

The Role of Women in the Church

By T. Sean Sullivan

Over the last 60 years, our society has taken on some dramatic changes. It is clear that life, as we know it, is different; and the alterations are dramatic in comparison to formerly long-standing concepts of right and wrong.

As the world trends away from God, will the church follow? Can we begin to ignore the precepts and examples of scripture? Can we come up with a better way than God's way? Has man and religion outgrown God?

We must know that truth is independent of our opinion—it is sourced from God and remains constant (John 12:48-50; 2Cor. 5:10; Titus 1:2). Regardless of what “they” may say, the truth is still the truth—so we still need it.

The religions of men have adopted many of these changes; they are bending, twisting, and totally abandoning the scriptures in order to facilitate society's demands. So, what are we to do?

One specific area wherein society has brought dramatic change into today's religions is the role of women in the church. Let's consider what the scriptures have to say on this matter.

We Must Avoid the Extremes

There are always extremes in the minds of men; the great equalizer, however, is the truth of God's word. With the revealed truth, we can settle on the same mind and the same judgment (1Cor. 1:10).

In a discussion on the role of women in the church there are some who say that women have every right to participate in all activities of preaching and teaching. They call any prohibition of women sexist and demeaning. Then there are those at the other extreme who prohibit any input from a woman—demanding subjection and complete silence.

With these extremes seeming so radical and unbalanced, we need to know what God has revealed. Our final conclusions must be drawn from God's word—knowing that we must not think beyond that which is written (1Cor. 4:6). We must stick with God, regardless of what the world might think or say (1Peter 4:11). To come to a proper conclusion, we must avoid extremism and emotional rhetoric—seeking only a, “book, chapter, and verse” answer for our question about the role of women in the church.

Women are No Second Class Citizens

It would be foolish to argue against the fact that women have been mistreated and disrespected in the history of mankind. Many civilizations of the Ancient World saw women as next to slaves in worth and purpose. Among the Greeks and Ancient Romans women were restricted by law and they were simply subjugated (consider researching Aristotle's views on women sometime—it is an eye opener).

However, too many have believed this to be the mindset of God and religion, when in fact the scriptures have always had a much different view toward women—that of honor to be bestowed upon women. From the beginning, woman was created to be the perfect counterpart for man (Gen. 2:18-23); as the scripture declare: a helper, comparable to man. Women are the womb of humanity (Gen. 3:20; 1Cor. 11:11-12). What man walks the earth today without a woman—not one, since Adam. Ever since God formed Adam from dust, and Eve from Adam, all human life has been perpetuated from the womb of a woman. The scriptures proclaim that women and specifically one's wife is to be the honored vessel (1Peter 3:7). Husbands are to honor and care for their wives, with the care that they would expect for themselves (Eph. 5:25-29).

Another point that demonstrates a different attitude toward women in the Bible is the fact that a “woman” is the personification of wisdom in the Proverbs (Prov. 1:20-33) and many women were chosen examples of strength and courage and respect for their role. Think of Sarah, Rebekah, and the woman of Proverbs 31—in the Old Testament. Consider Tabitha, Lydia, and the woman with the Alabaster flask (Mark 14:3-9)—in the New Testament.

Truth, Honor, But Also Different

God has provided a role for men and a role for women. We must not argue with God, His plan is perfect and will lead us to success temporally (earthly relationships) and eternally (spiritual relationships).

There is a major difference in our gender roles found in the fact that the word of God forbids a woman to teach, or have authority, over a man (1Tim. 2:9-14). Keep in mind that this was not Paul’s personal view. Paul was led by inspiration to reveal this prohibition. Paul, declares later, that all scripture is from God (2Tim. 3:16-17)—the Apostle Peter also adds that no scriptures is of private interpretation (2Peter 1:19-21).

Paul declares the reason for this limitation in two factors. First, the order of creation (v. 13)—Adam was made first and then Eve. Also, it was because Eve was deceived into sinning when Satan tempted her (v. 14)—Adam was not deceived he only heeded his wife and ate the fruit. These points are not open for discussion—they remain in effect always. Therefore, there is no scriptural authorization for women leading in worship. This would clearly include preaching, teaching in mixed public assemblies, praying, or song-leading—all of which are conducted with authority.

Since we are in 1Timothy 2, we need to clarify verses 11 and 12. We learn from these verses that women have a quieter God-given role. However, we must know that the word “silence” often falls prey to the “extreme swing”. There are some who will want to argue for absolute closed-lip silence from this verse. A proper understanding from the original language helps clarify what is being taught. The word, here translated “silent” is “husuchia” which is the same word that is used in its masculine form in verse 2 and is translated there as “peaceable”. Clearly women are expected by God to take on a quiet and peaceable demeanor—not absolutely forbidden from speaking. Women, while maintaining their quiet and peaceable role, cannot be “proclaimers” or preachers, and cannot assume a teaching position over a man in the church.

Conclusion: Yes, over the last 60 years our society has taken on some dramatic changes. However, God, and His word, has not changed. As the world trends away from God, His church must not follow. We cannot ignore the precepts and examples of scripture.

We are not looking for a better way than God’s way—we still need God.

We are completely dependent on God and His direction for our lives, our worship, and our service to Him. There is no room for us to bring in anything without His authority.

Another area wherein men have tampered is the plan of salvation—to be saved we need the truth, who will you listen to—the world or God, the right choice should be clear. The opportunity is yours, right now.