perhaps the Roman colonists. The publicity here given to the action of the women is in accord with all that is known of their social position in Asia Minor, where they were often priestesses and magistrates."¹¹

Silas was chosen as an assistant to Paul (Acts 15:40), and another famous New Testament figure, Timothy, was added to the ministry soon thereafter (Acts 16:1, 3). Timothy's grandmother and mother were also well-known disciples (Lois and Eunice, 2 Timothy 1:5).

Lydia and the Women of Philippi

God chose to call, convert and work with and through women throughout the early history of the Church. The next segment of Luke's history that we should take note of is Paul's trip to the city of Philippi, some distance from Antioch. Women are in the main spotlight here. Paul's group met exclusively with women, both Jews and proselytes, who were the first converts to the Church in the area.

One of the converts was a successful businesswoman named Lydia whose example and leadership led to the conversion of her family—hers was a significant role in the Church. She also served by hosting Paul and his group. *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia* provides helpful background information about her.

"Lydia was (1) living in Philippi, (2) of the city of Thyatira, (3) a seller of the purple-dyed garments from her native town, (4) and 'one that worshipped God.' Her occupation shows her to have been a woman of some capital. The phrase which describes her religion (*sebomene ton Theon*) is the usual designation for a proselyte. She was in the

¹¹ *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, Biblesoft, 1995-1996, "Antioch, of Pisidia."

habit of frequenting a place of prayer by a riverside, a situation convenient for the necessary ablutions required by the Jewish worship, and there Paul and his companions met her. After she had been listening to Paul (Greek imperfect), the Lord opened her heart to give heed to his teaching... Her house probably became the center for the church in Philippi (Acts 16:14-15,40). Lydia is not mentioned in Paul's letter to the Philippians, but, if Ramsay be correct, she may have been Euodias or Syntyche (Phil 4:2)."¹²

Women Held High-Profile Positions

The reason women did not serve as elders or pastors in the early New Testament Church cannot be ascribed to the lack of women in the Church. Nor can the reasons be that all cultures in which God established His Church suppressed women, for we have seen that women were honored in Antioch and Philippi—and also Macedonia. Many women were among those called to conversion as a result of Paul's preaching in Thessalonica (Acts 17:1-4).

Note that "leading women" are specifically mentioned. What does "leading" mean? *Vincent's Word Studies of the New Testament* offers insight into the answer:

"The position of women in Macedonia seems to have been exceptional. Popular prejudice, and the verdict of Grecian wisdom in its best age, asserted her natural inferiority. The Athenian law provided that everything which a man might do by the counsel or request of a woman should be null in law. She was little better than a slave. To educate her was to advertise her as a harlot. Her companions were principally children and slaves. In Macedonia, however, monuments were erected to women by public bodies; and records of male proper names are found, in Macedonian inscriptions, formed on the mother's name instead of on the father's. Macedonian women were permitted to hold property, and were treated as mistresses of the house. These facts are borne out by the account of Paul's labors in Macedonia. In Thessalonica, Berea, and Philippi we note additions of women of rank to the church; and their prominence in church affairs is indicated by Paul's special appeal to two ladies in the church at Philippi to reconcile their differences, which had caused disturbance in the church, and by his commending them to his colleagues as women who had labored with him in the Lord (Phil 4:2-3)."¹³

Also called to the Church were people in the Macedonian city of Berea, famous for their fair-mindedness and their readiness to receive Paul's preaching, coupled with a diligent commitment to prove his message by researching the Scriptures. We should notice that women, as well as men, set the "Berean example" of careful Bible study. Like those converts in Thessalonica, some Bereans were "prominent women" (Acts 17:10-12).

Paul's appearance before the Areopagites is well-known. For the purpose of this paper, we observe that a woman named Damaris is mentioned among the few Athenians who were

¹² Ibid., "Lydia."

¹³ *Vincent's Word Studies of the New Testament*, BibleSoft, 1997, notes on Acts 17:4.

converted. *Nelson's* says of her, "The fact that she was singled out along with Dionysius the Areopagite, one of the court judges, may indicate she was a woman of distinction."¹⁴

Priscilla's Notable Service

One of the best-known women in Church history is Priscilla, wife of Aquila. She and her husband were Corinthian disciples, who traveled with Paul after meeting him (Acts 18:1-2, 18, 26). On one occasion Aquila and Priscilla privately taught Apollos, expounding the truth of God to him (verse 26). This demonstrates Priscilla's as well as Aquila's depth of understanding, for Apollos was a well-spoken man, already "mighty [that is, competent] in the Scriptures" (verses 24-25). The mention of her name with his points out that she was an active participant in the dialogue, not just a passive listener.

Philip's Daughters

The final reference in Acts for us to consider in this paper is chapter 21:8-10, in which we find Philip's daughters "who prophesied." Have we encountered something here that contradicts the thrust of the entire history of the Church up to this point? Do these verses prove women served as elders or pastors? Nothing here indicates that these women engaged in preaching, interpreting or teaching the Scriptures in the way that we understand the elders do today.

The root word from which "prophesied" is taken means "to speak under inspiration" or "to exercise the prophet's office," but it doesn't indicate functioning as an elder or pastor. The word can also mean "to foretell events." How should it be understood here?

The daughters of Philip are not mentioned again, and no further detail beyond this one phrase is offered about what role they filled. Does the context indicate how we should understand the role fulfilled by these women? *Matthew Henry's Commentary* advises that it "intimates that they prophesied of Paul's troubles at Jerusalem, as others had done [i.e. Agabus], and dissuaded him from going; or perhaps they prophesied for his comfort and encouragement, in reference to the difficulties that were before him."¹⁵

Whether this explanation is accurate or these women were prophetesses like Anna (Luke 2:36), neither explanation lends credence to any claim that their service indicates women were elders or pastors in the early Church.

