

Requirements for Ministry: Can a Woman be a Minister?

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Can a woman be a minister of Jesus Christ? There is a lot of background information that is helpful for us as we examine this important issue.

- In his paper, Women in Leadership John H. Currier explains Jesus' attitude toward women and points out specific women in leadership roles in the early church.
- A Church Without Women, explains the mistranslation and misunderstanding of the two scriptural passages commonly cited for denying women a public teaching role.
- A Church With Women documents female ministers in the New Testament era while acknowledging a husband's leadership role within the family.
- Gary L. McDonnell's paper, A Church With Love deals with the scriptures about love and shows how this applies to the issue of women's role in the church.
- All of these papers and more can be obtained from the Web Site of The Church of God, Dallas-Fort Worth at **ChurchofGodDFW.com** or write to P.O. Box 152544, Arlington, TX 76015.

These papers reveal many Biblical references to women leaders and ministers, but are there any historical references to back up the Biblical record?

History Documents Early Female Ministers

“Two women ministers at Bithynia-Pontus in Asia Minor were tortured during Emperor Trajan's reign (AD 98-117) as the leaders and most knowledgeable persons in their congregation. After Pliny describes a report of an apparently innocuous service he decides, ‘it was all the more necessary to extract the truth by torture from the slave-women, whom they called ministers’” (*The Letters of Pliny*, Bk.X.96). As quoted by Aida Besancon Spencer, Beyond The Curse, page 115.

Two things jump out at us as we read this, first is the utter contempt in Pliny's words, “the slave women, whom they called ministers.” To him they were the lowest form of life—slaves—and females at that! Yet the early church called them ministers! Second, these two brave women who died for the faith illustrate that the early church **believed** “There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.” Gal. 3:28. It was not some hollow tenet that would take place in the resurrection. They were female and they were ministers and they died for Jesus Christ!

The Scriptural Requirements for Ministry

Even if there are female ministers mentioned in history, there remains one very critical issue. Don't **the scriptural requirements for ministry** specify **men** as ministers? We must base all our beliefs on the Bible and always be able to prove with scriptures what we believe. However, we are faced with the problem of translators that assumed an all male ministry because of their past influences. So we will study what Paul and others

originally wrote concerning qualifications for ministry, but in a way that non-Greek experts like ourselves can understand.

Today we are fortunate to have incredible research tools at our disposal to check out the meaning of the original Greek words. Using powerful computer programs we can see how each word was translated in the rest of the Bible, compare each translation, and see what modern Greek scholars say about each word. Today with computers as our tools we can delve deeper, more accurately, and faster, than any other generation in history! What an exciting time to be in! What a fantastic time for us to be searching for truth, zealously prayerfully, always being **ready to change if we can prove it by the Holy Scriptures**.

2 Timothy 2:2

“And the things that thou hast heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful **men** (*anthroopois*), who shall be able to teach others also.”

Should be: “And the things which you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses, these entrust **to faithful ones**, who will be able to teach others also.”

The word translated “men” is *anthroopois*, plural of the word *anthropos*, Strong’s 444 “a human being, **whether male or female**, generically, to include all human individuals.” Thayer’s Definitions. Paul does not use the Greek word for man “*aner*” 435, which is totally masculine, but instead he leaves this teaching open to both men and women.

Faithful ones, men and women are to be taught and eventually are **to teach others**.

Another common proof text for an all-male ministry is:

1 Timothy 3:1-2

“This is a true saying, **If a man** (*ei tis*) desire the office of a bishop, he desireth a good work. A bishop then must be blameless, the husband of one wife, vigilant, sober, of good behaviour, given to hospitality, apt to teach;”

ei tis (i tis); **if any** Strong’s Greek-Hebrew Dictionary, Strong’s 1536.

ei tis- **whoever**, whatever, Thayer’s Definitions 1536.

The original does not say “man” at all but instructs,
“**If any** desire the office of a bishop, (he/she) desires a good work....”

Paul knew the Greek language. He would not have used **a word** that can mean either man or woman if he had intended to limit overseers to males only! If Paul had intended a male ministry he would have used the all male word, “*aner*” 435 in this text. Paul did not just slip up in this scripture. In all his admonitions concerning the ministry **he uses words that include both sexes!** Yet translators were bound by their own traditional ideas and translated with male words not found in the original! Just as their hatred of the Sabbath caused the translation of “*sabbatismos*” 4520, in Hebrews 4:9 to become “rest” instead of the correct translation, “Sabbath rest.” In both cases they knew better.

