

Women in Ministry: New Testament – Rightly Divided

Pastor Bob Adkins

I have studied this topic from both sides and have entertained arguments to the extreme that women can be ordained into any ministry office and to the extreme that women cannot hold any of the five-fold ministry offices identified in Eph. 4:11. After weeks and many hours of study, meditation and prayer concerning this topic, and as a final attempt to rightly divide the word of God concerning this, I received answers to specific and pointed questions that I asked of God in the early morning hours of Thursday 8-14-08.

I thereby received the following discernment concerning the Role of Women in New Testament Ministry, and hereby present this as the continuing and ongoing direction of Spiritual Life Christian Fellowship in this matter. I submit the following as the rightly divided doctrinal standing on the Role of Women in Ministry of Spiritual Life Christian Fellowship. This stance will be ratified in a Church Business meeting as a resolution of Spiritual Life Christian Fellowship and will thereby be used as guide to the formation of the upcoming Church Constitutional chapters that cover the office of Evangelist, Prophet and Teacher. (We currently do not have need for a chapter on the office of Apostle, as we are only one local fellowship. We have already have formulated the chapter of the Office of Pastor.) It will also serve for the direction setting for the ministry roles of Elder and Deacon.

1. The Bible has five ministry offices identified in Eph. 4:11. This is referred to the five-fold ministry. This passage identifies the office of Apostle, Prophet, Evangelist, Pastor and Teacher.
2. The scripture of 1 Timothy 2:12 details the instructions of Paul that he does not permit a woman to exercise authority over a man. Interestingly so, the original Greek word translated women herein can be translated wife. Is it possible that this was instructions to the Church in Corinth for wives to submit to their husbands, as is elsewhere in scripture so instructed. This would also seem a better interpretation within the context of the entire passage. Even so, let us assume that this passage refers to a woman taking authority over a man in any spiritual situation. An additional question we then must consider is what did Paul mean when he also included the words “or teach” a man. If this meant teach a man in any capacity then this would disqualify women from all of the five-fold ministry offices as well as many other roles within the fellowship. We know that there is specific reference to women within Paul’s assistants that did teach men, this fact alone tells us that this is not what this passage indicates. So we must rightly divide all scripture to determine what was meant therein. If we look at it within context, it is apparent that the women cannot teach men in matters of spiritual administration. Just as it is in the structure of the marriage covenant, we can look towards her wisdom and education to assist us in spiritual decision making, but ultimately it is the men that are accountable unto God for all decisions made that involve spiritual authority.

1 Tim. 2:8-15 I desire therefore that the men pray everywhere, lifting up holy hands, without wrath and doubting; ⁹ in like manner also, that the women adorn themselves in modest apparel, with propriety and

moderation, not with braided hair or gold or pearls or costly clothing,¹⁰ but, which is proper for women professing godliness, with good works.¹¹ Let a woman learn in silence with all submission.¹² And I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man, but to be in silence.¹³ For Adam was formed first, then Eve.¹⁴ And Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived, fell into transgression.¹⁵ Nevertheless she will be saved in childbearing if they continue in faith, love, and holiness, with self-control.¹

3. In all of the New Testament, there is not found any reference to a woman serving as an Apostle or Pastor. However, there is women identified in Evangelism, Prophecy, and Teaching. Therefore, we should accurately access that these women worked within the office that applies to their ministry gifts.
4. Apostles have a unique office in that their unique calling is to act in the capacity of all of the other four ministry offices identified within Eph. 4:11. This being the office of Prophet, Evangelist, Pastor and Teacher. The Apostle acts in the office of Prophet as they receive direct revelation from God and authoritatively proclaim it to His people. He acts in the office of Evangelist as he works in the mission field to plant and establish local fellowships. He acts as Pastor in that he initially serves as Sheppard to the local fellowship until such time that Elders are equipped to carry on the work, and thus a Pastor is ready to take over as Sheppard to the local assembly. He acts as Teacher, in that he equips the Elders within the local fellowship for honorable and righteous service. We therefore can equate the office of the Apostle to the modern equivalent of an Overseer. It can be noted that based upon the earthly government of a denomination of local fellowships, that an Overseer is often designated as General Overseer, who has national Overseers under him. National Overseers can have regional overseers and/or territorial (state) Overseers who serve under him. A regional / territorial overseer can have district Overseers under him. And that the district Overseer will have the local Senior Pastor of each fellowship within his assigned district under him. Since each of these Apostles / Overseers have authority over the men under them in the chain of oversight, than these offices can only be held by men.
5. The rightly divided New Testament scriptures indicate that the office of Elder and Pastor (Senior Pastor) have the same qualifications. Therefore, we can accurately access that for one to hold the office of Pastor, that the individual must first be an Elder. The position of Pastor, the modern day equivalent of Senior Pastor, has all authority in the local fellowship. Therefore, the Bible is clear that this position is reserved for males, and thus excludes women from serving in this capacity. In addition, given that the Pastor has full authority in the local fellowship, the Pastor can accurately be addressed as The Elder of Elders.
6. The New Testament does identify women as fellow laborers with Paul in his work as an Apostle. They have been shown in assisting the ministry of Apostles and Pastors. The New Testament also has specific reference to women who evangelize, preach, exhort, teach, prophecy and fulfill many other varied roles within the local fellowship. Within these examples we see women serving in the office of Evangelist, Prophet and Teacher. We therefore know that these offices

