

# A CHURCH WITH WOMEN

By Dianne D. McDonnell

Paul has a reputation for being a man rather critical of women, a man who would tell a young man in love that it was better to stay unmarried as he was. Yet, even Paul taught a basic fairness and lack of prejudice that was essential to early Christianity, "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus" Gal.3:28. In Christ Jesus and His Church there is to be no distinction made between Greeks and Jews (racial or national differences), slave nor free (social differences and skin color differences) or male nor female (gender differences). A converted Jew is free to participate in church services, a slave is free to participate, and a woman is free to participate in services. We must not consider anyone "unholy" or "unworthy" for God is not a God of prejudice, but a fair and loving God!

Peter had been taught all his life that Gentiles were lesser persons, and were not his spiritual equal. God sent him a special vision, and at the end of it, he had learned his lesson, "But God has shown me that I should not call any "anthroopon" impure or unclean." What does "anthroopon (Strong's number 444)" mean? "A human being, whether male or female" Thayer's Definitions. If God has cleansed a person, male or female, Peter was not to look down on them as spiritually inferior! (Acts 10:28) We are not to see ourselves as superior or inferior to someone else because of our sex. No one is "unworthy" or "impure" just because they were born into a minority race, a poor person, or a female.

Jesus never made any rulings preventing the full participation of women in the church or in church services. He taught women such as Mary along with the men, refusing Martha's request to send her back to the kitchen with "...but only a few things are necessary, really only one, for **Mary has chosen the good part, which shall not be taken away from her.**" Luke 10:42 New American Standard Bible.

Jesus said it was better to pick the role of disciple over being confined to the traditional role of women! Jesus expected **all** to teach others afterward. He did not restrict the women to "private" instruction as some teach, instead he said, "...**whosoever** shall do and **teach** them (the Ten Commandments), the same shall be called **great** in the kingdom of heaven." Matt. 5:19. Jesus put no gender restrictions on teaching, but said "whosoever" and promised **greatness** for both men and women who taught the commandments. There were no "only in private" restrictions put on women by Jesus, Paul, or the other apostles. God loves both his male and female children. He does not tell females they are not to publicly teach his truth! How one serves the church must depend on what spiritual gifts have been given that person by Jesus Christ, it is not up to men to decree that women may not play as active a role as men in serving their congregations. Jesus Christ is in charge of His church!

Once Peter and John were **commanded not** to speak or **to teach publicly** in the name of Jesus. But the response of Peter and John was, “**Judge for yourselves whether it is right in God's sight to obey you rather than God.**” Acts 4:10 NIV.

The present beliefs against women teaching were introduced by an apostate church just as were the present holidays and deception against the Sabbath. All were introduced to hide God's truth and to hide **the magnificent potential of both men and women with God's Holy Spirit.**

There are many examples of women who served God as leaders in the New Testament Church, teaching God's truth and serving His Church. The most imminent woman was **Junia**. Because Romans 16:7 NIV reads plainly of Andronicus and Junia, “They are outstanding among the apostles” this passage has been under special attack. “Outstanding” is used in the NAS, NAU, and NIV, and better translates the Greek *episemos* than “of note” used by the KJV. Strong's Greek Dictionary, defines it as “remarkable, eminent”. Obviously, she blows away the entire theory of women's subordination within the church. Critics pose many questions concerning Junia in their attempt to deny her femininity or remove her place from among the later apostles that arose after the twelve. Apostle remained a spiritual gift given by God, I Cor. 12:28, and others such as Paul and Barnabas were called apostles beyond the twelve.

Some think that Paul was saying Junia was thought to be outstanding “by” the apostles and therefore was not one of the apostles, and mentally revise the scripture to become, “They are (said to be) outstanding (by) the apostles.” “Said to be” and “by” just aren't in the text! Paul, an apostle himself, Eph.1:1, never relied on the opinion of the other apostles when praising anyone. Also, the Greek *en* indicates “within a group” and is rightly translated “among” here. The same word is used in Matt. 20:26, “among you” The meaning “by” would be rendered by the Greek *para* or *pros* as in Acts 2:47. Paul states that Andronicus and Junia are **notable or eminent** from **among** the apostles, had been imprisoned with him, and were converted before he was.

