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Your sons and daughters will prophesy,  
your young men will see visions,  
your old men will dream dreams.*

*Acts 2:17*



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Church of God Ministries, Inc.  
Congregational Ministries Team  
Jeannette Flynn, Director  
ISBN: 1-59317-0912  
Erin Moss Taylor, Editor  
Arthur M. Kelly, Publication Manager  
Cover Design and Layout by Curtis D. Corzine

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# *Foreword*

The contents of these pages are offered to the church with love, prayer, and hope. This work reflects the combined efforts of a number of individuals who have labored well to make this booklet a reality and place it in your hands. Thirty-two men and women, all called, gifted, and equipped servants and ministers, have given input and thought into what you are beginning to read.

The contents of these pages are meant to engage the reader both intellectually and theologically regarding the call of God to both men and women. Our heritage in the Church of God movement is a powerful testimony to our commitment to hear and boldly obey the word of God! Our theological understanding of the Scriptures embraces not only our sons for ministry—but also our daughters.

Challenges surround us. The demands upon the church today are many: to face the hard issues biblically, to resist giving in to cultural pressure, to ensure that our theological understandings are based on the whole word of God, and that our practices match our theology!

Thanks must go to Merle Strege and Arthur Kelly for their patience, editing gifts, and contributions. Special thanks goes to Erin Moss Taylor without whom this document might never have been completed.

I invite you to read, consider, reflect, and examine the Scriptures as a whole. But most of all, I invite you to allow God to reveal to you how abundant is his grace, how impartial is his love, and how generous is his gifting in the body of Christ. Perhaps you will find yourself, like Peter in Acts 10:9–23, discovering that God's plans may be larger than we've been taught or ever dreamed.

Jeannette Flynn  
Anderson, Indiana  
2004

*Can*  
*Women*  
*preach in*  
*the church?*

The matter of equality in the Church of God (Anderson) has been well defined since its inception. Christ designed his church to be universal throughout the world. It must be unrestricted by human barriers of nationality, race, social or economic status, tradition or sex discrimination. Dual standards for male and female are not part of the gospel. Every person must meet the same requirements to be saved, baptized, sanctified, or healed. Qualifications for service and leadership are synonymous for all. Spiritual gifts are not in two listings, designating some for men and the inferior gifts for women. It is written, "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus" (Gal. 3:28). God is an equal rights employer, granting equal remuneration. God is no respecter of persons. It is worthy of note that a "soul" is neither male nor female.<sup>1</sup>

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# *Introduction*

The eligibility of women for the ordained ministry has been and remains a contentious issue across the length and breadth of the Christian church. In some Christian bodies the office of ordained ministry has always been closed to women. Other groups permit women to be ordained but limit the roles that they may play in the life of the church. Still other church bodies make no distinction between male and female as candidates for the ministry and ordain both men and women equally. The history of the Church of God (Anderson), however, tells a different story—one that calls the movement to recover in teaching and practice the biblical and doctrinal bases for women’s ordination and the placement of women in Church of God pastorates.

In its earliest days the ministry of the Church of God was open to women as well as men. In 1895, 14 percent of pastors in the Church of God were women. In 1925 women served as pastors of one third of all Church of God congregations. Of this very significant level of involvement, the late church historian John W. V. Smith wrote, “On the basis of this and other evidence it is probably safe to say that no other movement either religious or secular in this period, except the suffrage movement itself, had such a high percentage of women leaders whose contribution was so outstanding.”<sup>2</sup> Despite this impressive legacy, after 1930 the number of women pastors and women in the Church of God ministry began a rapid decline; in 2002 only 2 percent of its senior pastors were women. The explanation for this decline is, for the present purpose, not as important as its consequences. Clearly this is an issue of great importance to every woman who is called to ministry, but it is also a matter of crucial importance for the theological and moral life of the church. In 1939 Charles E. Brown, then editor of Church of God publications and a leading theological voice in the church, took notice of the diminishing number of women in the ministry. In response, he observed, that “As a matter of fact, the prevalence of women preachers is a fair measure of the spirituality of a church, country or an age. As the church grows more apostolic and

more deeply spiritual, women preachers and workers abound in the church; as it grows more worldly and cold, the ministry of women is despised and gradually ceases altogether.”<sup>3</sup>

Note Brown’s words carefully. They strongly suggest that the Church of God movement cannot prosper as it would if were women encouraged to answer their divine callings and placed in positions of pastoral service.

When pulpit committees refuse to consider women as pastoral candidates and when their ordinations are delayed despite a valid call to ministry, something is deeply amiss in congregations of the Church of God and the movement as a whole. C. E. Brown was right to question whether the church can prosper spiritually while denying the gifts that God has conferred on some of its members. In this view, the refusal to ordain and call women to the pastoral ministry becomes a burdensome weight that prevents the church from realizing its divinely appointed mission. For the sake of the Church of God movement, then, it behooves us to re-examine biblical teaching and the movement’s historic doctrinal practices concerning this matter so vital to the health of the church and to reaffirm the legitimacy of God’s calling of women to pastoral leadership.

## *The New Testament and the Ordination of Women*

It goes almost without saying that the Bible is the single-most crucial element in the doctrinal practice of the Church of God. *Bible* is a modifier for virtually every important aspect of the movement’s life and thought. As C. W. Naylor wrote, “The Bible is our rule of faith, and Christ alone is Lord. / All we are equal in his sight when we obey his word....”<sup>4</sup> Clearly any doctrinal practice of the church must conform to biblical teaching. Many church bodies, however, do refuse to ordain women on the basis of their reading of Scripture, and it is this practice in other faith communions that has become a larger and larger stum-

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bling block for the ordination of women in the Church of God. If the ordination and call to ministry of women cannot be grounded in the Bible, let the church refuse the practice outright. An examination of key New Testament texts and their interpretation, therefore, is not only appropriate but necessary.

