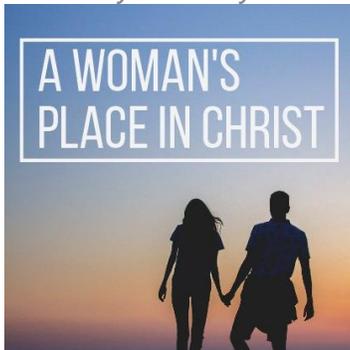


A Woman's Place in Christ

Written by Jack Hayford



For too long, the church has devalued the role and the ministry of women. Are you ready to step up to the place Jesus has prepared for you?

The Bible says in Galatians 3:28 that because of what Christ has done, there are no longer any differences among us. "There is neither Jew nor Greek" (no ethnic or national difference), "neither slave nor free" (no economic difference), "neither male nor female" (no gender difference), "for [we] are all one in Christ Jesus." This verse refers to the equality we have in God.

If we are all equal, how is it that the Church has so often been guilty of sanctifying a chauvinistic system that puts women (and not always gently) in second place? I believe it is time for us to revisit the issue of what a woman's place is according to God's order of things. My purpose is not to incite women in the Church to rise up and angrily assert their individuality, authority and rights. It is to examine what the Bible says a woman was made to be, so that women are free to move into and fulfill all the things God has for them.

Casting Off Old Ideas

I want to begin by declaring that my view of women is not a radical feminist or an anti-traditional Church view. It is a solid biblical view. This view holds that God has a high destiny for every one of His redeemed, whether male or female, and this destiny is rooted in the blossoming of who people are created to be in Jesus Christ.

Discovering who we are in Christ can be made difficult if we cling to old ideas originating from the flawed, human culture around us. Imposed systems of thought, such as human or religious philosophy, and our own ignorance or misunderstanding can also get in the way. We must allow the Lord to deliver us from all preconceived notions in order to discover His true call on our lives.

One way to do that is to closely examine the Scriptures many people use to dispute the role of women in the Church and try to determine what God is really saying through them. To that end, we will look at 1 Timothy 2:8-15:

I desire therefore that the men pray everywhere, lifting up holy hands, without wrath and doubting; 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, but, which is proper for women professing godliness, with good works.

Let a woman learn in silence with all submission. And I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man, but to be in silence. For Adam was formed first, then Eve. And Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived, fell into transgression. Nevertheless she will be saved in childbearing if they continue in faith, love, and holiness, with self-control.

First, let's see what the different verses in this passage do not mean.

That the women adorn themselves in modest apparel (v. 9). "All women should dress as crummy as possible to verify their holiness."

Let a woman learn in silence (v. 11). "Women should keep their mouths closed in church and have no input on spiritual matters."

With all submission (v. 11). "Women should do as they're told."

I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man (v. 12). "Women are allowed to teach only other women."

Adam was formed first, then Eve (v. 13). "God likes men more than He does women."

Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived, fell into transgression (v. 14). "Men are smarter than women."

She will be saved in childbearing (v. 15). "The only thing a woman is good for is having babies."

Are you guilty of interpreting any of the verses this way?

Now let's see what God is really telling us about women. We can't analyze every verse, but we will look at a few of the most important ones.

"Let a woman be silent..."

The first thing we have to understand is that, in this passage, Paul is writing to Timothy to instruct him on how to lead a church. He is giving him counsel on how to deal with relationships within the body.

But we cannot divorce the counsel given here from what we find in other parts of Scripture. Elsewhere Paul mentions women who labored with him in the gospel (Philippians 4:3) and others, such as Priscilla and Phoebe, whom Paul recognizes as teachers and deaconesses (see Acts 18:26; Romans 16:1, 3 and 12).

Therefore, he can't be saying that women are to have no input regarding spiritual matters in the church.

In fact, let me begin by addressing verses 11-12: "Let a woman learn in silence with all submission. I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man, but to be in silence." These verses are commonly interpreted to mean that a woman is permitted to teach only other women. In particular, older women may teach younger ones, as Titus 2:4-5 suggests.

...the older women, likewise, that they be reverent in behavior, not slandering, not given to much wine, teachers of good things—that they admonish the young women to love their husbands, to love their children, to be discreet, chaste, home makers, good, obedient to their own husbands, that the word of God may not be blasphemed.

But if this is true, it is true only in the United States. When a woman goes abroad as a missionary, she is both allowed and expected to teach, and not just to teach other women.

And what happens when a woman becomes a writer? We put no sign at the top of her articles warning men, "Caution: This article was written by a woman and could be hazardous to your spiritual health."

So, why the dichotomy? Mainly because the word "silence" is mistranslated in verses 11-12. The same word is translated "quiet" in a preceding verse (v.2): "that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life."

