

An Encouraging Word to Christian Women

These are difficult times. The evangelical church is full of mixture, compromise and downright heresy. Deception abounds everywhere, and the more Christian resources abound as never before, the more susceptible it seems believers are to every wind of doctrine. There was more true faith in times when believers didn't even have a Bible.

It is noteworthy that in many church streams, where poor doctrine and practical aberrations abound, there is also a preponderance of vocal women and women in leadership. Many godly ladies have mentioned this to me with sadness. Now I am not blaming these women for the problems, it is the men that have failed, but it is noticeable that this is a feature in deceived works. One friend who has a keen itinerant teaching ministry says that feminism is one of the key problems in the church today. Paul himself notes the significant weakness of women in 1 Tim 2:14 and gives this as the reason why women cannot teach or have authority (1 Tim 2:11-12). The spiritual sensitivity of women is both their strength and weakness.

Now submissive, godly women see all this and fear. Many feel unduly oppressed by it, or even ashamed, and hold back on God-given gifts. Some become shy and timid, while others even become repressed within their own home. Sisters don't let this happen to you; you have a significant calling whatever your station. There is a place for caution, but there is a place for ministry also. There is a godly place between fleshly feminism on the one hand and repressed timidity on the other.

The enhanced role of women in the New Testament

The New Testament was written in a social climate that treated women appallingly; life for them in ancient times was very hard and often cruel.¹ Women were second class citizens in Jewish society at the time of Jesus and some rabbis called them 'dogs' (a common term for Gentiles).² Even in classical Athenian and Roman society women were treated with disrespect.³ Female babies were often left to die from exposure.⁴ There was seldom more than one daughter in a family as they were a financial liability because a dowry was expected in marriage and they could rarely earn money. Many women suffered from

¹ The life of the woman was arduous. Apart from housework, she had to draw water from a well in heavy jars, take clothes (made by herself) to a river to wash them, grind her own flour and bake her own bread. Most likely her material would have been woven and dyed by her own hand. Read Proverbs 31 for an illustration of this.

² Zohar, Vol 21:4, THE JUDGMENT IN THE WOMAN ADHERES TO THE JUDGMENT IN THE FOREIGNER. It is written of them: "the dogs are insolently greedy, they never have enough" (Yeshayah 56:11). According to rabbis, a dog is a symbol of a being that is empty.

³ For instance: In ancient Rome, an adulterous wife could be justifiably killed by the husband, though the reverse was not allowed [Marcus Cato, Speech *'On the Dowry'*]. If a Roman man made clothing for his wife from his own wool, it belonged to him, even if the wife helped to make it. Yet if a wife, from her wool, made clothing for her husband, it belonged to him [Pomponius, *On Sabinus*, book 4]. Spartan and Macedonian women were better treated.

⁴ Abortions were often fatal to mothers and were made illegal by Septimius Severus. Female babies were left on trash heaps or in an isolated place to be eaten by wild animals or die of hypothermia. Sometimes the baby was sold as a slave.

malnutrition due to an inadequate diet. This, coupled with childbearing at an immature age, contributed to a shorter life expectancy than men. All this meant that there was a smaller female population.

Life for Jewish women was not so severe but was still constrained and difficult. In Jerusalem women could not go into the same area of the temple as men but were restricted to their own court. Many rabbinic writings viewed females as greedy, vain creatures and hindered their religious opportunities; in fact conversations with women were discouraged altogether.⁵ Jewish women were not even allowed to be a witness in court.

Unmarried women had few options in life apart from begging, prostitution or slavery since suitable skilled crafts required a capital outlay (such as weaving or trading). Less skilled professions included: midwifery, wet-nursing, selling groceries, acting, music, dancing, painting, dressmaking or laundering; but these mostly applied to town dwellers. An unmarried woman's social life and standing was especially tough in rural areas.