One of the New Testament passages often cited as reason to prohibit women from preaching and, by extension, ordained ministry is 1 Timothy 2:11–12. “Let a woman quietly receive instruction with entire submissiveness. But I do not allow a woman to teach or exercise authority over a man, but to remain quiet” (NASB). This seems to be an unequivocal statement of Pauline instruction concerning women in ministry. How is it, then, that the Church of God, a movement that has historically determined to order its thought and practice by biblical teaching, could ordain women to the ministry and appoint them as pastors over settled congregations? The answer to that question lies in the manner in which the Church of God has interpreted 1 Timothy 2:11–12 and similar passages.

F. G. Smith, third editor of the Gospel Trumpet Publishing Company, read the issue of women in ministry in light of a larger vision of the church. In his view, the New Testament church, which is the standard for the communal life of all Christians, was a family of redeemed men and women whose redemption made them all equal. Members of the church were equal, baptized into one body whether Jew or Gentile, slave or free. This equality extended to the ministry, which was to avoid all semblance of hierarchical arrangement. Also, wrote Smith, the equality of men and women in the church was a feature of Christianity that distinguished it from other world religions. “In heathenism women are regarded as greatly inferior to men and generally have little or no place in religion...”<sup>7</sup> The principle of the equality of men and women extended to official church positions, including both that of deacon and minister. Smith noted several instances from the New Testament in which women were reported to have “prophesied,” explaining the meaning of this term as preaching. It was the prophetess Anna, said Smith, who preached the first sermon in the New

Testament concerning Christ. The Spirit of God was poured out on women at Pentecost “and they prophesied in the presence of wondering multitudes.”<sup>6</sup> Smith cited additional examples to make the point that the New Testament church made no distinction between men and women as qualified for church offices, ministry or otherwise.

Editor Smith understood the Apostle Paul to have practiced church ministry in a manner that treated women and men with full equality. Smith cited Philippians 4:3 (“Help those women which labored with me in the Gospel, with Clement also, with other fellow laborers, whose names are in the book of life”) as evidence that Paul ranked women involved in gospel ministry as equal to Clement and others Paul specifically referred to as ministers. From Smith’s point of view, “this was only carrying out in a practical way the doctrine of the apostle himself, that in Christ Jesus there is ‘neither male nor female.’ ”<sup>7</sup> But how did Smith interpret such passages as 1 Timothy 2:11–12, 1 Corinthians 14:34, or even Ephesians 5:23, the famous “submission” passage?

F. G. Smith regarded these passages as exceptions to the general standard of New Testament equality. For the sake of the spread of the gospel, wrote Smith, on several occasions Paul found it necessary to accommodate his work to prevailing social custom. Such actions were a matter of expediency rather than principle. Paul admits that he had sometimes written things that were “good for the present distress” (1 Cor 7:26), and in Smith’s view such things “were not a standard for all people and ages.”<sup>8</sup> One of the matters to which Paul accommodated himself, declared Smith, was the Greco-Roman culture’s attitude toward women. In a society that regarded women as vastly inferior to men and diminished the role of women in religion, for the sake of the gospel “what course could the apostle take other than what he did take—command the Christian women *there* to ‘keep silence in the churches.’ ”<sup>9</sup> Otto F. Linn, professor of New Testament at Anderson College and Warner Pacific College successively, concurred: “The modern estimation of women is different than two thousand years ago and her participation in public service is offensive to none.”<sup>10</sup>

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Smith dismissed 1 Timothy 2:11–15 as altogether irrelevant to the issue of women’s official position in the church. The Timothy passage, wrote Smith, only concerned proper domestic relations between husbands and wives. Even here, however, Smith strictly limited the force of the passage by eliminating religious matters from its scope. “In spiritual things the husband is not the head of the wife. ‘Christ is the head of the church,’ and ‘the church is subject unto Christ’ (Eph 5:23, 24); therefore in spiritual things the woman’s subjection, first of all, is to Christ, and she ‘ought to obey God rather than men.’”<sup>11</sup> Otto F. Linn shared Smith’s view that early Christianity adapted its message to the social setting of the Greco-Roman world but “enabled [woman] to merit a higher freedom by and honor by adjusting her life to the highest prevailing standards. The change in her status through the centuries has been achieved through beneficent and self-sacrificing service, and her glory is the joy of us all.”<sup>12</sup>

## *New Testament Practice and the Church of God*

F. G. Smith, C. E. Brown, and Otto F. Linn represent the spectrum of biblical and theological positions in the Church of God. They had their differences concerning theological method, the interpretation of certain books of the Bible, and even their understanding of the doctrinal practice of the church. But on the issue of women in ministry these different and in some ways diverging voices spoke as one. They in turn speak for a wide spectrum of Church of God Bible scholars and students who have interpreted the New Testament—including passages that appear most “problematic”—not only as not restricting women from the pastoral office but also endorsing women whose candidacy for ministry is just as legitimate as men in the sight of God. These scholars read Pauline teaching in light of Pauline practice and the principle of equality in the New Testament church. Paul refers to women like Lydia, Phoebe, and Priscilla in ways that strongly suggest that he regarded these women as co-laborers in the work of the gospel. Paul’s practice trumps what Paul might have written, especially, state Church

of God scholars, when the Apostle's statements are properly interpreted. The model for Christian practice is not to be found in the unjust and oppressive social system of antiquity. We ought not to exclude women from the ordained ministry on the basis of improperly interpreted New Testament passages anymore than we would condone slavery in the modern world because the New Testament does not explicitly condemn the practice. Quite to the contrary, the church's model is Jesus her Lord, who entered into that unjust and oppressive system with a redemptive grace that broke the powers of injustice and oppression.

For decades the history of the Church of God was filled with examples of a church practice that conformed to the movement's understanding of New Testament teaching concerning women in ministry. Effective women pastors and teachers have been intrinsic to the church's life and thought from the very beginning. In 1882 Sarah Smith took her own stand for the church and joined forces with D. S. Warner and the Church of God movement. At the age of sixty-one she informed her husband that she had been called to full time gospel work. He supported her decision and sold a cow to support her financially. In 1885 Sarah Smith became a member of D. S. Warner's famed evangelistic company—the first such team in the history of the Church of God. Not incidentally women comprised no fewer than three of the original five members of that team, one that toured ten states and Ontario.

