

Women, Assemblies, and Churches of Christ

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*For you can all prophesy one by one,
so that all may learn and all be encouraged.*

1 Corinthians 14:31

[This essay offers a *succinct* case for the full participation of women in the assemblies gathered for prayer, praise, and mutual edification. I do not entertain the potential objections and alternative perspectives in this brief piece. *Women Serving God: My Journey in Understanding Their Story in the Bible* contains more detail and fuller argumentation. All biblical texts assumed and quoted in the essay are identified at the end.]

I remember the first time I heard a woman speak in an assembly of a church of Christ. I was visiting a Black congregation in Alabama. At some point in the service, the minister asked if anyone wanted to confess sin, bear witness, or ask for prayers. Several women stood up and responded with testimonies, confessions, and prayer requests. This was not, I learned, uncommon among African American churches of Christ, though it never happened in the integrated congregation in which I grew up as a teenager.

I was shocked. I said nothing, but it bothered me. It was the first time, at the age of twenty-five, that I had heard a woman's voice in the assembly other than congregational singing or baptismal confessions.

It disturbed me because I was convinced that women should neither speak to nor stand before the assembly. All leadership authority belonged to men because God formed Adam first, then Eve. This applied not only to the public assembly but to every group gathered for prayer and praise whether in a home or at a park.

My Early History

My first memories of discussing the audible participation of women in prayer and praise came in the context of whether pre-teen and teenage girls could voice their petitions in chain prayers as long as they did not begin or end the chain. That was an occasional topic of conversation in my youth group from 1972 to 1974. It also exploded across the landscape of churches of Christ in the 1970s, especially in youth and campus groups. Only rare voices approved such practices. Girls, most believed, should not participate audibly because God formed Adam first, then Eve.

That God formed Adam first, then Eve answered many questions. It meant women should not teach a baptized ten year old boy at the church building, even her own son. It meant women could not lead a small group that included men in their own home. It meant women could not silently serve communion to the assembly because it involved standing up in the assembly. It meant she could not read Scripture to the assembly, though she could read it in a Bible class. It meant she could write a sermon for publication, though she could not give it voice in an assembly. It meant that women could not serve as deacons, vote in or even attend

business meetings, or lead the singing, though she could serve tables (other than in the assembly), lead the nursery ministry, and start songs from her seat when needed.

I wrestled with these practices, and at one time I thought I had a solid, coherent, and convicting rationale based on the fact that God formed Adam first, then Eve. I wrote a book, with a Freed-Hardeman classmate, defending it, though I was an eighteen to nineteen year-old single when I wrote it. It was published in 1978. I was convinced that I was right, and I was sure that I had read the Bible correctly. It seemed clear to me. The Bible says what it says, and I believed it.

After my godly mother read my book, the only comment she has ever offered over the past forty-two years was her initial response: "You sure use the word subordination a lot in that book."

I sensed the book hurt her in some way. I was oblivious as to why. I did not then have the capacity to sympathize with her. Over time her comment gave me pause, and I began to wonder whether something was terribly wrong with my approach.

Some History Among Churches of Christ

In the early 1980s I read C. R. Nichol's *God's Woman*, published in 1938. Reading it literally *shocked* me.

Nichol had unquestioned conservative credentials. His five volumes of *Sound Doctrine* (co-authored with R. L. Whiteside) were in my father's library. I read each volume as a teenager. I practically memorized his Bible pocket encyclopedia. When I picked up *God's Woman* I expected a conventional perspective, but it was quite different from both my own understanding and my experience among churches of Christ.

Nichol believed women audibly and visibly participated in the public assemblies of Corinth and Ephesus. They led Corinthian assemblies in prayer and exhorted those gathered through prophecy. The only women silenced in Corinth were those who disrupted the order of the assembly by incessantly asking questions. He believed women could teach men in Bible classes and in other settings, though they could not preach with authority in the public assembly.

I could not believe my eyes. Nichol defended the *limited participation* of women in the leadership of the assembly while the congregations I knew practiced *no participation*. I wondered, however, whether he was all alone in his views and thus represented a kind of blip on the screen. To my surprise, subsequent reading revealed that Nichol was not alone. In fact, over the previous fifty years churches of Christ had debated the extent of participation of women in the public assembly, Bible classes, and teaching in their own homes. They also debated whether women could vote, pursue public careers, or make public speeches in social settings.