Summary of the Historical Record of Acts

Here is what we learn by analyzing the book of Acts:

- Women were treated with respect, educated and held positions of influence in at least some of the cultures from which Christians were drawn.
- Women were numbered among Christ's disciples from the beginning of the Church.

¹⁴ *Nelson's Illustrated Bible Dictionary*, BibleSoft, 1986, "Damaris."

¹⁵ *Matthew Henry's Commentary*, 1991, notes on Acts 21:8-14.

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- Women were given the Holy Spirit, along with men.
- Women are mentioned throughout the history of the Church as valuable contributors to the spreading of the gospel message.
- Dedicated, converted women were part of the Church from its beginning, but their service was different from the tasks performed by an elder or a pastor.

Acts tells only part of the story, but it is an important part. We turn now to what Paul wrote about women.

Chapter Five—What Paul Wrote About Women

The most debated passages regarding women are found in Paul's epistles. Determining how to understand and apply what God inspired Paul to write requires sound exegetical principles, which include consideration of historical, cultural and grammatical factors. We will examine the principal references Paul makes to women, including Galatians 3:28; Ephesians 5:22-23; 1 Corinthians 11:3, 7-12; 1 Timothy 2:12; 1 Corinthians 14:34-35; Titus 2; and Hebrews 11.

Galatians 3:28

Paul's landmark statement in Galatians 3:28 perfectly summarizes Jesus' example: "Now, in Christ, there is no difference between Jew and non-Jew, between slave and free, between male and female. You are all the same in Christ Jesus" (Simple English Version).

The thought that introduces this passage appears in verses 26-27: "For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ, have put on Christ." Plainly, he's speaking of the fact that all people, regardless of ethnic background, social standing or gender enjoy the same spiritual potential, once converted—to become the children of God. Galatians 3:26-28 reiterates the fact that "God is no respecter of persons" (Acts 10:34, KJV), or as the Simple English Version puts it, "God treats everyone the same."

Using this verse to obliterate all gender distinctions and as authority for changing the roles of men and women is foreign to the context. Paul did not call for a change in the roles of parents and children or the roles of masters and slaves—although he mentions all in the verse. Neither did he call for a change in the roles of men and women.

Ephesians 5:22-23

Understanding the meanings of the key words *submit* and *head* is vital to the true meaning of this passage. Spiros Zodhiates defines the word *submit* (*hupotasso* in Greek) as, "'to place under in an orderly fashion' (*hupo* —'under' + *tasso*—'place, set, appoint, arrange, order')." ¹⁶ Its meaning in verse 22 "is the same as in verse 21, that is, 'submission in the sense of voluntary yielding in love.'" ¹⁷

Wayne Grudem defines "submission" as "an inner quality of gentleness that affirms the leadership of the husband."¹⁸ This means to voluntarily accept and accommodate herself to the husband's leadership role that God ordained. This response stems from a conscious, cognitive and heartfelt commitment to her God-given role.

George W. Knight III adds, "This is no abandonment of the great New Testament truth also taught by the Apostle Paul that 'there is neither... male nor female, for you are all one in

¹⁶ Spiros Zodhiates, *The Complete Word Study Dictionary New Testament*, 1992, pp. 1367, 1427.

¹⁷ John Piper and Wayne Grudem, ed., *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*, 1991, p. 168.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 196.

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Christ Jesus' (Galatians 3:28). Rather, it is an appeal to one who is equal by creation and redemption to submit to the authority God has ordained."¹⁹ Submission and equality do not contradict each other.

What is the significance of the word *head* (*kephale* in Greek)? "Besides its natural significance," says *Vine's*, it is used "metaphorically, of the authority or direction of God in relation to Christ, of Christ in relation to believing men, of the husband in relation to the wife, 1 Cor. 11:3; of Christ in relation to the Church, Eph. 1:22; 4:15; 5:23; Col. 1:18; 2:19; of Christ in relation to principalities and powers, Col. 2:10."²⁰ Simply put, *kephale* refers to the leader in a relationship. In Ephesians 5:21-33, Paul emphasizes that the husband's leadership role should reflect the godly leadership approach exemplified by Jesus Christ, who gave His life for the Church.

"Paul thus affirms that male headship is a divine appointment. It is evident in Ephesians 5 itself that Paul has Genesis 2 and its principles in mind, because he quotes Genesis 2:24 at Ephesians 5:31. What he has explicitly said in 1 Corinthians 11:8, 9 informs his statement in Ephesians 5:23, and his quotation of Genesis 2:24 in Ephesians 5:31 demonstrates that the principles of Genesis 2 inform his statements in Ephesians."²¹

Before leaving this section, we should note that neither these verses, nor any others, permit a man to subjugate his wife, as if force could bring about biblical submission. Instead, the husband is to be a humble, loving leader in character, attitude and actions. In turn, the wife is to live and work with him as a complementary counterpart, willingly submitting to his loving guidance. In Ephesians 5 Paul presents the relationship between Christ and the Church as a model for the husband-wife relationship.

Paul and Peter

Peter's writings complement what Paul wrote in Ephesians 5; Peter demonstrates that a Christian husband and wife are "heirs together of the grace of life" (1 Peter 3:7).

