

Can Women Minister?

By William Mark Bristow

I grew up with people who would answer “NO!!” before finishing the question.

Two scriptures are given:

1 Corinthians 14:34, “Let your women keep silence in the churches: for it is not permitted unto them to speak; but *they are commanded* to be under obedience, as also saith the law.” KJV

1 Timothy 2:11,12, “Let the woman learn in silence with all subjection. ¹²But I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man, but to be in silence.” KJV

But is that it? Really?

Who was the first person ever to “preach” the Good News of Jesus as Messiah? The answer may surprise you. The answer is found in this passage from John 4:28, “The woman then left her waterpot, and went her way into the city, and saith to the men, ²⁹Come, see a man, which told me all things that ever I did: is not this the Christ? ³⁰Then they went out of the city, and came unto him.” KJV

The woman at the well was the first to tell of Jesus’ love and forgiveness – and had quite an altar call. Then she did something that should be the ideal for preachers everywhere.

John 4:39, “And many of the Samaritans of that city believed on him for the saying of the woman, which testified, He told me all that ever I did. ⁴⁰So when the Samaritans were come unto him, they besought him that he would tarry with them: and he abode there two days. ⁴¹And many more believed because of his own word; ⁴²And said unto the woman, Now we believe, not because of thy saying: for we have heard *him* ourselves, and know that this is indeed the Christ, the Saviour of the world.” KJV

Do you see it? She introduced men and women to Jesus and then she stepped out of the picture – at first these believed because of her word – but after she introduced them to Jesus – they believed because of HIS word, “for we have heard him ourselves, and know that this is indeed the Christ.”

Should I mention here that women were at the cross after the men ran? Women were first at the tomb – and it was a woman, Mary Magdalene who was trusted with the message, “He is RISEN!”

Women were part of the 120 (Mary the mother of Jesus is noted as being there) in the upper room on the day of Pentecost. Acts 1:14, “These all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication, **with the women, and Mary the mother of Jesus**, and with his brethren.”

Yes, I know, what about Paul’s two statements regarding women? Are you sure your

interpretation is exactly what he meant? Let's see what Paul did.

Romans 16:1, "I commend to you our sister Phoebe, a deacon of the church" *NRSV*
"I commend to you Phoebe our sister, who is (also) a minister of the church" TNAB

Of course the King Jim here says, "servant" – but the Greek word is "deacon." Care to look at the duties of deacons? In Acts 6:5, Phillip and Stephen were ordained deacons. Let's see what they did – in addition to waiting tables. Acts 6:8, "And Stephen, full of faith and power, did great wonders and miracles among the people." Read on and you will find quite a powerful sermon preached to those who are about to make him a martyr.

We find Phillip in Acts 8:5, Then Philip went down to the city of Samaria, and preached Christ unto them. ⁶And the people with one accord gave heed unto those things which Philip spake, hearing and seeing the miracles which he did. ⁷For unclean spirits, crying with loud voice, came out of many that were possessed *with them*: and many taken with palsies, and that were lame, were healed. ⁸And there was great joy in that city." (Read on – it's gets better.)

Could Deacons preach – I think the scripture answers a resounding, "Yes."

There are scholars who believe we are seeing a woman pastor in 2 John 1, "The elder unto the elect lady and her children . . ."

Aquila and Priscilla are certainly co-teachers, Acts 18:24, "And a certain Jew named Apollos, born at Alexandria, an eloquent man, *and* mighty in the scriptures, came to Ephesus. ²⁵This man was instructed in the way of the Lord; and being fervent in the spirit, he spake and taught diligently the things of the Lord, knowing only the baptism of John. ²⁶And he began to speak boldly in the synagogue: whom when Aquila and Priscilla had heard, they took him unto *them*, and expounded unto him the way of God more perfectly." KJV

1 Corinthians 16:19, "Aquila and Priscilla salute you much in the Lord, with the church that is in their house." Here it seems clear that husband and wife are co-pastors together.

