

CHURCH. SUPPLEMENT 6

[LEADERSHIP] WOMEN IN A LEADERSHIP OFFICE

When a congregation chooses women workers to serve in the congregation, then they must choose women that fulfil the biblical requirements and are able to fulfil the biblical tasks for women workers.

Woman in any office is a very controversial matter among Christians and Christian congregations. The purpose of this supplement is to shed some light on the controversy. The leaders of your congregation should make the final decision in this matter.

What does the New Testament teach about women in leadership?

1. Women in the historical and cultural context of the Bible.

Some Christian congregations regard the instructions of the apostle Paul as limited to the relationship between married women and their own husbands. Other Christian congregations regard his instructions as directed to the behaviour of women in all the official meetings of the congregation (particularly the worship services on the Lord's Day).

(1) Were there women in the office of elders?

Read 1 Timothy 3:2; Titus 1:6.

The Bible teaches that only male persons were chosen as “elders” (leaders of the church). They had to be “men of one woman” (1 Timothy 3:2; Titus 1:6)¹. The Bible does not justify or warrant the appointment of women in any office whatsoever in the church.

(2) Were there women in the office of deacons?

The Bible also teaches that the deacons were all male. 1 Timothy 3:11 literally says, “women likewise”².

- This cannot refer to an official office of “deaconesses”, because then the sentence would have to read “the deaconesses likewise”³.
- This also does not refer to “the wives of the deacons”, because then the sentence would have to read “their wives”⁴ or “having wives”⁵. If “the wives of the deacons” were an official office, it would mean that “the wives of the elders” were excluded. The wives of the elders and the deacons are mentioned in verse 2 and 12.
- The translation “women likewise” refers to special women, “women assistants” or “women workers”, because the word “likewise” points to a category of people that are similar to the group of male deacons, without being deacons.

Therefore we must regard these women as a special group of women in the congregation at Ephesus that performed a special service in the congregation (cf. 1 Timothy 5:3-16).

(3) Was Phoebe a deaconess?

Romans 16:1-2 is the only time in the Bible that a woman was called a “deacon”, the same word that is used for a male deacon. The Greek verb “diakoneó” is never used in the sense of serving in the office of a deacon. It always means serving in the sense of “taking care of the needs of people”. The primary meaning of the Greek noun “diakonos” is therefore also “servant” and not “deacon”. Romans 16:1 does not refer to Phoebe as a “deaconess” in the sense of Acts 6:1-7, but to Phoebe being a “servant”!

Cenchrea was one of the harbours of Corinth. There was a Christian congregation and Phoebe was a servant within that congregation. However, her service had similarities to the service of the deacons in Acts 6, because she was “a protector”, “assistant” or “helper”⁶ of many people, including Paul. She probably showed hospitality to many people who travelled between the East and the West. She could have been a woman like Lydia in Philippi (Acts 16:15) or the women who served Jesus and his disciples with their possessions (Luke 8:1-3) or like the women in Ephesus who performed special services in the congregation (1 Timothy 5:9-10). Nevertheless, the performance of such services does not mean that these women were appointed to the office of deacon in the congregation.

2. Women in the teaching context of the Bible.

Two Bible passages, 1 Timothy 2:11-14 and 1 Corinthians 14:33-38 are authoritative instructions and not merely historical descriptions. Titus 2:3-5 shows that the apostle Paul does give women authority to *teach and train* other women in their homes. And 1 Corinthians 11:3-5 shows that the apostle Paul gives woman the authority to *prophesy* (proclaim God's Word) outside the official meetings of the congregation.

¹ Not “the wife of one man”. It also does not mean that the elder had to be married. It means that the behaviour of a married or unmarried elder towards women should be impeccable. Christians and Christian leaders must not flirt!

² Greek: gunaikas hósautós

³ Greek: tas de diakonous

⁴ Greek: gunaikas auton

⁵ Greek: gunaikas echontes

⁶ Greek: prostatis

(1) 1 Timothy 2:11-14.