The word translated "heirs together," *Vine's* explains, "is used of Isaac and Jacob as participants with Abraham in the promises of God, Heb. 11:9; of husband and wife who are also united in Christ, 1 Pet. 3:7; of Gentiles who believe, as participants in the gospel with Jews who believe, Eph. 3:6; and of all believers as prospective participants with Christ in His glory, as recompense for their participation in His sufferings, Rom. 8:17."²²

When Peter speaks here of the wife as "the weaker vessel," he is not implying that the man is "superior." Rather, he is referring to the specialized design and structural differences between men and women. Women are physically weaker than men but that does not make women inferior to men.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 168.

²⁰ W.E. Vine, *Vine's Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words*, 1985, "Head."

²¹ *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*, p. 170

²² *Vine's*, p. 178.

More importantly, this passage is one of many that illustrates the principle of reciprocal responsibilities. Barclay points out: “Short as this passage is, it has in it much of the very essence of the Christian ethic. That ethic is what may be called a reciprocal ethic. It never places all the responsibility on one side. If it speaks of the duties of slaves, it speaks also of the obligations of masters. If it speaks of the duty of children, it speaks also of the obligations of parents (compare Eph. 6:1-9; Col. 3:20-25; Col. 4:1). Peter has just laid down the duty of wives; now he lays down the duty of husbands. A marriage must be based on reciprocal obligation... This was a new conception in the ancient world.”²³

Compare the following translations of this verse, and note the highlighted portions:

“Husbands, likewise, dwell with them *with understanding, giving honor to the wife*, as to the weaker vessel, and as being heirs together of the grace of life, that your prayers may not be hindered” (NKJV).

“Husbands, in the same way *be considerate as you live with your wives*, and *treat them with respect* as the weaker partner and as heirs with you of the gracious gift of life, so that nothing will hinder your prayers” (NIV).

The New Living Translation conveys its intent well: “In the same way, you husbands must *give honor to your wives. Treat her with understanding as you live together*. She may be weaker than you are, but she is your equal partner in God’s gift of new life. If you don’t treat her as you should, your prayers will not be heard.”

The highlighted phrases speak to the unique meaning of the word *wife*. It translates “a rare word that is used only here in the New Testament. It means more literally ‘the feminine one,’ and suggests that Peter is looking to the characteristic nature of womanhood or femininity and seeing in it an appropriateness for receiving honor. It is appropriate that those who are ‘feminine,’ those who give characteristic expression to ‘womanhood,’ should receive special honor, for this is what God has directed.”²⁴

The implication is that Peter was encouraging every husband to seek a deeper understanding of his wife’s feminine nature with its unique qualities and attributes, esteeming and highly honoring her ability to complement his masculine qualities and attributes.

1 Corinthians 11

What Paul wrote about women in 1 Corinthians 11 is another often-debated section of Scripture on the role of women in the Church of God. The issues that we need to concern ourselves with for the purposes of this paper center around verses 1-16. Before we discuss these verses, though, we should point out verse 1, in which Paul described himself as an imitator of Christ, not an innovator of new doctrine.

²³ William Barclay, 14:222.

²⁴ *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*, p. 208.

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It is also important to note that the Greek word *aner* can mean either “man (male gender) or husband”; likewise *gune* can mean either “woman or wife.” The ambiguities created by the interchangeability of these two terms have created major misunderstandings and misapplications of this and other passages.

Notice the difference between “every man” and *the* man in verse 3. This passage teaches that Christ is the head of every man. It does not say that every man is the head of every woman. Note how the New Revised Standard Version translates the verse: “But I want you to understand that Christ is the head of every man, and the husband is the head of his wife, and God is the head of Christ.” This briefly reiterates what Paul wrote in Ephesians 5 about the roles of a husband and a wife in marriage.

But in 1 Corinthians 11, he goes on to address appropriate hair length (“covering”) for men and women in the context of prayer and prophesying. Paul uses the underlying theme of headship and submission both in the roles of a husband and wife in marriage and in the service of men and women in the Church. He relates hair lengths to symbolically demonstrating headship and submission. (He includes “prophesying” at first, verse 5, and offers no definition of his intent of the word; later, he mentions only prayer, verse 13.) The Church’s view is that women do not give public prayers in congregational services, nor do they lead in congregational song services. There are situations where women may lead in prayer in a public setting, such as in women’s activities.

He writes tactfully, allowing no room for the men to feel superior to the women, while he explains that the women’s longer hair demonstrates their yielding themselves in submission to the man who has the God-given responsibility for authoritative teaching in the church or assembly.

Paul is addressing the issue of leadership and role distinction through the concept of head coverings, which Paul explains to be hair (verse 15) and not an external veil or cloth covering. Though this is also debated among scholars, the NIV footnote is rather revealing:

“Every man who prays or prophesies with long hair dishonors his head. And every woman who prays or prophesies with no covering of hair on her head dishonors her head—she is just like one of the ‘shorn women.’ If a woman has no covering, let her be for now with short hair, but since it is a disgrace for a woman to have her hair shorn or shaved, she should grow it again. A man ought not to have long hair” (1 Corinthians 11:4-7).²⁵

In the context of this chapter, the Church has consistently taught that there is no command from Paul for women to wear an external head covering.

²⁵ *Life Application Bible*, footnote on 1 Corinthians 11:4-7.

By piecing the writings of Paul together, we intend to provide a biblical framework in which to place the assertions he makes in this chapter regarding the role distinctions of men and women in the Church. Again, we see a consistent pattern between Paul, Christ and Genesis, rather than the introduction of contradictory thought or doctrine. This passage instructs husbands and wives on how to apply these timeless biblical principles of marriage roles.

