

Lesson 10: Role of Women

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1.) What are the modern challenges?

Generally speaking, the modern challenges related to role of women call out Biblical teachings as sexist and those who follow them as oppressors of women. The message of the world, and in particular our culture, can indeed be very different than the teachings of the NT. This reminds us again of the difficulty of addressing certain challenges without a sound faith in the validity of scriptures.

What are challenges you have heard made against New Testament teachings on the roles of women?

There are also challenges made by those who claim to use the scriptures to teach that there are no restrictions on the activities that women may lead in worship or the leadership roles to which they can be appointed in the church. A few years ago, a church in Atlanta published its scriptural reasoning for allowing women to take a leadership role in all aspects of public worship. In the last section below, we will include two quotes from their statement as examples of modern challenges.

2.) What do the scriptures say?

The scriptures have a great deal to say about the roles of women, particularly in regard to their ability to serve God and others in a unique manner. We will examine the many ways in which women are active and useful in the church in the next section below. But here we want to note a few restrictive passages, i.e., those that place some limit on the activities of women. For each of the passages below, list the role or activity that women are not to fill:

- I Corinthians 14:33-35
- I Timothy 2:11-12
- I Timothy 3:1-13, Titus 1

3.) Special women in the New Testament and their roles

Read the scriptures associated with these women and note the important roles they served in the church and in their families, and the nature of their service:

- Mary – Luke 1:26-33
- Phoebe – Romans 16:1-2
- Anna – Luke 2:36-38
- Philip's daughters – Acts 21:7-9
- Older women teaching the younger – Titus 2:3-4
- Euodia and Syntyche – Philippians 4:2-4
- Priscilla – Acts 18:24-26, I Corinthians 16:19, Romans 16:3-5

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- Lydia – Acts 16:13-16
- Mary Magdalene – John 20:11-18
- The Worthy Woman – Proverbs 31:10-31 (not in the NT but applicable given the nature of the Proverbs)

Can you name others not included on the list above?

4.) How we make it worse

Unfortunately, given the strong force exerted by modern challenges to what the scriptures define as the role of women, our response (or lack of a response) may make it more difficult for young women to understand and follow the truth. Here are some potentially damaging approaches:

- Ignore how difficult this challenge is for younger women (given culture, etc). To act instead as if a Biblical restriction is both easy to explain and to accept.
- Fail to acknowledge and teach the valuable role women have in the church and within their families (whole point of the next section). Along with this would be the failure to give honor and recognition to what women do.
- Fail to use and challenge women to take on the roles they are called to by God. Making the role even more restrictive than the scriptures require.
- Fail to teach and follow the lesson that those who are greatest in the kingdom are the servants of all.

Can you think of other ways?

5.) Modern challenges with a Biblical flavor

These are two statements made by the elders of a church in Atlanta to explain why decided women could take a leadership role in all aspects of public worship. How would you use the New Testament to address answer them:

Quote 1 – *In the few specific comments relating to the role of women, Paul was concerned that certain activities were creating a barrier to the gospel. For Paul, the life of the church should honor the gospel and create an environment conducive to the spread of the gospel. This concern is the context of the two prohibitive texts on gender (1 Cor 14 and 1 Tim 2). Men and women were acting in ways that hindered the gospel message. Following Paul's example, we believe that our practice of restricting women's roles creates a barrier for the gospel today. After much study and prayer, we have concluded that Paul made his restrictive statements to specific and limited circumstances.*

Quote 2 – *That is why Paul can argue so vigorously in 1 Corinthians that every Christian is a recipient of the Holy Spirit's gift and each person should be valued in the practice of that gift (1 Cor 12). To allow some to use their gifts and others to be restricted runs counter to the inclusive nature of the gospel message.*