

Seek The Old Paths

"Stand ye in the ways, and see, and ask for the old paths...and walk therein" (Jeremiah 6:16)

Vol. 2 No. 3

December 1990

The Role And Work Of Women In The Church

Robert R. Taylor, Jr.

This is one of the hotly debated questions of our day. For a long time denominations paid no attention to what Paul wrote relative to this crucial topic and now some of our own brethren have joined their numbers. They are ready to make prayer leaders, song leaders, teachers of mixed classes, preachers in the pulpits, officiants at the Lord's Table, servers of the bread and fruit of the vine and even elders and deacons of women.

A CLEAR EXAMPLE OF WHAT WE ARE TALKING ABOUT

A lady in a Texas congregation some time back wrote an article in their church bulletin on what is the role or work of women in the church. She said that it was the same as it was for men. If she is right in this, which of course

she is not, then the eldership would be open to her, she could serve as deacon, the pulpit would not be denied her. She could officiate at the Lord's Supper, she could serve the bread and fruit of the vine to the worshippers on the Lord's Day, she could teach both men and women in mixed Bible classes, she could direct the singing, she could lead prayers at any and all our services. If what this woman advocated is true, Paul might as well have saved his literary breath when he wrote such passages as I Timothy 2:11,12. It was wasted effort on his part if her allegations are accurate.

INTRODUCTION AND INTENT

In the early chapters of Acts both men and women were responsive to the gospel demands of the budding move-

ment of Christianity. On occasion women were the first in a community to obey the gospel. Such was true at Philippi in Macedonia. Luke, in Acts 16:13-15, tells of the conversion of Lydia and her household of women. Every indication of this trio of verses is that her household consisted of women and women only. Rather significantly, it was in an earnest epistle directed to the Philippian church that Paul paid stately tribute to the work that Christian women had supplied the Lord's Cause at Philippi. He wrote that aid should be given "*those women which labored with me in the gospel*" (Philippians 4:3). The work of dedicated women to the Lord's Cause has defied any type of accurate calculation. Only eternity will give an accurate appraisal of the great good godly women have done in nearly two thousand years of Christianity upon earth.

It shall be my stated purpose in this study to note what her work is and what her work is not. The work of women in the church is one of the burning issues of the day. A number of congregations are already experiencing serious difficulties in this very realm of Biblical teaching.

It seems wise that we approach this subject both negatively and positively, both in principle and in personification. A majestic type of motivation for every Christian woman lies in a royal recognition of what Deity and Deity's Book have done for women in general and Christian women in particular. We shall therefore close upon the noble note of some inspirational examples of women at work in their God ordained (appointed) spheres.

What happened at Jubilee in Nashville in the summer of 1989 makes this series of studies all the more germane.

LIMITATIONS OF HER WORK

A NEGATIVE LOOK

No surprise should be expressed at the placement of limitations upon women. All

the servants of Jehovah God, including his only begotten Son, have had some limitations placed upon them. Jesus in John 6:38 declared, "*For I came down from heaven, not to do mine own will, but the will of him that sent me.*" It was not the Lord's purpose to please himself but to receive the "*reproaches of them that reproached*" God (Romans 15:3). But submission to God did not make Jesus a second-rate Lord and a Saviour of little or no value.

Hebrew prophets of the Old Testament and apostles, prophets and evangelists of the New Testament were under strict submission to the Father's will. They could not stop short of the Father's will; they were prohibited in going beyond it. In I Corinthians 11:23 and 15:3 Paul delivered to the Corinthians only what he had received from Heaven. However, such crystal clear limitations did not make them second-rate servants or men of but little worth or value. Such really enhanced their intrinsic value in God's kingdom.

Paul wrote a very germane declaration in I Corinthians 11:3. It reads in our beloved Bible, "*But I would have you know, that the head of every man is Christ; and the head of the woman is the man; and the head of Christ is God.*" In the apostolic ladder of proper authority Paul has Christ in submission to God, man in submission to Christ and woman in submission to man. But such submission does not make Christ a second-rate member of the Timeless Trinity. Man is not an inferior creature due to his submission to Christ. In fact, he comes into his own right with such submission! Then why should any blasphemously assert that woman is deeply inferior and second-rate because of her commanded submission to man? Biblically speaking, submission and inferiority are not synonymous terms at all.