Instead of considering 1 Corinthians 14 next, we want to first look at 1 Timothy 2, following the principle of explaining an unclear scripture by clear ones.

1 Timothy 2:12

God inspired Paul to write this guideline to Timothy: “And I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority [*authenteo*] over a man, but to be in silence” (1 Timothy 2:12). In this passage *aner* without the article means “a man,” as translated, as opposed to “her man” or her husband in 1 Corinthians 11.

Was Paul prohibiting all teaching by women? No, he wasn’t. Ample scriptures, including others Paul wrote, show that there are many situations in which it’s appropriate for women to teach (Titus 2:3-4; 2 Timothy 1:5; 1 Corinthians 11:5; Colossians 3:16; Acts 18:26; and Proverbs 31:26).

The logical question that follows is what type of teaching did he mean? Although it has a broader meaning in a few passages (most notably 1 Corinthians 11:14—“does not nature itself teach you”), *didasko* usually appears in the context of giving formal, authoritative doctrinal instruction.²⁶ In fact, the Greek word translated “doctrine” is from the same word family as *didasko*. However, Paul instructed Titus that older women should “be reverent in behavior, not slanderers, not given to much wine, teachers of good things (*kalodidaskalos*)...” (Titus 2:3). Here also, Paul links respectful behavior with women teaching. (This passage will be explained in detail later in this paper.)

The word translated “have authority” (*authenteo*) occurs nowhere else in the New Testament. The Greek word for “exercise authority” is *exousiazō* (Luke 22:25). A stronger word (*kataexousiazō*) occurs in Matthew 20:25 and Mark 10:42 to refer to the authoritarian rule of gentile governments in contrast to the godly leadership concept Jesus enjoined upon His disciples. *Authenteo* has a much stronger meaning than simply *having* or *exercising* authority or even exercising authoritarian rule. *Vine’s* explains: “In the earlier usage of the word it signified one who with his own hand killed either others or himself. Later it came to denote one who acts on his own ‘authority.’”²⁷ The implication seems to be a violent, presumptuous *seizing* or *usurping* of authority, or to domineer.

Paul makes these observations in the context of creation—the way it was “from the beginning.” In that regard, he follows Christ’s example (Matthew 19:4-8), illustrating the principle and precedent set for mankind in matters of marriage and in the realm of roles and

²⁶ *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, 1996 Electronic Database, “Teach; Teacher; Teaching.”

²⁷ *Vine’s*, “Authority,” p. 46.

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relationships of men and women as they assemble together to learn and worship. Paul clearly identifies authoritative teaching as the role of a man.

Paul's directives are based upon two concepts made clear at creation—Adam was created first (the order of creation) and Eve was the first to be deceived. Both of these statements speak to the foundational concept of role distinctions, defined broadly as headship and submission. The moment Eve chose to assume Adam's position of headship, exercise authority over him and "take the lead," attempting to teach her husband, things went terribly wrong.

Paul's intention clearly is not a blanket prohibition against women teaching. In Titus 2:3-4, he encourages older women to teach younger women. There are clearly appropriate ways and venues for women to teach, but the overarching principle of headship and submission in the context of authoritative teaching by men in the congregational setting is Paul's emphasis in all his writings. Paul was illustrating the type of leadership and authority God designed for men to fulfill in marriage, the home and the Church.

Gill's Exposition of the Whole Bible comments on "having authority" in his notes on this verse: "...not in things ecclesiastical, or what relate to the church and government of it; for one part of rule is to feed the church with knowledge and understanding; and for a woman to take upon her to do this, is to usurp an authority over the man: this therefore she ought not to do."²⁸

Because formal, authoritative, doctrinal instruction takes place in church services and Bible studies today, we understand Paul's instruction to mean that women should not teach in those circumstances.

God inspired Paul to continue the direction He gives from the beginning. No doubt, local issues triggered what he wrote, and understanding them would help us understand his letters better. In its notes on 1 Timothy 2:11-12, the *Jamieson, Fausset and Brown Commentary* says: "Paul probably wrote this from Corinth, where the precept was in force."

With this relatively clear passage in mind, we return now to examine one of Paul's most often-debated writings, 1 Corinthians 14:34-35.

1 Corinthians 14:34-35

What did Paul mean by these words? "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" (1 Corinthians 14:34-35).

Paul introduces the subject of speaking with verse 1, where he writes, "...that you may prophesy." Through the next several verses, he contrasts prophesying (which in this context means inspired preaching or teaching) with speaking in tongues (languages) unknown by much

²⁸ *Gill's Exposition of the Whole Bible*, note on 1 Timothy 2:12.

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of the audience. He summarizes his point about speaking in church in verse 12: "...let it be for the edification of the church that you seek to excel." He defines edifying the congregation as speaking "...by revelation, by knowledge, by prophesying, or by teaching" (verse 6).

Paul then continues for several verses, pointing out the weaknesses and the fallacy of speaking in languages that people do not understand. In verses 23-24, he again contrasts speaking in different languages with prophesying. The former confuses (under the wrong circumstances); the latter convicts.

In verse 26, he moves into guidelines whereby speaking in different languages might properly fit into church services: have an edifying message; have no more than two or three such speakers; have an interpreter or don't speak in different languages at all. That last guideline is phrased, "But if there is no interpreter, let him keep silent in church..." (verse 28.) "Keep silent" unmistakably means do not speak before the congregation in the formal church service.

In verses 29-33, Paul continues to give guidelines for speaking in church. Then, verse 34 flows logically from this discussion, based upon the meaning of "prophesying" as "preaching": "Women should not speak," that is, preach or teach before the congregation.

