



WOMEN IN MINISTRY

Crossroads Church has had a long-standing commitment of affording women the opportunity to be ordained and serve in all ministerial leadership capacities. As evidenced throughout Scripture and church history, the body of Christ has experienced clear benefits resulting from women who have been released to teach and preach as empowered by the Holy Spirit and who have responded to their God-given gifts and calling.

Initial Thoughts on Interpreting Scripture

As stated in the 'About' section of our church website, we believe that the Bible is the fully-inspired Word of God, and the only infallible rule for faith and practice. We also believe that all Scripture can be more fully understood when interpreted in consideration of its historical and cultural contexts. What we mean by this is we can better understand what the Bible says and how to apply it to our lives today when we first understand the circumstances in which it was written and what it meant to its original audience. We certainly don't think one needs extra, special training, or a degree in theology to read and be transformed by God's Word. But we do have a deep reverence for Scripture—a reverence that pushes us to do our best to understand what God is communicating to us.

Additionally, it is important to remember that Scripture is the best commentary on itself. When we encounter Scripture that seems unclear, it is vital we interpret it in light of those parts of Scripture which are clear and well-defined.

These principles of interpretation inform how we approach all theological issues, and the question of women in ministry is no different. It is important to us that we talk about the way we understand Scripture because we recognize the view we take on women in ministry is regularly challenged based on a select few Scriptural passages. If we're going to follow the guidance and direction of Scripture, then it seems to follow that we need to do our very best to make sure we understand the whole of the text.

What Does Scripture Say About Women

- 1. In the Beginning:** The creation story reveals the full equality of man and woman in God's original plan, as both were made in the image of God (Gen 1:26-27). The "cultural mandate" gave them full authority over the earth and all earthly life-forms (Gen 1:28-30). This plan of equality was interrupted by the fall, as human sin brought the wife's submission to her husband (Gen 3:16). But even at that



point God spoke of His redemptive plan—He foretold that Eve’s descendant (Jesus) would crush Satan beneath his heel (Gen 3:15), thus redeeming all humanity from the consequence of the fall, including the subjection of women (Gal 3:13).

- 2. In the Old Testament:** God Himself initiated opportunities in the Old Testament period by His call and blessing of women in ministry. God used Miriam as both a prophetess (Ex 15:20) and a leader (Micah 6:4). He used Deborah as a prophetess and as a judge who led Israel; Deborah directed Barak as to how military victory was to be won and she even accompanied him into battle (Judg. 4:4ff). God used the prophetess Huldah (despite Jeremiah and Zephaniah also being prophets at the time) to spark a great religious revival during the reign of King Josiah (2 Kings 22:14ff; 2 Chron. 34:22ff). God also foretold (via the prophet Joel) of the long-expected Day of the Lord when the Holy Spirit would be poured out on both men and women, and they and their sons and daughters would prophesy (Joel 2:28-29).
- 3. In the Ministry of Jesus:** The New Testament communicates how Jesus differed from the prevailing culture, taking a disposition of positive openness towards women as co-laborers. He ministered to men and women alike without distinction. He violated cultural taboos to share the good news with the Samaritan woman, who then evangelized her village (John 4:7ff). He was accompanied by women who ministered to him and his disciples (Mark 15:40-41; Luke 8:1-3). Jesus also chose women to be the first to see him after his resurrection and the first to carry the message of the resurrection to the disciples.
- 4. At Pentecost:** Both men and women were awaiting the fulfillment of Jesus’ promises that the Holy Spirit would come upon them and that they would receive power and authority to be his witnesses to the whole world (Acts 1: 8, 13-15). It was this group of men and women who were filled with the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost and began to speak in many languages to the Jews assembled in Jerusalem for the festival (2:1-12). Peter took the occasion to declare, “this is what was spoken by the prophet Joel” who predicted: ‘Your sons and daughters will prophesy . . . and on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days, and they will prophesy’” (2:17-18). The birth of Christ’s church was accompanied by the demonstration and announcement that men and women would both serve as God’s voices to carry the message of Christ to the world.
- 5. In the Ministry of Paul:** Paul, like Jesus, also worked with and alongside women. In what was probably the first epistle he wrote, Paul declared that in Christ Jesus, “There is neither..male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus” (Gal. 3:28). In writing to the Corinthians, he recognized that women prophesied and prayed in public worship under the new order (1 Cor. 11:5—we understand this verse touches on another contentious concept, but that’s not



what we're here to discuss in the immediate). When closing his letter to the Romans, Paul mentions ten women in chapter 16, seven of whom he speaks of in detail, and with high praise:

- One as a “deacon” (not deaconess) who had been a great help to many, including Paul himself.
- One as *“outstanding among the apostles.”*
- Refers to one as a “fellow worker.”
- Refers to those who had worked hard “in the Lord” or for the Roman believers.
- In Philippians 4:2-3, he mentions two women who had “contended at my side in the cause of the gospel.”
- Some of the names of these gifted leaders—who set an example for women to follow—were: Phoebe (Ro 16:1,2), Apphia (Phm 1:2), Claudia (2Tim 4:21), Chloe (1 Cor 1:11), Julia (Ro 16:15), Lois and Eunice (2 Tim 1:5), Mary (Ro 6:16), Nereus’s sister (Ro 16:15), Nympha (Col 4:15), Persis (Rom 16:12), Rufus’s mother (Rom 16:13), Tryphena and Tryphosa (Ro 16:12), Priscilla (Ro 6:3-5; 1 Cor 16:19; 2 Tim 4:19).
- The preacher, Apollos, is disciples by the husband-and-wife team of Priscilla and Aquilla. In the seven times this couple is mentioned, Priscilla’s name comes first in five of those references. Culturally, this is significant because it suggests the order of responsibility. Priscilla was seen as having the prominent teaching role. The catacombs of Prisca (Priscilla) in Rome also celebrate her martyrdom. A church dedicated to her is built over the top of her grave, and Tertullian said of her “By the holy Prisca, the gospel is preached” (Bailey, Kenneth, E. Women in the New Testament: A Middle Eastern Cultural View 2000).

6. A Female Apostle: The role of an apostle is a gifting which is foundational to the building of Christ’s church. The word apostle (from the Greek Apostolos) is “one who is sent” or “one commissioned.” In Romans 16:7, Paul says, “Andronicus and Jounian are notable among the apostles.” Chrysostom (347-407 AD, Archbishop of Constantinople), an early church father, while preaching on this text, said about Jounian, “how great the wisdom of this woman must have been, that she was even deemed worthy of the title of apostle.” The original text is written in the feminine, while the masculine version of the name (Junius) first appeared in 1860 in the English Language Authorized Version of the Bible. When Martin Luther translated the Greek into German, he was the first to use the masculine version in 1512. However, the original text and the early church recognized the name as a female who is called an apostle. By returning to the original manuscripts and early church tradition, we gain a more accurate picture of the role of women in the early church.

7. Misused Passages: Among Scripture passages frequently cited against women serving in the ministry, the most significant are probably 1 Corinthians 14:33b-35 (“women should remain silent in the churches”), 1 Timothy 2:11-15 (women are not to teach or have authority over men), and passages in 1 Timothy, and Titus calling for a minister to be “the husband of one wife.”



- a. The 1 Corinthians passage deals with a specialized, probably localized, cultural issue since, in 11:5, Paul recognizes women speaking in church as normal. As such, the instruction by Paul is descriptive for that time and place, not prescriptive for everyone for all times and all places.
- b. The 1 Timothy passage, as translated and interpreted, is also inconsistent with Paul's position in 1 Corinthians 11:5. It may likely deal with the false teaching at Ephesus that is repeatedly discussed by Paul in 1 Timothy. We might consider asking whether we want to separate out this passage with all its difficulties and make it the centerpiece of our theology of women.
- c. Paul sets forth qualifications for "a bishop" or "overseer" in 1 Timothy 3:1ff., and elder/bishop/overseer in Titus 1:5-7, and "a deacon" in 1 Timothy 3:12, and in all cases says that such is to be the "husband of but one wife." Since Paul implies that he and Barnabas were not married (1 Cor. 9:5-6), and he specifically calls Phoebe a deacon (Rom. 16:1), his references in 1 Timothy and Titus do not appear to exclude women and single men from ministry, but rather polygamous men.

8. Headship: Crossroads Church does not have an official position on how Christ-followers should apply the biblical passages on headship in the home to our lives today. Some believe the ideal is for the husband to be the leader of the home, just as he was in the ancient context of such passages. Others interpret Ephesians 5:21 ("submit to one another out of reverence for Christ") to teach mutual submission of husband and wife, with husbands submitting to wives and wives submitting to husbands. While the issue of women in ministry is not directly affected by our view of this passage, we might ask ourselves how this passage ought to be understood when viewed in conjunction with Galatians 3.

9. Scripture Is Its Own Best Commentary: As mentioned above, it's helpful to remember that one rule of scriptural interpretation is that unclear passages are to be interpreted in the light of clear and well-defined ones. And even if we were to argue in favor of the passages that prohibit women from leadership in the church, we are left with the example of Jesus (who worked alongside women), and the statements of Joel, Peter, and Paul as our scriptural mandate.

The Lord provided opportunities for women in the Old Testament to lead, the examples of Jesus and Paul provided increasing opportunities for women to lead in the New Testament, and so we also are called to enact this redemptive action. To live within the teachings of Scripture, we must work—often counter-culturally—to provide women with increasing opportunities to answer the call of God in their lives and engage with the spiritual gifts bestowed on them by God.

"So Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teacher, to equip His people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ" (Ephesians 4:11-13).



Conclusion

We believe that God has revealed in the Scriptures His purpose to call, equip, and empower men and women to serve in all leadership capacities. Crossroads Church places a high value on developing, training, and releasing this next generation of leaders to make a kingdom impact. Galatians 3:28 states that *“There is neither...male, nor female.”* **This does not eliminate the differences between genders or biological sexes,** but rather speaks to a general principle of Scripture—**that in Christ all have equal value.** Any passage that first appears to contradict this general statement must be understood in light of the general principle of Galatians 3:28. We believe the spiritual and heavenly identity proclaimed in Galatians 3:28 has clear precedence over other roles or identities given to women in the church.