The Gospel raised women to a new status, placing them before God on the same level with men for the first time;⁶ all are one in Christ (Gal 3:28). Access to God became direct and not via men; women were elected as joint heirs with them (1 Pt 3:7). Early in the Gospels we see that the faith of Anna is placed alongside that of Simeon. The Gospel demands that women be treated honourably and with respect; husbands are commanded to love their wives with the same degree of sacrificial love Christ has for his people. In the church they have a significant ministry to fulfil, but not the same ministry as men.

This was a new world for women. Salvation and fellowship (but not church authority) is now on the basis of the new nature, all sharing equally in the inheritance of Christ. The Gospel liberated women and gave them an individual purpose and dignity not found before.

No Christian woman needs to feel that she is a second class citizen.

There is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus. (Gal 3:28)

There are differences of function and some ministries are restricted to men; neither is a woman permitted to have authority in the church or to teach men since leadership is a creation ordinance (see later):

And I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man, but to be in silence. For Adam was formed first, then Eve. (1 Tim 2:12-13)

In this the church followed the synagogue pattern.

However, this does not mean that women are to be dismissed, devalued or demeaned in any way. They have a vital role to play in church life and need to be honoured. In fact if they are the weaker vessel (1 Pt 3:7) then they should be given the greater honour (1 Cor 12:22-23).

Women must be honoured and not put down.

As women accept their Biblical role and do not strive to be like men, they will find a rich and fruitful ministry in a number of areas in church life.

⁵ Erub 53b. Some rabbinic writings had a more positive attitude to women.

⁶ Note, for instance that in the OT a husband could divorce a wife but the wife could not divorce the husband (Deut 24:1-4); or a mother was required to purify herself twice as long for a daughter than for a son (Lev 12:2-5).

The attitude of Jesus to women

There is no denying that the Lord Jesus gave a large place to women in his ministry and friendship. Some of his most trusted friends and supporters were women; indeed several women exhibited a greater understanding of his glory and Messiahship than his most trusted disciples. Let's look at a few examples.

Jesus broke religious rules in order to approach certain women

Firstly we need to understand that there were strict social rules regarding the separation of men and women in Jewish society. Men did not talk to women outside their own families. It was considered a major transgression to converse with a woman, especially someone you did not know, or worse, a foreigner; in fact even speaking to your own wife in the street was discouraged. Furthermore, it was a reproach for a religious scholar to talk to a woman.⁷ Furthermore, menstruating women were ritually unclean and could not be approached.

Despite all this Jesus not only talked to female strangers and foreign women, but also to a woman in menstruation. In Mk 5:25-34 Jesus healed a woman who had suffered from continual menstrual bleeding. Not only that but she touched him, which would normally make a man ritually unclean. Her desperation, despite being godly, caused her to ritually render the people in the crowd next to her unclean also. Jesus' reaction is little short of amazing. His perfect righteousness could not be contaminated by this ritual offence, and Jesus is more concerned with the great faith of the woman. Not only is she healed by touching his robe, but Jesus calls her a 'daughter'. This may mean many things: a normal expression of courtesy to a lady; or that she was a daughter of Abraham in covenantal terms (see later) or also that she was a true daughter of God, a child of grace by faith. She was a daughter of the covenant in material Jewish terms and she was a child of God in a spiritual sense.

Notice that the woman had no precedent for doing this. Her faith broke new ground. She was utterly convinced that Jesus was the Messiah sent from God and could do the amazing things promised in the Old Testament of the Christ. So great was his power, she thought, that merely touching his robe would be enough to cure her. This faith, based upon understanding of his Messiahship (which can only have come by divine revelation; Lk 10:21ff) caused the Lord to give her this compassionate title.

In John 4 we see Jesus having a long conversation with a Samaritan woman and letting her draw water for him. This stunned the disciples. Not only is he talking to a woman, not only is she considered a foreigner, but she is also a despised Samaritan, whom the Jews considered to be outside of God's purposes and cursed for their historic apostasy. On top of that she may be a multiple adulterer.⁸ Indeed, she is at the well in the heat of the day to avoid the other local women who would have come in the cooler morning or evening to draw water. Clearly she is also poor, as she has no servant to draw water for her.