When translating Romans 16:1-2 translators were well aware they were talking about a woman, **Phoebe**, and translated with the same bias shown other women. First some background information. During the winter of 55-56 AD Paul dictated the book of Romans to Tertius (Rom16:22) in Corinth and sent the epistle by Phoebe, who traveled over 800 miles to Rome.

Paul begins Chapter 16 with an introduction of Phoebe, “I commend to you (*Sunisteeem* 4821, “Commend or favorably introduce,” Strong's Greek-Hebrew Dictionary) our sister Phoebe, who is a “*diakonon*” of the church which is at Cenchrea.”

This word *diakonon* is usually translated as “minister” and is the same word Paul uses when he writes, “Who then is Paul, and who is Apollos, but **ministers** through whom you believed, as the Lord gave to each one?” I Cor. 3:5. And in Ephesians 3:7, Paul refers to himself with this same Greek word, “...I was made a **minister**...” The vast majority of times, 22 times, “minister” is the translation. See Strong's, “specially, a Christian teacher

and **pastor**". The clear meaning here is also minister being linked together with her area of service. Servant had become a code word for minister, so you will note that Tychicus is called a servant in the NIV and a minister in the KJV, Eph. 6:21, yet both are translated from the same Greek word used for Phoebe. For Phoebe the KJV translated "servant", but the translation would have been "minister" had she been a male like Tychicus.

Cenchrea is a port city very near Corinth. A sea voyage from there to Rome was well over 800 miles. For Phoebe to be traveling alone, by ship this great distance carrying this letter from Paul, proves that she was a woman of considerable faith, responsibility, and bravery. Paul continues, "That you receive her in the Lord in a manner worthy of the saints," (Receive her- welcome her, a weary traveler, in a way worthy of saints!) "And that you help her in whatever matter she may have need of you;" This tells us that she might need help from the Christians at Rome in accomplishing the matter that caused her trip to Rome. She is in Rome apparently on church business, and carries the letter from Paul as her introduction to the church there. If she is not the minister of the church at Cenchrea, then why did she, a woman, come on such an important mission? Why didn't the "real" minister of the church come? Phoebe **was** the minister.

The rest of the passage reveals even more in the original Greek. "For she herself has also been a *"prostatis"* of many, and of myself as well." Prostatis, 4368, is defined by Thayer's Greek Definitions as "**A woman set over others**, a female guardian, a **protectress**, a **patroness**, caring for the affairs of others and aiding them with her resources." "Patroness" indicates ample financial resources. She has helped and protected many, including Paul, and is traveling on church business requiring the help of the congregation. "Set over others" she may be one of the Greek "leading" or "chief women" Paul mentions converting in Acts.17:4.

Greek scholar Alfred Marshall translates this passage, "Now I commend to you Phoebe the sister of us, being also **a minister** of the church in Cenchrea, in order that her ye may receive in (the) Lord worthily of the saints, and may stand by her in whatever of you she may have need thing; for indeed she a protectress of many became and of myself." The Interlinear NASB-NIV parallel New Testament in Greek and English, pg. 477.

This brave woman of some authority has protected many and helped fund Paul and others. Paul could not make enough tents to pay for his long journeys; this capable woman minister was supplying some of the money Paul needed! And at this time protection too, was also often bought with money. Calling Phoebe a "helper" and a "servant" is about like calling Bill Gates a "computer nerd"; it just does not get the full picture across. She was a brave servant/minister and a wealthy protector of the brethren.

Another woman leader was **Nympha** who had a church meeting in her home that was in the Greek, "oikon autees ekkleesian" or "**her house church**"! In Col. 4:15, the King James and New King James erroneously translated "his house".

Four Bible translations, (The New American Standard, The New American Standard Update, The New International Version, and the Revised Standard Version ) all agree on

Nympha, a female as the correct rendering of Col. 4:15, “Greet the brethren who are in Laodicea and also Nympha and the church that is in **her** house.”