The woman cannot be an elder for very obvious reasons. In I Timothy 3:1 Paul refers to a MAN as the one who desires the office of a bishop. He used the masculine

pronoun HE also in this verse. An elder is to be the HUSBAND of one wife and to have HIS children in subjection with all gravity (I Timothy 3:2, 4). MAN, HE, HIS and HUSBAND still have a masculine ring to all who have not been subverted and totally duped by all the Women's Lib propaganda.

She cannot be a deacon because deacons are to be husbands of one wife (I Timothy 3:12). Not even ERA can equip the women to play the biological role of husband. Such is biologically impossible!!!

The woman cannot be an evangelist. In I Timothy 2:12 Paul prohibits her from teaching and usurping authority over the man. The evangelist is to "speak, and exhort, and rebuke with all authority" (Titus 2:15). This, for the very obvious reasons stated in I Timothy 2:12, she cannot do.

She cannot teach a mixed Bible class of both men and women regardless of what Jubilee practiced in the summer of '89 in Nashville, Tennessee. Some thirty-eight years ago I went to preach for a little congregation in Middle Tennessee. To my utter amazement they had a woman teaching a Bible Class each Sunday morning with her husband and several gray headed men as her students. I opposed such and would again just as strenuously now as then. They had two elders. One of them was an uncle of the lady who was doing the teaching. The other

God's true woman will not seek a place, position, role or work for which he never equipped her to fill or authorized her to accept and execute.

elder stood for truth. We finally got her out of the mixed Bible Class but not before her uncle let me know in no certain terms that he had talked to any number of well known preachers, far more knowledgeable than I,

who thought the practice all right. I knew there and then that we had preachers who just did not believe what the New Testament teaches on this theme. I could have predicted as a twenty-one year old preacher then that we would one day have serious trouble in the church over this very matter. It is now in full bloom in many places, but seeds were sown for it a generation ago. We have some excellent women at Ripley who teach in our Bible school work but none teaches past the sixth grade. Men teach in Junior High on up.

She cannot be the head of the home unless her husband is dead or gone and she is the only parent of the household. In such circumstances, stern necessity lays headship on her - not on her children. Paul, by inspiration - not by an appeal to a cultural situation - conferred headship of the home upon the husband as per Ephesians 5:23-25. It is a sad, Sad, SAD day for womanhood when she seeks to become like man. She leaves her Queenly role in such invasions. A wise woman once said, "There are some things men have to do and other things women have to do. They have no business getting them all mixed up." This wise woman lived to be in excess of one hundred years and celebrated seventy-eight wedding anniversaries before she and her husband both died in 1974. I preached the funeral of this saintly sister in August of that year.

God's true woman will not seek a place, position, role or work for which he never equipped her to fill or authorized her to accept and execute.

Perhaps one hundred or more religious bodies now have women preachers or women teaching mixed Bible classes. A proponent of such was asked sometime back what course was taken when they came to such passages as I Timothy 2:11,12. The answer was given promptly, "We just skip over those passages." Apparently, that is what some of our brethren are doing relative to this matter. Now, let's turn the coin over and take notice

of some positive aspects as well as a couple more fundamentals on this frequently discussed theme in our day.

WHAT WOMEN CAN DO A POSITIVE LOOK

She can learn about Jesus in youth and become a Christian when the age of accountability or the realm of responsibility is attained. Then she can grow in the Christian graces and adorn her life with the fruit of the Spirit (II Peter 1:5-11; Galatians 5:22,23). She can conduct herself as becometh a young woman of Christian holiness during courtship. She can marry a good man, make a success of wifehood and motherhood. To her husband she can be a good find for him and exhibit that her origin is from the Lord (Proverbs 18:22; 19:14). She can be a modern woman of worthiness as per Proverbs 31:10-31. She can love her husband, her children, be discreet, chaste, a worker at home and the Queen of the family (Titus 2:4,5). She can marry, bear children, guide the house and leave the adversary silent as far as any manner of reproach is concerned (I Timothy 5:14). She can be the sterling type of wife Peter envisioned in I Peter 3:1-6. To her Christian husband she can be an holy heir along with him of heaven that their prayers be not short-circuited (I Peter 3:7).