¹*The New King James Version*. 1982 (1 Ti 2:8-15). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

are not restricted to men alone. In addition we see women also serving in assistant roles as Elders and/or Deacons within a local fellowship.

7. Elders and/or Deacons within the local fellowship are the spiritual and administrative assistants to the Pastor within the local assembly. In the modern Church we can liken the title of Associate Pastor to the office of Elder or Deacon. Therefore, if we use scripture to determine the structure of our denominational grouping of local fellowships, we see that in actuality, what we refer to as an Associate or Assistant Pastor is in actuality the Biblical role as Elder or Deacon. Whether the Associate Pastor primarily assist the Senior Pastor in spiritual or administrative oversight determines if they are Biblically a Elder or a Deacon. Or possibly function in a dual-role. Elders and Deacons alike should be specifically trained, equipped, anointed and appointed by an Apostle or the Pastor. This is our Biblical example. We see proof of this doctrinal stance within Paul's writings of 1 Cor. Chapter 11. Paul elaborates to these points therein:

1 Cor. 11:2-16 Now I praise you, brethren, that you remember me in all things and keep the traditions just as I delivered *them* to you.³ But I want you to know that the head of every man is Christ, the head of woman *is* man, and the head of Christ *is* God.⁴ Every man praying or prophesying, having *his* head covered, dishonors his head.⁵ But every woman who prays or prophesies with *her* head uncovered dishonors her head, for that is one and the same as if her head were shaved.⁶ For if a woman is not covered, let her also be shorn. But if it is shameful for a woman to be shorn or shaved, let her be covered.⁷ For a man indeed ought not to cover *his* head, since he is the image and glory of God; but woman is the glory of man.⁸ For man is not from woman, but woman from man.⁹ Nor was man created for the woman, but woman for the man.¹⁰ For this reason the woman ought to have *a symbol of authority* on *her* head, because of the angels.¹¹ Nevertheless, neither *is* man independent of woman, nor woman independent of man, in the Lord.¹² For as woman *came* from man, even so man also *comes* through woman; but all things are from God.¹³ Judge among yourselves. Is it proper for a woman to pray to God with her head uncovered?¹⁴ Does not even nature itself teach you that if a man has long hair, it is a dishonor to him?¹⁵ But if a woman has long hair, it is a glory to her; for *her* hair is given to her for a covering.¹⁶ But if anyone seems to be contentious, we have no such custom, nor *do* the churches of God.²

This passage can lead us into other topics for consideration, but let us concentrate to specific topic as to what offices and positions women can serve in the New Testament Church. As to the point of women serving as an Elder to a local fellowship we can see that this scripture allows this as she does not hold a position of authority over men in her ministry role and is covered by the authority of the appointing Pastor who is a man, thus she is provided a symbol of authority. This symbol of authority thus releases her to teach and administer both men and women alike within the local fellowship. It does not however, provide her with authority over a man. She therefore can serve in the office of Evangelist, Prophet and Teacher as long as she is under the proper covering.

²The New King James Version. 1982 (1 Co 11:2-16). Nashville: Thomas Nelson

We see that this is Gods' ordained structure for reasons of:

- The head of every man is Christ, the head of every woman is the man and the head of Christ is God.
 - The woman was created by God by taking parts of the man and she was created for the man, and not vice-versa.
8. Given that the women can serve in the ministry office of Evangelist, Prophet and Teacher as well as the ministry roles of Elder and Deacon we therefore acknowledge that women, with one exception, can serve in any capacity within the local fellowship as long as she is appointed and/or authorized to do so by the Senior Pastor.