However, in 1 Timothy 3:15-16 the apostle Paul gives instructions “how people must always (present continuous tense) conduct themselves in God’s household, which is the Church (Greek: ekklesia) of the living God”. Here the apostle Paul speaks about the official meetings of the church, which were usually held “on the Lord’s Day”⁷. He gives instructions to men that qualify to be appointed in the office of an elder in the church. (1 Timothy 3:1-7) and (if necessary) to be appointed in the office of deacon in the church (1 Timothy 3:8-13). He also gives instructions how men and women must conduct themselves “everywhere” where Christians gather for prayer and teaching (1 Timothy 2:8-15). The apostle Paul says, “A woman⁸ should learn in quietness and full submission. I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man⁹; she must be silent” (1 Timothy 2:11-12).

According to “A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and other Early Christian Literature” by Bauer, Arndt, Gingrich the word “man” (Greek: anér) in these passage of the Bible refer to “every male adult” and not just to “a married man”, and that the word “woman” (Greek: guné) in these passage of the Bible refer to “every female adult” and not just to “a married woman”! Thus, the apostle Paul does not limit this instruction to married women. It is an authoritative instruction with regard to all women.

(3) 1 Corinthians 14:26-38.

Also in 1 Corinthians 14:26-38 the apostle Paul gives instructions with regard to the orderly conduct within the official worship services of the congregation where Christians have gathered . Several men and or men with the gift of prophecy spoke “a hymn, a word of instruction, a revelation, a tongue or an interpretation”. With apostolic authority the apostle Paul sets limits to what may happen in the official meetings of the congregation so that “everything may build up the church” (1 Corinthians 14:26). He sets three limitations: he limits:

- the speaking in tongues (unknown languages)
- the prophesying (preaching)
- the speaking of women in these official meetings.

He writes, “Let the women¹⁰ be silent *in all churches*¹¹. They are not allowed to speak (In the context the apostle speaks especially about speaking in tongues and prophesying), but must *always* be in submission (Greek: hupotassó) (imperative, present continuous tense), as the law says” (1 Corinthians 14:34) (“As the law says” cf. verse 21 and Genesis 3:16).

The women in Corinth did not behave in a submissive way and wanted to act just as the men. They wanted to speak the Word of God with authority in the meetings, just as the men speak the Word of God with authority, speak in tongues and prophesy. The Lord does not allow this!

He says that his instruction “is the Lord’s command. If anyone ignores this (command), he himself will be ignored” (1 Corinthians 14:37-38)! And he writes, “As in all the congregations of the saints (Christians)” (1 Corinthians 14:33) This command is therefore not limited to the culture in the time of Paul, but is normative for all cultures in the world and forever! This command is also not limited to the relationship between married women and their husbands at home, but refers to the relationship of women and men in all the official meetings of the church.

(3) 1 Peter 3:1-5.

Thus women must practise a healthy self-control within the church. “Wives, in the same way be submissive to your husbands, so that if any of them do not believe the word, they may be won over without words by the behaviour of their wives, when they see the purity and reference of your lives. Your beauty should not come from outward adornment, such as braided hair and the wearing of gold jewellery and fine clothes. Instead it should be that of your inner self, the unfading beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is of great worth in God’s sight.. For this is the way the holy women of the past who put their hope in God used to make themselves beautiful. They were submissive to their own husbands.” This command first of all refers to the relationship between a married woman and her husband at home, but also refers to the relationship between women and men in the official meetings of the church.

3. Women in the Bible are of equal value, but not the same (they are different).

Read Luke 8:1-3; Romans 16:1-6; 1 Timothy 3:11; 5:1-16; Titus 2:3-5.

(1) Women and men are equally valuable, important, able and useful in God’s eyes!

Both are equally a part of the Body of Christ (Galatians 3:28). Both men and women need to serve equally with their spiritual gifts within the congregation (1 Peter 4:10).

⁷ Revelation 1:10; Acts 20:7

⁸ Greek: guné

⁹ Greek: anér

¹⁰ Greek: guné in the plural

¹¹ Greek: hos en pasais ekklesiáis tón hagión

(2) But the assigned functions and tasks of women and men differ.

