

A Biblical & Theological Basis for Women and Men Serving Together in Ministry

Community Presbyterian Church (CPC), Danville, has long embraced the fact that the Holy Spirit gives Spiritual gifts to women and men equally. For decades women and men have served together in areas of leadership throughout the church, as volunteers leading ministries, as elders and deacons guiding and serving our body and as ordained pastors shepherding our congregation. Through the years CPC has taught and modeled our belief that God expects all believers in Christ to use their Spiritual gifts to further His Kingdom

The Session of CPC maintains that God's calling to ministry and leadership is a privilege to which many, both women and men, are called. We believe and commit to the following values:

- To provide opportunity for ministry at all levels, including teaching and ruling elders and deacons, based on giftedness, character, and calling without regard to gender.
- To pursue the kind of purity and loyalty in relationships between women and men that led New Testament writers to describe them in terms of family; "brothers and sisters."
- To be intentional in overcoming sexist elements in our culture and to offer encouragement to women in areas where their giftedness has been traditionally discouraged.
- To teach and model these values to members of our community, to the church, and to the world at large.

The following examination of the scriptures "A Biblical & Theological Basis for Women and Men in Ministry Together" is written to help individuals understand the biblical foundation for CPC's position on this issue.

There are many Old Testament texts that address Women and Men serving in Ministry Together

- Genesis 1:26-28 indicates that man and woman were created in God's image and that dominion was given to both of them.
- Women are mentioned as playing a part in Israel's worship in various contexts (such as Exodus 38:8 and 1 Samuel 2:1-10).
- Women functioned in leadership roles without limits, demonstrating the Old Testament basis of women serving in ministry. Miriam and Huldah are both referred to as prophetesses who had significant roles in God's purposes (Exodus 15:20,21 and 2 Kings 22:14-20). Deborah is referred to as a prophetess, and is best remembered for her activity as a Judge of Israel and a leader in a time of conflict (Judges 4-5).

Jesus' attitude and practice about women was in direct contradiction to that of his contemporaries and the culture of the time.

- Educating women was not encouraged and rabbis warned against teaching the law to females.
- Jesus initiated conversation with women, even those considered unrespectable, like the Samaritan woman at the well (John 4). Her subsequent witness led many to faith in Jesus. Jesus had women disciples accompany him from Galilee to Jerusalem and some financed his ministry (Mark 15:40, 41 and Luke 8:1-3).
- Jesus educated Mary and he defended her choice to learn (Luke 10:38-42).
- Women were the last at the cross and the first at the tomb.
- After his resurrection, Jesus appeared first to women and gave them the task of telling the disciples "he has risen from the dead" (Matthew 28:7).

The Book of Acts clearly and consistently documents the newfound freedom and role of women in Christ and in the establishment of the early Church.

- Women were involved in all aspects of the early church's ministry from the praying in the upper room (Acts 1:14) to being persecuted by Saul (Acts 8:3) to the reception of the Gospel by Greeks (Acts 17:12).
- Joel 2:28-32 (referred in Acts 2:17-21) explains the pouring out of the Spirit at Pentecost. This significant event highlights the fulfilled promise that God would pour out his Spirit so sons and daughters would prophesy.
- The church at Philippi was founded by women, and one of them, Lydia, played an important role in the origin and growth of this church.
- The four prophesying daughters of Philip (Acts 21:9) are examples of the ministry of the Holy Spirit through women.

The ministry of women is explicit in the writings of Paul with the exception of a few passages that require deeper understanding of their context.

- "There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus." (Galatians 3:28) Racial, societal, and sexual barriers have been removed in Christ so that all are made one.
- 1 Corinthians 11:5 is one of the most important passage regarding women in ministry. It is clear that women were praying and prophesying in the early Church. The only concern was for proper decorum in the way they dressed. (Also noted in 1 Timothy 2:8-15).
- The New Testament does not make a distinction between prophesying and teaching (1 Corinthians 14:3 and 31). One cannot conclude that women were allowed to prophesy but were not allowed to preach or teach.
- Paul's letters record no less than nine women engaged in ministry: **Phoebe**-Deacon (Romans 16:1-2); **Prisca** (Priscilla)-Paul's colleague and teacher with her husband, Aquila; **Mary, Tryphaena, Tryphosa, and Persis** – labored

with Jesus (Romans 16:6 and 12); **Junia (Junias)** – apostle, most likely a woman and not a man as known by some translations (Romans 16:7); **Euodia** and **Syntyche** – followers of Paul who shared in his struggles (Philippians 4:2, 3).

Biblical Passages in the writings of Paul that require a deeper understanding of their context.