Barnes' holds this view unambiguously: "This rule is positive: explicit and universal. There is no ambiguity in the expressions; and there can be no difference of opinion, one would suppose, in regard to their meaning. The sense evidently is, that in all those things which he had specified, the women were to keep silence; they were to take no part. He had discoursed of speaking foreign languages, and of prophecy; and the evident sense is, that in regard to all these they were to keep silence, or were not to engage in them. These pertained solely to the male portion of the congregation. These things constituted the business of the public teaching; and in this the female part of the congregation [was] to be silent. 'They were not to teach the people, nor were they to interrupt those who were speaking.'—Rosenmuller."²⁹

Regarding the term *speak*, or *laleo* in the Greek, that is used twice in 1 Corinthians 14:34-35, *The Expositor's Bible Commentary* states:

"Paul now turns to the role of women in public worship, the implication being that men were to lead in worship. Paul's instruction for Corinth is that followed in all the churches. The phrase *tais ekklesiiais ton hagion* ('the congregations [or, the churches] of the saints') is distinctive, occurring only here in the NT. The expression emphasizes the universality of the Christian community. All the churches are composed of saints (those set apart for God), and should be governed by the same principle of orderly conduct.

"The command seems absolute: Women are not to do any public speaking in the church. This restriction is not to be construed as demoting woman, since the expressions 'be in submission' (*hypotasso*, cf. v. 32) and 'their own husbands' are to be interpreted as simply consistent with God's order of administration (cf. 1Cor 11:7, 8; Eph 5:21-33).

²⁹ *Barnes' Notes*, Online Bible, comment on 1 Corinthians 14:34.

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'The law says' must refer to the law as set forth in such places as Genesis 3:16; 1 Corinthians 11:3; Ephesians 5:22; 1 Timothy 1:12, and Titus 2:5.

"Some have explained the apostle's use of the word 'speaking' (v. 34) as connoting only general speaking and not forbidding a public address. But this is incompatible with Paul's other uses of 'speaking' in the chapter (vv. 5, 6, 9, et al.), which imply public utterances as in prophesying (v. 5). A woman's request for knowledge is not to be denied, since she is a human being equal to the man. Her questions can be answered at home, and not by asking her husband in the public service and so possibly interrupting the sermon.

"The word *gyne* used in vv. 34, 35 has the general meaning of 'woman,' an adult female (cf. Matt 13:33; 27:55). But the same word is used to indicate a married woman (cf. Matt 14:3; Luke 1:5). Here in vv. 34, 35 Paul uses the word in the general sense when he declares as a broad principle that 'women should remain silent in the churches.' That he assumes there were many married women in the congregation is evident from his reference to 'their husbands' (v. 35). He does not address himself to the question of where the unmarried women, such as those mentioned in 7:8, 36 ff., were to get their questions answered. We may assume, however, that they were to talk in private (just as the married women were to inquire at home) with other qualified persons, such as Christian widows (7:8), their pastor (cf. Timothy as a pastor-counselor, 1Tim 5:1, 2), or with elders who were 'able to teach' (1Tim 3:2). At any rate, a woman's femininity must not be disgraced by her trying to take a man's role in the church.

"But what about the seeming contradiction between these verses and 11:5 ff., where Paul speaks of women praying and prophesying? The explanation may be that in chapter 11 Paul does not say that women were doing these things in public worship as discussed in chapter 14. (See B.B. Warfield, 'Women Speaking in the Church' in *The Presbyterian*, Oct. 30, 1919, pp. 8, 9.)

"Paul's rhetorical questions (v. 36) are ironical and suggest that the Corinthians had their own separate customs regarding the role of women in public worship and were tending to act independently of the other churches who also had received these commands. They were presuming to act as though they had originated the Word of God (i.e., the gospel) and as if they could depart from Paul's commands and do as they pleased in these matters of church order."

Harper's New Testament Commentary, by C.K. Barrett, says on this section:

"Nor is it very convincing to argue that *to speak* (in verse 34, *lalein*) does not refer to such praying and prophesying, but to uninspired speech, especially the asking of questions that might seem to pass judgment (vs. 29) on what had been said. It is true that the verb does in Classical Greek bear the meaning 'to chatter,' and it would be understandable that Paul should wish to stem an outburst of feminine loquacity; but in the New Testament, and in Paul, the verb normally does not have this meaning, and is used throughout chapter 14 (vss. 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 9, 11, 13, 18, 19, 21, 23, 27, 28, 29, 39) in the sense of inspired speech. It is not impossible that Paul should now use it in a new sense

(promptly reverting to the old in verse 39), but it is unlikely...The verse contemplates married women, whose husbands are Christians. *A fortiori*, unmarried women and the wives of unbelievers will not speak in the assembly; if they wish to learn they must presumably persuade married friends to put questions to their husbands.”

In addition, *Vine’s Expository Dictionary* says about *laleo*, “*Laleo* is used several times in 1 Cor. 14; the command prohibiting women from speaking in a church gathering, vv. 34, 35, is regarded by some as an injunction against chattering, a meaning which is absent from the use of the verb everywhere else in the N.T.; it is to be understood in the same sense as in vv. 2, 3-6, 9, 11, 13, 18, 19, 21, 23, 27-29, 39.”

Therefore, since the term *laleo* is used 16 times in this chapter to mean “inspired speech” (15 times before verses 34-35 and once afterwards), it is logical to conclude Paul used this term with the same meaning in verses 34-35. To have done otherwise would have been very confusing, especially when he had plenty of other Greek words available to express a different concept.

