

What Does the Bible Say About Women's Roles in the Church?

Few subjects stir up more feeling today than the place of women in the church. The world has strong opinions about it, and it presses the church to fall in line. But the question for a Christian is not what the culture prefers. It is what God has appointed. The Bible speaks of women with great honor, and it gives them real and weighty work to do. It also assigns the leading of the assembly to men. These belong together, and we will misjudge the whole matter if we pull them apart. Let us take up the Scriptures and read them honestly, whatever we may have hoped they would say.

Equal in Worth Before God

Begin where the Bible begins, with the worth of the woman. She is not a lesser creature. God *"created man in his own image... male and female created he them"* ([Genesis 1:27](#)). Man and woman alike bear the image of God. In the matter of salvation there is no difference at all. Paul wrote, *"There is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus"* ([Galatians 3:28](#)). A woman is saved by the same gospel, washed in the same blood, and promised the same heaven as any man.

Peter calls husband and wife *"heirs together of the grace of life"* ([1 Peter 3:7](#)). Together. Whatever the Bible says about different roles, it never says one soul is worth more than another. Any teaching that treats a woman as less than a full heir of God's grace has already left the Scriptures behind.

Different Roles by God's Design

Equal worth does not mean identical roles. God, who made men and women equal in value, gave them different places in His arrangement. Paul stated the order plainly, *"the head of every man is Christ; and the head of the woman is the man; and the head of Christ is God"* ([1 Corinthians 11:3](#)). Notice where that line ends. The head of Christ is God. The Son submits to the Father, and no one imagines that this makes the Son inferior. Submission is not a measure of worth. It is a matter of order, and God Himself set it.

And He set it at the beginning, not in some passing custom. When Paul explained why the woman is not to take the lead in the assembly, he did not point to the manners of his day. He pointed to

creation, *"For Adam was first formed, then Eve"* ([1 Timothy 2:13](#)). Because the reason reaches back to the garden, the arrangement is not ours to revise when the times change.

Leadership in the Assembly Is Given to Men

When the church comes together, the public leading falls to men. Paul wrote, *"Let the woman learn in silence with all subjection. But I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man, but to be in silence"* ([1 Timothy 2:11-12](#)). To another church he wrote, *"Let your women keep silence in the churches: for it is not permitted unto them to speak"*

([1 Corinthians 14:34](#)). This is not a low view of a woman's understanding. It is a limit on one thing, the teaching and exercising of authority over men in the assembly. The same letters that say this also expect women to learn, to pray, and to serve.

So the man is to take the lead in public worship. *"I will therefore that men pray every where, lifting up holy hands"* ([1 Timothy 2:8](#)). And the oversight of the congregation is given to qualified men. An elder must be *"the husband of one wife"* ([1 Timothy 3:2](#); [Titus 1:6](#)), a man who leads his own house well before he is trusted to lead the family of God. None of this is an insult to women. It is the order God appointed, and a faithful church keeps it because God said so, not because men prefer it.

The Honored Work God Gives Women

If a woman is not to lead the assembly, what is she to do? A great deal, and none of it small. The Bible hands her work the church cannot do without.

She teaches. The older women are to be *"teachers of good things"*, training the younger women to love their husbands, to be discreet and chaste, and to keep their homes ([Titus 2:3-5](#)). When the preacher Apollos needed correcting, Priscilla, together with her husband, helped to expound to him *"the way of God more perfectly"* ([Acts 18:26](#)). A woman may teach much, in its proper place.

She shapes the next generation in the faith. Paul reminded Timothy of the faith *"which dwelt first in thy grandmother Lois, and thy mother Eunice"* ([2 Timothy 1:5](#)), a faith that lived in them before it ever lived in him, and from his earliest years his mother had taught him the holy Scriptures ([2 Timothy 3:15](#)). Much of what the church will be in twenty years is being formed right now at the knee of a faithful woman.

She serves. Dorcas was *"full of good works and almsdeeds"* ([Acts 9:36](#)), and the church wept when she died. Paul commended Phebe, *"a servant of the church"*, who had been *"a succourer of many"* ([Romans 16:1-2](#)). The honored widow is the one *"well reported of for good works"* ([1 Timothy 5:10](#)). This is not the life of a bystander. It is the work of a saint, and God keeps account of it.

The Beauty God Prizes

The world tells a woman her worth is in how she looks and how loudly she is heard. God tells her something better. Peter wrote that her adorning should not be merely the outward kind, *"But let it be the hidden man of the heart, in that which is not corruptible, even the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit, which is in the sight of God of great price"* (1 Peter 3:4). Of great price. God treasures a quiet and faithful spirit more than the loud world ever could.

Paul said the same, that women should adorn themselves *"in modest apparel, with shamefacedness and sobriety"*, and above all *"with good works"* (1 Timothy 2:9-10). The Christian woman is not drab, and she is not shut away. She is free, honored, and busy with work that outlasts her, and she carries herself in a way that points to God rather than to herself.

Taken Whole

So here is what the Bible says, taken whole. A woman is equal to a man in worth, in salvation, and in hope. She is given different work, and the leading of the assembly is placed on men. Both halves are God's, and we are not free to keep one and throw out the other.

This calls for humility on every side. The man who leads must remember that headship is a weight to carry in service, not a throne to sit on, and he answers to God for how he carries it. The woman is asked to trust that the order God set is good, even where the world mocks it, and to pour herself into work that heaven counts precious. And all of us are asked the same question we are asked about every other matter. Not what we prefer, but what God said, and whether we will submit to it. A church that loves God will not be ashamed of the place He gave to women. It will honor it, because He did.

Every Scripture reference in this study links to the King James Version. Open it and read for yourself.