

## Women Mentoring Women

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Here's a MentorNet message especially for ladies. (Girls, your husbands might want to read it, too.) We who mentor church workers must facilitate the training of women in ways that honour Scripture, respect culture, empower women, advance the gospel, and cause new churches to reproduce continually. The New Testament provides significant examples and teaching about women workers. Likewise, church history and the contemporary church reproduction around the world reveal some powerful facts about women workers.

### Biblical and Current Examples

- Around the world, the majority of church workers are women, often poor, even illiterate, women. If only males were allowed to plant churches and train leaders, then most of that work would never get done, and most of the major church planting movements currently underway around the world would grind to a halt.
- The New Testament teaches that the Holy Spirit distributes ministry gifts to all believers, according to His will. The result is that "each one" has a gift to share with others (Rom 12:3-6; 1 Cor 12:7; 1 Pet 4:10-11). Thus, woman believers all have one or more gifts of the Spirit which are for the common good, enabling them to share in church meetings, to start new church meetings, to train new leaders, and much more. Among the five kinds of gifted persons that Christ gives to every church or cluster of churches (Eph 4:11), some are women:

**Women apostles.** Here we are not talking about the Twelve but about ordinary church-planting apostles. Junia and her husband Andronicus (Rom 16:7) were well-known apostles [not "known by the apostles"], as were Priscilla and her husband Aquila (Rom 16:3; 1 Cor 16:19; etc.).

**Women prophets.** Anna, a prophetess, blessed Baby Jesus (Lk 2:36-38). Four daughters of Philip, an evangelist, prophesied (Ac 21:9). Paul told women, along with everyone else, that they could prophesy in the church (1 Cor 14:24 & 31) in submission to their husbands.

**Women evangelists.** The first evangelists were women (Mt 28:7), and women figured amongst those who received the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. Euodia and Syntyche labored with Paul "in the gospel" at Philippi (Phil 4:2 & 3).

**Women shepherds.** Lydia (Ac 16:14-15, 40), Nympha (Col 4:15), Julia, and the sister of Nereus provided leadership for churches that met in their homes (Rom 16:15).

**Women teachers.** It is normally older women who teach younger women (Tit 2:3-5). Priscilla, along with her husband, Aquila, mentored Apollos, a competent teacher, in their home (Ac 18:24-26).

- Any legitimate church practice can be carried to an unhealthy excess. Some pundits decry a 'feminizing' trend in Western churches that emphasizes feeling good and developing warm relationships at the expense of obeying Jesus' order to call an unbelieving world to repentance and faith. In some big churches, when women have taken the lead, those who complain loudest about their leadership were other women,

including some who had long abandoned the wearing of head coverings. Unfortunately, many capable men simply drop out, no longer seeking positions of leadership.

- In regions that are hostile towards Christians, it is often safer for women to lead new churches, because the authorities usually do not look for women to arrest them.
- The apostle Paul wrote these sticky passages:

*Let a woman learn quietly with all submissiveness. I do not permit a woman to teach or to exercise authority over a man; rather, she is to remain quiet. 1 Timothy 2:11 & 12 ESV.*

*As in all the churches of the saints, the women should keep silent in the churches. For they are not permitted to speak, but should be in submission, as the Law also says. If there is anything they desire to learn, let them ask their husbands at home. For it is shameful for a woman to speak in church. 1 Cor. 14:34 & 35 ESV*

Exegesis of these verses and their context shows that Paul was concerned that *wives* not usurp authority over husbands. See details in the Appendix below.

#### **A few guidelines for those who mentor women.**

- Most apprentice women church workers should be trained by other women who have more experience.
- If you are a man, then you should empower your wife and women co-workers to mentor and supervise other women.
- Mentors should seek to learn how each woman is gifted by the Holy Spirit and called by Christ to serve in the body, whether as apostles, prophets, evangelists, shepherds or teachers.
- Where women workers win families to faith in Jesus, they should seek to raise up the men as shepherds and church planters.
- Women apostles should be empowered and trained in how to organize new cells and congregations, and in how to appoint and mentor leaders.
- Women prophets should be trained in how to prophesy while remaining in public submission to their husbands.
- Women evangelists should be instructed in how to let the gospel flow into families, households, and communities. They need methods and materials that women can afford.
- Women shepherds should be supervised in how to lead cells and congregations to become obedient to the command of Jesus and of the New Testament.
- Women teachers must be provided Bibles and literacy or easily recallable lessons and Bible stories to pass on others.
- Mentors should help women to realize their spiritual gifts and their biblical mandate, and how to defend themselves against misogynists who try to silence them.

### **Appendix for our more scholarly readers**

#### *Exegetical Comments on Paul's Advice on Women's Authority.*

*1 Timothy 2:11 & 12.* The wider context of verses 8 through 15 deals with husbands and wives. In fact, the words for “women” and “men” in the original language are often translated “husband” and “wife”. Actually, these verses help women to know how to show respect for their husbands in a church meeting, in keeping with the divine order of voluntary submission: God is “head” over Christ, Christ over a husband, and a husband over his wife (1 Cor. 11:3). Thus, these verses should not be applied to women church workers in general, only to wives relating to their husbands. Some commentators note that this advice to Timothy was appropriate, because some Ephesians believers were clinging to pagan practices of the cult of the goddess Diana whose image had been molded from a meteorite and whose priestesses gave all religious instruction.

*1 Corinthians 14:34 & 35.* From the wider context of these verses, it remains clear that all the believers have gifts of the Spirit to share with all the others (14:24-26, 31). Likewise, everyone should remain silent while another person is speaking (14:30). There is no reason not to apply these verses to all believers, including women. As in the 1 Timothy text, so here, too, there is the special case of “wives” who come to the church meeting with their “husbands”; wives are to remain silent in the church meeting and ask questions of their husbands at home.

Thus, neither of these texts says anything against women church workers and their ministry roles. Nor do these verses give either men or women special authority over the others, except when husbands and wives come to church meetings together. Never are men to assert their “authority” over other men’s wives, nor are women required to submit to men other than to their husbands. Paul's advice has helped established congregations where there are plenty of men leaders, and does not forbid women leaders starting churches and raising up novice leaders. When women leaders win men and their families to Jesus, a wise pastor will help those women to raise up novice men leaders.

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