⁷ Pirke Abot, c. 1. sect. 5. Abot R, Nathan, c. 7. fol. 3. 3. & Derech Eretz, fol. 17. 3. Bemidbar Rabba, sect 10. fol. 200. 2. T. Bab. Beracot, fol. 43. 2. Maimon. Hilch. Dayot, c. 5. sect. 7.

⁸ We can't be sure of her situation. She had been married five times and was either divorced for some reason by these men (which was common in those times) or they had died. Verse 18 certainly seems to imply that she was in adultery and living with another man, but she may have been betrothed and not in sin. She clearly had not done well in these marriages and was poor, living outside the town and drawing her own water.

Instead of judging her, Jesus offers her the water of life and gains a missionary who spread the news of the Messiah. The miracle of his word of knowledge resulted in many believing in him. Others, coming after being summoned by the woman, believed when they heard the Lord for themselves. This providential conversation with a despised woman was the means of successful evangelisation over two days. A woman the disciples despised and would have avoided, was the key to many people being saved. Jesus helped another foreign woman, a despised and cursed Canaanite no less (Matthew 15:21).

Luke 13:11-16 explains how Jesus healed a woman from a spirit of infirmity which had caused crippling. The Lord loosed her from this spirit and thus cured her infirmity. On being criticised for healing on the Sabbath, which as Lord of the Sabbath he was entitled to do, Jesus uniquely referred to her as a 'daughter of Abraham'. Now this is usually understood to merely refer to her status as a Jewess, however, no one else in scripture is called by this name, so the Lord seems to be highlighting a truth.

When confronting the ruler of the synagogue who had opposed him, (remember this is God's work, Jesus only did what his Father commanded) Jesus not only highlights that if a donkey can be loosed to get water on the Sabbath, so can this poor woman; not only should a godly woman be loosed from Satan's bondage; but this woman is a daughter of Abraham and entitled to the blessings of the covenant. No Biblical woman had been called this before.⁹ The terms 'seed of Abraham' and 'sons of Abraham' are common in scripture, and the covenant line ran through the elect males - Isaac, Jacob etc. But here Jesus uses this phrase implying that women have a significant place in the covenant as well. This would have shocked religious Jews and set new ground. He is saying that women have equal covenant rights with men in salvation, including healing. Jesus elevates the place of women in direct confrontation of a religious leader showing that the Messiah has come to redeem women as thoroughly as men.

Jesus, uniquely, taught women

Jewish tradition at that time excluded women from religious instruction and forbade rabbis from speaking to women at all.¹⁰ It was the province of men to be schooled in the Law and the commentaries of the rabbinic schools. However, Jesus included many women in his general and more intimate teaching. Indeed, some women appear to have advanced in understanding his messianic ministry further than his disciples.

It was a woman who, by revelation, anointed his body for burial in advance, using very expensive oil (Matt 26:6ff).

When Lazarus died, both his sisters (who were close friends of the Lord's) uttered significant statements about his power and resurrection. Martha said:

"Lord, if You had been here, my brother would not have died. But even now I know that whatever You ask of God, God will give You." Jesus said to her, "Your brother will rise again." Martha said to Him, "I know that he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day." Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live. And whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die. Do you believe this?" She said to Him, "Yes, Lord, I believe that You are the Christ, the Son of God, who is to come into the world." (Jn 11:21-27)

Mary, fell at Jesus' feet in worship and exclaimed:

"Lord, if You had been here, my brother would not have died." (Jn 17:32)

⁹ It was, according to Gill, a term used by the Jews for true Jewesses.

¹⁰ Rabbi Eliezer: 'Rather should the words of the Torah be burned than entrusted to a woman ... Whoever teaches his daughter the Torah is like one who teaches her obscenity.'