If she chooses not to marry, she can be a Christian woman and show by her single life, sobriety, righteousness and godliness (Titus 2:11,12). Paul speaks of her in just such a role in I Corinthians 7. She can be invaluable in this role to Christ and the church and need never be spiritually unemployed for as much as a day or hour of her Christian life.

She can teach other women (Titus 2:3-5). She can teach her own children and the children of others (II Timothy 1:5; 3:14,15). She can be a real partner to her husband in his work for Christ. Elders,

deacons, preachers and teachers of the Bible with good wives are blessed with prized possessions far greater than gold. There is a wide open field for qualified and dedicated women who can and will write helpful material for other women and children's classes. A Christian woman can teach children in her home. She can bring the neighborhood children of the unchurched to Bible classes on Sunday, Wednesday and VBS. The visitation of the sick, shut-ins, the weak and newcomers are always present opportunities for good works among dedicated Christian women. The Christian woman can take the lead in seeing that the homes of the congregation provide for recreational needs of our youth. This is a task for the home and should not be charged upon the church. "Let not the church be charged" should be our attitude in this vital realm. It is my view that the woman who reverently cares for the Lord's Supper in its preparation or assists another woman in getting ready for baptism is doing just as much for the Lord's Cause as the person who officiates at the Table on Sunday or administers the ordinance of baptism to the penitent believer. Did someone say there is nothing challenging our Christian women today? There are well over three billion women and children below the age of accountability who need religious instruction. No woman should complain that there are no people for her to teach. The world is full of such!!!

WHY WOMEN SHOULD BE BUSY FOR CHRIST

If for no other reason save sheer gratitude, the woman should be a dedicated Christian. Where the Bible and Christianity have gone woman has been lifted. Where Christ is respected woman is no longer mere chattel and is no longer just the playful sport for the uncontrolled passions of sensual men. Christianity has lifted woman to a superior plateau of feminine value and womanly dignity.

Woman should be diligent in Christian service for the salvation of her soul. Though saved by Jehovah's grace she still is saved through the spirit of submission to Heaven's will. She should be diligent for Christ because so much of her work can only be done by her. If not done by her, it will go undone. Woman needs to work for the Lord to exhibit her love for Jesus. John eloquently echoes the sentiment, "For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments; and his commandments are not grievous" (1 John 5:3). Does the devout Christian woman need greater motivation for serving Christ fervently than these practical points? If so, what could she demand by way of motivation?

INSPIRATIONAL EXAMPLES OF WOMEN AT WORK FOR CHRIST

The unnamed woman at Jacob's well in John 4 made much spiritual headway in her unique conversation with Christ. In turn she became a soul winner by influencing many of her fellow Samaritans to come and hear God's Son during his short stay in the land of Samaria.

Jesus expelled seven demons from Mary Magdalene and she became strong and steadfast in her discipleship to his cause. He conferred great honor upon her by making his first post-resurrection appearance to her as per Mark 16:9. Mary of Bethany anointed him in Mark 14:3-9 and received some sterling compliments from the grateful Galilean Prophet who then stood on the threshold of Calvary. All these were before Pentecost in Acts 2 and the exciting establishment of Christ's church on earth in its superlative perfection.

