

# WOMEN AND THE WORD OF GOD

by Steve Thurman

## Life Perspectives from Fellowship Bible Church

### WOMEN AND THE WORD OF GOD

#### ØIs there a problem?

Both the Bible and history reveal an attitude that men have had toward women that has raged down through the centuries and has created incalculable damage and pain. For instance, in the Bible, Jesus' disciples were shocked that He would even talk to a woman (John 4:27). And, 1500 years later, one of our greatest theologians and church reformers, Martin Luther, had not improved upon the male perspectives when he wrote, "Men have broad and large chests, and small narrow hips, and more understanding than women, who have but small and narrow chests, and broad hips, to the end that they should remain at home, sit still, keep house, and bear and bring up children."

Unfortunately, many Christian men today continue to view women (including their wives) with less than the respect and honor given them by God. Thousands of years of "male superiority" thinking have done an insurmountable amount of damage not only in society, but also in the home and local church. We agree with Chuck Swindoll when he writes, "Some women today have gotten a dirty deal and have every reason to be angry."

#### ØAre women "equal to" men?

In Genesis 1:27, Moses wrote, "So God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created Him; male and female He created them." As far as equality of person is concerned both man and woman are made in the likeness of God. Man and woman may look different and, at times, even act different, but as far as essence, value, self-

worth and basic humanity are concerned both are created equal by God.

#### ØAre men and women equally "gifted"?

The Bible does not teach that giftedness is a matter of gender. In 1 Corinthians 12:4-6, Paul writes, "Now there are varieties of gifts . . . and ministries . . . but the same God who works all things in all persons." In other words, spiritual gifts and abilities for service in God's work are given to both men and women. Men have teaching gifts and so do women; men have evangelism gifts and so do women; men have gifts of leadership and so do women. To treat a woman as less gifted or less capable than a man is to disregard the teaching of God's Word.

#### ØIs a woman to be in "submission to a man?"

If a woman is married she is to submit herself to her husband (defined: place herself under the loving, God-honoring leadership of her husband). If a woman is in the church she (along with all the men of the church) is to submit to the men who serve Christ as elders (see Hebrews 13:17). Paul wrote, "Now I want you to realize that the head of every man is Christ, and the head of a woman is man, and the head of Christ is God" (I Cor. 11:3). Thus, there is a "headship" or an order of leadership in God's family: God the Father, God the Son, man, and woman. This does not mean, of course, that women as a class are to be in submission to men as a class, but instead is specifically applied to the husband/wife and elder/woman relationships (see Eph. 5:22-24 and I Cor. 16:15,16)

### **ØIsn't submission contrary to equality?**

It is generally believed that if a woman is required to be in submission to a man (her husband, or an elder in the church) then the woman is somehow “less than” or “inferior to” the man. Nothing could be further from the truth. For example, Jesus is the Son of God and is, as God, equal to the Father. Still, Jesus submitted Himself to the Father and followed His leadership. In fact, He said, “I do nothing on my own but speak just what the Father has taught me . . . I always do what pleases Him” (John 8:28,29). Jesus is equal to God, but He has placed Himself in submission to Him. Does that make Him “less than” God the Father? Of course not. And neither is a woman, who submits to her husband (or an elder in the church) “less than” those men . . . in any way whatsoever!

### **ØCan a woman teach a man?**

In 1 Timothy 2:12, Paul writes, “I do not permit a woman to teach or have authority over a man; she must be silent.” Many have taken this statement out of context and flatly denied women the freedom to teach men, in some cases, ever. The problem with that interpretation is that it forgets (1) that the Greek word for “have authority” prohibits women from teaching with an authoritative (or domineering) spirit, (2) that there is a difference between teaching “over” a man and teaching “with, to, or under the authority” of a man, (3) that the command is in the context of elder rule (1 Timothy 2), as if Paul is prohibiting women from teaching in the realm of elder authority, and (4) that if women can never teach men then we have some major contradictions in the Scriptures (and in the home where wives teach, correct, and challenge their husbands). Can a woman teach a man? Of course she can.

Take a look . . .

- In Judges 4 Deborah was a prophetess (a proclaimer of God's truth) in all Israel (vs. 4). She was also a minister of state who gave military commands to men (vs. 14).
- Huldah was a prophetess who stood before men and priests, saying, Thus says the LORD God of Israel” (2 Kings 22:14).
- Anna the prophetess (Luke 2:36-38) served in the temple night and day with fastings and prayers “And continued to speak of (Jesus) to all.”
- Apollos, a man “mighty in the Scriptures” was taught and corrected by both Aquila and his wife, Priscilla (Acts 18:24-28). Both husband and wife “took him aside and explained to him the way of God more accurately.”
- In the church at Corinth women both prayed and prophesied (proclaimed) the Word of God. It was not a question of whether they should be free to teach men, but how (in submission, see 1 Cor. 11).