These statements show significant faith in Jesus as the Messiah, but also confidence in his power, understanding of the gift of eternal life and submission to his Lordship. Only Peter uttered anything similar to these confessions in Mt 16:16; Jn 6:69. Martha understood Jesus to be the foretold Prophet of God (Deut 18:15) but also the actual Son of God; i.e. God himself. But also remember, this amazing, confident confession was proclaimed under great duress and suffering, making it of more power than Peter's. The phrase, 'I have believed', really means, 'It is my settled and firm faith'.¹¹ This is the same Martha who many disparage from reading Luke 10:41.

Martha and Mary had this great faith because they had been taught by the Lord personally after giving him hospitality, becoming committed disciples:

Now it happened as they went that He entered a certain village; and a certain woman named Martha welcomed Him into her house. And she had a sister called Mary, who also sat at Jesus' feet and heard His word. (Lk 10:38-39)

To sit at Jesus' feet means to be instructed. This was the posture of Jewish scholars while listening to the instructions of their rabbis. Note that Paul uses the phrase of his education when he explains that he was brought up at the feet of the Pharisee leader Gamaliel (Acts 22:3).

When the closest disciples were waiting in Jerusalem after the cross, the women companions of Jesus were present (Acts 1:14). When the Spirit fell on that first company, it fell on the key women at the same times as the disciples. They had been taught well enough to know what to do after the cross and were treated equally in the Spirit's outpouring.

Jesus accepted women into his inner circle

Luke 8 describes the close companions and disciples of Jesus. It mentions the twelve, but also various women: Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Susanna and others. These helped to support the Lord in his ministry as well as learning from him and being healed by him.

Matthew 27:55 mentions that many women had followed him from Galilee and ministered to him. Among these were Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James the less and Joses, and Salome, the mother of Zebedee's sons (possibly Jesus' mother's sister, Jn 19:25). Mark mentions these women who remained at the cross when most of the disciples fled, adding that many other women came with him to Jerusalem (Mk 15:40-41).¹²

It was women that were granted the privilege of first seeing Jesus alive after the resurrection. The two Marys being the first (Matt 28:9-10), then other women while Peter was the first disciple (Lk 24:34).¹³

¹¹ pepisteuka the perfect active indicative of pisteuw.

¹² Only John mentions the mother of Jesus; so were there three women or four named? We can't be sure if the sister of the mother of Jesus is Salome [the mother of the sons of Zebedee] or the wife of Clopas.

¹³The following are the resurrection appearances in scripture: ten are to Jesus' disciples and family [nine being mentioned in the Gospels] and one to Paul.

- Mary Magdalene [Mark; John]
- The other women [Matthew]
- The two going to Emmaus in [Luke]
- Peter [Luke; I Corinthians]
- The ten apostles and others [Mark; Luke; John]
- The eleven and others [John]
- The seven by the sea [John].
- Over five hundred in Galilee [Matthew; Mark; 1 Corinthians].
- The apostles in Jerusalem [Mark, Luke; Acts; I Corinthians]

It was the two Marys who were given the first commission to tell the good news of the resurrection to anyone (Matt 28:7-8).

Conclusion

Overwhelmingly we can see that Jesus had great concern for women. He even broke religious taboos in order to reach out to them and had no fear of conversing with hated foreign women. He trusted them, taught them, let them minister to him, appeared first to them after being raised and baptised them in his Spirit with the key disciples at Pentecost.

Jesus' attitude was not discriminatory in any way, so neither should ours be.

The attitude of Paul to women

Co workers

Paul always tried to work in a team when preaching the Gospel and travelling amongst the churches. Part of the reason for this was to train men for the ministry by apprenticeship. However, some people were included who were not trainee apostles and evangelists. These were co-workers who helped in various ways and some of these were women.

Indeed, some of Paul's most valued co-workers were women, one of whom (Priscilla, or Prisca, with her husband Aquila, Rm 16:3) was especially close; two thirds of the time Priscilla is mentioned before Aquila (although I don't think too much can be surmised from this). Paul even says that all the Gentile churches gave thanks for this husband and wife team (Rm 16:4). They also hosted a house church (Rm 16:5), so presumably Aquila was an elder. It was this couple that brought deeper insight about the Gospel to Apollos (Acts 18:24-26).