Consider some women subsequent to Pentecost in Acts 2. There is Dorcas in Acts 9 who with needle, thread and cloth literally wove her name into the wonderful fabric of eternity. Mary of Acts 12, mother of John Mark and kinsman of the beautiful Barnabas, was a wonderful worker for the Lord, opened

her home for praying Christians and reared a son who wrote the gospel according to Mark. Priscilla teamed with her holy husband, Aquilla, greatly aided the Lord's Cause in many places. She and her husband are uniformly mentioned together. What a spiritual exhibition they have left for eloquent emulation by every Christian husband and wife team. By name, Lois and Eunice are mentioned but once by Inspiration. What their unfeigned faith and diligent preparation of Timothy achieved for the Cause are well known facts to every Bible student. Phoebe is mentioned only in Romans 16:1,2. There she is depicted as sister, servant, saint and succourer (helper) of many. What a quartet of royal roles for every Christian woman to fulfill today! Paul praised the wonderful, worthy women who aided him in the gospel (Philippians 4:3). Paul referred to the mother of Rufus in Romans 16:13 who had been a spiritual mother to him also. In this Mark 10:30 is beautifully fulfilled.

CONCLUSION

What a marvelous, majestic mold Jehovah and Jesus have made for lovely, dedicated Christian women to fill with honor, dignity and success. Thank God for our lovely, charming and gracious Christian women. They are as far above the mold Women's Lib and the Feminist Movement are currently carving for all women to fill as the high heavens soar above lowly earth.

P.O. Box 464, Ripley, TN 38063

"Let your women keep silence in the churches: for it is not permitted unto them to speak; but they are commanded to be under obedience, as also saith the law. And if they will learn any thing, let them ask their husbands at home: for it is a shame for women to speak in the church."
1 Corinthians 14:34-35

(Continued from back page, *ROLE*)

the increasing challenge to the God-given role of women in the church is the growing ignorance of the Word of God and the diminishing respect for its authority!

In discussing the role of women in the church as ordained by Almighty God, we must keep in mind two things. First, it does not matter what the world says or does. Our standard is the unchanging, ever relevant, inspired, inerrant Word of God (Romans 12:2; II Timothy 3:16-17). Second, the question of man's place in the home and the church in contrast to the woman's place is not a question of superiority and inferiority but of purpose and function. God has given each sex a vital role to play. It is essential to human happiness that both men and women remain in their God-given roles.

AREAS WHICH ARE THE SAME

There are some areas in which men and women stand in the same footing before God. God's love is the same for both (John 3:16). God is no respecter of persons (Acts 10:34-35; Romans 2:11). Salvation in Christ is freely and equally available to all people without distinction to race, class, nationality, or sex (Galatians 3:26-29).

AREAS WHICH DIFFER

There are, however, areas in God's plan for men and women which differ. In God's plan, men are the primary breadwinners, leaders and authority figures (Genesis 3:17-19; II Timothy 5:8; Ephesians 5:23; 6:4). In God's plan, women are to be helpmeets to their husbands, mothers and workers at home (Genesis 2:18; Titus 2:3-5). Although the role of wives is a role of submission to the leadership of their husbands, this in no way detracts from the vital importance of their position (Genesis 2:16; Ephesians 5:22-24; Titus 2:5). Men and women differ one from

another, not only physically, but also psychologically. This suits them for their different but complementary roles.

KEY SCRIPTURES

There are several key Scriptures which deal with the role of women in the church today. Please read these passages in your Bible as we discuss them. The first of these passages is Genesis 2:18-25.

"And the LORD God said, It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him an help meet for him. And out of the ground the LORD God formed every beast of the field, and every fowl of the air; and brought them unto Adam to see what he would call them: and whatsoever Adam called every living creature, that was the name thereof. And Adam gave names to all cattle, and to the fowl of the air, and to every beast of the field; but for Adam there was not found an help meet for him. And the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall upon Adam, and he slept: and he took one of his ribs, and closed up the flesh instead thereof; And the rib, which the LORD God had taken from man, made he a woman, and brought her unto the man. And Adam said, This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh: she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man. Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh. And they were both naked, the man and his wife, and were not ashamed."

Here we learn that God created man but that man was incomplete. He needed a companion. None of the animals was man's moral and intellectual equal and therefore could not be a suitable companion for him. God specially created woman from the man and for the man to fill a unique place in his life. Then God instituted the state of marriage in which man and woman would each find his fulfillment and completion in the order.