Can a woman teach a man? Absolutely. God has simply commanded that she do so with a spirit and attitude of submission. Just as a wife can teach and correct her husband from the Scripture (with a spirit of respect), so too can a woman teach men in the local church.

### **Ø But aren't women to “keep silent” in the churches?**

In 1 Cor. 14:34-35, Paul writes, “Let the women keep silent in the churches; for they are not permitted to speak, but let them submit themselves . . . And if they desire to learn anything let them ask their own husbands at home; for it is improper for a woman to speak in the church.”

What many people miss when they read this is that men have also been instructed to “keep silent in the church,” under certain circumstances (see verse 28). Simply put, these commands were not given to limit women from ever speaking to or teaching men, but were given to promote order in a church that was out of order in their misuse of the gift of speaking in tongues (see verse 23). Basically, the church service was out of control. There was chaos and confusion. Thus, Paul commands that there be “silence” and order since “God is not a God of confusion but of peace” (see verse 33). And, in verse 40, he concludes: “But let all things be done properly and in an orderly manner.” And certainly, part of what is “proper” and “orderly,” according to Paul, is women “praying or prophesying” in church with an attitude of submission (see 1 Cor. 11:5-16).

### **Ø Can a woman be an Elder in a local church?**

The New Testament leaves with the man the responsibility and burden of giving leadership to the local church. In 1 Timothy 3:1, Paul writes, “If any man aspires to the office of overseer (elder), it is a fine work he desires to do. An overseer, then, must be above reproach, the husband of one wife . . .”

Limiting the office of elder to men does not speak to a woman’s ability to do the job as well as or better than a man. Simply, it is God’s determination that men will carry this particular load. It should be remembered, however, that an elder board is as inept at leadership in the church as is a husband in the home if it does not honor his wife’s thoughts, opinions, hesitations, and corrections; the same is true for any elder board in any church.

### **Ø Can a woman be a Deacon in a local church?**

If “deacon” is properly defined as an individual who holds the office of “servant” (Greek, diakonos), then there is no reason why a woman should be excluded from such a position. Phoebe, for example, in Romans 16:1, was “a servant (diakonos) of the church which is at Cenchrea” and Paul even commanded the church (men and women) to “help her in whatever matter she may have need” (verse 2).

### **Ø To whom do women have primary responsibility?**

Although women have a great deal more freedom in the local church ministry than some might allow, it is only right to say that the emphasis in the New Testament is that women are to primarily teach other women and children. Titus 2, for instance, challenges wives and mothers to be “workers at home.” This does not mean that women cannot work outside the home, but that they are to be good managers of their homes and children (see Proverbs 31, especially verse 27). This, her husband, her children, and her home are to be the focus of her life and ministry. Furthermore, as a priority, women are to teach other women. In Titus 2, Paul commands the older women to “teach what is good, that they may encourage the young women.” Thus, a woman’s primary teaching role should be focused, not on men, but on other women and children. After all, who can do a better job?

### **Ø Application**

1. At FBC, the high place of women will be recognized, appreciated, and honored in the life and ministry of our church. As in the home, men and women are co-partners and co-equals in the pursuit of excellence for Jesus Christ.

2. At FBC, women will be permitted to teach men in variety of contexts, including Sunday morning adult education classes, home Bible studies, and in our various small group ministries. From Junior High on up, however, a woman will not be considered the teacher, but will be under the leadership of a man who is responsible to and under the authority of the Elder Board as the primary teacher and director of that particular ministry. Male leadership is modeled quite extensively in Scripture and should be modeled in the local church.

3. At FBC, men are to carry the responsibility of Elder and “preaching pastor,” not because they are more spiritual, gifted, or mature than women, but because of the authority inherent in those positions and the biblically stated will of God.

4. At FBC, it will be taught that the church and the home are to model one another in respect to the man-woman relationship. Men are to humbly provide spiritual leadership while women are to contribute submissively with honest, open, appreciative, and corrective communication.

5. At FBC, women will be encouraged to hold a variety of leadership positions. Both women’s and children’s ministries offer a wide range of opportunities for mature women to exercise their gift of leadership. Caring, hospitality, and serving ministries also need the leadership and gentle touch of a woman.

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