Smith's ministry inspired Mary Cole, who left her denomination to affiliate with the Church of God. Those opposed to Cole's preaching threw eggs at her, doctored the wood burning meeting house stove with red pepper, and on one occasion fired bullets over her head. But she refused to retreat from the call to ministry which she was certain had come from God and went on to years of fruitful ministry.

Following the New Testament practice of calling women to ministry has also been important in the life of ethnic minorities in the Church of God. Rev. Jane Williams was a key figure in the movement's early growth among African-Americans. In 1886 she brought her

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Charleston, South Carolina congregation into the movement. From this church the teaching of the Church of God spread to Georgia, Florida, and North Carolina. For many years Amelia Vasquez taught at La Buena Tierra Institute in Saltillo, Mexico, where she also pastored other congregations. In 1951 Vasquez planted the Hispanic church in Albuquerque, New Mexico.

Women have been involved in some of the most successful congregations of the Church of God. In 1936 the Board of Church Extension and Home Missions sent Esther Kirkpatrick to Washington, D C, for the purpose of holding together a struggling congregation. Rather than content herself with a maintenance ministry, Kirkpatrick persuaded the congregation to relocate. So began National Memorial Church of God, dedicated in 1942. After an initial congregation was begun in Vancouver, Washington, Minna Jarrett was called to its pastorate, led the church through its first move and building program, and laid the spiritual foundation of one of the movement's thriving congregations. Lillie S. McCutcheon pastored First Church of God in Newton Falls, Ohio, from 1945 to 1988. During the span of her forty-three years in ministry, the congregation sent out twenty-eight pastors and associate pastors and eleven missionaries. The Newton Falls church also grew into a strong congregation and ranked for years among the top supporters of the Church of God World Service budget. "Sister Lillie" was also an author and a revival preacher in high demand across the church. The accomplishments of her distinguished pastoral career set a high standard of comparison for any pastor—male or female.

It has also been true of the Church of God that we have placed ordained women ministers in positions where they were responsible for the biblical and professional education of candidates for the ministry. Irene S. Caldwell, Gertrude S. Little, and E. Marie Strong each served Church of God educational institutions as professors of Christian education and Bible, respectively. At Anderson University, the School of Theology, Warner Pacific College, and Warner Southern College these outstanding educators taught future ministers of the church—male and female. Through the decades of the 1950s, '60s,

and into the '70s the ministry of the Church of God was enriched by the teaching of these women who answered God's call to ministry and who were placed in positions of leadership to fulfill that call.

## ***A Step Backward Is Sometimes a Step Forward***

In view of Church of God biblical interpretation and such compelling historical examples, isn't it time that the movement return to the faithful practice of its visionary and dynamic youth? The Church of God that ordained and placed women ministers in such high numbers practiced a discipleship that insisted on the unity of all believers. It was a dynamic church that would sooner follow the Holy Spirit than the limited counsel of human beings.

If the wind of the Spirit blew the church to commitments and practices that disregarded the cultural norms of society that was fine with those early pioneers. Conformity to the dominant culture was no match for conformity to Christ and his leadership of a church that indeed imagined a new way of being the people of God. Their determination and example serve as a challenge to the people of the Church of God in the twenty-first century.

***Will we have the imagination, courage, and grace to follow where they led?***

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## *End Notes*

- <sup>1</sup> Lillie S. McCutcheon, *Centering on Ministry*, (Winter, 1980), pp. 5–6
- <sup>2</sup> John W. V. Smith, *Heralds of a Brighter Day*, (Anderson: Gospel Trumpet Company), p. 126
- <sup>3</sup> Charles E. Brown, “Women Preachers,” *Gospel Trumpet* (May 27, 1939) p. 5
- <sup>4</sup> C. W. Naylor, “The Church’s Jubilee.” *Worship the Lord: Hymnal of the Church of God*, (Anderson: Warner Press, 1989), No. 312
- <sup>5</sup> F. G. Smith, *What the Bible Teaches*, (Anderson: Gospel Trumpet Company, 1914), pp. 219–220
- <sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 221
- <sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 223
- <sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 224. Smith’s emphasis.
- <sup>10</sup> Otto F. Linn, *Studies in the New Testament*, Vol. II, (Anderson: The Warner Press, 1942), p. 69
- <sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>12</sup> Linn, *Studies in the New Testament*, Vol. II, p. 163

*Go* preach my gospel \_\_\_\_\_

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# **A Biblical Basis for Equal Partnership**

## **Women and Men in the Ministry of the Church**

*American Baptist  
Women in Ministry*

Published by permission of  
American Baptist Women in Ministry  
P.O. Box 851  
Valley Forge, PA 19482-0851  
1-800-ABC-3USA  
ext. 2147

10/00 10M

American Baptist Churches USA

# **A Biblical Basis for Equal Partnership—**

## **Women and Men in the Ministry of the Church<sup>1</sup>**

*by David M. Scholer*

### *Introduction*

Women have contributed much to the ministry of the church throughout its history. However, their role in this area has never been free from controversy. Today, most church bodies are discussing the place of women in their ministries. Crucial to these discussions for many of us are the matters of faithful biblical interpretation.

Perhaps a few words should be said about the concept of ministry itself on the basis of the New Testament. Today, we tend to confuse our specific church traditions about ordination with the biblical concept of ministry. The New Testament says relatively little about ordination. It clearly portrays, however, the fact that the early church had a varied and faithful ministry arising from the fact that all of God's people were "gifted" by the Holy Spirit for the purpose of edifying or building up one another (see, for example, 1 Corinthians 12:4–31, 14:1–19; Romans 12:3–8; Ephesians 4:7–16, 1 Peter 4:8–11). Any person could exercise ministry (which means, remember, service) who was called and gifted by God and affirmed by the body of Christ, the Church. Some were set apart in leadership positions and some were assigned specific tasks to accomplish, but the differences among ministries were not distinctions of kind. Eventually, certain types of affirmation were combined with certain functions of ministry to produce our current understanding of ordination.