Some, like David Lipscomb, thought women should not pursue any public activities (whether in church or society) but thought women could teach Bible classes that included men at the meetinghouse or in their homes. Some, like Daniel Sommer, thought women should not preach in the public assembly, but it was their privilege to lead singing, lead prayers, and exhort the assembly. Some, in what became the ultimate practice of most churches of Christ, thought women should not teach groups that included men in the assembly, Bible classes, or their own

homes, lead any men in prayer, and exclude women from any audible participation or visible leadership in the assembly.

Apparently, Nichol's book attempted, in part, to preserve female voices within the assemblies of the churches of Christ. Nevertheless, women were effectively silenced by the 1940s. F. W. Smith, the respected minister of the 4th Avenue congregation in Franklin, Tennessee and an esteemed writer for the *Gospel Advocate*, illustrates the sort of decision that was made (*Gospel Advocate*, 1929, 778-9; emphases are his).

To what extent a Christian woman has the right to participate in public worship has never appeared as clear to me as I could wish, and for that reason I feel unable to deal with the question. . . I conclude, therefore, not dogmatically, but to be on the safe side, that since the word of God does not *clearly* and *explicitly* inform us that it would be Scriptural for a woman to lead the prayer in the assembly of the saints, it would be best to conform to the custom in this respect of the 'loyal' churches.

The rationale is important: *safe* and *loyal*, but *not dogmatic*. "Safe" because he could see no specific and explicit blueprint authorization. "Loyal" because northern assemblies, in which women often prayed and exhorted, were headed into apostasy as a separate denomination called the Christian Church (even though some conservative congregations of the churches of Christ, like those associated with Sommer, welcomed some forms of female leadership in the assembly). But he could not be *dogmatic* about this particular question. Yet, what was once primarily a matter of *safety* and *loyalty* in 1929 became, by the 1940s-1950s, a *dogmatic* marker of a faithful New Testament church. The full exclusion of women from leading in the public assembly as well as teaching and praying in Bible classes became the dominant practice of churches of Christ, and it still is.

Smith's comment is disturbing. What I thought was so plain and what churches of Christ had consistently practiced in my experience was not so clear, uniform, or absolute between 1888-1938. In fact, at the beginning of these years of intense discussion, David Lipscomb wrote (*Gospel Advocate*, March 7, 1888, p. 7), "It is a difficult question to determine exactly the limit of the law forbidding women to teach or usurp authority publicly." If my spiritual ancestors recognized the difficulty and their practices were diverse, I began to wonder whether my own certainty was rooted more in (recent) tradition than Scripture. Perhaps the meaning of "Adam was first formed, then Eve" was not as clear as I thought it was.

Embracing Limited Participation

In 1989, at the request of *Image Magazine*, I wrote an article entitled, "Worship in 1 Corinthians 14:26-40: The Injunction of Silence." I restated the view I had held at least since 1977. Paul forbade, I argued, women to have an authoritative voice in the public assembly. They should not exercise their gifts of tongue-speaking or prophecy. However, while I wrote what I believed, I did not express my misgivings.

When, in 1990, I was invited to speak at a lectureship on this topic and write a chapter for the book, I decided to thoroughly review my understanding of the Corinthian assembly and Paul's commands. I resolved to reexamine my thinking, update my research, and see where the evidence led me.

This reassessment gave rise to some new perspectives. It became clearer to me that Paul's restriction of speech was limited in a significant way. It was not a prescription for total silence. Even if we restrict it to authoritative speech, this did not exclude the voices of women in other speech (including singing, confessing, testimonies, prayer requests, announcements, etc.). Moreover, I came to believe that Paul's interest was not about whether a particular form of speech was authoritative or not but whether it was disruptive. God is not the God of confusion. Everything must be done for edification as well as decently and in order. Consequently, just as Paul silenced the tongue-speakers and prophets in specific ways to maintain order, so Paul silenced disorderly women. This was not about authority or leadership but about submission to order in the assembly.