Another key passage having to do with

the God-given role of women in the church is I Corinthians 11:3. *“But I would have you know, that the head of every man is Christ; and the head of the woman is the man; and the head of Christ is God.”* In order to deal with a local problem in the church at Corinth, the inspired apostle of Jesus Christ laid down a fundamental principle of the Divine order. Man has a head to whom he must submit, Jesus Christ! Woman also has a head to whom she must submit, man! But even Christ has a head to whom he must submit, God, the Father! Jesus as Christ is not inferior to the Father even though he is in submission to him, so woman is not inferior to man even though she must be in submission to him (Philippians 2:6).

The second chapter of Timothy contains what is perhaps the most pertinent discussion of woman's role in the church and the reasons for it to be found in the Bible. Here, the inspired penman is discussing the public worship and work of the church (2:1-2; 3:14-15). In verse one, Paul commands that prayers be made for “all men.” He uses the

Any effort to use women to lead public prayers, preach, or teach in mixed assemblies is clearly sinful!

I Timothy 2:11-12

Greek word “*anthropos*” which refers to mankind in general without distinction of sex. In verse four, Paul says that God would “have all men to be saved.” Again, he uses “*anthropos*.” But in verse eight, when he addresses the subject of leading in prayer, he uses a different word for man – “*andras*” which comes from “*aner*” and refers to the male of the human species as opposed to the female (See Vine's Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words).

There is a clear contrast between verse eight in which men (males) are commanded to pray and verse eleven in which women are commanded to “learn in silence with all subjection.” The word translated “subjection” comes from a Greek military term which means “to rank under.”

In verse twelve, the woman is forbidden to usurp (take that which does not rightfully belong to her) authority over the man. Preaching and public teaching both must be done “with authority” (Titus 2:15). Women simply cannot do this without violating their God-given role and rebelling against the role God has ordained for man! Any effort to use women to lead public prayers, preach, or teach in mixed assemblies is clearly sinful!

Two reasons are given by inspiration for the subordination of women to men in the leadership of the public assemblies. First, man has priority in creation. God made Adam first. Then he created Eve for Adam (Genesis 2:21-22; I Corinthians 11:8-9). Second, Adam was not deceived in the temptation, but Eve was (Genesis 3:6). Obviously, Satan took advantage of the woman's more sensitive, trusting nature to deceive her. Adam went into sin with his eyes wide open in order to please his wife. If anything, Adam's sin was the greater because of the deliberate nature of it! The difference in the nature of men and women can be seen in the temptation in the Garden. Man's leadership role is given because of his more deliberate, less emotional approach.

WOMAN'S ROLE

The fact that woman's God ordained role in both the home and the church is not one of leadership but of submission to the man, does not mean that woman does not have an important and essential role to play. Woman was created to be a “helpmeet” (suitable helper) for man (Genesis 2:22-24). In marriage, woman fulfills her most vital reason for being. As her husband's com-

panion physically, mentally and emotionally, she achieves her highest place. Truly, beside every successful man is a successful woman!

Woman was created to be a mother. Giving birth to children is not a punishment brought on by the Fall in Eden but a privilege ordained by God in the beginning (Genesis 1:28; 3:16). David Lipscomb said: "No more sacred and higher office did God ever lay on mortals than that he has laid on woman — to bear and train children and subjects for his everlasting kingdom" (A Commentary on the New Testament Epistles, Vol. V, p.145). Abraham Lincoln said; "All that I am and have, I owe to my angel mother."

Woman was created to be a teacher. The teaching function is done in the home as children learn their first lessons about God, life, love and discipline at their mother's knee. In childhood, minds are molded and attitudes formed which continue throughout life. Lois and Eunice were godly women teachers in the home as were Jochebed and Hannah (II Timothy 1:5; 3:15; Exodus 2:1-10; I Samuel 1 & 2). Women make the most effective Bible school teachers for young children because of their motherly instincts. Christian women, like Priscilla, will assist their husbands in teaching the Word of God privately to others (Acts 18:24-26). Older Christian women are explicitly commanded to teach younger women their duties in regard to their homes, husbands, and children (Titus 2:3-5). Godly Christian women also teach by their examples (I Peter 3:1-2). Many men are faithful followers of the Christ today because they were won by the chaste conversation of their wives.