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Modern debates over the ordination of women often miss the crucial and basic issues of the holistic concept of the ministry of the church reflected in the New Testament. Of course, no person should be ordained or given any responsibilities of ministry within the church because of sex or for the sake of a “point.” On the other hand, we have affirmed in the church that no person, called and gifted by God, should be denied any role of ministry or leadership in the church because of one’s sex.

## *The Basis in Creation*

The basic foundation of the partnership of women and men in God’s creation and in the church and its ministry is given in the opening chapter of Genesis. Here are found two fundamental perspectives which should inform our thinking about persons and their mutual relationships.

First, man (*’adam*), a generic term meaning “the human person,” is created in God’s very own image (Genesis 1:2–27; 5:1–2). This creation in God’s image includes the identification of persons as male and female. This mutuality of women and men carries no suggestion of male headship or female submission.

Second, this mutuality is confirmed that both the man and the woman are together, without distinction, charged with responsibility for all of God’s creation (Genesis 1:26, 28).

This equal partnership between man and woman is also present in the retelling of the creation story in Genesis 2. Here the man is found in need of a companion, but none of the creatures God has created qualify (Genesis 2:18–20). Thus, God differentiates man (*’adam*) into man (*’ish*) and woman (*’ishshah*), persons of separate male and female gender identity. The point of such a provision of companionship is to relate the male and female persons as equals, indicated by the common designations (*’ish/’ishshah*; the same word root) and the common identity of bone and flesh (Genesis 2:23). This is climaxed with the concept of mutuality expressed in the “one flesh” language (Genesis 2:24).

Some have interpreted Genesis 2:23, in which the man (*'ish*) calls the “bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh” woman (*'ishshah*), as an act of naming which demonstrates the headship or authority of man over woman. However, that type of naming does not occur until after the Fall when “Adam *named* his wife Eve...” (Genesis 3:20).

Genesis 2 also indicates that the woman partner with the man will be an appropriate “helper” (Genesis 2:18). The word “helper” (*'ezer*), when used of a person in the Old Testament, always refers to God (in 29 places) apart from one reference to David. The word “helper,” then, is not to be understood as an expression of submission and service *to* man; rather, the woman as helper serves God *with* man.

The woman and man sin together (Genesis 3:1–7). Although it does not show in English translations, the serpent addresses the woman with the plural “you.” Genesis 3:6 states that the woman “...gave some [of the fruit] to her husband, *who was with her*, and he ate it.” The fact that the man was with her (a phrase sometimes omitted from English translations!) indicates that both partners are together involved in the disobedience to God. This is also seen by the fact that it is after both ate that it is said: “*Then* the eyes of *both* of them were opened...” (Genesis 3:7).

The statements of judgment for disobedience (Genesis 3:1–19) are descriptive ones of future realities which involved a supremacy/subject relationship between man and woman. These statements are not creation mandates; rather the relationship of mutuality, partnership and equality portrayed in Genesis 1:1—3:7 is now sadly marred by sin.

## ***The Basis in Jesus’ Ministry***

In the time of Jesus’ ministry women were usually regarded as subordinate and inferior in virtually every area of life. They were to remain at home, to be good wives and mothers and to take no part in public discourse or education Josephus, a Jewish historian, said: “The

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woman, says the Law, is in all things inferior to the man. Let her accordingly be submissive....” It was also said: “Better is the wickedness of a man than a woman who does good” (Sirach).

Jesus, however, by his teachings and actions, affirmed the worth and value of women as persons to be included along with men within God’s love and service.

Jesus challenged “sexual put-downs” of women. In Jesus’ setting, the prerogative of divorce belonged almost exclusively with men, and virtually any reason could be used to justify divorce. Jesus tolerated no such “male chauvinism.” He recalled the “one flesh” concept (Genesis 2:24) of mutual partnership and God’s intention for marriage (Matthew 19:3–9). Although women were held responsible, in Jesus’ time, for all sexual sin, Jesus rejected this “sexism” with his dramatic indictment of men: “... anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart” (Matthew 5:27).

Jesus reached out to women who were rejected. In spite of the laws regarding uncleanness Jesus allowed a woman with a twelve year menstrual problem to touch him and commended her faith (Mark 5:25–34). Jesus permitted a sinful woman to anoint and kiss his feet (Luke 7:36–50) Jesus challenged religious leaders by saying: “I tell you the truth, the tax collectors and prostitutes are entering the kingdom of God ahead of you” (Matthew 21:31). He also offered salvation directly to women who were known as adulteresses (John 4:4–42 and John 8:1–11).

In Jesus’ day responsible teachers were not to teach women. Nevertheless, Jesus taught women and included them in his group of committed disciples. He taught Mary of Bethany and commended her learning to her sister who was carrying out the traditional tasks (Luke 10:38–2). It was to the Samaritan woman that Jesus made his most explicit affirmation that he was the Messiah, and he shared with her his basic mission (John 4:4 42). According to Luke 8:1–3 many women were in Jesus’ band of traveling disciples. These same women

were present at the crucifixion and burial and on resurrection morning (Luke 23:49, 55–56; 24:1).

Jesus affirmed the value of committed discipleship and obedience to God, even over the natural and valued role of mother: “My mother and brothers are those who hear God’s word and put it into practice” (Luke 8:21), and “Blessed rather [than his own mother] are those who hear the word of God and obey it” (Luke 11:28).

The women Jesus included became proclaimers of Jesus as Savior and risen Lord. The Samaritan woman was responsible for evangelizing her town (John 4:39–2). All of the Gospels show that it was Jesus’ women disciples who were the first persons to declare the message of Jesus’ resurrection, central to the gospel in the early church.

Among Jesus’ disciples we know of seventeen men by name: the Twelve, Joseph Justus and Matthias (Acts 1:23), Lazarus, Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea. What is not so often noted is that we know eight women by name from among his circle of devoted disciples: Mary the mother, Mary Magdalene, the “other” Mary, Mary and Martha of Bethany, Joanna, Susanna and Salome.

Jesus’ inclusion of and ministry to and through women within his own life and teaching were a powerful witness to the early church of the partnership of women and men within its membership and ministry.

