

## DEVELOPING A HEALTHY INTERPRETIVE LENS

We all look at scripture through our own interpretive lenses. Many things shape how each of us views scripture: our family upbringing, church heritage, race, gender, economic status, culture, and ethnicity. Try as we might to be totally neutral and objective, we interpret everything in life, all our experiences, *and even scripture* with lenses that are impacted by so many things. That's not bad or good; it's just a reality.

For example, there was a great deal of culture, history, and "context" going on when the Bible spoke about and referenced slavery. There are many Bible verses in both the Old & New Testament which affirm slavery, condone slavery, and even state that slaves should obey their Masters. Yet, who would argue that *today* we should support, condone, and endorse slavery? While there is no scripture that challenges the wrongness or immorality of slavery in Old or New Testaments, we now recognize and interpret other scriptures, within the whole of *all* scripture, to be more overriding and the real lens by which we filter these "slavery" scriptures. As a result, we have become a people who have chosen to dismantle slavery, and we do so out of reverence to Christ and the Word.

Similarly, consider the command in Luke 14:33 where Jesus states that unless one gives up all his/her possessions, they cannot be his disciples. He's very clear and very straightforward about this. Do we need to put all our houses, cars, televisions, and mobile phones up for sale, giving away whatever assets are received once we sell all our belongings? Or, is Jesus trying to teach something here to his disciples and to us? Is he stating this instruction to make a point? If so, what is the context? What principle is Jesus trying to establish by this command?

In 1 Timothy 2 (verses 9-10), women are not to adorn themselves with pearls, gold, elaborate hairstyles, or expensive clothes. Is this a command? If so, is this a specific command for all time, or is it just for a certain scenario and situation? Does the Bible have other verses that would make it acceptable for wives to wear their gold wedding rings? Is it unreasonable for daughters to get their hair elaborately done for a wedding or family photo? It's unlikely that any of us believe that a literal rendering of 1 Timothy 2:9-10 is to be the dress code for all time for women who are attempting to be godly and pure. Likewise, in this situation we have allowed culture, both then and now, to help explain Paul's intention to guide what we do in 2014 with those verses.

### HOW WE APPROACH SCRIPTURE MATTERS

As we approach scripture, some serious, "micro-level" analysis needs to occur. Important questions must be asked and addressed to gain insight into a clearer interpretation of the Bible. Consider these four questions when approaching scripture to help develop a healthy interpretive lens:

- What's the textual context?
- What's the overall intent/argument?
- What's the historical/cultural background?
- What's the underlying principle?

## Studying the Role of Women in Worship... "Starting with what we know"

### I. IN CREATION

The creation story provides perspective in understanding women's role in the church. Prior to the Fall, there is no explicit hierarchy of leadership, control or responsibility described within the Genesis account. In Genesis 1, male and female are treated equally in the activity of God. In Genesis 2, the man is made aware of his need for a mate and the woman is presented as expressly suited to fulfill that need. Whatever is derived from this second account of creation in regard to leadership or functional roles should be evaluated within covenant relationship of marriage since that is the original context – 'for this reason'. While the Fall can be used to explain the abuses of

leadership by men toward women before the Cross, it is not an appropriate basis for developing philosophies and practices which stifle the gifts of women redeemed in Christ.

\* Created Humanity (Genesis 1:26-29; 5:1-2)—God purposes and acts to create man (mankind) in the image of God (-head, -hood), both male and female, to rule over all creatures. He blesses them and commands them to fill the earth and subdue it.

\* Created Marriage (Genesis 2:18-25)—After the man is created, God determines that it is not good for him to be alone and purposes to provide a suitable helper (*ezer*). First all livestock, birds and wild animals are presented to the man. Finding no partner among the creatures, God makes woman from the man and presents her to him. Man acknowledges that he is the source (head) of the woman taken out of him. The marriage of the two is declared to be a partnership creating ‘one flesh’ – oneness as in the image of God.

\* The Fall (Genesis 3) — The serpent tempts the wife to eat from the tree. She succumbs, eats, and offers it to her husband – who is with her – and he eats, as well. The consequences for the wife include the first mention of her husband ruling over her.