Paul mentions a Mary who laboured with him in the Gospel, in some capacity (Rm 16:6). Other women workers include: the sisters Tryphena and Tryphosa, and Persis who was beloved of the churches (Rm 16:12); the mother of Rufus (Rm 16:13); Julia (a common slave name in the imperial household) and the sister of Nereus (Rm 16:15). These are just from one of Paul's letters. Clearly women travelled around the churches in some capacity, sometimes in partnership with husbands (e.g. Prisca and Aquila; perhaps Philologus and Julia) but also alone.

Paul especially commends Phoebe who was a servant at the Corinthian church (Rm 16:1). The word 'servant' here is the word used for 'deacon', and is sometimes translated as 'deaconess'. There is no reason to refuse women to this order since a deacon carries no spiritual authority. Deacons serve the church in practical ways to relieve the pressure of pragmatic issues from the elders. A woman deaconess could serve the church in many things, such as caring for widows, children, the sick, distributing relief to the poor etc. Regarding Phoebe Paul says, 'receive her in the Lord in a manner worthy of the saints, and assist her in whatever business she has need of you; for indeed she has been a helper of many and of myself also' (Rm 16:2). The word 'helper' is *prosta,tij prostatis* [Strong's No. 4368] meaning: a woman set over others; a female guardian, protectress, patroness, caring for the affairs of others and aiding them with her resources. Clearly Phoebe had a significant ministry and may have led a team of women in various supportive tasks or taught other women.

• James [I Corinthians 15:7].

• Paul at a later time [I Corinthians 15:8].

Paul mentions five of the ten; one [the appearance to James] is not given elsewhere.

Converts

The first convert in Philippi was a woman called Lydia and the new church seems to have met in her house (Acts 16:14, 15, 40). She appears to have been a Gentile proselyte, coming from Thyatira in Lydia in Asia Minor. She was converted as a result of Paul going to the river and talking to the women there (Acts 16:13). Rabbinic rules required that ten men were necessary to form a synagogue and as there was no synagogue, Paul went to the riverside where Jews were accustomed to pray on the Sabbath.¹⁴ He found no men there but women were gathered. This perhaps tells us something about the state of Jewish religion in Philippi; either that or this was before the appointed meeting time and these women were zealous and early. Paul sat down to preach, this posture being a Jewish custom. In many places there was an uncovered building for the purpose that had seats, called a *proseucha*; the word can mean the act of prayer or the place of prayer. Note this: the speaking was conversational and two way. In fact the Greek implies that all four companions spoke in an informal manner.¹⁵ After her conversion, Paul and his companions stayed in her house.

Paul had no problem talking to strange women (not all Jewesses), no fear of sharing the Gospel with them, no embarrassment of being seen with them and no hesitation to partake of the hospitality offered by a foreign woman - despite how this may have appeared. But take note: the very first converts in Europe were women. This is also the first case where converts were baptised in connection with Paul's ministry - again a woman and her household. As no husband or children are mentioned, it seems that Lydia was wealthy, being a trader of purple silk or dye, who had servants that believed after hearing Paul who are called 'brethren' in v40. [Remember that women were better treated in Macedonia.] In God's sovereignty, the first European baptised convert is a woman.

Ministry

The Pauline emphasis on mutual edification, every member participation and unity in the local church gave women freedom to minister in a number of gifts along with men (1 Cor 11:5, 12:6-7, 11, 14:5, 31), excepting those that were inherently authoritative, such as teaching

And I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man, but to be in silence. (1 Tim 2:12).¹⁶

Paul expected women to pray and prophesy in the gathered church and set out various details to ensure this was done decently (1 Cor 11:5ff). Prophecy here is powerful, applied encouragement (1 Cor 14:3) not the authoritative words of a prophet/leader.¹⁷ Women could speak in tongues and interpret (1 Cor 14:5, 13) and almost all the gifts and ministries of the Spirit are available to women (1 Cor 12:7).¹⁸ Women are not relegated to making tea and serving biscuits.