## ***The Basis in the Early Church***

The Book of Acts shows clearly that women were part of the first church in Jerusalem and were included as the church grew and spread. The group of 120 disciples (Acts 1:15) who waited in Jerusalem for the coming of the Holy Spirit included women (meaning those women previously mentioned in Luke as disciples who followed Jesus) and Mary, the mother of Jesus (Acts 1:14). That women continued as part of the growing church in Jerusalem is attested by Luke’s comments that “more and more men and women believed in the Lord and were

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added to their number” (Acts 5:14) and that Saul, in his persecution of the Jerusalem church, “dragged off men and women and put them in prison” (Acts 8:3; see also 22:4). Women are frequently mentioned in Acts as the account of the spread of the church is given, including the widows in Joppa, Timothy’s mother in Lystra, the women in Philippi, the prominent women who joined the church in Thessalonica, the prominent women in Berea who believed, Damaris in Athens, Priscilla in Corinth, the wives in Tyre, and Philip the evangelist’s four daughters who had the gift of prophecy in Caesarea.

Apart from documenting the widespread presence of women in the early church, the account in Acts presents us with three additional items of importance. First is the fact that when the Holy Spirit came in power and in fulfillment of God’s Word (Joel 2:28–32) both men and women were present (Acts 1–2). Peter interpreted the events of Pentecost to mean that the “last days” of God’s time had come and that God’s Spirit was poured out on both women and men enabling them to prophesy. This foundational role was significant in the early church (see Acts 21:8–9; 1 Corinthians 11:5). Throughout the history of the modern church the events of Acts 2 have been one of the major arguments in favor of women in ministry.

Second, the involvement of women in the establishment of the Philippian church is noteworthy (Acts 16:11–15). Paul begins the church in Philippi, the leading city of its district, with a group of women gathered for prayer outside the city gate (Acts 16:13–15). The “place of prayer” here is probably to be understood as a synagogue. Clearly one of the leaders of this remarkable women’s synagogue was Lydia. She and her home became the center of the new Philippian church (Acts 16:1–15; 16:40). This data is very significant background for the two women of Philippi who worked with Paul in the gospel ministry (Philippians 4:2–3).

Third, Acts gives some indication of the importance of Priscilla (Acts 18:2,18, 26). She, along with her husband Aquila, instructed Apollos who became a noted teacher in the church (Acts 18:26). There has

always been debate over the significance of the fact that Priscilla taught Apollos at home rather than in the church, but it must be recognized that she *did* teach Apollos (see 1 Timothy 2:12).

## ***The Basis in Paul***

Galatians 3:28, like Acts 2, has been cited for hundreds of years as a basis for women in ministry. Detractors of women in ministry often argue that Galatians 3:28 refers *only* to the spiritual reality of equal access to God through faith in Christ Jesus. The text does refer to this, but it clearly encompasses other realities as well. There are three traditional pairings, and they reflect the three basic social divides of hostility within the first century A.D. in the Roman Empire. Paul's declaration would have had no less actual social impact than an American preacher's statement in the 1950s that "in Christ Jesus there is neither Black nor White" would have had.

Further, the conflict of Paul and Peter recorded in Galatians 2:11–14 demonstrates that the declaration of "neither Jew nor Greek" had social implications in the life of the church. Paul's letter to Philemon has similar implications for "neither slave nor free" in asking Philemon to accept Onesimus as a *dear brother* in the Lord just *like Paul* (Philemon 15–17)! Paul's declaration about male and female had implications, too, for the life of the church. The point is not the obliteration of God's created differences between male and female, but is that sexual differentiation does not determine the participation in Christ's church for persons created in the image of God.

Paul also notes the mutuality of men and women in Christ in two striking passages in 1 Corinthians. In 1 Corinthians 7:3–5 Paul makes it clear that sexual relations between a husband and wife are matters of mutuality and equality in respect and in rights. Such a position grew out of the love and inclusiveness of Christ and was directly counter to the prevailing Jewish and pagan opinion in the Roman Empire that the husband had all the sexual rights over his wife. In 1 Corinthians

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11:11–12 Paul includes a strong and explicit assertion of the mutuality of men and women lest his discussion about head coverings be misunderstood as against women’s participation.

The discussion of head coverings for women in 1 Corinthians 11:2–16 clearly implies and assumes that women, as well as men, engage in prayer and prophecy (1 Corinthians 11:5). The participation in prophecy is particularly significant in view of its importance in the church. According to Paul prophecy is the “highest” gift in the church because it is the means of edification, encouragement and comfort in the church (1 Corinthians 14:3). Such edification is the purpose of the church’s life together and constitutes, under the Holy Spirit, the exercise of authority and teaching in the church. Thus, Paul concludes the first part of his discussion on head coverings (1 Corinthians 11:2–10) by stating that women ought to have *authority* on their heads. First Corinthians 11:10 is rarely translated accurately in English (most often one finds “a sign of authority” or “veil”), but Paul asserts that women have authority, using his normal word which always means the active exercise of authority (and never the passive reception of it).

Paul’s letters also mention twelve women by name who were co-workers with him in the gospel ministry. This is the most often neglected evidence from the New Testament relevant to the participation women in ministry.

Three women are known as leaders of house churches (the only type of church there was in the first century!): Chloe (1 Corinthians 1:11), Nympha (Colossians 4:15) and Apphia (Philemon 2). To this group we can add Lydia, a Pauline house church leader known from Acts 16.

Paul stated that four women—Mary, Tryphena, Tryphosa and Persis (Romans 16:6, 12) had worked very hard in the Lord. The Greek word translated “work very hard” was used regularly by Paul to refer to the special work of the gospel ministry, including his own apostolic ministry (1 Corinthians 4:12; 15:10; Galatians 4:11; Philippians 2:16; Colossians 1:29; 1 Timothy 4:10; see also Acts 20:35) as well as the

work of others in the ministry, leaders and persons of authority in each case (1 Corinthians 16:15–16; 1 Thessalonians 5:12; 1 Timothy 5:17). Thus, for Paul, the term, “work very hard” was not a casual term referring to menial tasks.