I also became convinced that whatever "man is the head of woman" meant, it did not exclude women from exercising their gifts in Corinth, particularly praying and prophesying. Headship did not silence women in Corinth. Women enjoyed the privilege of prophesying just as much as men as long as both did so in culturally appropriate ways (e.g., head-coverings in Corinth—whatever that was and whatever it meant, which is disputed). This was, in fact, the practice of all the assemblies of God.

This made much more sense to me when I returned to chapter fourteen and noticed the plural verbs and nouns that saturate the chapter. Paul's teaching addressed women as well as men. "Pursue love, and strive for spiritual gifts, and especially that you may prophesy" is spoken to the whole church. Paul hoped "all" of the Corinthians would speak in tongues but "even more" prophecy. When Paul addressed the Corinthians as "brothers," he addressed the whole church, including women.

No distinction is made between men and women when he wrote, "When you come together, each one has a hymn, a lesson, a revelation, a tongue, or an interpretation." Everyone brought their gift to the assembly, and Paul wanted them to use these gifts for the edification of the assembly, including prophecy (revelation) and teaching ("lesson"). Moreover, when it comes to prophecy, Paul regulated the disorder so that "you can all prophesy one by one, so that all may learn and all be encouraged."

Women are prophesying in chapter eleven, women are gifted with prophecy, and "you can all prophesy." Paul included women when he said "you can all prophesy." Both men and women are included from the opening imperative to "pursue love" to its final one to "be eager to prophesy, and do not forbid speaking in tongues." Paul expected people, both men and women, to use their gifts as long as they did so in an orderly manner.

Women, included in the "each one," are among those who bring their gifts to the assembly, which included psalms (hymns), teachings, and revelations. Women taught in the assembly, sang in the assembly, and they spoke the word of God through their prophesying. I have never been convinced that prophesying is less authoritative than what we call preaching today (or authoritative teachers in the church). When Paul listed the gifts, he was explicit: "first apostles, second prophets, and third teachers." Prophets spoke words of exhortation, edification, and encouragement from which the assembly learned about God and were convicted by God's word. If authoritative teaching is the guideline, the word of the Lord through the prophets carries as much authority, if not more, as preachers, teachers, and elders (however we may distinguish those categories).

Prophecy and Inclusion

As this insight took root in my understanding, I began to more carefully notice a thread within Scripture that I had typically misunderstood, ignored, or dismissed. Namely, there have always been significant and effective female prophets who exercised authority over men in Israel.

After Abraham and Aaron, Miriam is the next named prophet in the Bible. She—along with Moses and Aaron—was sent to lead Israel in the wilderness and saw visions from the Lord just like Aaron did. She also led both men and women in worship as the congregation praised God for their liberation from slavery.

The fifth named prophet, after Moses, is Deborah. She was the only person, during the period of the Judges, who was called *both* a judge and a prophet except for Samuel. Deborah exercised authority, like Samuel, over Israel by judging cases, declaring the word of the Lord, and leading Israel. She summoned Barak and commanded him to obey God. Barak made the honor roll of faith because he obeyed Deborah.

The prophet Huldah spoke the word of the Lord to the king of Judah through God's high priest. Moreover, she affirmed the veracity of the text about which they asked. In effect, Huldah confirmed that a book discovered in the ruins of the temple was, in fact, Scripture. She officially, by her authority as a temple prophet, sanctioned the use of this book as Scripture for Josiah and his high priest.

Esther authorized a new feast for Israel that was not included in the Mosaic covenant. She commanded Israel to keep the feast. She exercised not only political authority but also religious authority. Queen Esther gave Israel the authority to celebrate a feast that was an addition to the Mosaic law.

The prophet Anna dedicated herself to fasting and prayer in the temple for decades. When she recognized the Messiah, she began to praise God and speak about the child to everyone who was looking for redemption. As a prophet, she publicly taught both men and women in the temple courts about God's redemptive grace, just as Jesus himself would later publicly teach in the those same temple courts.

These women spoke the word of the Lord, led the people of God, and authorized deeds and laws which Israel obeyed. None of this violated God's intent in creation. *God does not gift women and sanction the use of their gifts in ways that inherently violate God's own intent in creation.*

But did not "Adam was formed first, then Eve" exclude women from positions of authority among the people of God? *It did not.* That rationale had always been a seemingly solid foundation for me because I thought that is how Paul used the creation story. Yet, Paul's use of creation did not exclude women from prophesying. Female prophets who spoke the word of the Lord to the people of God, rebuked sin amidst the people of God, and demanded their obedience did not violate God's design in creation. These women exercised authority over men in various contexts and in diverse ways. None of their actions violated God's intent in creation. Perhaps Paul meant something different than I had always assumed.