## II. IN THE OT: WOMEN IN ISRAEL

On the whole, women’s sole sphere in Old Testament times was limited to the home. Women were excluded from the priesthood as well as from most other leadership within Israel. There were exceptions, however. In fact, several women are mentioned in the Old Testament as having exercised leadership among God’s people. Their stories are told, moreover, without any hint of condemnation.

\* Miriam (Exodus 15:20; Numbers 12:1-2)—called a prophetess; leads the women in a song of praise to God for the deliverance of Israel from the Egyptians

\* Deborah (Judges 4-5)—one of the judges of Israel in the period of time before Samuel and the monarchy, who led the Israelites against the Canaanites; also called a prophetess.

\* Huldah (2Kings 22:14-20; 2 Chronicles 34:22-28)—a prophetess in Israel to whom King Josiah sends his closest advisors for word of the Lord. (“Go and inquire of the Lord for me and for the people and for all Judah...” 22:13). They go to Huldah, who answers them by saying, “This is what the Lord, the God of Israel says: Tell the man who sent you to me, This is what the Lord says: I am going to bring disaster in this place and its people...” In short, she speaks to them the prophetic, authoritative word of the Lord.

\* The wife of noble character (Proverbs 31)...buys, trades, sells, speaks with wisdom, instructs faithfully, watches over the affairs of her home, fears the Lord, her works bring her praise

\* Isaiah’s wife (Isaiah 8:3)—identified as a prophetess

Though their numbers are small, it is clear that in some cases in Old Testament times, women, by divine inspiration, spoke the authoritative message of God and exercised leadership among God’s people. They were able to do so, furthermore, without violating God’s overall design for men and women in relationship to each other.

## III. WOMEN IN THE MINISTRY OF JESUS

Women are frequently mentioned in connection with Jesus and his ministry. Here is a list of some of them:

1. Luke 1:46-56 – Mary’s song, in which she praises God for what he is about to do in the birth of Jesus (NOTE: it is a parallel to “Zechariah’s song” in Luke 1:67-80)
2. Luke 2:36-38 – Anna the prophetess (a parallel figure to Simeon, Luke 2:25-35)
3. Matthew 12:46-50 – Jesus’ mother and brothers
4. Matthew 15:21-28 – The Canaanite woman, who is held up as a model of faith
5. Matthew 20:20-28 – The mother of James and John; (Interestingly, she has the boldness to come to Jesus with her request that he give her sons the chief places in his kingdom. This may have resulted from the openness Jesus had already shown toward women.)
6. Luke 7:36-50 – Jesus is anointed by the “sinful woman”; In a way that scandalizes Simon the Pharisee, Jesus allows a woman to make him the object of this emotional display, holds her up as a model of love, and speaks to her directly when he says, “Your sins are forgiven. Go in peace.”
7. Luke 8:1-3 – Women disciples (perhaps an unusual thing for a Rabbi!) who support Jesus and his disciples out of their own means—including a noted high-ranking woman from Herod’s household.

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8. Luke 10:38-42 – Jesus at the home of Mary and Martha; Martha becomes angry when Mary chooses to sit at Jesus' feet as a learner, rather than help in the kitchen. This may involve more than simply Martha's personality. She may be objecting to the fact that Mary has left her "appointed sphere."
9. Luke 13:10-17 – The crippled woman healed on the Sabbath; Jesus calls her a "daughter of Abraham."
10. Luke 21:1-4 – The widow's offering; she is held up as a model of giving.
11. John 4:1-42 – Jesus and the Samaritan woman at the town of Sychar; she is the first person in the Gospel of John (including the apostles!) to whom Jesus comes right out and reveals who he is; she gets the whole town to come out and hear him.
12. John 8:2-11 – Jesus and the woman caught in adultery
13. John 12:1-8 – Mary anoints Jesus; He defends her in the face of charges that she is wasteful; she becomes a model of devotion.
14. Mark 15: 40-41; Matthew 27:55-56 – The women at the cross; when all of the disciples except John have fled, the Gospel writers pointedly tell us that the women stayed with him until the end
15. Matthew 28:1-10 – The first disciples at the tomb, the first witnesses to the resurrection, are women.
16. John 20:10-18 – Jesus and Mary Magdalene (Jesus' appearance to her seems to be a deliberate parallel to his appearance to Thomas, John 20:34-29); note that the first person to proclaim the good news of the empty tomb to the disciples is a woman.