Close study of this passage shows that verses 7-16 relate to specific churches and the comings and goings of church leaders and ministers. Epaphras, who sounds like a minister that oversees several areas, is there with Paul and sends his greetings. In verse 16 Paul writes, “After this letter has been read to you, see that it is also read in **the church of the Laodiceans** and that you in turn **read the letter from Laodicea.**” A leader of the church of the Laodiceans has written a letter from Laodicea, yet **the only leader** that Paul calls by name that seems to be **actually in Laodicea is Nympha!** If Nympha only supplied a meeting place for the church, then why didn’t Paul also greet the man who was the minister? **Nympha is the only leader in Laodicea greeted by name.** She is the most likely author of the letter from that church, and **must have led the church meeting in her home.**

Another woman minister leading a house church is the woman John addresses in 2 John. The letter that became the book of 2 John was written to a **female church leader** during a time of great persecution for the church and church leadership, and is sent as a warning about “many deceivers” who are coming to her area. John sends his brief letter to warn her about these deceivers. Due to dangerous times, there is not a single name in the entire letter; neither her name nor the exact location of her house church. She is addressed as “*Eklektee Kuria*” or one “Chosen” “Elect”, **picked out or chosen by God, preeminent** (Thayer’s, 1588). “*Kuria*” is a *feminine form* of *Kurios*, 2962) a title expressive of respect and reverence, a high position and great authority. The feminine form is used only in 2 John. To translate “Kuria” as “lady” is about like referring to a female ambassador only as “a woman.” It doesn’t convey her high calling! This very popular woman was respected and loved by all true believers, “all who know the truth” but her fame created danger for her just as it had for Paul. Both were leaders whom the authorities would like to arrest and kill!

John talks of her spiritual converts as “children” in verse 4 just as he refers to his own converts as “children” throughout 1 John and in 3 John verse 4, “I have no greater joy than this, to hear of **my children** walking in the truth.” Many scriptures such as John 2:1, 12,18 and 28 “And now, dear children,” all refer to true believers as “children”. Thayer’s Definitions confirms, “In the New Testament pupils or disciples are called **children** of their teachers,” These are “her children” in the same way, her converts. They would understand, outsiders reading the letter wouldn’t know that John was talking to her converts rather than her biological children.

Because this book of the Bible is written to a highly honored woman minister, some have tried to indicate it is merely symbolic. **Yet John looks forward to seeing her “face to face”** (or mouth to mouth as the Greek idiom is for talking in person, vs. 12). It is rather difficult to talk “face to face” or mouth to mouth with a symbolic woman. John looks forward to seeing her and her converts one on one, **they were all real people.** John writes a very brief letter, a cautious letter, “Having many things to write to you, (there is more I want to say) **“I do not want to do so with paper and ink;”** (there is some danger in

putting these things down in writing). She is not named by name because she is very well known, even **famous within the church**, and the authorities were searching for her as they were for other leaders. The mention of her name would have endangered both her and the messenger carrying the letter. As a safety measure, it was brief and partially “encoded”. John wrote clearly to her yet alluded to “children” a term they understood, but unlike other letters, **did not mention any of them by name for their own safety**. John closes by sending a greeting from another congregation led by “**your chosen sister.**” “Chosen” or “elect” in both vs. 1 and vs.13 indicate chosen in an ecclesiastical sense, chosen by God for a specific calling, and indicates two women ministers responsible for leading two churches.

Many think Paul was opposed to women as teachers, yet to Titus he writes: "Older men are to be temperate, dignified, sensible, sound in faith, in love, in perseverance. Older **women (*presbutis*)** likewise are to be reverent in their behavior, not malicious gossips, nor enslaved to much wine, **teaching what is good,**" Titus 2:2-3.

Older women is from *presbutis*, which is very closely related to *presbuteros* 4245, and means “female elder”. These female elders are to be “teaching what is good” which is translated from the Greek word *kalodidaskalos* , 2567; Strong’s **a teacher of the right**. **Paul tells these women to teach what is right**—the right way of life! Next Paul talks about training the young women and so some assume that an elder woman can only teach younger women. But if you look carefully at the passage you will see that these elder women are not in any way limited to teaching only the women in this passage. Neither does it say that they must never teach in public as some believe. They are to be reverent, refrain from gossip, not have a drinking problem, and **teach what is right**.