When people speak of biblical texts in opposition to the ministry of women, they frequently refer to three texts:

1 Timothy 3:1-7, 1 Corinthians 14:34-36 and 1 Timothy 2:11,12. Taken superficially, these texts appear opposed to women in ministry. As with the interpretation of all Scripture, full understanding requires these texts to be understood in their proper historical and biblical contexts

1 Timothy 3:1-7

This passage refers to an "overseer"(or bishop) as one that should be the husband of one wife.

The passage focuses on the necessity of fidelity in a monogamous relationship as one of several tests of the moral character of an overseer. This does not mean overseers should be married men, excluding single men from ministry. Nor has the guideline that an overseer should rule his own house well (1 Timothy 3:4) been interpreted to prevent fathers of rebellious children from ministering. Concluding that women should be excluded from ministry is to ignore the text's intention.

1 Corinthians 14:34-36

It is difficult to reconcile that in one epistle, 1 Corinthians, Paul gives instruction for proper dress for women speaking, praying and prophesying (Corinthians 11:5) and yet, elsewhere for their complete silence (1 Corinthians 14:34-36).

The context of 1 Corinthians 14:34-36 begins with verse 26. Paul's concern is the disruption of the service. Women are not the only ones asked to be silent. Anyone who was going to speak in tongues is told to keep silent if an interpreter is not present (14:28). If one prophet was speaking and revelation came to someone else, the first prophet should be silent (14:30). Nor were women the only ones told to be in submission as various prophets were to be submissive to each other as well (14:32). The service was to be orderly because God is a God of peace (14:33 and 40). The last part of verse 33 (" . . . as in all the churches of the saints") should be read with the rest of verse 33, rather than with verse 34 as in some translations.

The newfound freedom of women in Christ caused difficulties in the Corinthian church and elsewhere (11:2-16). Married women were disrupting the service by asking questions of their husbands, and instructed to ask their questions at home. Disruption during service was one of several ways that pride was manifesting itself in the Corinthian church (14:36). This activity was considered shameful, particularly in ancient culture where public exposure of women was considered a disgrace.

1 Timothy 2: 8-11; 12-15

The whole of 1 Timothy 2 must be interpreted within the context of false teaching. The focus of the chapter is prayer, but the concern is over false teachers where men are told to pray without wrath and disputing (2:8) and fear of deception (2:14).

False teaching is addressed in approximately one-fifth of the two hundred and forty-two verses of the pastoral epistles. In 1 Timothy, Timothy remains in Ephesus to prevent false teaching (1:3) and reveals false teaching among women (5:13), which "turned some aside to follow Satan" (5:15). Second Timothy speaks of false teachers who creep into houses and take captive "silly women" who are ever learning yet never able to come to the knowledge of truth. (3:6,7).

When the fall of humanity is discussed in scripture, reference is always made to the disobedience of Adam. 2 Corinthians 11:3, is the only reference to Eve in the New Testament when speaking to the seduction of false teachers. Previously uneducated women not fully engaged in everyday life, would have been easy targets for false teachers.

The most controversial part of this passage is 2:12, usually translated as: "I do not permit a woman to teach or to have dominion over a man, but to be in quietness." To "have dominion over" (authentein in Greek used to refer to murder, suicide, sexual offenses, to thrust oneself) is not found elsewhere in the New Testament and is not a usual word for authority. The other uses of the word for murder and suicide obviously are not pertinent for this text. If the reference is to authority, the negative connotations of this word would translate "domineer." The gospel opened to women a new found freedom to lead and teach but they were not to misuse it in a way that is domineering. Whatever the meaning, what is prohibited of women seems so negative that it would not be permitted of men either.

Conclusion: The Old and New Testament contain significant examples of women active in ministry and in noteworthy leadership positions with men. A select few scriptures appear to contradict the position of women in leadership but are not persuasive when examined within the historical context. The Session of CPC maintains God's calling to ministry and leadership is a privilege as God calls women and men to serve, through the discernment of the diversity of gifts within Christ's body. A person's role in the ministry of the Church is determined by the leading of the Spirit manifested in that person's life and actions (1 Corinthians 12:11).

Web sites for further study:

Christians for Biblical Equality (CBE) statement, "Men, Women, and Biblical Equality
<http://www.cbeinternational.org/?q=content/men-women-and-biblical-equality>

Evangelical Covenant Church adopted in 1987, a biblical and theological basis the Covenant holds to for its affirmation of women in ministry.

<http://www.covchurch.org/resource/a-biblical--theological-basis-for-women-in-ministry-occasional-paper-1>