### Conclusion

Women clearly played an important part in the ministry of Jesus. In fact, from what we know of women in Jewish society, Jesus acted in a revolutionary and very countercultural way in his treatment of women. He treated women with dignity, valuing them as full participants in the Kingdom of God. They numbered among his disciples, and some even supported his ministry financially. He encouraged them to learn. He used illustrations drawn from their spheres of work. Finally, He held them up as models of faith and devotion.

## IV. WOMEN IN ACTS AND THE EPISTLES

### Acts 2:17-21

In his sermon on the day of Pentecost, Peter quotes Joel 2:28-32 to explain the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the Apostles to the crowd of onlookers who have gathered because of the commotion caused by that event. With this prophecy, Peter tells them that something entirely new has been inaugurated—the possibility of salvation through the cross of Jesus. Notably, the prophecy of Joel emphasizes, not once but twice, that men and women will be sharers together in this new work of God:

"In the last days, God says, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy...Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days, and they will prophesy."

In the New Testament, one of the distinct activities that was specific to worship was prophesying. As we noted in I Corinthians 14, prophesying was a worship experience for the church.

### 1 Corinthians 11:2-16

The Problem in Corinth: Women (and possibly men as well) are praying and prophesying in a manner that is disruptive to the Christian assembly. Specifically, some of the women are praying and prophesying without wearing a head-covering, while some of the men are apparently praying and prophesying with heads covered. In response, Paul urges the women to keep their heads covered and the men to keep their heads uncovered.

Paul's Argument:

1. What is very clear is that both men and women are praying and prophesying (aka proclaiming...can be same word) in the Christian assemblies. Worship is occurring, and both men and women are praying and prophesying. We know specifically from I Corinthians 14 that prophesying (and tongue-speaking) was intended to be part of their corporate worship experience, activities that the whole community of believers shared in during worship.

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2. But in Corinth, in that church and in that culture, how they are doing it—both the men and the women—is violating a principle (vs. 4-5a): Men are praying/prophesying with heads covered; women praying/prophesying with heads uncovered.
3. And Paul says there's a problem: you both are not showing respect for how God created you, **at least according to the custom and culture of their day.**
4. Arguments for women wearing the head-covering: Paul says...
  - a) (vs. 5b-6): A woman praying/prophesying without the head-covering is no different than a woman who has shaved her head. In Corinth, that was seen as disrespectful.
  - b) (vs. 7-9): There are distinctions between men and women that go back to creation itself.
5. THEREFORE ("For this reason"), because of the angels (Paul is assuming that angels are the guardians of the created order), women ought to have an "authority" (a sign of respect) on her head (vs. 10).
6. HOWEVER (vs. 11-12), (i.e., lest you get the wrong idea from what I/Paul just said), IN THE LORD we are interdependent, and all are to be in submission to God.
7. Further arguments for women wearing the head-covering:
  - a) Argument from "nature" (vs. 12-15):  
Wearing a head-covering is analogous to having long hair. Women are "naturally" given long hair. Thus, a covering is appropriate for them. Men are "naturally" given short hair. Thus a covering is inappropriate for them.
  - b) Argument from accepted church practice (vs. 16): This is how we are handling this issue in all the churches.

The idea, then, seems to be as follows:

- Women praying and/or prophesying in public without their "covering" could be taken to be a reversal of created distinctions...at least in these Corinthian churches.
- Men praying and/or prophesying in public with a "covering" could also be taken to be a reversal of created distinctions...at least in these Corinthian churches.
- So here is what we know about the Corinthian church: both men and women are clearly affirmed and equally endorsed to pray and prophesy, as long as neither is doing so in a manner that shows disregard for God or his lovely creation of the man and woman relationship.

NOTE: When we look at this passage, it is crucial for us to remember that Paul is dealing with a pressing problem in the Corinthian church. Perhaps because of their new-found freedom in Christ, women (and possibly also the men!) are behaving in ways that are disruptive to the worship assembly. Their behavior is also potentially threatening to their influence on outsiders (see 14:24). Paul's main concern is to get things under control, because what always mattered most to Paul is this question: Is this hindering or promoting the gospel?

**Summary:** Some of the Corinthian Christians are engaged in worship practices which, in their culture and community, violated the created distinctions between men and women. Specifically, men are praying and prophesying with heads covered and women are praying and prophesying with heads uncovered. **Paul does not forbid these expressions of worship and exhortation by the women (or the men).** Rather, he regulates them so that they can continue in a way that is no longer disruptive and offensive.

