

One of the distinctives of Christian faith is the absence of a class system.

Galatians 3:28

“There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus.”

But is this really true?

The church has suffered needlessly because of the exclusion of women’s input and wisdom in the church down through the ages.

This is not only but especially true in the pastoral care of women and children.

“I would rather trust a woman’s instinct than a man’s reason.”

Stanley Baldwin
(British prime Minister 1928)

How did the Apostle Paul view women and leadership in the church?

It is often claimed that the Apostle Paul was a misogynist.

Some believe that he was the product of a conservative Jewish culture from which he never fully escaped.

The Pharisee’s view of women was notorious.

- “Better the Torah be burned than to be studied by a woman” (*Babylonian Talmud P. Sotah, 3:4*)
- “He who teaches his daughter the law teaches her sin (*B. Sotah, 20a*)
- “Blessed are you, Lord, our God, ruler of the universe who has not created me a woman.” (*traditional Jewish morning prayer*)
- “The birth of a daughter is a loss” (*Ecclesiasticus 22:3*)

Romans 16

“¹ I commend to you our sister Phoebe, who is a servant of the church which is at Cenchrea; ² that you receive her in the Lord in a manner worthy of the saints, and that you help her in whatever matter she may have need of you; for she herself has also been a helper of many, and of myself as well. ³ Greet Prisca and Aquila, my fellow workers in Christ Jesus,

⁴ who for my life risked their own necks, to whom not only do I give thanks, but also all the churches of the Gentiles; ⁵ also greet the church that is in their house. Greet Epaenetus, my beloved, who is the first convert to Christ from Asia.⁶ Greet Mary, who has worked hard for you. ⁷ Greet Andronicus and Junias, my kinsmen, and my fellow prisoners, who are outstanding among the apostles, who also were in Christ before me.”

Note that there are eight women mentioned in Rom.16:1-16

- 1 **Phoebe**, Cenchrea
- 3 **Prisca** and Aquila
- 5 The church in their house, Epaphroditus
- 6 **Mary**
- 8 Ampliatus,
- 9 Urbanus, Stachys.
- 10 Appelles, the household of Aristobolus.
- 11 Herodion, the household of Narcissus,
- 12 **Tryphaena** and **Tryphosa**, **Persis**
- 13 Rufus,
- 14 Asyncritus, Phlegon, Hermes, Patrobas, Hermas, the brethren with them.
- 15 Philologus and **Julia**, Nereus and **his sister**, and Olympas, and all the saints who are with them.

But did Paul recognize women as leaders in the early church?

Paul does seem to respect distinct roles and responsibilities for different groups.

- **Strong and Weak**
- **Gifts and callings**
- **Leaders and flock**
- **Slave and master**
- **Husband and wife**
- **Men and women in ministry**

Colossians 3:11

“a renewal in which there is no distinction between Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave and freeman, but Christ is all in all.”

This is a parallel text to Gal.2:28 and it comes to us in a context that speaks of role distinctions.

Colossians 3

“¹⁸ Wives, be subject to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord. . . . ²² Slaves, in all things obey those who are your masters on earth,”

Paul seems to recognize gender related roles in the church and home.

1. In 1 Cor.14 and 1 Tim.2 Paul clearly links some ministry roles with gender.

- In modern post enlightenment Western culture the Christian church has been divided on how to interpret these teachings.

2. In Rom.16 it is claimed that Paul gives us examples of women who are recognized as leaders in the early church.

- We will look at these claims today.

“¹ I commend to you our sister Phoebe, who is a **servant (deacon)** of the church which is at Cenchrea; for she herself has also been a **helper (leader or benefactor)** of many, and of myself as well.

- **The deacon was an ordained servant of the early church who managed pastoral care.**
- **The word “helper” used here is found nowhere else in the Bible and means to “care for” or “lead.” It is unlikely that Paul is saying that Phoebe was his leader.**

⁶ Greet Mary, who has worked hard for you. ⁷ Greet Andronicus and **Junias**, my **kinsmen**, who are outstanding among the apostles, who also were in Christ before me.”

- **The word “Junias”, if accented differently could be “Junia”, a female but we cannot be sure.**
- **The word “kinsmen” is masculine suggesting that both “Andronicus” and “Junias” are men.**

“who are outstanding **among** (or according to) the **apostles**, who also were in Christ before me.”

Philippians 2:25

“But I thought it necessary to send to you Epaphroditus, my brother and fellow worker and fellow soldier, who is also your **messenger (apostle)** and minister to my need;”

Putting the issue in context

✓ The real issue may not be **ethical** but **symbolic**.

Gender roles symbolize the Christ / church relationship.

Ephesians 5

“²² Wives, be subject to your own husbands, as to the Lord. ²³ For the husband is the head of the wife, as Christ also is the head of the church, He Himself being the Savior of the body. ²⁴ But as the church is subject to Christ, so also the wives ought to be to their husbands in everything. ²⁵ Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her;. . . ³² This mystery is great; but **I am speaking with reference to Christ and the church.**”

Putting the issue in context

✓ The real issue may not be **ethical** but **symbolic**.

Gender roles symbolize the Christ / church relationship.

The Enlightenment made it all about “Me” and this life.



* making this a Personal rights issue.

* making this a Practical ministry issue.

Putting the issue in context

✓ The real issue may not be **ethical** but **symbolic**.

Gender roles symbolize the Christ / church relationship.

✓ Take your **baptism** seriously because God will.



My baptism made it all about Him.

Putting the issue in context

✓ The real issue may not be **ethical** but **symbolic**.

Gender roles symbolize the Christ / church relationship.

✓ Take your **baptism** seriously because God will.