¹⁴ As water was necessary for ritual purification, prayers were often made by rivers or at the seaside. In some foreign cities laws had been passed to allow this use.

¹⁵ Paul, Luke, Timothy and Silas. 'Spoke' = inchoative, imperfect of *lalew*, *laleo*, often used for preaching.

¹⁶ Despite modern feminists' attempts to re-interpret the word 'authority' here (*authenteo*), its meaning has been settled. It is the vernacular word for dominion, authority, being the absolute master. The verb form means to dominate. Paul is simply saying that he does not allow women to dominate men or have any authority in church. No one in the first century questioned this as it was normal practice in the Jewish synagogue. The only place where a different ethos prevailed was in occult religious systems based upon priestesses and oracles.

¹⁷ Such as Agabus (Acts 11:28), Paul, Judas and Silas (Acts 15:32), or Barnabus (Acts 13:1).

¹⁸ I am not concerned here with the argument about cessationism but drawing out principles that Paul applies to the church of his day. Whether you believe in the continuation of supernatural gifts or not, the argument is the same. Women can use all the non-authoritative gifts in the church.

Apostolic teaching thus fulfils the prophecy of Joel regarding the messianic age:

And it shall come to pass in the last days, says God, that I will pour out of My Spirit on all flesh; your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your young men shall see visions, your old men shall dream dreams. And on My menservants and on My maidservants I will pour out My Spirit in those days; and they shall prophesy. (Acts 2:17-18)

Daughters and maidservants will prophesy in the church that was established and empowered by the outpouring of the Spirit at Pentecost. Women were prevented from having any vocal place in synagogue life; rabbis even let male children speak if they were capable, but not a mature woman. The Gospel sets women free. Under the guidance of the Spirit, women are fully qualified to share within their sphere of function. The evangelist Philip even had four daughters that prophesied (Acts 21:9).

When Paul exhorts the church to participate, such as in Ephesians 5:19, 'speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord', he includes women.

The exclusion, as we have said, applies to gifts that carry authority. No woman can exercise authority over men in the gathered church (1 Tim 2:12) and thus cannot be an elder (pastor), apostle, prophet, evangelist or teacher. The restrictions Paul places on women's ministry relate to this principle.

In 1 Corinthians 14:34-35 Paul says this:

Let your women keep silent in the churches, for they are not permitted to speak; but *they are* to be submissive, as the law also says. And if they want to learn something, let them ask their own husbands at home; for it is shameful for women to speak in church.

In 1 Tim 2:11 he says:

Let a woman learn in silence with all submission.

These have been used as chains to bind women in some churches. Other liberal and charismatic churches have simply ignored them altogether and promoted women to leadership. Both stances are wrong.

While there are differences among expositors in explaining these verses, one thing is certain - if Paul elsewhere encourages women to pray, prophesy, speak in tongues and interpret in church then these texts cannot mean that women can never speak in a church, not even in a prayer meeting. If you take these verses literally, then a woman can never utter a word in a gathered church, not even to pray or give thanks. We cannot go into detail here, but I will simply say this:

- The Corinthian passage is set in the context of judging prophecy: **Let two or three prophets speak, and let the others judge** (1 Cor 14:29). He then explains that judging prophecy is an authoritative action and is thus the province of men. Women must keep silent in this. Women cannot judge the weight or truth of prophecy.
- It also mentions asking questions and thus distracting the body from what the Lord is doing in the midst. This must be done at home. Paul probably has in mind the synagogue practice where men could ask questions, object, or attempt to refute; but this liberty was not allowed to any woman. Again questioning, contending or refuting is an authoritative action and is thus denied to women.
- Finally, the word 'speak' (*laleo*) can refer to teaching and preaching (as we have seen earlier). Women cannot teach in a mixed company.
- The Timothy passage is about learning in submission. It does not say that a woman cannot share anything, it simply says that while teaching is being ministered, women must be silent, not interrupt, not question and learn in submission. If they have

questions about the teaching, they should ask after the meeting is concluded (1 Cor 14:29). This is confirmed when Paul immediately adds that a woman should not teach in any way (1 Tim 2:12). The very prohibition from teaching implies that other vocal ministry is acceptable.

