

Women Standing in the Church

“⁴ Deborah, a prophetess, the wife of Lappidoth, was leading Israel at that time. ⁵ She held court under the Palm of Deborah between Ramah and Bethel in the hill country of Ephraim, and the Israelites came to her to have their disputes decided. ⁶ She sent for Barak son of Abinoam from Kedesh in Naphtali and said to him, ‘The LORD, the God of Israel, commands you: ‘Go, take with you ten thousand men of Naphtali and Zebulun and lead the way to Mount Tabor. ⁷ I will lure Sisera, the commander of Jabin’s army, with his chariots and his troops to the Kishon River and give him into your hands.’ ” ⁸ Barak said to her, ‘If you go with me, I will go; but if you don’t go with me, I won’t go.’ ” ⁹ “Very well,” Deborah said, “I will go with you. But because of the way you are going about this, the honor will not be yours, for the LORD will hand Sisera over to a woman.” So Deborah went with Barak to Kedesh, ¹⁰ where he summoned Zebulun and Naphtali. Ten thousand men followed him, and Deborah also went with him.” (Judges 4:4-10)

Everyone agree that women are also called by God to serve Him. Yet the controversy about women standing and preaching in the Church meetings need to be addressed. “Should a woman stand or lead a congregation?” The above quoted event in the life of the church in the Old Testament, the Israelites – the chosen people of God, clearly gives us the conclusion that women can lead a church. Albeit some people put up requirements and limitations toward the women ministers, the truth behind is that women could lead a congregation. Besides the narrative of Deborah, there are many more women in the Bible who have been faithful and fruitful in their ministry to the Lord.

Similarly, the family is a small congregation in the church, and the Lord has commanded, “¹ *Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right.* ” ² “*Honor your father and mother*”—which is the first commandment with a promise— ³ “*so that it may go well with you and that you may enjoy long life on the earth.*” (Ephesians 6:1-3) God has commanded the children to obey their fathers and their mothers because parents are the first teachers of God’s Word to their children. Whether we accept it or not, our mothers have been our first teachers! However, wives are called to help their husbands in teaching the children in the family and to be under the authority of man. “³ *But I want you to realize that the head of every man is Christ, and the head of the woman is man, and the head of Christ is God.*” (1Corinthians 11:3)

A. There are certain sayings of Paul that we need to understand before we conclude that women are not allowed to teach or stand in the church. Here we will discuss these saying to draw out good conclusions:

1- ³⁴ *Women should remain silent in the churches. They are not allowed to speak, but must be in submission, as the law says. ³⁵ If they want to inquire about something, they should ask their own husbands at home; for it is disgraceful for a woman to speak in the church.*” (1Corinthians 14:34-35) When we just merely or first read this Scripture, at once the thing that comes into our mind is that women by no means should be allowed to stand and preach in the church meetings. But let us study and understand the set up of the Corinthian church so that our minds will be at peace. In the church meetings in Corinth, all the men were sitting together on one side and all the women were sitting together on the another side. During their worship, while speaking in tongues and preaching was going on, any woman who wanted to ask the explanation and interpretation of tongues should ask her husband who is sitting away from her with the other men. So to avoid disturbance to the rest of members while the church meeting was going on, women had to remain seated and silent while in the church. Paul suggested that if any woman had a question or wanted to enquire something she should ask her husband at home and not while the church meeting was going on, in order to maintain orderliness at the meeting while speaking in tongues and receiving its interpretation during worship. This explanation is satisfactory because Paul was speaking to the church about the issue of speaking in tongues and the need for interpretation of tongues. Already there must have been confusion and questions inside the hearts of everyone, and there would be more disorder if women seated in their pews are allowed to speak to their husbands.

2- ¹² *I do not permit a woman to teach or to assume authority over a man; she must be quiet.*” (1Timothy 2:12) Paul was speaking here that women should be in submission to their husbands and they should not teach their husbands, but instead they should listen and receive the teaching of the Lord from their husbands. The men should be the one to lead their families and to direct them with God’s Word and instructions. God is expecting the men to lead their families in the fear of the Lord, and women are called to help their husbands in their leadership. But if the man fails God and refuses to respond to His Word then God may use his wife to

teach the children and raise them in the fear of the Lord. Otherwise, Paul would not permit a woman to teach or to assume authority over a man who is her husband as long as the man is obedient to God. Paul would not permit a woman to teach or to assume authority over a man who is her husband, but it does not mean that women are not allowed to teach or stand in the church if God has called her and she has the Word of God, the gift of the Holy Spirit and the vision of God. ¹⁵ ***“But women will be saved through childbearing—if they continue in faith, love and holiness with propriety.” (1 Timothy 2:15)*** Women who live in faith, holiness, appropriateness, and endowed with the gift of God to serve as spiritual mother to young believers are commendable in their service.

B. Paul did commend women who served, stood and said something in the church meetings as they were called by God to speak:

1- ⁵ ***“And every woman who prays or prophesies with her head uncovered dishonors her head--it is just as though her head were shaved. ¹³ Judge for yourselves: Is it proper for a woman to pray to God with her head uncovered?” (1 Corinthians 11:5, 13)*** So Paul is approving of women praying or prophesying in the church. To prophesy means to speak the Word of God. But Paul is also implying that every woman who prays and prophesies should have her head covered with her long hair.

2- ¹ ***“I commend to you our sister Phoebe, a servant of the church in Cenchrea. ² I ask you to receive her in the Lord in a way worthy of the saints and to give her any help she may need from you, for she has been a great help to many people, including me.” (Romans 16:1-2)*** Phoebe is the woman who served at the Church in Cenchrea and Paul had commended her ministry and requested the brethren to support her.

C. The Bible speaks about women who prophesy, see visions and filled with the Holy Spirit to serve God:

1- ²⁸ ***“And afterward, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your old men will dream dreams, your young men will see visions. ²⁹ Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days.” (Joel 2:28-29)*** So as God has promised to pour out His Spirit on both men and women in order to serve Him, we as church should allow women to help us in God’s service.

2- ⁸ ***“Leaving the next day, we reached Caesarea and stayed at the house of Philip the evangelist, one of the Seven. ⁹ He had four unmarried daughters who prophesied.” (Acts 21:8-9)*** God has given to the four daughters of Philip the gift of prophecy to declare God’s Word and God’s Will to His people, the Church.

The Holy Scriptures clearly speaks about women as servants of God. Therefore let us recognize the women whom God has called to do the ministry in the Church with us; to stand and speak, to pray, preach and prophesy as the Holy Spirit enables them to help us edify His people, the Church of God.