Titus 2:3-5

We also want to take a look at what Paul wrote to Titus about women in the Church of God. The detailed instruction in this passage clearly describes important aspects of the biblical role of women in the Church.

Because this instruction is given to a minister who supervised other elders, it speaks to more than simply how Titus should work with the women in congregations he pastored. Titus likely taught this to other elders and pastors for use in all the congregations in his district. And, since God inspired its inclusion in the Bible, it should guide the Church today. Paul instructs Titus:

“But speak thou the things which become sound doctrine: That the aged men be sober, grave, temperate, sound in faith, in charity, in patience. The aged women likewise, that they be in behaviour as becometh holiness, not false accusers, not given to much wine, teachers of good things; that they may teach the young women to be sober, to love their husbands, to love their children, to be discreet, chaste, keepers at home, good, obedient to their own husbands, that the word of God be not blasphemed” (Titus 2:1-5, KJV).

The Greek word for “teach” in verse 4 is *sophronizo*, which means to make of a sound mind, teach to be sober, teach self-control. In these verses Paul admonishes that older women should teach the younger women, first of all by being a role model themselves in godly conduct. Paul then lists characteristics that the older women are to teach the younger women:

- To be sober (of a sound mind).
- To love their husbands.
- To love their children.
- To be discreet (self-controlled).
- To be chaste (pure).

- To be keepers at home.
- To be good (kind).
- To be obedient to their own husbands.

Hebrews 11

God's respect for His women servants is evident in the language used throughout Hebrews 11, the "faith chapter."

Verse 11 speaks of Sarah, and verses 13-16, which are a memorial to the faithful follows in context: "These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off were assured of them, embraced them and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth. For those who say such things declare plainly that they seek a homeland. And truly if they had called to mind that country from which they had come out, they would have had opportunity to return. But now they desire a better, that is, a heavenly country. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for He has prepared a city for them."

Rahab is mentioned by name in verse 31. Additionally, verse 35 refers to multiple women of faith, without specifically naming them. This anonymous tribute is found in the moving summary statements of the faith chapter, capped by the words: "of whom the world was not worthy" (verse 38).

These statements underscore the fact that faithfulness to God is the responsibility of every Christian, man and woman alike. Even though God has set the husband as the head of the home, a Christian woman must always put God first in her life. She must uphold God's truth in her life even if her husband may not do what is spiritually right in his life. Many women in God's Church over the years have done so, walking in the tradition of these faithful women of the past.

Summary of Paul's Teachings

Here is a summary of points we have gleaned from Paul's writings about women:

- He writes of God's design of men and women with gender-specific differences to equip them for specialized roles as husbands and wives.
- He shows that God intended for husbands and wives to work together as a team in their respective domains, reflecting the roles He introduced to Adam and Eve.
- He writes of authority that God vested in the man to be the leader in his marriage and family.
- Paul shows that a wife is to bring honor to her husband by supporting his leadership and using her talents to complement her husband's abilities, as they work together to serve God and care for their family.
- Paul instructs the spiritually mature women to teach and encourage younger women in their feminine role. A wife's role includes keeping the home and loving her husband.

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- Paul's writings do not lend support to the radical, unbiblical revisions of women's roles advocated by the modern feminism movement or to male suppression of women in the name of religion.
- Paul builds on the foundation of godly leadership established by Jesus Christ by emphasizing mutual love and respect between husbands and wives, as each fulfills the role God designed.
- Paul shows that the husband's leadership role in marriage, which God established at creation, also offers a norm for the male leadership roles in other areas of life, including the Church.
- Paul taught that men should lead public worship and that women should not teach the congregation in public worship.
- Paul's letters speak of women praying and "prophesying," but they offer no basis or support for women preaching, pastoring or serving as elders.
- Paul's writings reflect the fact that God regards men and women equal in spiritual potential, and He treats them accordingly. One is not superior to the other. Both have equal access to God and His promises.

We have shown that what Paul wrote about women has its unmistakable roots in Jesus' instructions, as well as the rest of the Scriptures. Nothing in his writings contradicts or conflicts with the timeless spiritual principles of the Bible from the beginning.

We now examine another role filled by women in the Church of God—that of deaconess.

Chapter Six—The Role and Office of Deaconess

The English word *deaconess* is not found in some versions of the Bible. Romans 16:1 refers to Phoebe as a “servant of the Church in Cenchrea” (NKJV). The word for “servant” in this verse (*diakonos*) can refer in a general sense to someone “who renders helpful service” (as in Matthew 23:11) or to a specific office, such as “deacon” (Philippians 1:1). Which meaning is intended in Romans 16:1 is not clearly apparent. New Testament translations and reference works are divided on the matter

This verse in the New King James Version reads, “I commend to you Phoebe our sister, who is a servant of the church in Cenchrea.”

The Catholic Bible, Rheims Edition of the New Testament of 1582, says, “Phoebe our sister, who is in the ministry of the church, that is in Cenchrae.” The New English Bible says, “...Phoebe, a fellow-Christian who holds office in the congregation at Cenchrea.” The Revised Standard Version and Moffat translate “servant” as “deaconess.” The margin of the Scofield Bible says, “Deaconess.” *Adam Clarke’s Commentary* says, “Phoebe is here termed a servant, a deaconess of the Church.”³⁰

The Bible contains no record of the creation of the office of a deaconess. If Romans 16:1 indicates that the office existed at this time, we can work from the scriptures that list the responsibilities of a deacon to understand more about a deaconess.