CONCLUSION

Time and space would fail to tell of the great women in both the Old and New Testaments and the many wonderful women in the Lord's church today who are faithfully fulfilling God's will for their lives in the role he has given them. May their number increase!

May we all, men and women alike, recognize that God's way is wisest and that only by submitting to it can we all find the peace, happiness and salvation that we so earnestly desire!

4399 Aloha Ave., Memphis, TN 38118

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE WORTHY WOMAN (Proverbs 31:10-31)

1. The "worthy" woman is very industrious.
2. The "worthy" woman is thrifty.
3. The "worthy" woman is energetic — not lazy.
4. The "worthy" woman is well organized.
5. The "worthy" woman is a good business woman.
6. The "worthy" woman is careful to develop strength of body and mind.
7. The "worthy" woman is a good judge of value.
8. The "worthy" woman is ever alert for "her candle goeth not out by night."
9. The "worthy" woman is capable as a worker.
10. The "worthy" woman is merciful.
11. The "worthy" woman is prepared.
12. The "worthy" woman contributes to the success of her husband.
13. The "worthy" woman is strong of character, and honorable.
14. The "worthy" woman is a wise and kind teacher.
15. The "worthy" woman takes care of her family, and is engaged in proper activities.
16. The "worthy" woman is known, appreciated, honored, and praised.
17. Both in the past, and in the present, God has approved this type woman.

Garland Elkins
POWER, Vol. 1 No. 2

There seems to be a great deal of confusion among some brethren concerning what women may or may not do in a worship assembly. Some feel that women may lead men in prayer in

“chain prayers” at youth devotionals, but not in the worship hour on Sunday morning. Others contend that a woman is out of place if she takes the lead in any assembly where men are present. The issue is further clouded by those who contend that it is inconsistent to prohibit a woman from praying in all assemblies where men are present and yet not forbid her from speaking and asking questions in certain assemblies (e.g., Bible classes where men are present) in apparent contradiction to what Paul stated in I Timothy 2:11 and I Corinthians 14:34-35.

It is to this problem that this article is addressed. It is hoped that if the teaching of the Bible can be precisely stated then a workable solution can be found that can be sensibly and consistently applied to the church today.

A GENERAL PRINCIPLE

Paul stated in Galatians 3:28 “...*there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus.*” If this were the only passage in the New Testament concerning the relationship of men and women, then we could conclude that a woman could do anything a man could do in the worship assembly regardless of whether men are present. In fact, there are those who have used Galatians 3:28 as a proof-text to justify women preachers. Before one can draw this conclusion he must consider the totality of Bible teaching to find out if there were any exceptions to this general principle. For example, when the Pharisees asked Jesus if it was lawful for a

May Women Lead Prayer In The Presence Of Men?

J. B. Myers

man to put away his wife (Matthew 19:3) he stated the general principal that it was unlawful by citing Genesis 2:24 (Matthew 19:4-5). But later he gave an exception to the general principle (Matthew 19:9).

EXCEPTION TO THE GENERAL PRINCIPLE

There is an exception to the general principle that “there is neither male nor female” in Christ Jesus. The exception is woman’s subordination to man in worship and religious instruction. The following are the limitations placed upon the woman relative to worship and religious instruction:

- (1) In a worship assembly a woman is to keep silent (I Corinthians 14:23-24).
- (2) A woman may not lead in prayer when men are present (I Timothy 2:8). The word for “men” in this verse is not the general word for mankind but the specific word for male (*aner*).
- (3) A woman may not teach in a situation where she exercises authority or dominion over the man (I Timothy 2:12).
- (4) To indicate her subjection to man, a woman is to learn in silence or quietness (I Timothy 2:11).