You can't take the word that is used in verse 2 to mean one thing and then claim it means something totally different in verses 11-12. The two translations of the word are not interchangeable. It wouldn't make sense for Paul to tell Timothy to pray that those in authority would take away the right to speak, so that he could live a "silent" life, a life in which he never got to say anything.

What he is telling him, on the contrary, is to pray that he'll have the kind of government that will allow his life to have a serene quality about it, a sense of peace. In the same way, when Paul says let a woman learn in "silence" (really, "quiet") he is making an appeal that has to do with the dynamics of male-female relationships in general. He is calling for peace between the genders in a church setting.

Women are to not only learn in a spirit of serenity, according to Paul, but also "with all submission." Some people take the word "submission" to mean "subjection." Subjection, or subjugation, is the term that defined the action of the ancient emperors when they would overwhelm an enemy and bring them under dominion. "Submission" is not even a remotely similar concept.

In real life, this erroneous idea of submission would give us a picture of a wife who just keeps her mouth shut, no matter what her husband does or says. She would just bite her lip and wait for him to ask her, "Well, my dear, do you have anything to offer? It's difficult to imagine you would, considering that I am primary in the purposes and mind of God, and you are only secondary. But go ahead."

A more valid understanding of submission shows a wife who says what she thinks in a very honest and open way, not badgering or demanding, and with a "gentle and quiet spirit" (1 Peter 3:4). Then she trusts God to help her husband understand the value of partnership, to see they are co-heirs in the life of God (see Romans 8:16-17)-and respond appropriately.

Serenity and submission are not characterized by misty-eyed pacifism, but by the fruit of the Spirit, love, joy, peace and so on. A woman is not to insist on her rights. Yet, she should be free to express herself in a gracious way, as she feels led. If her husband does not receive what she says, she must look to the Lord to take up her cause.

"Suffer not a woman to teach..."

If you look at 1 Timothy 2:12 in the context of the whole Bible, you will see that Paul couldn't be prohibiting women from teaching, or even from teaching men. If he were, why would he, in another epistle, give rules for women to follow when they are prophesying? In 1 Corinthians 11:5, he is referring to prophetic utterances given in the midst of an entire congregation, one that includes men. We know prophecy can come by itself, or it can accompany either preaching or teaching. Therefore, Paul allows for the possibility of women speaking in church in the capacity of teacher.

The problem with this verse is similar to the one we found in verse 11, the Greek word translated here as man, "anair," actually means "husband." What Paul is really saying is he does not allow women to push their

husbands around by trying to seize their authority. He is addressing the natural tendency women have had since the Fall, to clutch for the rule, or authority, their husbands have been given over them (see Genesis 3:16). God did give husbands authority over their wives. He made them head over their wives, as Christ is head of the Church (see Ephesians 5:23). But this authority is not for the purpose of quenching women into nothingness. Rather, it is for husbands to act as releasing agents, doing everything possible to maximize their wives' potential and support them into fulfilling the highest possibilities of their created beings.

God's initial plan was for men and women to be equal. That's the way it can be in Christ, if men and women will submit to the redemptive process God has ordained. The redemptive process requires that the husband take leadership, and the wife submit (see Ephesians 5:22-24).

This is not the frightening proposition some women make it out to be. As I said before, submission is not subjugation, and it is not destructive to your person-hood. It is a summons to relate properly to the different kinds of authority in your life, from the civil government to church leadership to your spouse.

In the ancient world, the word "submission" was a military term referring to the order of soldiers in rank, which was the strategic placement of soldiers not only for marching but also for going into battle. Soldiers were positioned in a way to protect one another and to increase the likelihood of success. It wasn't an issue of titles, or who was more important, but an issue of meeting the objective, which was victory.

That's the way it is with the military today. Individuals are positioned both in practice maneuvers and in a real wartime situations to best serve the overall purpose of victory. Each one keeps his place, because he understands the need for order and the mutual benefit of the soldiers covering one another.

A woman's place...

Being in submission really means knowing and keeping one's place. So, what is a woman's place?

It is not the rigid, chauvinistic, stay-in-the-background, keep-your-mouth-shut place sometimes offered her by the Church. It is not the liberal, insist-on-your-own-rights place carved out by modern feminists. It is certainly not the rebellious, do-your-own-thing place defined by flesh.

It is the place of being obedient to the Word of God and allowing His Word to become incarnate in her by the work of the Holy Spirit.

How does a woman reach this place? Not by falling prey to the enticements of the culture around her. Not by seizing authority from her husband. She attains her place by relating rightly to all the authorities in her life, submitting in serenity and allowing the gifts of God to make room for and life her up. As all believers obey, God will cause the power of Jesus Christ to work in their situations, so they can fulfill their destiny. This is certainly true for God's daughter's, as well.

<https://www.jackhayford.org/teaching/articles/a-womans-place-in-christ/>