**Priscilla** was such an active part of a husband and wife team that she is mentioned first before Aquila in all of the best manuscripts. Priscilla and her husband accompanied Paul on a missionary journey to Ephesus, where Paul left Priscilla and Aquila to evangelize and teach. Then Apollos, “a learned man, with a thorough knowledge of the Scriptures” came to Ephesus and began to “speak boldly in the synagogue. When Priscilla and Aquila heard him, they invited him to their home and explained (*ektithemi*) to him the way of God more adequately.” Acts 18:18-26.

We learn in Romans 16: 5 that Priscilla and Aquila had a church meeting in their home, so Apollos may well have learned “the way of God more adequately” during church services. The meaning of *ektithemi* 1620, is expound, set forth, declare, exhibit **publicly**, explain by means of abstraction. This is the same word used in Acts 11:4 when Peter explains publicly in Jerusalem his acceptance of Gentile converts, and also in Acts 28:23.

Paul praises many women active in teaching both men and women. The one scripture that was believed to forbid a woman from fully serving her Savior is misunderstood and partly mistranslated. The scripture, 1 Timothy 2:11-12, is important because many quote it to deny women a teaching/speaking role before men and women. The original order of 1 Timothy 2:11-12 is literally translated word by word (just as Paul wrote it), with the simplified Greek, English transliterations and English translations on the chart that follows.

**THE ORIGINAL ORDER OF THE GREEK WORDS** of I Tim. 2:11-12

γυνη <i>Gunee</i> <b>1) Wife/Woman</b> 1135	εν <i>en</i> <b>in</b> 1722	ησυχια <i>heesuchia</i> <b>peacefulness</b> 2271	μανθανετω <i>manthanetoo</i> <b>2) I let learn</b> 3129
εν <i>en</i> <b>in</b> 1722	παση <i>pasee</i> <b>all</b> 3956	υποταγη <i>hypotagee</i> <b>obedience</b> 5292	διδασκειν <i>didaskain</i> <b>3) to teach</b> <b>1321</b>
δε <i>de</i> <b>4) but</b> 1161	γυναικι <i>gunaiki</i> <b>5) wife/woman</b> 1135	ουκ <i>ouk</i> <b>not</b> 3756	επιτρεπω <i>epitrepo</i> <b>I am allowing</b> 2010
ουδε <i>oude</i> <b>6) not even</b> 3761	αυθεντειν <i>authentain</i> <b>7) to dominate</b> 831	ανδροζ <i>andros</i> <b>8) husband/man</b> 435	αλλ <i>all</i> <b>but</b> 235
ειναι <i>einai</i> <b>to be</b> 1511	εν <i>en</i> <b>in</b> 1722	ησυχια <i>heesuchia</i> <b>peacefulness</b> 2271	

- 1) “Gunee” can be translated either wife or woman, Strong’s Greek Hebrew Dictionary, 1135, “a woman;...a wife.”
- 2) The Greek ω ending indicates “I” just as “I am allowing” two lines below. Basic Greek in 30 Minutes a Day by Jim Found, Page 84. Most translations omit this.
- 3) **Jesus** uses a form of the same verb, “didasko” 1321: “Go therefore and **make disciples** of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, **teaching** (“didaskontes” 1321) **them** to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.” Matthew 28:19-20.
- 4) In Greek usage the particle “de” modifies the word that comes directly before it, and becomes “but to teach” in this case.
- 5) “Gunaiki” translated “**wife**” in I Cor. 7:3 and 27. Can be a wife or a woman, see 1).
- 6) “Oude” translated “not even” in I Cor. 11:14, “Doth **not even** nature teach...”
- 7) Vincent’s Word Studies of the New Testament I Tim. 2:12, “The King James Version ‘usurp authority’ is a mistake.” Strong’s: to act of oneself, **dominate**.
- 8) “Andros” can mean **husband** or man, Thayer’s Greek Definitions, 435. The same word is used in Luke 2:36, “Anna...lived with her husband seven years” .