Does Paul mean to say that a woman is out of place anytime she speaks in an assembly? Does this include Bible class? If not, does this mean that women could also lead men in prayer in Bible class? The only way to understand the full meaning of the above mentioned restrictions is to consider their application in the New Testament.

APPLICATION IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

The subordination of women in worship and religious instruction did not prohibit the following:

- (1) There were occasions when women were "praying and prophesying" (I Corinthians 11:5).
- (2) Philip the evangelist had four daughters who prophesied (Acts 21:9).
- (3) Both Aquila and Priscilla expounded unto Apollos the way of God (Acts 18:26).
- (4) Women labored with Paul in the gospel (Philippians 4:3).
- (5) Older women were to teach the younger women (Titus 2:3-4).
- (6) Phebe was commended for her work in the church (Romans 16:1).
- (7) Women may confess Christ before men (Matthew 10:32-33; Romans 10:10).
- (8) Women may speak in "psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord" (Ephesians 5:19). Singing can be done "in the midst of the assembly" (Hebrews 2:12).
- (9) Paul's instructions that women keep silent in the assembly was so that they might "be under obedience, as also saith the law." Anna, who lived under the law, prophesied in the presence of a man (i.e., Joseph) concerning the child Jesus (Luke 2:33-34, 36,38).

The above examples of the activities of women in the church show that women may still play an important role in the church even though there are restrictions placed upon them at certain times. Every one of these examples must be understood in the light of what God said elsewhere. One cannot assume, for example, that the women who were praying in I Corinthians 11:5 would be allowed to lead prayer in the presence of men.

There are certain situations where women were restricted, but even these restrictions had exceptions. Paul's instruction that the women keep silent when the "whole

church" comes together (I Corinthians 14:23, 34) does not prevent her from singing (Ephesians 5:19; Hebrews 2:12) or confessing Christ (Matthew 10:32-33) in an assembly. The prohibition against women teaching (I Timothy 2:12) does not mean that she cannot teach younger women (Titus 2:3) or, under certain circumstances, men (Acts 18:26). The example of Anna who delivered a prophecy in the presence of Joseph proves nothing relative to women leading men in worship. The declaration of a prophecy does not necessitate a worship situation. Neither does the giving of thanks necessitate the leading of prayer. It is also significant that women were restricted to the court of women during worship. And who would believe that Joseph preferred to worship in the court of the women?

The confusion that brethren have today concerning the restrictions placed upon women can be cleared up by recognizing the different kinds of assemblies. A summary statement can be formulated from the passages under discussion (I Corinthians 14:34; I Timothy 2:8, 11-12); *in all worship assemblies where men and women are present God wills that (1) men should take the lead and direction of the worship and that (2) women are to, in general, keep silent* (see exceptions above). In other words, women are not to take the lead by directing prayers, teaching, or questioning.

APPLICATION TODAY

The application of the above stated principle is consistent with Biblical teaching. Some have argued that in I Corinthians 14 one finds a "formal" assembly as opposed to "informal" assemblies elsewhere. Thus a woman can speak (e.g., Bible class) or lead prayer (e.g., devotionals in the home) at an "informal" assembly but not at a "formal" one. This argument is not convincing. For one thing, the concept of formal and informal

worship assemblies is not found in the Bible. The restrictions of I Corinthians 14 and I Timothy 2 apply to all worship assemblies. The purpose of an assembly is not determined by its location. God does not distinguish assemblies by either location or formality. At times the church met in the home for worship (Romans 16:5). Could a woman lead prayer in such an assembly? If a woman can lead prayer at one of these so-called “informal” assemblies, then she can also preach at the Sunday morning worship hour. In reply to this, some have argued that since worship cannot be turned “on and off” then all Christian assemblies are the same. Worship, however, required intent. Either we assemble with the intention to worship or we do not. Paul indicated that women should be allowed an opportunity to ask questions outside of the worship assembly. They were to ask their husbands (or “men-folk”) at home (I Corinthians 14:35). It is not the location of the assembly, but the purpose of it. At Corinth, teaching was included in the worship period (I Corinthians 14:26) just as it is today by the usual Sunday morning sermon. But not all teaching is in worship situations. The Corinthian women could discuss the Bible with their “men-folk” in assemblies at home. Priscilla, in an assembly of three, was within her rights by helping Aquila teach Apollos. But even here women continue to be in submission to men (I Timothy 2:13; Ephesians 5:23). Priscilla could verbally impart knowledge in the presence of her husband as long as, by her attitude and position of authority, she remained true to the general principle of submission. Although Priscilla was free to question and to teach, she could not relegate her husband to a submissive position by usurping his authority. Today, a woman is out of place if she speaks up during the worship service by asking questions or making comments just as she was in Paul’s day. Brethren who argue that a woman can lead men in prayer must also