Creation, Men, and Women

When I returned to Genesis 1-3 to reflect on its meaning for the relationship between men and women, it became apparent that the only authority identified before humanity sinned was the dominion men and women shared. They shared a common identity as persons created in the image of God as God's representatives on the earth. They shared a common vocation to fill the earth with the glory of God, subdue the chaos in the earth, and have dominion over the creation. They shared a royal commission as male and female. They were both called and blessed to participate in the mission of God. Humanity was differentiated as male and female but formed as one through their shared human identity, vocation, and intimacy. Men and women complement each other as they stand shoulder-to-shoulder. They are different but the same, diverse but united. Whether in community or marriage, men and women are partners and allies in the mission of God.

While Genesis 1 portrays the sixth day of creation as a singular event—male and female created in the image of God, Genesis 2 describes it as a succession of events. God created the earth, formed the man out of the ground, placed the man in the garden of Eden, created the flora and fauna, formed a woman from the side of the man, introduced them to each other, and united the two as one flesh. This succession of events is not about who has primary responsibility or who is in charge. Otherwise, it would entail a supremacy of men over women in every aspect of created life, not only in the home and church but also in society. If “Adam was first formed, then Eve” means Adam has authority and supremacy, then this would be true not only in the home and church but also in society.

Rather, the succession of events is about the beauty of the oneness God actualized in the garden. The narrative climaxed with man and woman as one flesh. It reached its pinnacle in the encounter between the man and the woman. They are of the same flesh and bones; they are designed for each other. They are one flesh, which is much more than sexual union. It is the unity, mutuality, and intimacy of their life together as man and woman, whether in marriage or community, as they take up their shared vocation with a shared identity.

However, that beauty and harmony dissolved when they ate the forbidden fruit. God addressed each as moral agents who were responsible for their own actions and did not hold one responsible for the other. The man, however, blamed the woman, and the woman blamed the serpent. As a result, the order that pervaded the garden became a chaotic mess.

While harmony once existed within Eden, now hostility emerged between the serpent and the woman. While childbearing was originally free of anxiety, now the woman bore children with great fear. While the original couple once knew harmony in their oneness, now they experienced conflict. While in the garden the couple enjoyed a bountiful provision, now they anxiously struggled with the ground to produce food. While in Eden the man and woman were nourished by the tree of life, now they experienced death.

Actions have consequences. When a rightly ordered life is disordered, chaos and destruction ensue. The harmony, mutual authority, and self-giving that God intended for men and women in God's good creation is now disrupted by anxiety and conflict. It brought conflict between humanity and the creation and between men and women. Due to the introduction of moral chaos, death now enslaved the couple. Due to moral chaos, women would desire their husbands and their husbands would rule over them. Rule, in the form of abuse, oppression, and enslavement, began with the introduction of moral chaos as humanity now lived life east of Eden.

The abusive domination of men over women emerged quickly. Lamech married two wives. The “sons of God” married the “daughters of men” with the result that the creation was filled with violence. Dinah, Jacob’s daughter, was raped. Concubines were sacrificed in order to protect men. David violently secured Bathsheba as his wife. Tamar, raped by her half-brother, lived the rest of her life in grief and solitude. In Ancient Near Eastern cultures women were treated as property, limited in activities and rights, and regarded as unstable and weak. Men ruled, abused, and oppressed women, which was part of what living east of Eden came to mean.

Nevertheless, this abusive male rule did not snuff out the value of women in Israel or prevent God from enlisting them as leaders. In calling female leaders, God reminded Israel that the human vocation is a shared one and that women also bear the image of God as they, too, represent God in the world not only in their essence but through their gifts and leadership.

Pentecost and Renewal of Creation

Recognizing that creation did not entail male authority over women but that male rule was a distortion of God’s intent opened a window to more fully grasp what happened at Pentecost. There God renewed the creation intent for shared life in mutual submission in order to fulfill the mission of God. God recreated a community where men and women share dominion and take up the mandate to fill the earth with the glory of God and subdue the dark powers that rule the present evil age. More than recreation, God poured out the future reality of new creation (new heaven and new earth) as the kingdom of God broke into the world through the pouring out of the Spirit.