* Living sacrifices

* A picture of Christ & the church



My baptism made it all about Him.

Contrasting models



The Enlightenment made it all about “Me” and this life

Achieved roles

Democracy



My baptism made it all about Him.

Ascribed roles

Theocracy

The Kingdom is about God not Me.

This world

We should get what we earn.

We should freely choose what we do.

We have rights and demand justice.

We should be able to vote on the rules.

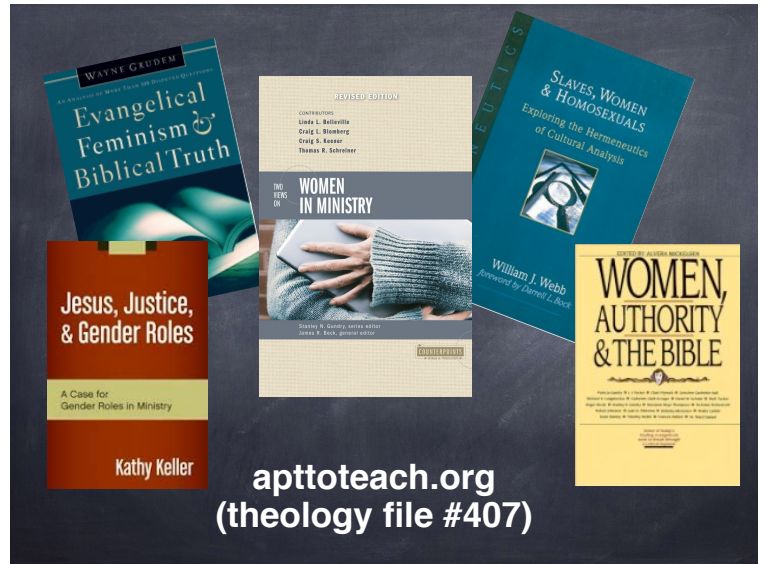
God's Kingdom

Israel, God's Chosen People

Levitical Priests

Matthew 20
Laborers and unfair wages

Sovereign Grace



How should women be recognized in the Body of Christ?

1. *Women and men should be recognized and respected for their gifts, character, spiritual maturity, etc. Paul does this in Rom. 16*

- *Both men's and women's wisdom and perspective should be sought and respected by church leaders.*
- *Both men and women should be equally compensated and publicly recognized for outstanding service.*
- *Jesus and the Apostles do this.*

How should women be recognized in the Body of Christ?

2. *Ministry roles among God's people are not determined by ability alone. Note: Israel, Levites*

- *1 Tim.2:11-15 & 1 Cor.14:33-36 make gender an issue with respect to certain roles in the church.*
- *God is interested in more than efficiency and equality when it comes to roles.*
- *A sense of "calling" must be notarized by the church, Scripture, etc.*

Not everyone who fashions themselves an Apostle of Christ has a right to that role.

2 Corinthians 11

"¹² But what I am doing, I will continue to do, that I may cut off opportunity from those who desire an opportunity to be regarded just as we are in the matter about which they are boasting. ¹³ For such men are false apostles, deceitful workers, **disguising themselves as apostles of Christ.**"

How should women be recognized in the Body of Christ?

3. *We cannot assume that our modern culture's emphasis is the standard. individual autonomy, achievement / rights and position / power, worth*

- *Gender defined roles were and are generally unchallenged in non Western cultures.*
- *The Kingdom of God exists in contrast to human culture on many issues.*
- *The freedom to love is the door to real power in the Kingdom of God.*
- *The completed Canon of Scripture replacing oral tradition is significant in teaching roles.*



As a powerful woman, how do you respond to those who say that women are not free to be ordained in the Catholic Church?

“Power in the Kingdom of God is the freedom to love. I do not need a position or a title to exercise that power.”

How should women be recognized in the Body of Christ?

- 4. All Christians are called to submit (first) to Christ.** All roles start with death to self. Headship Apostleship, Elder, etc. are not exceptions.
- **The role of leading in the church is not a ticket to power and privilege if it is preceded by submission to Christ.**
 - **Any male or female who aspires to leadership in the church apart from death to self in Christ is not to be trusted or allowed.**
 - **Anyone in their right mind who understands the real role of leadership in the Kingdom would be foolish to aspire to it apart from God's Spirit.**

Philippians 2

“³ Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind let each of you regard one another as more important than himself; ⁴ do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others. ⁵ **Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus,** ⁶ who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, ⁷ but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant,”

Correcting authoritarian abuses

Issue	Abuse	Correction
Headship	Men have superior ability, with arbitrary willfulness, and exclusive privileges.	Men are responsible, self-sacrificing servants, taking initiative in leadership.
Submit	Women are not gifted to lead, and should defer to men.	Women like men are to offer loyal support, trusted counsel, and public respect.
Silence	Women are to speak by permission only, and never challenge men.	Women like men are to give respectful, feedback, and make honest inquiry.
Teaching	Women cannot teach men, in public, or teach doctrine.	Women can teach in any venue where a non ordained man can teach.

Pastoral suggestions

- **Men should assume leadership responsibility for the church** - with sensitivity, self-sacrifice, and spiritual maturity.
- **Elders should affirm, equip, and support the whole church** - including women to minister in the whole range of their gifts.
- **Elders should actively seek & heed the input of Godly women** - as part of an advisory board.
- **Qualified women should be teaching** - in all and any capacity other than that of an ordained elder.
- **The church should be careful not to abuse headship / submission teaching** - but embrace it unapologetically.



Lyle Shaller
(church consultant)

“Denominations that have historically ordained women to the highest positions of leadership have experienced an exodus of men, not only from leadership but also from the church.”