A need for a specific kind of service came early in the New Testament Church (Acts 6:1-6). The elders found that they could not preach, teach and counsel new converts, as well as attend to the coordination of specific and unique physical needs of the rapidly growing Church. Thousands of people who had come to Jerusalem only to observe Pentecost had stayed over to fellowship with and be taught by the Church of God. Housing and food were needed. Certain widows had been “neglected in the daily distribution” (Acts 6:1). The men who were selected for this job were set apart by the laying on of hands, that is, ordained to an office (Acts 6:6), which is generally recognized to be the origin of the office of deacon. This was A.D. 31.

When and Why the Office Was Established

Paul is believed to have written the book of Romans about A.D. 55. If his reference to Phoebe as a *diakonos* should be understood as “a deaconess,” the official title must have been established sometime within that quarter century.

According to *Unger’s Bible Dictionary*, “The need of such helpers arose from the customs and usages of the ancient world, which forbade the intimate association of the sexes in public assemblies.”³¹ In other words, the cultures from which God called Christians typically separated men from the women.

³⁰ *Adam Clarke’s Commentary*, Biblesoft, 1996 notes on Romans 16:1.

³¹ *Unger’s Bible Dictionary*, 1988, “Deaconesses.”

The basis for choosing deacons included their character, reputation and example. The apostles then officially ordained them through prayer and the laying on of hands. Would the method for choosing and appointing the female counterparts (deaconesses) be any different?

The guidelines in Acts 6 for deacons focused on having an “honest report” (good reputation), being “full of the Holy Spirit” (converted and yielded to God’s guidance) and “wisdom” (a record of good choices—presumably including in the type of work they would do for the Church). They were selected and put forth by the membership of the Church in this example. Then they were formally ordained through prayer and the laying on of hands by the apostles of the Church. Only a few men were chosen to serve as deacons, because not all men in the Church had those qualifications and/or God’s calling to the office. It would seem that the same would be true of deaconesses.

1 Timothy 3:11

In 1 Timothy 3:8-13 Paul gives instructions to Timothy in selecting men as deacons. The Greek word for deacon is *diakonos*, the same Greek word used for “servant” in connection with Phoebe. Seemingly breaking into the guidelines for deacons, Paul says, “Even so must their wives” (verse 11, KJV). By “even so,” Paul is saying that the general principles of character and reputation about deacons must be applied to “their wives.” Scholars have debated whether “their wives” refers to the wives of deacons or to “deaconesses.”

Because of the reference to Phoebe in Romans 16:1, it is logical to conclude that “their wives” refers to deaconesses and not to wives of deacons. Also, this view is consistent with the structure of the verses of the same chapter that address the qualifications of an elder. These qualifications did not mention the wife of an elder. Why would Paul give instructions about the wife of a deacon and not about the wife of an elder? The logical answer is that he is speaking of another office altogether in verse 11, that of deaconess.

The Greek word for wives in this verse is *gune*, which, as discussed in the section about Paul’s writings, can mean either a woman or a wife. The meaning has to be determined by the context. In this case, the context does not reveal the intention of the writer. So, the intended meaning could indeed be “the women,” i.e. deaconesses, as the above paragraph concludes.

If *gune* refers to female candidates for deaconship, why isn’t the Greek word for deaconess, *diakonissa*, used by Paul? R.C.H. Lenski points out that “the word *diakonissa* was not yet in use” at the time 1 Timothy was written.³²

Other commentators recognize that “their wives” can mean deaconesses. *Adam Clarke’s Commentary* says, “The original is simply: ...Let the women likewise be grave. Whatever is spoken here becomes women in general; but if the apostle had those termed deaconesses in his

³² *Commentary on the New Testament*, 1998, Vol. 8, notes on 1 Timothy 3:11, p. 598.

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eye, which is quite possible, the words are peculiarly suitable to them.”³³ A footnote for “wives” in 1 Timothy 3:11 in the New English Bible says, “deaconesses.”

In 1 Timothy 3 the guidelines for deacons focused on the man, his habits and values, the condition of his marriage and children, and whether or not he held the “mystery of the faith in a pure conscience.” Since a deaconess is the female counterpart of a deacon, it would seem logical that, in general, the same guidelines would apply to both. As Paul said in 1 Timothy 3:11, “*Even so*” must the women... An additional point Paul added in verse 11, not specifically listed in those for deacons, was the matter of not being slanderers—women who practiced the right use of the tongue.

From a modern perspective, a minor footnote as to why Paul put guidelines for deaconesses in the middle of guidelines for deacons is that husbands and wives might have been ordained as deacon and deaconess at the same time. We have done this in our recent history. This does not mean, though, that husband and wife must both be ordained in every instance, for the guidelines given are for the individual man or woman. Each should be ordained on his or her own merits.

The belief and practice in the Church of God has been that those women who fulfill certain guidelines should be ordained to the office of deaconess through prayer and the laying on of hands of the ministry. Some deacons’ wives have been ordained as deaconesses, while others have not been ordained. It depends upon the qualifications of the individual and the need of the given congregation where she serves.

Duties of a Deaconess

Since deaconesses serve the Church, their duties have spiritual overtones, but they do not perform the service or functions of an elder. The Bible does not give a detailed listing of the duties of a deaconess, but Paul’s brief comment in Romans 16:2 gives us some guidance: “...for indeed she has been a helper of many and of myself also.” The word *helper* is *prostatis* in the Greek, defined by *Thayer’s* as, “1) a woman set over others 2) a female guardian, protectress, patroness, caring for the affairs of others and aiding them with her resources.”³⁴

Prostatis is translated as “succourer” in the King James Version. It may be of help to look at its definition. The root word has these meanings: “aid, help, [lend] assistance, relief; to go to the aid of when in want or distress.” Synonyms are: “help, comfort, sustain, deliver, rescue.” If we think of a deaconess using her natural womanly gift of nurturing to serve the Church, it may also help to consider the meaning of “nurture:” “to feed or rear; to educate or train.”³⁵

Although the Bible doesn’t give a detailed listing of the duties of a deaconess, women have served in many responsibilities in the Church of God in recent decades, contributing valuable and commonly acknowledged female aptitudes of nurturing, caring and helping. The

³³ *Adam Clarke’s Commentary*, Biblesoft, 1998, notes on 1 Timothy 3:11.