“A wife, in peacefulness, I let learn in all obedience (not causing angry disputes), but to teach (a) wife I am not allowing (present indicative tense—he is not presently allowing a wife to teach), not even to dominate (a) husband, but to be in peacefulness.”

We learn at the start of 1 Timothy that Paul had left Timothy behind to counter false teachers and the controversies they had caused, see 1Tim.1:3,4. Belief in Artemis/Diana was rampant in Ephesus, as was a belief that Amazon women who were superior to men originally established the city of Ephesus. Paul was making a decision for the time being preventing the wives of Ephesus from teaching doctrines of Artemis (such as women needing protection during childbirth from Artemis, 1Tim. 2:15), or from dominating their husbands. In Ephesus 5:22 we find further proof that the wives of that city were having a very difficult time submitting to the leadership of their Christian husbands. Paul cites their beliefs in myths and their long genealogies which tied them to their Amazon forebears as part of the problem that he and Timothy faced in Ephesus, 1Tim.1:4. Paul was not dealing with converted women teaching true doctrines! For more in depth study of this entire passage see the paper **Paul and Women Teachers** by this same author.

For those who continue to believe that 1 Tim. 2:11-12 is correctly translated and correctly understood, I would say that something is terribly wrong that Paul would greet and praise so many women who were leading and teaching men and women. Women such as Junia, Nympha, Euodia, Syntyche, and other teachers he praised in many scriptures. Paul called Pricilla (who taught the minister Apollos) and Aquila “my **fellow workers** in Christ Jesus” Romans 16:3. Paul also wrote, “...help these women who have **contended at my side in the cause of the gospel**, ...whose names are in the book of life.” Phil. 4:2-3 NIV. These women verbally contended-verbally wrestled- right beside Paul, arguing forcefully for the true gospel message! If he really did issue an edict that forbids women from teaching men, he would be undermining his own instructions with his praise! All of these women were using the spiritual gifts God had given them, and they are each witnesses and proof that we have not had a right understanding of Paul’s meaning in 1 Timothy 2:11-12.

Any time we are dealing with an unclear scripture we must balance it against a clear scripture. **The clear words of Jesus Christ must always be weighted heavier than an unclear passage by Paul.** Jesus commands, “Therefore go and **make disciples** of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and **teaching them** to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.” Matt 28:19-20 (NIV) We see that both men and women were carrying out that command. Can modern women ignore the commands of Jesus Christ that extend even to the end of the age?

A Christian husband is to lead his wife lovingly and gently as Christ does the Church. He is responsible for the leadership of his family, and is to be honored in this leadership position given him by God. Yet each woman is responsible for her own spiritual decisions and is punished just as her husband is for disobedience. Sapphira was killed because of her spiritual decision to lie, and her husband Ananias was not responsible for her sin. Each faced the consequences of their sin personally and individually (Acts 5:1-10). The idea that a wife can sit back and leave spiritual matters up to her husband is proven wrong by this passage. A husband takes responsibility for his wife within the family, but a wife answers directly to Jesus Christ within the Church. If this were not true then Sapphira would have borne no punishment, Peter’s decision would have been,

“You were under your husband’s authority, you had to do what he said.” If a husband leads down a wrong spiritual path, a wife must make her own spiritual decisions before God, and answer for her own decisions. She is to give her husband love and honor his leadership, but spiritually, Jesus Christ is the highest leader of each of us, male or female.

Brethren, and that term does refer to women as well as men, within the church there is to be no "male or female" prejudice anymore than we should be prejudiced against a black man speaking to us or a converted Jew. Our God is a God of great love, caring for each of us! It is very hurtful to think that one should be unable to participate during our church services, not even to offer a prayer aloud, merely because one was born black, of a minority nationality, or female. God is not like that! He wants us **all** to serve Him and **He gives wonderful spiritual gifts to both males and females**. How has He gifted you? How can you use your gifts to serve His Church? These should be the real questions.

Can we have love for the women of the Church and still deny them full equality? There is now no scriptural backing for our previous tradition. It is only a wrong tradition that has deceived us for too many years. What a triumph for Satan to block women and limit them for hundreds of years, all with one misunderstood passage!