This renewal was announced by the prophet Joel, whom Peter quoted on the day of Pentecost. Men and women, enslaved and free, and Jew and Gentile will prophesy and dream dreams. This was revolutionary. It was the beginning of something new; it was an expression of new creation. It was not only about how these groups are equally called into a saving relationship with God, but how they have been equally gifted by God to participate in the mission of God, demonstrate the presence of God in this new community, and represent God in the world as the images of Christ. “There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female” in Jesus the Messiah because we are all heirs of the promise to Abraham, which includes the presence, fruit, and gifts of the Holy Spirit.

While Jesus chose only males as his Twelve, he also only chose free Jewish males. But after Pentecost, it was no longer only free Jewish men who were gifted by God. God gifted the church with apostles beyond the Twelve. For example, Paul, Barnabas, James, Andronicus, and Junia are called apostles. While Moses, too, only chose male priests, he only chose free males from the lineage of Aaron. But after Pentecost, it was no longer only Aaronic free men who were priests in the new order of Melchizedek where Jesus is the High Priest. Gentiles, the enslaved, and women in the new creation are priests, too.

When Jesus ascended to the right hand of God, God poured out the Spirit through Jesus and gave gifts to the people of God. The Messiah gave “some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers.”

Whenever Paul listed the gifts of the Spirit, he never suggested some are for women, some are for men, and some are for both any more than he said some are for Jews and some

are for Gentiles or some are for the enslaved and others are for free persons. Rather, God distributes gifts according to grace, not according to economics, ethnicity, or gender.

In fact, within the ministry of the church in the New Testament, we see a female apostle, women prophesying, women evangelists (spreading and proclaiming the good news), and women teachers. In another list of gifts, every gift was exercised by women in the New Testament. Women prophesied, ministered, taught, exhorted, gave, led, and practiced mercy.

Women served as deacons. Women were patrons. They labored with Paul (the same language describes Paul's male counterparts). They were Paul's co-workers. These women were leaders, and Paul directed the Corinthian house churches to submit to every co-worker and laborer in the Lord. Given the presence of female prophets in Corinth and that twenty percent of the people Paul named in his letters as co-workers and co-laborers were women, Corinthian house churches, as well as congregations in other localities, submitted to women as well as men who were known as co-workers and laborers in ministry.

What Paul desired for the disciples of Jesus is mutual submission—to live together in “one-anotherness.” Just as Jesus humbled himself to serve others through becoming like us, so we should serve each other. Just as Jesus called his disciples to reject the kind of status, authority, and power that characterized Gentile rulers and authorities, so we reject authoritarianism and status in order to submit to each other in mutual love. We welcome one another, instruct one another, love each other, encourage each other, and live in harmony with one another. Indeed, we serve and submit to each other.

But “Adam was first formed, then Eve.”

Despite all this evidence in the biblical text, there was *one* text that hindered me from embracing the *full participation* of women in the assembly as God's will. (However, at times, I wondered whether I had badly misunderstood this one text since the flow of the story of God so strongly empowers women in such diverse ways.)

As I sought to make sense of what Paul was saying, two crucial questions emerged. What exactly did Paul forbid, and why did he forbid it?

My interest in the application of this text grew when my eight year old daughter participated in a Christian event where pre-teens and teenagers gave speeches, led singing, were quizzed in Bible bowls, and performed in puppet shows. My daughter competed in the speech category. When the time came for her to speak, I went to the designated room. I was barred entry. Men, including fathers, were not allowed to listen to pre-teen girls talk about God. When I inquired about the rationale, the organizers quoted Paul. She was not allowed to speak in front of me because she was not allowed teach men. If she taught me, she would exercise authority over me. There was something terribly wrong, I thought at the time, with any reading that generated that application just as there was something wrong when the text was used to prohibit girls from audibly praying in chain prayers, wives from leading husbands in prayer, or girls from leading their fathers in prayer. All of which I had heard—and even advocated—in my years serving churches of Christ.