Having said all this, it is clear that women can teach, and teach with authority, in other settings. Older women should disciple younger women and teach them how to be good wives and mothers. Women should teach children, as they have more time and contact with them while the husband is at work.

The older women likewise ... that they admonish the young women to love their husbands, to love their children, to be discreet, chaste, homemakers, good, obedient to their own husbands, that the word of God may not be blasphemed. (Titus 2:3-5)

‘Admonish’ here literally means to restore someone to their senses, and thus means to train or to disciple. If ever there was a time when wise older women were needed to guide young women, it is now.

There is even a place where women are said to rule: **Therefore I desire that *the younger widows* marry, bear children, manage the house, give no opportunity to the adversary to speak reproachfully** (1 Tim 5:14). The word ‘manage’ is *oikodespoteo* (Strong’s No. 3616) meaning ‘to be master (or head) of a house’, ‘to rule a household, manage family affairs’ and it only appears here in the NT. We get the word ‘despot’ from the latter half of this word. However, the context relates this to widows, (as most versions translate it) i.e. this is applied here to a situation where there is no male head of the house. Even so, the actual Greek word is ‘young woman’ (lit. ‘younger’; used of males and females) not ‘widows’, so it could be seen as raising the status of women in comparison to the social world of the time by using such a strong word. They are the masters of the household; women rule the domestic home situation (not strategic decisions). Women should have a large say in the running of the home, the house environment, domestic matters, raising children and so on.

Conclusion

Unlike modern feminist accusations, Paul was not anti-women and did not place excessive restrictions on women. In agreement with the other apostles (2 Pt 3:15-16) Paul taught that the Biblical pattern is male leadership; consequently a woman can hold no authority in the church. Outside of this, there are a variety of roles for women, which Paul encouraged. Paul enjoyed the company of women and clearly enhanced their role in the church and the home beyond his rabbinic training.

The attitude of Peter to women

While we have less information about Peter it is clear that his position is entirely in harmony with that of Jesus and Paul. He believed that every believer has a gift from God to be used in the church and that this gift should be expressed through energy supplied by God, spoken as if God was speaking and all done to glorify God.

As each one has received a gift, minister it to one another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God. If anyone speaks, *let him speak* as the oracles of God. If anyone ministers, *let him do it* as with the ability which God supplies, that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom belong the glory and the dominion forever and ever. Amen. (1 Pt 4:10-11)

Only as everyone serves the body is the grace of God revealed is a manifold way; that is literally ‘many coloured’, variegated. God’s grace is to expressed in various sorts by different people; not by one person doing the same thing.

The KJV translation gives a false impression by using 'if any man', 'let him' or 'as every man'. The word 'man' or 'him' does not appear in the Greek text at all; it uses the words 'anyone', 'each'. Peter (as Paul) clearly has in mind all people, men and women.

Regarding wives, Peter has this to say:

- 1 Wives, likewise, *be* submissive to your own husbands, that even if some do not obey the word, they, without a word, may be won by the conduct of their wives,
 - 2 when they observe your chaste conduct *accompanied* by fear.
 - 3 Do not let your adornment be *merely* outward -- arranging the hair, wearing gold, or putting on *fine* apparel --
 - 4 rather *let it be* the hidden person of the heart, with the incorruptible *beauty* of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is very precious in the sight of God.
 - 5 For in this manner, in former times, the holy women who trusted in God also adorned themselves, being submissive to their own husbands,
 - 6 as Sarah obeyed Abraham, calling him lord, whose daughters you are if you do good and are not afraid with any terror.
- Husbands, likewise, dwell with *them* with understanding, giving honour to the wife, as to the weaker vessel, and as *being* heirs together of the grace of life, that your prayers may not be hindered.
- 1 Pt 3:1-7

Here we see Peter affirm that women need to be submissive to their husbands (so it was not just Paul that demanded this), but also that women can have great power and opportunity for the Gospel. This comes from their virtue and not from what they say. This is something in which they can excel beyond men.