³⁴ *The Online Bible Thayer’s Greek Lexicon*, 1993.

³⁵ Synonyms and definition from *Webster’s New Universal Unabridged Dictionary*, 1983.

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following examples can help us understand how other women can serve in the Church, since many of these contributions do not refer exclusively to that of a deaconess:

- Assisting at the baptisms of women.
- Coordinating and assisting the women's foot-washing at Passover.
- Conducting or assisting with women's seminars.
- Assisting the pastor with office work and miscellaneous duties.
- Taking care of women's restrooms and mother's rooms.
- Coordinating the meals at Church socials.
- Managing food banks.
- Coordinating and assisting with cleaning homes of those in need.
- Coordinating used clothing departments in the congregation.
- Helping shut-ins.
- Sending cards of encouragement on behalf of the congregation.
- Teaching Sabbath school (children and youth).
- Presenting special music.
- Volunteering at youth camps.

This is by no means a complete list of the many ways that women have faithfully served. Nor does it imply the necessity of a detailed listing of what is and is not appropriate. Rather it is to encourage spiritually mature women led by the Holy Spirit to continue to serve God in harmony with His design and purpose as outlined by the principles of the Word of God.

Again, the biblical record shows a much different attitude toward women than that evidenced by the history of the founding fathers of traditional Christianity.

Because the wife of an elder also plays a key role in the Church of God, our task force wanted to include a chapter on this subject. Since the Bible speaks to this only in principle, this chapter isn't truly a doctrinal study, so we place it at the end of the doctrinal paper.

Chapter Seven—The Example of an Elder’s Wife

Today’s minister’s wife finds herself in a world that is, in some ways, vastly different from the world in which the Church of God was established. Yet her value and priceless contribution to the Church are as important as ever.

What does the Bible say about an elder’s wife? It doesn’t speak specifically to the subject, but rather covers it in principle or by extension. From our experience, she is often a woman with a clear understanding of God’s way of life, evidenced by how she lives—contrasted in 1 Timothy 2:8-10 with a woman who has no spiritual depth and pursues only self-interest. Her demeanor, her ability to respect all people, her resistance against the pulls of human nature and her loyalty to God and His truth are important qualities that every elder’s wife will strive to attain.

We can discern the service an elder’s wife can provide from what God inspired about an elder’s role. For example, she obviously fills an integral part in her husband’s responsibility to be hospitable. As the primary caregiver of his children, an elder’s wife is also an important contributor in her husband’s ability to rule “his own house well, having his children in submission with all reverence” (1 Timothy 3:2, 4). Or, as Titus puts it, the elder (and therefore, of necessity, his wife) must manage the ministerial home in such a way that it has “faithful children not accused of dissipation [debauchery—incorrigibility, margin] or insubordination” (Titus 1:6).

(The implication is that this refers to young children still living with and subject to their parents. Children reach an age when they are responsible for themselves, especially after leaving home to live on their own.)

Accomplishing all of this requires the wisdom, the home management and the parenting skills of a woman who understands and commits herself to being a godly wife. As such, an elder’s wife is clearly a role model for other women, greatly enriching her husband’s service to the Church.

In 1 Corinthians 9:5 we find a scriptural precedent for an elder’s wife to travel with him in conjunction with his responsibilities. Many members comment on the benefit and value of having the elder’s wife accompany him when he visits them—but it’s very demanding on a woman with young children and/or a job outside the home to do this all the time. Her health, family and other responsibilities contribute to determining how much of the time she is able to visit members with her husband, or to serve the Church in other ways.

(The role of a pastor’s wife is more specific and specialized than that of an elder’s wife. We do not deal with it in detail here, but would like to highly commend those pastors’ wives who dedicate their time and energies to the service of the Church. The congregations their husbands pastor are much the stronger for their contribution, as is the entire Church.)

Many of the biblical qualifications for an elder in the Pastoral Epistles deal with his private life. Here again, the implicit service of the elder’s wife is to help and support him behind

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the scenes, which includes overseeing the home environment and being attentive to her family's needs.

These and other scriptures speak in general terms to the ways elders' wives contribute. How else might they serve? There is no "one size fits all" for the wife of an elder, for different temperaments, different personalities and different life circumstances come into play. These wonderful ladies serve in numerous ways, according to individual ability, health, energy and time.

It's often true that a woman has more energy and time to contribute to the Church after her children leave home. Those whose lives are filled by the role of wife and mother implicit in 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1 should not feel guilty if they do not serve the Church in additional ways. And we also value those individuals who serve the Church as teachers of other women, Sabbath school teachers, organizers of service to the ill and needy, youth camp leaders, helpers of widows, etc.

A list of ways elders' wives serve the modern Church of God would be long indeed. They are a source of encouragement to Church members and their families by their example, care and friendship. Often, members treasure their lending "a listening ear" and offering timely advice. An elder's wife who serves faithfully is a priceless instrument in God's hands. She is a wonderful servant of God, in addition to being her husband's partner.