Nevertheless, the functions and tasks that God assigns in a sovereign way to men and women are not the same! God has assigned women different functions and tasks:

- *physically* in bearing children (Genesis 3:16; 1 Timothy 2:15)
- *socially* in the marriage relationship (Ephesians 5:22-24; Colossians 3:18; 1 Peter 3:1-6)
- *spiritually* in the congregation (1 Timothy 2:11-14; 1 Corinthians 14:26-38)

God has assigned the function of leadership in marriage as well as leadership in the congregation to men and not to women (1 Timothy 3:2b)¹². God has also assigned the task of preaching and teaching the Bible authoritatively within the official meetings of the congregation to men and not to women (Acts 6:4; 1 Thessalonians 5:12b; 1 Timothy 3:2b; 5:17; 2 Timothy 4:1-5; Titus 1:9).

(3) Women are indispensable in the Church.

The Bible has recorded the names and acts of many women, who have performed important and valuable services in the Church (Luke 7:44-47; 8:2-3; John 4:39; 20:17-18; Acts 9:36; 16:15; Romans 16:1-2; 16:3; 16:6; 16:12-13; 1 Timothy 5:1-16; Titus 2:3-5).

(4) Two extreme positions must be avoided.

- The one extreme position is when Christian congregations appoint women to offices within the congregation when they have no biblical warrant to do so.
- The other extreme position is when Christian congregations neglect to make use of the important and valuable services of their female members.

4. GOD determines who has authority and in which relationships.

(1) Romans 13:1-2.

The question about authority is not answered by any human culture (traditional values or customs) whatsoever. It is also not determined by democratic voting. The Church is not a democracy, but a theocracy (Christocracy)¹³ “Everyone must submit himself to the (governing) authorities (Greek; exousia), for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God. Consequently, he who rebels against the authority is rebelling against what God has instituted (Greek: diatag ), and those who do so will bring judgement on themselves” (Romans 13:1-2 cf. Matthew 28:18).

(2) God instituted seven authority-submission relationships in the Bible:

- I. God in Christ has authority over all and everything (Psalm 145:13; Psalm 146:10; Mattheus 28:18; 1 Corinthians 11:3; Ephesians 1:20-23; Colossians 1:18).
- II. Men and women have authority over God’s creation (Genesis 1:28; Psalm 8:4-8).
- III. Men have authority over women in marriage (Genesis 3:16; Ephesians 5:22-24; Colossians 3:18; 1 Peter 3:1-6) and over women in the official meetings of the church (Acts 20:17,28; 1 Corinthians 11:3; 1 Corinthians 14:33-35; 1 Timothy 2:11-14; 1 Timothy 3:2; Titus 1:5-6).
- IV. The parents have authority over their children that are still under age (Ephesians 6:1-3; Colossians 3:20).
- V. The government of a country has authority over its citizens (Romans 13:3-7; 1 Peter 2:13-17; cf. Revelation 13:1-10);
- VI. The employer has authority over his employees (Ephesians 6:5-9; Colossians 3:22-4:1; 1 Peter 2:18-23).
- VII. The elders have authority over the members of the congregation (Acts 20:28; 1 Thessalonians 5:12; Hebrews 13:17).

5. The traditional culture of people and the culture of the kingdom of God.

Some Christians regard the instructions of the apostle Paul not as authoritative through the Holy Spirit¹⁴, but as ordinary instructions determined by the human culture in the time Paul lived and that are no longer valid today. This is a dangerous and wrong way of thinking!

(1) Definition of culture.

The culture of any group of people is their world-view, truths, beliefs, superstitions and values that are expressed in their convictions, experiences, behaviour, relationships and institutions (customs and traditions).

(2) The historical context of the Bible.

The historic and traditional culture of every group of people contains good as well as bad aspects. The historic parts of the Bible describe the good as well as the bad aspects that existed in the human cultures at the time a particular Bible book was written. But none of these descriptions of human culture in any age is normative!

¹² “The man of one wife” and not: “the wife of one husband”.

¹³ In upcoming democracies women fight for equal rights in every area of life.