In Romans 16:3–4 Paul greeted Priscilla and Aquila. This husband and wife team is mentioned six times elsewhere in the New Testament. It is significant that Priscilla is usually mentioned first, since the cultural pattern would be to name the husband first. This may indicate that Priscilla was the more important or visible leader and may suggest that she had a higher social status and/or more wealth than Aquila. Paul indicated that he and all the Gentile churches were indebted to both of them. Paul designated Priscilla and her husband Aquila “fellow workers in Christ Jesus,” a term used regularly for other leaders in the gospel ministry: Urbanus (Romans 16:9), Timothy (Romans 16:21), Titus (2 Corinthians 8:23), Epaphroditus (Philippians 2:25), Clement (Philippians 4:3), Philemon (Philemon 1), Demas and Luke (Philemon 24), Apollos and himself (1 Corinthians 3:9), and several others (Colossians 4:11).

In Philippians 4:2–3 Paul mentioned two women, Euodia and Syntyche, whom he also classed “along with Clement and the rest of my fellow workers” and noted that these two women fellow workers “contended at my side in the cause of the gospel,” an expression similar to the “worked very hard in the Lord” phrase applied to the four women noted in Romans 16. In view of Acts 16:11–40 it is not surprising that two such women leaders emerged in the Philippian church.

Phoebe, usually assumed to have been the one to deliver Paul’s letter to Rome, is warmly commended by Paul to the Roman church (Romans 16:1–2). Phoebe is designated as “a servant of the church in Cenchrea.” Although some have thought the word “servant” here meant “deacon” (or “deaconess”), that is most unlikely since the other New Testament texts which refer to the office of deacon mention the office of bishop in immediate conjunction with it (Philippians 1:1, 1

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Timothy 3:8, 12). Paul regularly used this term “servant” to refer to persons clearly understood to be ministers of the gospel: Christ (Romans 15:8); Apollos (1 Corinthians 3:5); Epaphras (Colossians 1:7); Timothy (1 Timothy 4:6); Tychicus (Ephesians 6:21; Colossians 4:7); himself (1 Corinthians 3:5; Ephesians 3:7; Colossians 1:23, 25) and generally (2 Corinthians 3:6; 6:4; 11:15, 23). Thus, Phoebe should be understood as well as the minister (leader/preacher/teacher) of the church in Cenchrea.

Paul identified Andronicus and Junias as “outstanding among the apostles” (Romans 16:7), an expression which includes them within the apostolic circle. Junias is a male name in English translations, but there is no evidence that such a male name existed in the first century A.D. Junia, a female name was common, however. The Greek grammar of the sentence in Romans 16:7 means that the male and the female forms of this name would be spelled identically. Thus, one has to decide—on the basis of other evidence—whether this person is a woman (Junia) or a man (Junias). Since Junia is the name attested in the first century and since the great church father and commentator on Paul in the fourth century, John Chrysostom (no friend of women in ministry) understood the reference to be to a woman Junia, we ought to read it that way as well. In fact, it was not until the thirteenth century that she was changed to Junias!

These thirteen women surveyed here (Lydia, Chloe, Nympha, Apphia, Mary, Persis, Tryphaena, Tryphosa, Priscilla, Euodia, Syntyche, Phoebe and Junia) provide clear evidence from Paul that women did participate in the gospel ministry as did men. Paul’s common terminology made no distinctions in roles or functions between men and women in ministry.

## ***1 Corinthians 14:34–35***

1 Corinthians 14:34–35 is one of the two texts from the New Testament often used as a major argument against preaching, teaching

and leadership ministries for women in the church. If one believes that the Bible supports women in ministry, then an adequate, biblical explanation must be offered for this apparent prohibition.

It should be recalled that Paul has already indicated in this letter—1 Corinthians—that women did participate in prayer and prophecy with authority in the church (1 Corinthians 11:5, 10; 14:3–5). This fact alone shows that 1 Corinthians 14:34–35 cannot be a general, absolute and timeless prohibition on women speaking in church.

It was common at one time (and a few would still argue this position) to “dismiss” the evidence of 1 Corinthians 11:5, 10. It was suggested that 1 Corinthians 11:2–16 did not refer to a meeting of the church but only to a private non-church gathering. The whole context of 1 Corinthians 11:2—14:40, the argument of 1 Corinthians 11:16 and the parallelism between 1 Corinthians 11:2 and 11:17 make such an idea most untenable. Some have even suggested that 1 Corinthians 11:5 was only hypothetical, but such an approach is clearly an argument of desperation.

The silence enjoined in 1 Corinthians 14:34–35 must be a specific, limited silence. Numerous suggestions have been offered, but only the major alternatives can be reviewed here (some scholars, with slight evidence, have also suggested either that 1 Corinthians 14:34–35 was not written by Paul but was inserted by a copyist or that it is a quotation from Paul’s opponents in Corinth which Paul denounces in 1 Corinthians 14:36). One view is that the speaking prohibited here is mere babbling. There is, however, nothing specific in the context to support this meaning of “speak” and such nonsense would certainly have been prohibited to all persons in the worship Paul described. Another view suggests that the speaking prohibited is speaking in tongues (glossolalia) since that is frequently mentioned in the preceding context (1 Corinthians 14). However, glossolalia is always referred to as “tongues” or “speaking in tongues” and never simply as speaking.

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Probably the most popular view today among those who oppose women speaking with authority in the church is to identify the speaking prohibited with the judgment of the prophets mentioned in 1 Corinthians 14:29. Thus, it is argued that women may prophesy (1 Corinthians 11:5) but may not judge or evaluate prophecy. The evaluation of prophecy is seen as the truly authoritative level of speech in the church from which women are to be excluded. This view has two major difficulties. First, the word “speak” in 1 Corinthians 14:34 has no implication within the word itself or in its immediate context (14:34–35) to support identifying it with the concept of prophetic evaluation. Second, the idea of two levels of speech in the church—prophecy and the judgment of prophecy—with the understanding that one is higher than the other and is for men only has no clear or implied support elsewhere in Paul. In fact, Paul’s own definition and defense of prophecy (1 Corinthians 14:1–25) implies directly that prophecy itself is authoritative speech of the highest level in the church.