Such broad and limiting applications of Paul's single sentence have been part of Christian history and the history of churches of Christ. It had been used to prohibit women from voting in governmental elections, giving speeches in public social venues, and pursuing careers

in medicine, law, and politics. It had also been used to prohibit adult women from teaching ten year old baptized males in a Sunday School class, serving communion standing before the congregation, leading prayers in small groups or Bible classes, teaching Bible classes with men present, and baptizing anyone, even another woman. This verse has been used to prohibit women from exercising any authority in society, home, and church and serving in any leadership role where men would submit to women. In other words, this single verse has excluded women from a wide range of activities based on the discernment of empowered male leaders.

Men held the power, it was argued, because Adam was first formed, then Eve, and Eve was deceived and became a transgressor. Historically, this rationale was not only based on the fact that a man was created first but that women were more easily deceived, too emotional, and unfit for public service in both society and church. In other words, there was something about women—even in the nature with which they were created, something in their essence—that rendered them unfit for public leadership in the home, church, and society. Eve was deceived, but Adam was not.

But was Paul concerned with these broad issues of male leadership in all aspects of home, church, and society, or was Paul focused on something much more specific? What exactly did Paul intend to prohibit?

Paul's First Letter to Timothy

Paul's first letter to Timothy begins and ends with some weighty words about false teaching that promoted myths and ungodliness. Timothy must "fight the good fight" against this false teaching. Therefore, Paul encouraged prayer and reaffirmed the basic story of salvation in Jesus the Messiah. Because of this concern for false teaching ("therefore"), Paul also addressed the problem of angry disputes among men and the behavior of some women promoted ungodliness rather than good works.

Some women, including those who dressed immodestly, were going from house to house talking nonsense by promoting myths and saying what they should not. They were following the path of the false teachers into the clutches of Satan. Their teaching and self-promotion was disruptive and dangerous. Their style of dress promoted their ungodliness and association with false teachers, and they sought to persuade men to follow them. They targeted men due to their desire for wealth and power. Paul wanted to put an end to this kind of activity. "I do not permit . . .," Paul wrote. He did not want these women to assert themselves and overpower men by enlisting them in their project. The prohibition intended to stop this activity. It did not intend to prohibit all women for all time everywhere from teaching men at any time.

Stopping these women, however, was not the end game. Paul also wanted them taught. Timothy should teach the women as long as they were willing to learn in full submission to the teaching of God (sound doctrine) and with a quiet, humble demeanor. Paul wanted these women to learn with a submissive spirit that was neither disruptive nor boisterous. Once they have learned, then they could become teachers in the community. This was, in fact, Paul's agenda for Timothy—to teach people (both men and women) so that they might teach others.

But Paul said, “Adam was first formed, then Eve.”

How does “Adam was first formed, then Eve” serve as a rationale for Paul’s prohibition?

That is an important question. For a long time I simply assumed that the chronological fact entailed the principle of primogeniture (firstborn). In other words, since Adam was created first, therefore the first man had authority over the first woman. However, this is not explicitly stated. Only the chronological fact is explicit. If primogeniture is intended, it would also entail a greater inheritance for the man than the woman as it did for the firstborn in Israel. The firstborn received double inheritance. Will men inherit more than women in the new creation? In another place, Paul said we are all heirs and there is no longer male or female in the new creation, especially as it pertains to inheritance.

Moreover, in Genesis, primogeniture is subverted and overturned. It does not entail supremacy or authority. Isaac was chosen over Ishmael, Jacob over Esau, Judah over Rueben, and Ephraim over Manasseh. In these cases, the second born (created) received whatever primacy there was. In addition, if primogeniture is the basis for Paul’s instruction, then it should apply not only to the church but also to society because creation norms, it is argued, apply to all human relationships.

The principle of primogeniture is an unnecessary inference and assumption. In fact, it contradicts the explicit text of Genesis itself. Men and women share authority over the creation, and men only rule women after the couple sinned.

There is another reason why Paul might have employed this chronology. Paul told the story of Genesis in a telescoped fashion in order to make a specific analogy. The chronological fact begins the narration of creation (“formed”), moves to the fall (“transgressed”), and climaxes in redemption (“saved”). God formed Adam, then Eve, and then Eve transgressed, but God will save her (Eve) through the childbearing (Christ) if they (the problematic women in Ephesus) continue in faith with modesty.