### 1 Corinthians 14:26-40

This passage is the conclusion to a much longer treatment of abuses happening in the Corinthian assembly, beginning in chapter 11 and continuing through the end of chapter 14. The problem centers around the Corinthians' tendency to use their spiritual gifts to put themselves at center stage. Those with the more sensational gifts, like tongue-speaking, looked down on those with more "mundane" gifts (Paul mentions, for example, gifts of "helping others" and gifts of "administration," 12:28). In short, everyone is trying to "get the floor," leading to assemblies that are chaotic, disruptive, and unedifying. Paul writes to them to get this under control. Here is a summary of what he says:

Introduction (12:1-3): “Now, about spiritual gifts...”

- a) The Corinthians’ “pagan past”
- b) True spiritual gifts are grounded in the confession, “Jesus is Lord”

The nature of spiritual gifts (12:4-11)

- a) They are all given out by the same God just as he determines.
  - b) They take a variety of forms and are distributed for the common good (i.e., “NOT in order that some of you can feel more important or valuable than others!”).
- The “body metaphor” (12:12-26): Think about the human body. It’s made up of many different parts, some more presentable than others. Each part is important. They all work together to make the body function as one unit.
  - Application of the “body principle” to the church (12:27-31): You are the body of Christ. Each of you has a part to play. Not every person has the same gift, and nobody’s gift is any more or less important than any other person’s gift. They are all important and must work together for the body to function.
  - How does this happen? When we eagerly desire the more excellent way—namely, love (chapter 13). In ch. 14, Paul regulates the gifts of prophecy and tongues out of his concern that the assembly be a place where Christians are brought together and encouraged.
    - A. 14:1-12 – In the assembly, prophecy is more important than tongues, because prophesy can be understood. Therefore, it is a gift that edifies the church, whereas tongues is a gift that only edifies the tongue-speaker.
    - B. 14:13-17 – So, if you are a tongue-speaker, pray for the ability to interpret. Otherwise, you won’t be able to encourage anybody else.
    - C. 14:18-19 – Paul’s own example: “Sure, I can speak in more tongues than all of you. But I’d rather speak five words that you can understand than a thousand words in a tongue that you can’t understand!”
    - D. 14:20-25 “Grow up!”
      - (1) (vs. 21-22) Tongues can be a sign for unbelievers [provided they are interpreted].
      - (2) (vs. 23-25) but if the church is gathered together and an unbeliever walks in or someone who doesn’t understand, he will say, “These people are crazy!” If he walks in and hears you prophesying, he will be convicted and will worship God!
    - E. Conclusion (14:26-40)
      - Statement of the problem (vs. 26)—“Everybody wants to talk at once!” NOTE: This is not a commendation. It’s a rebuke!
      - Paul’s response: Let everything be done for the strengthening of the church.
      - The solution: Paul addresses three groups of people whose speaking out is causing disruption:

### **Tongue-speakers, prophets, and women**

(1) **Tongue-speakers** (vs. 27-28)

Two or three at the most, and only when there is someone present who can interpret. Otherwise, keep silent (the Greek word is “sigao”, a word meaning total silence.)

(2) **Prophets** (vs. 27-32)

Two or three should speak, and then others should weigh what has been said. If you are in the middle of prophesying and a revelation comes to someone else, then be silent (sigao, again). Paul emphasizes that the prophets, even while speaking by revelation, have the power to be quiet: “The spirits of the prophets are subject to the control of the prophets.”

Summary principle (vs. 33): God isn’t a God of disorder, but of peace—and this is true in all the churches! (We of course take the statement “as in all the congregations of the saints” to go with the beginning of v. 33.)

(3) **The Women** (vs. 34-35)

“Let the women be silent” (sigao). Without any further modification, this would mean that the women in the assembly were to be completely silent. “Not a peep!” (i.e., singing.) But does Paul modify this command? YES!