¹⁴ Matthew 22:43; John 14:26; John 16:13-15; 1 Corinthians 4:6; 2 Timothy 3:16-17; 2 Peter 1:20-21

(3) The cultural context of the Bible.

God wants the culture of the kingdom of God to become the only culture in every country and town and language in the world! On the one hand, the instructive parts of the Bible teach and command which aspects of the culture of the kingdom of God should become the culture in all places in the world and in all ages in world history (cf. Matthew 5 to 7 and all the parables about the kingdom of God)! On the other hand, the instructive parts of the Bible forbid the bad aspects of every human culture in all places in the world and in all ages in world history. God's people must not learn to imitate the detestable ways of the godless nations (cf. Deuteronomy 18:9-13)!

The instructive parts of the Bible institutes the Christian marriage relationship, the relationship between parents and children, between employers and employees, between government and citizens, etc. (Ephesians 5:22 – 6:9; Colossians 3:18 – 4:1; 1 Peter 2:13 – 3:7). The Bible commands clear sexual moral standards (Leviticus 18:5-6,20,22,23-24) and standards of justice (Leviticus 19:9-18,26-37)(cf. Matthew 5:21-48). Likewise, it commands the relationships between men and women in the congregation (1 Corinthians 11:3; 1 Corinthians 14:33-35; 1 Timothy 2:11-14). All these teachings, commands and prohibitions are normative everywhere in the world and at all times!

(4) The correct principle of Bible interpretation.

The culture of people may not determine the interpretation of the Bible! Rather, the culture of the kingdom of God in the Bible must determine what every human culture everywhere in the world and at all times should become!

God has decided to change (transform) the following with every group of people in the world:

- not only their heart (condition, attitude, motives, convictions, faith)
- but also their life (words, deeds, behaviour)
- and their national culture (norms, values, institutions)

Christians must make a distinction between the historic parts of the Bible and the instructive parts of the Bible. The historic parts of the Bible describe what actually happened within the lives and cultures of people, whether good or bad. These descriptions are not normative for Christian behaviour. But the instructive parts of the Bible teach and command what actually must happen in the lives and cultures of people. These teachings and commands are normative for Christian behaviour everywhere and always! They are also normative for the behaviour of non-Christians, even though non-Christians do not acknowledge them.

6. The qualifications of women workers.

When a congregation chooses women workers, then these women must fulfil the biblical requirements. They must also be able to fulfil the biblical tasks for women workers.

1 Timothy 3:11 teaches that these women workers must be worthy of respect. They may not be malicious talkers. They must be temperate, that is, modest with regard to their taste and behaviour. They must be trustworthy in everything. Thus, even as the male deacons, the female workers (assistants, helpers) must be chosen on the basis of their character, behaviour and abilities.

7. The tasks of the women workers.

(1) The women who supported Jesus.

Women supported Jesus and his disciples during their ministry (Luke 8:1-3).

(2) Phoebe, the protector, assistant and helper of Paul at Corinth.

Phoebe was an assistant or helper of the apostle Paul (Romans 16:1-2).

(3) Priscilla, the co-worker of Paul.

Priscilla was a co-worker of the apostle Paul (Romans 16:3-4).

(4) The women who were assistants and helpers of the deacons.

The women workers should therefore be *assistants or helpers of the deacons*, especially in their task towards the poor and the needy. They perform tasks for which women are much better equipped than men (1 Timothy 3:11).

(5) Older women equip younger women.

The older women in the church set an example to the younger women how to love their husbands and children, to be self-controlled and pure, to be busy at home, to be kind and to be subject to their husbands (Titus 2:3-5).

(6) Older widows at Ephesus.

A group of older widows in the church of Ephesus had special functions (1 Timothy 5:9-16).

(7) Women in Early Church History.

Early Church History relates that these women had the following functions: they gave advice and instruction to younger women, prayed with other women, visited the sick, prepared women for baptism and brought women along to the Lord's Supper. They also cared for the widows and orphans that were supported by the church. Women gave themselves to these tasks because were better suited (equipped) than men to perform these tasks!