allow her to preach and lead other aspects of the worship.

The only scriptural way for a woman to pray in the presence of a man is for her to pray silently as the man leads the prayer. That which is out of order in the worship assembly on Sunday morning is out of order in a so-called “private devotional.” Priscilla would have been out of place to have led Aquila and Apollos in prayer or to have taken the lead in any other aspect of worship. What Priscilla did in imparting knowledge in the presence of her husband is no different from what is done today when women make comments in Bible class. Asking questions or

**It does not matter what the world
says or does. Our standard is the
unchanging, ever relevant,
inspired, inerrant Word of God.
Rom. 12:2; II Tim. 3:16-17**

making comments in Bible class does not involve directing men in worship or usurping authority over men (unless she seeks to take charge of the class). If the Bible class has a short devotional at the beginning of class, women should keep silent in keeping with the regulations already discussed relative to worship assemblies. If, for some reason, the intention of the class is to continue in worship throughout the Bible study hour, then she should maintain silent in accord with the restrictions for worship assemblies. The Bible study program, as well as study groups elsewhere, represents an attempt to give women an opportunity to ask questions or impart knowledge in a non-worship situation. ★

The Role Of Women in the Church Today

Rod Rutherford

The traditional role of women in our society is under sharp attack today! Beginning with the Second World War when women left the home in large numbers to join the public work force while the men were away fighting, the role of women has undergone a constant change. Today, the influence of the Women's Liberation Movement is being felt world-wide. While most would agree with some of the goals of this organization such as equal opportunities of employment for men and women, equal wages for the same jobs, etc., this movement as a whole is a radical, humanistic approach which disparages the God-given role of women as wives, mothers and homemakers.

Not surprisingly, the role of women in the churches of Christ is also under attack! Some knowledgeable brethren predict there will be women serving in the pulpits and elderships of churches of Christ by the end of this century. There are a number of reasons for this growing liberalism towards woman's role in the church. Certainly the Women's Liberation Movement has had an influence on many of our sisters in Christ. Denominationalism, especially Pentecostalism, has long permitted women to serve in unscriptural positions of leadership. No doubt this has influenced some in the church. However, the biggest reason, in my opinion, for

(Continued on page 6, ROLE)

The role of women in the church is the theme of this issue. We encourage you to use your Bible as you read and study these lessons carefully. Every year that passes we see a diminishing respect for Bible authority. The role of women in the work and worship of the church is no exception. Both men and women must accept their ordained roles. As the title of this paper proclaims: "Seek the old paths and walk therein." There's no other way of salvation. Jesus said, "the truth shall make you free" (John 8:32).

Seek The Old Paths is a publication of the East Corinth church of Christ and is under the oversight of its elders. Its primary purpose and goal in publication can be found in Jude 3; II Tim. 4:2; Titus 1:13; 2:1; II Peter 1:12.

Manuscripts are welcome.

Editor: **Garland M. Robinson**

Associate editors: **Sidney White, Jimmy Bates**

Non-Profit Org.
U.S. Postage
PAID
Corinth, MS
Permit #253

EAST CORINTH CHURCH OF CHRIST
1801 CRUISE ST.
CORINTH, MS 38834-5108

FORWARDING & RETURN POSTAGE GUARANTEED
ADDRESS CORRECTION REQUESTED

574 SF

Church of Christ