The view which seems best to me is to understand the speaking prohibited here to women to refer only to disruptive questions which wives (usually uneducated in the culture of Paul’s time) were asking their husbands. This corresponds precisely with the resolution Paul offers (1 Corinthians 14:35): “If they want to inquire about something, they should ask their *own* husbands at home.” Such disruptive questioning was considered a disgrace in Paul’s day in which it was widely believed that it was morally indiscreet for any wife to say anything on any subject in public. This view of disruptive questioning also fits well the specific context (1 Corinthians 14:26–40) in which Paul is concerned about appropriateness and order which permit genuine edification (note that 1 Corinthians 14:26 expects *everyone* to participate). Thus, there are actually three injunctions to silence (1 Corinthians 14:28, 30, 34), although many Bible translations use the term “silent” only in 1 Corinthians 14:34.

## 1 Timothy 2:8–15

1 Timothy 2:8–15 is the paragraph in the New Testament which provides the injunctions (2:11–12) most often cited as conclusive by those who oppose preaching, teaching and leadership ministries for women in the church. It is inappropriate, however, to isolate verses 11–12 from the immediate context of 1 Timothy 2:8–15. If any of the paragraph is perceived as culturally bound (as 2:8–10 often is) or as especially difficult in terms of Pauline theology (as 2:15 often is), it must be realized that these same issues must be confronted in understanding 2:11–14.

It should also be observed that 1 Timothy 2:11–12 is a general prohibition on teaching and authority exercised by women. It is not directed to only a certain level of persons (such as “ordained” in distinction from “non-ordained” or “pastors” as distinct from “missionaries”). Further, it is not limited to only a certain style of teaching (“preaching” as distinct from “sharing,” seminary teaching or writing theological books). In other words, if 1 Timothy 2:11–12 were a trans-cultural, absolute prohibition on women teaching and exercising authority in the church, then it prohibits *all* such activity.

The word in verses 11 and 12 often translated as “in quietness” (11) and “silent” (12) is identical in Greek. The same term is used by Paul in 2 Thessalonians 3:12 which the NIV translates “settle down.” The point is that this term, which is often assumed to mean only “verbal silence,” is better understood as an indication of proper order or acceptance of normal practice. The term translated “to have authority” (*authentein*) occurs only here in the New Testament and was rarely used in the Greek language. It is not the usual word for positive, active authority. Rather, it is a negative term which refers to the usurpation and abuse of authority. Thus, the prohibition (2:11–12) is against some abusive activity, but not against the appropriate exercise of teaching and authority in the church. The clue to the abuse implied is found within the heretical activity combatted in 1–2 Timothy. The heretics

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evidently had a deviant approach to sexuality (1 Timothy 4:3; 5:11–15) and a particular focus on deluding women, who were generally uneducated (2 Timothy 3:6–7).

The injunctions are supported with selective Genesis arguments (2:13–14), using Genesis 2 rather than Genesis 1 (2:13) and the fact of Eve’s deception (2:14, see the use of this in 2 Corinthians 11:3 for male heretics). The function of the Genesis argument is parallel to its use in 1 Corinthians 11:7–9 where it is employed to argue that women must have their heads covered in prayer and prophecy. In both cases a scriptural argument is employed to buttress a localized, limited instruction. The concluding word of hope for women (2:15) is an affirmation of the role of bearing and nurturing children, a role considered as the only appropriate one by many in the culture who believed women incapable of other roles as well. This conclusion (2:15) is parallel in thrust to 1 Timothy 5:3–16 and Titus 2:3–5, both of which are concerned with specific cultural expectations.

## *Consistency and Balance*

Two broad and basic issues of responsible biblical interpretation should concern us in this, indeed in any, issue—balance and consistency. In terms of balance it is the total witness of Scripture which must inform our thought and action. In terms of consistency it is crucial to approach our understanding of all biblical texts in the same way in order to offset as much as possible our blind spots and biases.

Opposition to women in ministry has often been mounted virtually on the basis of one Pauline text—1 Timothy 2:11–12. Whatever that difficult text and context mean it must be put in balance with all other biblical texts which bear on the same issue. This shows, in my judgment, that the 1 Timothy text does, in fact, speak to a limited situation.

Further in regard to balance one must struggle with starting points. For example, on the matter of the “eternal security” of believers, does

one read Hebrews 6:4–6 “through” Romans 8:28–39, or should the Romans text be read “through” the one from Hebrews? It has often been assumed without question that 1 Timothy 2:11–12 is the “control” (= authoritative) text through which all other New Testament data on women in ministry must be challenged. It is more plausible, in my judgment, to approach 1 Timothy 2:8–15 through the accumulated witness of all the other Pauline passages on women in the church.

Consistency in interpretation is notoriously difficult. Yet, to be pushed here may help us considerably in the attempt “to hear” the Scriptures. Why is it that so many persons insist that 1 Timothy 2:11–12 is a transcultural, absolutely normative text, but at the same time do not approach other texts in 1 Timothy with the same passion? Pressed in the same way 1 Timothy 3:2 would rule out all single men from ministry, and 1 Timothy 5:3–16 would require churches to establish “orders of widows” for those sixty and older and would require that all widows fifty-nine and under remarry and that for the reason of their sensual desires and idleness.

Most of us do not literally exchange the kiss of peace or holy kiss even though the New Testament commands it five times (Romans 16:16; 1 Corinthians 16:20; 2 Corinthians 13:12; 1 Thessalonians 5:26; 1 Peter 5:14). Most of us do not consider foot washing a necessity even though Jesus explicitly commanded it (John 13:14–15). Obviously, our inherited traditions and/or our sense of the cultural contexts of certain texts strongly inform our interpretations.