- (a) “They are not allowed to speak”—Here, Paul uses a grammatical form called a “present infinitive.” Typically, writers would only use this form when they wanted to signify continual action. This suggests that the prohibited speaking is a continual speaking out.
- (b) “but must be in submission, as the law says”—This suggests, further, that the speaking is of a kind that is domineering, a taking of control.
- (c) “if they want to inquire about something”—this may indicate that the disruptive, continual, “control-taking” speaking has to do with the asking of questions. Since Paul has just mentioned the “weighing of prophesy” (14:30), what may be happening is that some of the women are challenging the prophets as they speak, interrupting them and disturbing the assembly.
- (d) “let them ask their husbands at home”—the prophets they are challenging may even be their own husbands, thus humiliating them in public.
- (e) NOTE: The women Paul actually gets onto here are some married women—he does not take to task single women, widows, etc.—just this one group of women, who were married and who were being disruptive... just like he didn’t take to task ALL the tongue-speakers and ALL those who were prophesying, just those who were causing disorder when they gathered.
- (f) Conclusion of his instruction to women (v. 35b.): It is **disgraceful** for women to continually speak out (again, present infinitive of the verb, “to speak”) in the assembly.

Conclusion (vs. 36-40): If you are truly spiritual, as you claim to be, you will recognize that what I am telling you is the Lord’s command. But whatever you do, make sure that things are done in a fitting and orderly way.

**Summary:** A number of people in the Corinthian church are vying for the floor, trying to dominate in the assembly. These included tongue-speakers, prophets, and women. The result is chaos and disorder. To deal with the problem, Paul places some restrictions on their expression. When he writes to the women, he does not forbid all expression. Rather, he restricts a kind of expression that is continual, disruptive and domineering. The problem may have even been one of women publicly challenging the prophets as they spoke, or even their own husbands as they were speaking. *[The women who are ‘silenced’ are wives who can ask husbands at home any questions they are restricted from asking in this context.]*

**This text, then, is written to deal with a specific set of problems in the Corinthian church. We believe that we are violating its intent when we use a restriction that was based on a specific kind of expression that was occurring, and make it apply to all women for all time.**

## 1 Timothy 2:8-15

This text is a difficult one for a number of reasons. This letter is the continuation of Paul’s “conversation” with Timothy regarding his leadership of the church in Ephesus. It is also difficult simply because we cannot be sure exactly what Paul means by some of the things he says in this passage! We do know, however, that throughout 1 Timothy, Paul is concerned with the problem of false teachers in Ephesus, and the dissensions, controversies, and moral problems that they are causing. We can also see in this text Paul’s desire, underlying all of chapter 2, that the Christians be able to “live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness” (vs. 2).

**Part of Paul’s concern is that the Christians live in a way that is sensitive to their culture, so that they will not place needless obstacles in the way of others coming to the Gospel (2:2-3; 3:7; 5:7; 6:1).**

- As a part of his letter to Timothy, Paul gives instructions in vs. 8 for how the men should conduct themselves, presumably in a worship setting. They are to “lift holy hands in prayer, without quarreling.” Notice something. Does Paul mean by addressing the men this way that it is OK for the women to quarrel? Of course not! He focuses on this particular behavior among the men because the men were guilty of it. (By the way, to take this instruction literally and to make applicable as a forever binding on men—which some have chosen to do with v. 12 re women—how are men today following the command to lift up their hands when they pray?)