So, we have seen a woman do the work of an evangelist (the woman at the well), a woman do the work of pastor and co-pastor (the elect lady, and Priscilla).

What about a woman teacher – well, Priscilla certainly qualifies having taught Apollos.

Could there be women prophets? Nave's Topical Bible lists the following:

Ezek. 13:17;

Joel 2:28,29.

Miriam, Ex. 15:20.

Deborah, Judg. 4:4.

Huldah, 2 Kin. 22:14.

Noadiah, Neh. 6:14.

Isaiah's wife, Isa. 8:3.

Elizabeth, Luke 1:41-45.

Anna, Luke 2:36-38.

Daughters of Philip, Acts 21:9.

Jezebel, Rev. 2:20 – listed as a false prophetess

What about a woman apostle? Romans 16:7, “Salute Andronicus and Junia, my kinsmen, and my fellowprisoners, who are of note among the apostles, who also were in Christ before me.” KJV Greek has both feminine and masculine such as Spanish has with *hermana* (sister) and *hermano* (brother). The name “Junia” is clearly feminine and she is called here an apostle – and is a fellow prisoner and worker with Paul.

That brings us back to Paul’s teaching. Did the women really keep silent in his services? In 1 Corinthians 11 Paul is going to deal with several problems *in the church* – customs of dress and appearance and problems at the communion table. Remember chapter 11 is written to the church about things that happen in the church. 1 Cor 11:4, “Every man praying or prophesying, having *his* head covered, dishonoureth his head. ^sBut every woman that prayeth or prophesieth with *her* head uncovered. . .”

Where is the woman praying and prophesying?? IN THE CHURCH. (If you’re concerned about dress and head coverings – please note verse 16 of the same chapter stating such things were “customs.”)

In light of all this commendation of women and teaching about praying and prophesying in the church – it seems we must re-examine “let the women keep silent.”

1 Corinthians 14:34, “Let your women keep silence in the churches: for it is not permitted unto them to speak; but *they are commanded* to be under obedience, as also saith the law. ³⁵And if they will learn any thing, let them ask their husbands at home: for it is a shame for women to speak in the church.”

Please remember women for the most part were uneducated – sat in the back or in a balcony (and such conditions still exist in many parts of the world today), and so they seem to be asking questions in the middle of the services – and that is what Paul is dealing with here.

1 Timothy 2:12, “But I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man, but to be in silence.” Paul seems here to be dealing with a problem woman who wants to “usurp” Timothy’s authority – not a Godly woman such as Priscilla or Phoebe whom he commends in other places. Remember Timothy had been despised because of his youth and had to “make proof of his ministry” to those around him. Somebody here is trying to take over – so Paul deals with that problem. Did this apply to all women – Paul’s own actions with Phoebe, Priscilla and others say, “No.”

So, we have shown from scripture women as Apostles, Prophetesses, Evangelists, Teachers, and Pastors.

Then there are the every-day Christians who put their life on the line for the Gospel. Acts 8:3,4, “As for Saul, he made havock of the church, entering into every house, and haling men and women committed *them* to prison. 4Therefore they that were scattered abroad went every where preaching the word.”

Women preached and won the lost right alongside the men – and were hauled into prison and were tortured and put to death right along with the men.

As I said, I was raised in a church which taught and teaches today that women may not be allowed to preach. It’s a bit funny when I think of their stand – a typical major denomination’s stand – they have women Sunday school teachers - teaching boys and male teens. They have women song leaders and women soloists who sing the Gospel. They have women choristers. They have women pianists and organists. A woman can even give a testimony - standing in the pulpit to do so. In fact one of their largest mission projects for the denomination is a Chinese work started by a woman, Lottie Moon, – who went and taught heathen men. So, maybe you can explain their interpretation of “let the women keep silence”and “I suffer not a woman to speak.” I’m confused.

One of the old Mothers of early Pentecost in this country said, “A woman helped bring sin into the world, a woman ought to help to take it out!”