The word “**he**” is not in the original text above, it is inferred from the verb used in the third person, *he/she/it*. (*I* is first person, *you* is second person, and *he/she/it* is third person.) This verb form can include both male and female. The original Greek is **not limited to the male gender**.

The translators added maleness to this scripture also.

1 Timothy 3:5

“For if a **man** (*tis*) know not how to rule **his** own house, how shall he take care of the church of God?”

tis “an enclitic indefinite pronoun; some or **any person** or object.” Strong’s 5100

It should be, “For if **anyone** know not how to rule...”

Also, “his” and “he” were not in the original text, but indicate third person (*he/she/it*).

1 Timothy 3:11

“Even so {must their}(not in the original) wives (*gunaikas* 1135 **Women**) be grave, not slanderers, sober, faithful in all things.”

Earlier in this entire passage Paul has not specified maleness but has used words that can address both sexes. Now he addresses women specifically, giving requirements for women to be church leaders! As we are talking about church leadership rather than marriage, the New American Standard translation below for this scripture is more accurate. The confusion was created by the word *gunaikas*, which does not differentiate between women or wives. We notice that Paul’s requirements for women leaders echo male requirements for ministry: Grave/grave, not slanderers/not double tongued, sober/not given to much wine, faithful in all things/not greedy of filthy lucre.

New Amer Standard Update, the NAS, RSV, ASV all translate “women” not “wives”:

1 Timothy 3:11

“**Women** in like manner {must be}grave, not slanderers, temperate, faithful in all things.” American Standard Version

The use of “**tis**” or “any” earlier shows Paul was addressing both male and female church leaders. *Gunaikas* is a plural form of *gune*, 1135, 1) a **woman** of any age, whether a virgin, or married, or a widow 2) a wife; Thayer’s Definitions.

The entire passage in **the original Greek is totally without gender bias or prejudice** just as Paul teaches in Galatians 3:28. Women were bishops and overseers in the New Testament church. Male requirements were added by translators and believed by us because we did not have access to the original Greek or any way of decoding the original Greek. Now computer programs make this readily possible and the bias of the translators is clearly revealed. An apostate church imposed an all-male ministry and Protestants have also accepted this tradition. It was not present in the Church Jesus Christ founded. I Tim.3:11 is referring to women ministers. “Women in like manner” were to have the

same qualifications as men, and were to be “faithful in all things,” just as the “faithful ones” of 2 Timothy 2:2.

Spiritual Gifts

1 Corinthians 12:4-11

4 Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit.

5 And there are varieties of ministries, and the same Lord.

6 And there are varieties of effects, but the same God who works all things in all persons

7 But to each one is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.

8 For to one is given **the word of wisdom** through the Spirit, and to another the **word of knowledge** according to the same Spirit;

9 to another **faith** by the same Spirit, and to another **gifts of healing** by the one Spirit,

10 and to another **the effecting of miracles**, and to another **prophecy**, and to another the **distinguishing of spirits**, to another {various} **kinds of tongues**, and to another the **interpretation of tongues**.

11 But one and the same Spirit works all these things, **distributing to each one** individually **just as He wills**. (New American Standard)

1 Corinthians 12:27-28

“Now you are Christ's body, and individually members of it. And God has appointed in the church, first **apostles**, second **prophets**, third **teachers**, then **miracles**, then gifts of **healings, helps, administrations**, {various} kinds of **tongues**.” (NAS)

All of the members of the body of Christ, His Church, receive a spiritual gift. Then all members, male and female, must work together using their various gifts to make up a local church. Each must have an attitude of service towards others, and an attitude of love. It seems that some have assumed that women were not given spiritual gifts for they have not allowed women any way to use a spiritual gift such as the gift of healing, teacher of the congregation, or what we might call “minister” today.

We must not prevent women from using the spiritual gifts God has given them. All members, both male and female should be encouraged to use their spiritual gifts. Then we would not have over-worked ministers, for each member would be serving through the gift God has given. Our fair and loving God has given women gifts as He sees fit. God will judge men who forbid women from obeying Him! No one will be guiltless before God's throne if he or she condones prejudice and mistreatment of women who seek only to serve God as He leads them. We cannot judge the calling of another person! They stand or fall before Jesus Christ, not us! All scriptures relating to spiritual gifts and ministry were written without gender bias, they were written for both men and women.