Paul appealed to the narrative where Adam, first created, was first instructed and, therefore, knew the command of God from the beginning. Eve, however, was deceived. She was tricked by the serpent, and Eve followed the serpent, just like some women were ensnared by Satan and followed others into false teaching and ungodly practices. Though deceived, she persuaded Adam who sinned with his eyes wide open. She overruled or overpowered him with her influence. Adam listened to the voice of his wife and followed her. Eve was a type of the deceived women who led men into transgression through their false teaching and aggressive tactics.

In other words, Paul’s rationale was not: men have supremacy or authority over women because men have primogeniture rights, therefore, women should not teach men. Rather, it was: some women have been deceived by false teachers and they are persuading men to follow them like Eve did, therefore, these women should not teach but learn.

Paul had no objection to women teaching men. Women possess the gift of the teaching as well as men. Women are invited to share their teaching gift in the assembly. Women are told to teach, women taught, and women prophets taught. Paul did not delimit the gift of teaching but excluded those who taught falsely and misled the church. Some women in Ephesus were promoting ungodliness and some men had already been excluded from the Ephesian church.

Paul is doing damage control and pointing Timothy to a solution: let these women learn but until they do, they are not permitted to teach.

Conclusion

What really is “safe” and “loyal”? Perhaps it is safer to heed God’s gifting of women by the Spirit and to affirm a loyalty to Scripture’s witness to the gifts of women. Perhaps it is safer to listen to the full story of women in the Bible, and the test of our loyalty is whether we are willing to hear what the whole of Scripture says.

Paul wanted women to learn so they could teach. In this, Paul followed the practice of Jesus who encouraged Mary to sit at his feet as a disciple-learner. Just as Paul sat at the feet of Gamaliel as a disciple to learn how to follow his teacher and become a teacher himself, so Mary sat at the feet of Jesus. Women are disciples of Jesus, too. They are not disciples in some secondary way.

When Jesus told his disciples to wait in Jerusalem for the coming of the Spirit, women were present. When Jesus commissioned his disciples, women were included. When the Spirit was poured out on the church, women received the Spirit as well. When Jesus gave gifts to the church, he gave gifts to women, too.

Both men and women are commissioned to “make disciples of all nations, baptizing them into the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you.”

Both men and women are commissioned to *make disciples, baptize, and teach*. Whether in the assembly or outside of the assembly, whether in the home or in the public square, God welcomes women into the body of Christ, gifts women in the body of Christ, and calls them to *make disciples, baptize, and teach* others.

Biblical Texts: Genesis 1:26-28, 2:15-25; 3:6, 8-19; 4:18, 23-24; 6:1-4, 11-13; 20:7; 21:14; 27:17-30; 34:1-5; 48:14; 49:8-10; Exodus 7:1; 15:20-21; Deuteronomy 18:15; Judges 4:4-10; 19:24-29; 2 Samuel 3:20-4:1; 11:1-27; 13:7-19; 2 Chronicles 24:19-28; Esther 9:29-32; Psalm 68:11; Micah 6:4; Joel 2:28; Matthew 26:55; 28:18-20; Mark 10:42-45; Luke 2:36-38; 10:38-42; 19:47; 21:37; 22:24-30; Acts 1:12-15; 2:16-17; 8:3-4; 9:36; 14:14; 18:26; 21:9; 22:3; Romans 12:3-8, 10, 16; 13:8; 14:13, 19; 15:7, 14; 16:1-3, 6-7, 12, 24; 1 Corinthians 3:9; 7:4; 11:3-16; 12:28; 14:1, 3, 5, 24-40; 16:16; 2 Corinthians 11:3-4; Galatians 1:4, 19; 3:14, 28-29; 4:1-7; 6:14-16; Ephesians 4:7-11; 5:21; Philippians 2:6-11, 25; 4:2; Colossians 4:10; Philemon 24; 1 Thessalonians 3:2, 5; 5:12; 1 Timothy 1:3-4, 18-20; 2:1, 4-6, 8-15; 4:6-7; 5:11-15; 6:2-6, 11-12; 2 Timothy 2:2, 16; 3:6; Titus 2:3; Hebrews 11:32.