- Then, in vv. 9-15, Paul addresses the women. When we look closely at the overall passage, we observe that Paul's primary concern has to do with the demeanor of these women, much more than the fact that some of them might have been teaching. He wants them to avoid certain kinds of dress—"braided hair, gold or pearls, and expensive clothes"—but instead, to adorn themselves modestly, "as is fitting a women who professes godliness." He wants the women to learn in a spirit of quietness and submission (vs. 11). He does not say to whom they are to be in submission, but he may simply mean that they are to submit to the need for decorum and appropriateness in the assembly.
- In v. 12, he says, "I do not permit a woman to teach or have authority over a man." The word which is translated "have authority" is a very strong word—used only here in all the New Testament—which means "to domineer." In earlier contexts, the word had actually meant "to murder." The word "to domineer" is joined with the word "to teach" in a way that indicates that these were not two separate activities, but rather, were one activity. Paul thus prohibits their "teaching in a domineering fashion," urging instead that women remain "quiet" (vs. 12). And this is an important point to make: this quietness denotes not "silence," but a demeanor that is in contrast to "domineering." (Note: Indeed, the word translated in the NIV as "silent" in vs. 12 here is the same word used in vs. 2 when referring to all Christians' lives. They are not "silent" lives but "quiet" ones.)
- As a basis for his instruction, Paul says, "For Adam was formed first, then Eve." Notice that Paul didn't say "Adam was the boss, not Eve." Paul is simply pointing to the creation story where God made Eve as a complement to Adam. Eve was originally made to live in a relationship of complementarity with Adam. "It is not good for man to be alone." But these women who are trying to domineer over the men are destroying that relationship.
- Following his argument from creation, Paul then offers an argument from the Fall: "Adam was not the one deceived; it was the women who was deceived and became a sinner." While it is difficult to know exactly what he means by this, Paul probably sees a parallel between Eve's becoming deceived and what is going on among these women in Ephesus. This may indicate that the false teaching he is so concerned about throughout 1 Timothy found particularly fertile ground among these women.
- Paul concludes his instruction with the statement, "But she will be saved..."—as the New International Version translates it—"through childbearing." Actually, Paul literally says that she will be saved through THE CHILDBIRTH (singular). If he had meant "childbearing" in general, this is likely not the construction he would have used. Instead, Paul appears to have a particular childbirth in mind—one history-changing childbirth—the birth of Jesus, of course. If that's the case, here's what we have in this text: he has focused on the women, seeing in their behavior a parallel with what happened to Eve—she was deceived and became a sinner, and through her sin set in motion a series of events that put all humanity in a fallen state. But Paul doesn't leave women there. He also wants us to know that women have a unique part in God's solution—a solution that involved the birth of a child, Jesus the Savior. This statement, then, tends to soften the strongly accusing language regarding Eve's deception.

**Conclusion:** in 1 Timothy 2:9-15 Paul deals with a specific set of problems that have arisen in the church in Ephesus: a group of women are dressing and acting in a way that is flamboyant, inappropriate, and domineering. In response he tells Timothy that these women need to learn in a spirit of quietness, and that they are not to domineer over men in their teaching.

- Why did Paul focus on the women in this passage? Was it because women are not allowed to domineer, but men are? Of course not!
- No one in the Lord's church is to control or domineer over anyone else. Jesus said that the pagans "lord it over" each other, but that we were not supposed to behave that way. Instead, the one who is great is the servant, and the greatest of all is the servant of all.
- In fact, as 1 Peter 5:3 makes clear, not even elders are to domineer!

**The reason why Paul focuses on the women in this passage is simply that in Ephesus, that was the problem he faced—a group of women were trying to gain control and dominate others. Therefore, we misapply this text when we use it as a prohibition against women ever speaking or teaching when a man is present.**

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Philip the Evangelist had four daughters who prophesied. These four women in the church are noted NOT for their gift of service, good works, compassion or charity. Luke says they were gifted proclaimers, preachers, prophets, i.e., speakers and testifiers for the Lord. Again, prophesying was a worship activity. There are no limits pronounced on their prophesying to only take place when women are present—their gift was for the whole church community. They had words from God to proclaim before the church, and they did so.

### **Acts 18:24-26; Romans 16:3**

Luke records in Acts 18 specifically that the great preacher Apollos was taught the word of God more fully by a woman and a man...“When Priscilla and Aquila heard him, they invited him to their home and explained the way of God more adequately.”

- Does that in any way imply Priscilla was remaining silent? That she was NOT teaching this man, but only her husband Aquila?
- In their teaching role with Apollos, is Priscilla exercising “authority” over him? For that matter, is Aquila? They are both teaching this man the way of the Lord more fully. No teaching restrictions are imposed on Priscilla OR Aquila as they bring Apollos up to speed re the gospel of Christ.

In Romans 16, Paul calls them his “co-workers in Christ Jesus.” Luke had already referenced in Acts that Priscilla could teach, so obviously her “co-worker” ministry included speaking and teaching in the presence of men. In fact, what is apparent is that she was gifted to speak and teach with a degree of scriptural mastery and spiritual depth, for along with Aquila, they went toe-to-toe with the likes of Apollos, well-known for his gift for public discourse and debate. High praise indeed!

### **Acts 1:12-14; 2:1**

What is interesting to note, and is often overlooked, is Luke’s description of the apostles when they gathered to choose a replacement for Judas after Jesus had ascended. They are waiting for the promised Holy Spirit to come, and here is how he describes the setting in vs 14: “They all joined together constantly in prayer, along with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brothers.” Luke states in vs 13 all the current apostles who are there, and then says that they (the apostles) joined together with the women who were there...to pray.