In I Cor.14:26-40 both men and women are to keep silent in church (vs. 28) under certain conditions of confusion. If a church has rowdy and disrespectful wives causing a disturbance during services, then that is the scriptures to refer to. However, this passage cannot be used to tell **all women** they are to keep silent in services **under all conditions** because it refers only to married women **who are causing a disturbance** who have converted husbands they can ask at home. Paul is treating these wives in a rude manner because he is upset with the confusion they have caused. It is very insulting to use this scripture to deter converted women from serving God by giving Bible Studies or offering up prayers during services. It is wrong to treat women as if they are nonmembers!

It is wrong to insinuate their prayers are not as good as the prayers of the men, or a Bible Study they would prepare would be “a sin” as some maintain. For something to be a sin there must be a commandment against it. One writer feels it involves coveting a role not given to women. I would ask, not given to them by whom? Not given to them by the doctrines of the apostate church...the doctrines and traditions we have accepted into our churches? Jesus never forbids a woman from speaking/preaching/teaching in public!! Such a restriction just isn’t there! Jesus **empowers** through His Holy Spirit, He does not forbid women to serve Him just as men do!

Deborah, “a mother in Israel” led an entire nation, Judges 4:4--5:27 She **publicly** judged court cases, she **publicly** sent for the man who was the military commander under her, she **publicly** went to war with him and ten thousand men that included many male leaders (Judges 5:14,15), she **publicly** sang an entire chapter of the Bible! Deborah was a prophetess, the second highest calling in spiritual gifts! In 1 Cor. 12:28, a prophet is listed second only to apostle and before teacher/minister. If God made a woman a prophet and top leader of His nation, then why do many think God would not call a woman to be a leader or a minister in the New Testament Church? God does not change.



The woman Huldah was also a prophetess and King Josiah **sent his high priest** to Huldah to ask about God's will. The King did not summon Huldah to come to him! She told the high priest God's exact words just as they had been given to her. See 2 Kings 22:14-20 and 2 Chron.34:20-28.

We are told in Acts 2:17,18 that both sons and daughters will prophesy in the last days. "On my handmaidens I will pour out in those days of my Spirit; and they shall prophesy." When these days come, will we disregard a message from God because it comes from a woman? Are these women going to be told it is a "sin" for them to publicly tell the entire congregation the message God has given them?

We are not as far away from these things as many people think. We must stop this insane policy of not allowing women to be full members of the body of Christ! God sees women as full members or he would not give them the gift of prophecy, one of the highest of spiritual gifts!

We are told, "by their fruits you shall know them" so we must look at the "fruits" of one telling of a prophetic message they have received. We must also check it against God's law, the testimony of Jesus Christ, and the prophets of the Old Testament, for a true prophecy will not contradict Jesus Christ, the law, or the prophets. We must also beware of people who are not well whose "visions" or "prophecies" are the product of an unstable mind.

Another spiritual gift is the gift of healing, I Cor. 12:28-30. How does a woman use a spiritual gift that speeds the healing of the sick if she cannot anoint as instructed by James 5:14? There were women elders in the early church as I have already shown. Are people dying because the person with the gift of healing in their congregation is a woman?

Others of the spiritual gifts can require speaking, teaching, talking, or preaching before the entire group! We cannot continue to force women into subservient roles if God has them destined for spiritual gifts requiring leadership or service as elders.

Our present tradition decides who can do what by the ordination given by MEN. It is God who gives spiritual gifts to both men and women as He sees fit! Ordination by men is to **follow** gifts God has already given. Notice that Philip had four daughters that were prophetesses, Acts 21:8,9, and that the women of the church were praying and prophesying publicly during services when a controversy arose over whether they were to be veiled or not, I Cor. 11:5-16. Remember, prophecy is a direct message from God for a certain person or for the entire church. Deborah publicly revealed the message God had given to her. God doesn't change! He would not have blessed Deborah and allowed her to be a prominent leader of an entire country if He was against women leading publicly as some think. Teaching, preaching, talking, evangelizing, call it what you will, God does not prohibit women from doing it!! Our past traditions hold back women, God does not.