

The Woman's Role in the life of the Church

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The discussion of the woman's role in the Church often begins with Paul's words to Timothy, "*I do not permit a woman to teach ...*" (1 Timothy 2:12). This should not be the starting point in the discussion, and we should not allow this verse to obscure the broader biblical perspective on the subject. We must remember **first** that the gospel treats men and women equally; there is no difference (Galatians 3:28). **Second**, women have qualities and abilities, they have spiritual, practical and theological insight that can be and should be used in the life of the Church (see Acts 18:24-28).

Third, the ministry and influence of women is woven throughout both the Old and New Testaments. Speaking through the mouth of his

character Gaius, in the Pilgrim's Progress (Second part), John Bunyan writes.

I will now speak on behalf of women,
to take away their reproach. For as
death and the curse came into the
world by a woman [Genesis 3:6], so
also did life and health: "God sent
forth his son made of a woman"
[Galatians 4:4].

There are many themes, and areas of the biblical story, which emphasise the role of women among the people of God.

Women in the Old Testament

Commenting on Isaiah 40:9, John Newton points out that it was "the custom in Israel for women to publish and celebrate the good news with songs and instruments" (Works, 4:68-69). Newton highlights Miriam (Exodus 25:20-21), the women welcoming David back from war (1 Samuel 18:6-7), and Deborah (Judges 5:28-29). Newton argues then that all the women of Israel should, in the same manner, proclaim to Jerusalem, "Behold your God" (Isaiah 40:9).

Woman in the lineage of Jesus

In Matthew 1:3-6, there are four women mentioned especially whom Jesus welcomed into his lineage; Tamar, who played the part of a prostitute, Rahab the prostitute, Ruth the Gentile idolator, and Bathsheba the adulteress (Matthew 1:3-6).

Women in the ministry of Jesus

Women had a very special and favoured place in the life and ministry of Jesus, which is illustrative for their continued role in the Church today.

- It was women who first rejoiced over the Saviour's birth, before men or angels (Luke 1:39-56).
- It was women who followed Jesus, ministered to him and provided for him, not men (Luke 8:2-3; Matthew 27:55).
- It was women who anointed his feet with tears, not men (Luke 7:37-38; John 12:3).
- It was women who followed him to the cross, who sat and wept there, and who sat and watched at the tomb (Luke 23:27; Matthew 27:55-56, 61).
- It was women who first brought the announcement of the risen Christ to the disciples (Luke 24:22-23).

Women in the early Church

The Church at Philippi was founded, primarily through the influence of a woman, Lydia (Acts 16). Almost half of his final greeting to the church in Rome was dedicated to women, named individually, and he begins with Phebe (Romans 16:1). Over and over again in his ministry, Paul mentions the help he has received from women in the churches and commends them for their work (Acts 1:12–14; 9:36–42; 16:13–15; 17:1–4, 10–12; 18:1–2, 18, 24–28; Romans 16; 1 Corinthians 16:19; Philippians 4:3; 2 Timothy 1:5; 4:19). After the apostolic age, there are mentions of women among what are called the “Church Fathers.” The most famous among them perhaps is Perpetua, a Christian noblewoman who was martyred at the beginning of the 3rd century.

Conclusion

Women are responsible (i.e. obligated), along with men, for many things within the life of the Church.

The Great Commission (Matthew 28:18-19), for example, or Peter’s exhortation to serve (1 Peter 4:10), were not written for men only. Our obligation to fulfil the “one another” passages of the New Testament were not written to men alone, but to women also.

Women are a precious, valued, and an essential part in the life of the Church—the body of Christ. In the creation story, God said, “it is not good that man should be alone” (Genesis 2:18).

The same can be said by the Church. The Lord has given to his Church gifts that are suited to men and gifts that are suited to women. As in the family, it is God’s design that these gifts complement each other in the life of the Church, and, like the healthy family needs both parents, the Church needs both men and women.

So, women have served throughout history and can serve the Lord in the Church today (Romans 16:1).

Think of women, like princess Clara Nalumansi, the first member of Buganda’s royal family to convert to Christianity, in 1888, was among the martyrs of the early Ugandan church. Women like Nalumansi can teach both by example and instruction (Acts 18:24-28; Titus 2:3; Colossians 3:16), they can provide for the Church, encourage or stir up to love and good works (Hebrews 10:25), spread the gospel (Acts 8:4), pray (Acts 16:13), etc., etc., and they can witness to the grace of God by giving their life’s blood for the sake of the gospel.