### **Romans 16**

Paul makes specific references to women, many of whom were presumably wives and mothers, who had displayed visible and notable roles in the church...hardly roles that would have excluded them from completely ever speaking, praying, teaching, witnessing, sharing before the church or in the presence of men

- Phoebe, a “deacon” in the Cenchræe church family, vs 1-2
- Priscilla the co-worker, who risked her life for Paul, vs 3-4
- Mary the hard worker, vs 6
- Junia, whom Paul especially denotes as “outstanding among the apostles”, and even went to prison with Paul, vs 7
- Tryphena, Tryphosa, and Persis, women who worked hard in the Lord, vs 12
- et al, vs 13-15

### **Galatians 3:26-29**

Here, Paul strongly states the principle that, in the Lord, we are one. We stand before God equally, and that the barriers that typically cause people to be at odds with each other or cause us to look down on each other—barriers of race, economic level, or gender—must no longer separate us. For we are one in Christ, Abraham’s children, and equally heirs of the promise of salvation. Certainly, Paul’s focus here is that we are equal before God in terms of our salvation. At the same time, we do not believe we should for that reason immediately assume that it has no further implications for the life of the church.

### **In Closing.**



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Let us close the study with this final thought. After much study and prayer, and really trying to wait on the Lord, and now with much godly anticipation, the whole direction we are proceeding is based on women having opportunity to share their voices and gifts, it is not about a paradigm of authority. If praying, reading scripture, teaching, proclaiming, sharing Lord's Supper thoughts, leading singing and worship are "acts of authority" in a corporate setting, or any large setting of believers, then those exact same functions are acts of authority in small group settings.

Men who stand before us on Sunday mornings—who aren't shepherds, pastors, ministers or the main preacher—and share a prayer or a Lord's Supper thought are not suddenly **doing** "authority" functions and roles. Men who aren't even considered informal leaders at SVC, men none of us would ever ascribe as exercising "authority", are still given opportunities to pray and read and share and sing before us...to edify and encourage and share their gifts and voices in worship. What we have learned in our study is that women sharing their public spiritual gifts, and women sharing their voices and edifying words and prayers in worship gatherings, or in Life Groups, or in Wednesday night Bible studies, or whenever...that it's not about authority.

For example, when Lee Brown has lead a song or said a prayer when he has been upfront on a Sunday morning...he is not suddenly "exercising authority" over anyone, men or women. No, when he does so, he is using his gift, he's sharing his voice, he's taking a turn and a moment to bring us before God and edify the church.

So whether it's a Lee or a Sara Lee (or a Priscilla or an Aquila) doing the very same thing, this is simply a member of the body sharing their voice, sharing their gift, sharing their heart...to build up the body. An "authority" role is not suddenly being imparted or exercised. I Corinthians 11 is very clear that both men and women prayed and prophesied (aka proclaimed) in the assembly...and in the context of I Cor ch. 11-14, it's about building up the body, sharing one's voice and gifts to edify and inspire worship.

Yes, Scripture clearly addresses abuses that were occurring in assemblies and mixed gender gatherings, and Paul gives instruction to both who and what to do about it. But Scripture also clearly affirms women having voices and sharing their gifts...be it in assemblies or informal mixed gatherings, be it in house worship settings or a small study setting. What we realize is that praising and praying and testifying and sharing your heart before your church family...**it's not about authority, it's about what Jesus has done in your life.**

We pray you feel blessed to be a member of the Sycamore View Church. The shepherds and ministers love this church family, and love the vision to be a church that points people to Jesus. As a "bible-committed" church, we made a choice to address and study the role of women in public worship. And we decided we weren't going to hide whatever we found under a rug or try to ignore it. However, where we have landed, and with all the integrity in the world, is at a place that goes beyond how many of us have long "done" church, and we acknowledge that.

But we are choosing now to be faithful to this journey. And to have that kind of integrity is not always a comfortable moment or easy place to be, but we are a scripture-following people—we love God's Word, wherever it takes us. And so this leadership determines to expand the role of women in worship because it is so right and biblical and good to do so. We see so many new doors opening for discipleship and encouragement and fellowship, and just so much refreshing and blessings as a result.

To God be the glory!