I doubt that it could be said of men that they could win someone without a word, but a chaste wife can. The conduct of a righteous wife is an amazingly powerful opportunity for a pure testimony to God. Notice that this behaviour includes fear, that is a respectful attitude to even an unbelieving husband. Many Christian women can fail here believing that they can be superior to their unsaved husband, or that they can easily override him. Peter demands submission and fear and states that this is powerful enough to win an unbelieving husband without a continual barrage of explanation about the Gospel.

He then, as with Paul, teaches that a woman should dress modestly. Her appearance should be focused on inner beauty not outward attraction. 'Adorning' means harmonious appearance and this is the basic meaning of our word 'cosmetic'.¹⁹ Modern female dress sense and cosmetics are centred upon sexual attraction; indeed as time goes on less and less is left to the imagination and female attire becomes degraded to the level of the gutter.

Biblical women should be focused upon 'the hidden person of the heart, with the incorruptible *beauty* of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is very precious in the sight of God'. What pleases God in women? A gentleness, quietness and submission to their husband. How do modern women behave? They primarily seek to be like men: powerful, ambitious, vocal, ruthless; while young girls seem to be more interested in looking and behaving like sleazy whores. There is no delicate way of putting this since this is the truth. Dominated by sleazy role models in the media; let down by liberal attitudes in school; fooled by the lurid example of singers and actresses; young girls have been hoodwinked into believing that this behaviour gives them power and attraction. Badly let down by parents who have not trained them, their lives become a

¹⁹ The Greek word is *kosmos*, which is usually translated as 'world', i.e. the ordered arrangement of the earth or the cosmos.

wilderness until they eventually realise the truth as they get older. We could say so much more, but this is enough.

God is concerned with a gentle spirit, a quiet spirit, a submissive spirit and inner beauty; and here we have come full circle. Peter calls such women true daughters of [Sara and] Abraham, the title he heard Jesus use of the crippled woman he healed. In trusting God, and behaving according to his instructions, the Christian woman has nothing to fear, either from her unbelieving husband, or of demands he may make, or of failing in her testimony. If she concentrates on virtue instead of their appearance, and her responsibilities instead of her rights, she will have nothing to fear. Virtue leads to strength of character and enables women to live in difficult circumstances without terror; the Greek is literally, 'not fearing any fear'.

Conclusion

The key issue for women is to understand their role within God's plan and be submissive to it. Within that role there is considerable liberty and great power based upon character and virtue. There are things women can do that men can never hope to achieve, and when men and women work together in the cause of the Gospel, each respecting the others' position and ministry in peace, there is great power.

Women should not struggle to try to be like men, as the feminist lie teaches. Their job is not to try to get round scriptural restrictions regarding authority and set themselves up as teachers and leaders, or invent new church jobs to find a way of having power. There is no blessing to anyone in this route. But neither should they feel hemmed in, repressed and chained up to merely do menial tasks like cleaning or arranging flowers. They have a very positive role and a key influence in both the church and the family. There are vocal gifts which they can exercise, especially in prayer and worship. Within the family their tasks carry significant authority, yet in ultimate submission to the husband.

The Lord Jesus elevated the position of women and treated them like no other rabbi before or since. Paul enhanced the role of women and trusted them as co-workers. Peter, a married man, also placed significant responsibilities on women and encouraged them as co-heirs with men.

The Gospel raised women from the awful repression that ancient society put them under. Modern Christian women do not need to seek further authority like the world, but to find their place in the church and serve the Lord with a quiet spirit in the way he chooses. In this path is a true testimony.

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