Finally, consistency and balance mean that we cannot impose on texts understandings that are not there. We cannot devalue the authority Jesus gave to his followers or the authority of prophecy in the Corinthian church just because they do not have the same structural pattern as that of 1 Timothy. We cannot divide the injunction of 1 Timothy 2: 11–12 into two levels of authority imposed from our context so that women can be included in some activities but excluded from the “highest” levels.

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In conclusion, it is my deepest conviction that the full evidence of scripture and an understanding of balance and consistency in interpretation mean that we must rethink some of our traditions and reaffirm with clarity and conviction the biblical basis for the full participation of women in the ministries of the church. The underlying biblical theology of a “new creation in Christ” in which there is “neither male and female” is a powerful affirmation of the commitment to equality in the Gospel, the Church and all of its ministries. Jesus’ inclusion of women among his disciples and witnesses, the coming of the Holy Spirit on both sons and daughters, and Paul’s inclusion of women in his circle of co-workers in the ministry all affirm the full and equal participation of both women and men in all the ministries of the Gospel.

*The Reverend Dr. David M. Scholer is Professor of New Testament at Fuller Theological Seminary in Pasadena, California. He is an ordained ABC/USA minister and has taught previously at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, Northern Baptist Theological Seminary and North Park College and Theological Seminary.*

<sup>1</sup> This is an abbreviated form of a series of articles published as “Women in Ministry,” Covenant Companion 72:21 (December 1 1983), 8–9; 72:22 (December 15, 1983), 14–15; 73:1 (January 1, 1984), 12–13; 73:2 (February 1984), 12–15; copyright 1983 and 1984 by the Covenant Press, 3200 West Foster Avenue, Chicago, IL 60625. This pamphlet was slightly revised in July 1996/January 1997.

## ***Recommended Resources for Further Study***

### ***Web Sites:***

Christians for Biblical Equality. Minneapolis, MN: Christians for Biblical Equality. 1996-2004. <<http://www.cbeinternational.org>>. An excellent resource from an organization based upon the teaching of scripture in Galatians 3:28.

Wesleyan/Holiness Women Clergy. Grantham, PA: Messiah College. 2002. <<http://www.messiah.edu/whwc>> This outstanding Web site is loaded with useful resources. It provides access to many articles regarding women in ministry.

Women in Ministry. Anderson, IN: Church of God Ministries. 2004. <<http://www.chog.org/wim>> This page is a section of the Church of God Web site and provides information and resources regarding women in ministry in the Church of God.

### ***Video:***

*Go Preach My Gospel: Women in Ministry*. 2003. [video] Producer Don Boggs. Anderson, IN: Covenant Productions. A video released by Congregational Ministries highlighting the history and theology of women in ministry in the Church of God. The video is approximately 15 minutes in length, serves as an excellent educational piece, and is an excellent tool for fostering discussion of this theological issue.

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## ***Books:***

Bilezikian, Gilbert. *Beyond Sex Roles: What the Bible Says About a Woman's Place in Church and Family*. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House. 1985.

An outstanding resource, Bilezikian elucidates helpful and cogent biblical arguments concerning women's roles.

Clouse, Bonnidell and Robert G. *Women in Ministry: Four Views*. Downers Grove, Illinois: Intervarsity Press. 1989.

This excellent resource provides four different perspectives from evangelicals regarding women in ministry and leadership.

Cowles, C.S. *A Woman's Place? Leadership in the Church*. Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City. 1993.

An outstanding resource, Cowles has written one of the clearest, most comprehensive, and best-reasoned arguments for women in ministry available today.

Huber, Randal. *Called, Equipped and No Place to Go: Women Pastors and the Church*. Anderson, IN: Warner Press. 2002.

This book is a comprehensive argument for women pastors. It explores relevant biblical texts and answers common objections against women in ministry. It includes recent research on placement issues in the Church of God.

Leonard, Juanita Evans. *Called to Minister: Empowered to Serve*. Anderson, IN: Warner Press. 1989.

This book of essays written by Church of God leaders is a must read for all who are interested in the subject of women in ministry in the Church of God. It comprehensively covers biblical, historical, ethical and statistical issues that impact the issue of women in ministry in the Church of God.

Mickelsen, Alvera. *Women, Authority & the Bible*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press. 1984.

A helpful resource, this collection of essays includes a collection of twenty-one Christian scholars' arguments for and against women in ministry.

Sumner, Sarah. *Men and Women in the Church*. Downer's Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003.

An excellent source on gender in the Bible, Sumner addresses many problematic passages of scripture and invites the reader to join her in wrestling with the text.

## ***Other Resources:***

Huber, Randy and John Stanley. *Reclaiming the Wesleyan/Holiness Heritage of Women Clergy: Sermons, A Case Study and Resources*. Grantham, PA: Wesleyan/Holiness Women Clergy c/o of Messiah College. 1999.

Available online at: <http://www.messiah.edu/whwc/booklets/reclaiming.html>

This booklet contains eleven sermons on women in ministry, a case study for change at the local level, and selected resources.

Pearson, Sharon Clark. "Women in Ministry: A Biblical Vision." *Wesleyan Theological Journal*. Volume 31, Number 1, Spring. (141-170). 1996.

Available online at:

<http://wesley.nnu.edu/WesleyanTheology/theojrnl/31-35/31-1-07.htm>

Pearson writes an outstanding and scholarly summary of New Testament based defenses of women in ministry.

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*There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.*  
—Galatians 3:28 (NIV)

Women have contributed much to the ministry of the church throughout its history. However, their role in this area has never been free from controversy. Today, most church bodies are discussing the place of women in their ministries. From its inception, women have been a vital part of the Church of God (Anderson, IN). The movement's historical commitment to follow the instructions of scripture calls the church to recover in teaching and practice the biblical and doctrinal bases for women's ordination and the placement of women in Church of God pastorates. This book introduces two valuable articles that address the role of women in ministry by providing a historical, theological, and biblical perspective.

The Women in Ministry Task Force was created in May of 2001 with a commitment to encourage those within the Church of God to reclaim an historical, biblical, and theological practice that affirms the call and placement of women as pastors and leaders in the church.



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Printed in the USA  
D4713  
ISBN: 1-59317-0912