

What the Bible Says about Women in Ministry: a Brief Summary

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Women in the Bible

Women in significant roles of spiritual leadership figure prominently on the pages of Scripture.

Take Huldah, for example. When the godly king, Josiah, needed someone to interpret the Bible it was a female prophet, Huldah, who was consulted instead of the numerous men available to help (2 Kings 22; 2 Chronicles 34). Of course, there was Deborah, the spiritual and political leader of Israel (Judges 4). Don't forget Miriam, Noadiah, and Anna, all of whom are called "prophetesses" in the Bible. Paul referred to Euodia and Syntyche as "women who have contended at my side in the cause of the gospel...my co-workers" (Philippians 4:2-3) indicating that their aid was in the proclamation of the good news. And Phoebe was clearly a Deacon (Romans 16:1). Junia deserves special mention, for she is listed along with the apostles (Romans 16:7). Junia was a Christian leader, perhaps an itinerant missionary.

The Day of Pentecost

On the Day of Pentecost God poured out His Spirit on both men and women, and with that came the inauguration of a new era—an era when female spiritual leaders and preachers would become even more common than before (see Acts 2). Peter explained, "What happened here is the fulfillment of what Joel predicted nine centuries ago!" Joel's prediction is found in Joel 2:28-29, where Joel relays the words of God: "*In the last days, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy...Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days, and they will prophesy.*" By the way, I stand in the broad stream of Christian scholarship that believes "to prophesy" in Joel 2 and Acts 2 means "to preach."

Not Liberal vs. Conservative

Many conservative denominations—Assemblies of God, Church of the Nazarene, Church of God, Free Methodists, Christian & Missionary Alliance, Covenant Order of Evangelical Presbyterians, Global Methodist Church, and The Salvation Army—support women as pastors. I know people in each of those denominations, and they are certainly not liberals.

Galatians 3:28

I believe we *start* with Galatians 3:28 ("*In Christ there is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus*") and interpret other verses having to do with female ministers *in light of* Galatians 3:28. Other texts, such as 1 Timothy 2:11-12 and 1 Corinthians 14:34, are thus exceptions to the rule. In other words, we follow Galatians 3:28 except in limited situations where it would be inappropriate for women to be church leaders (i.e. strongly patriarchal cultures).

Galatians 3:28 is not only about personal salvation. If it is true, there are implications for society and the church—the equality of Jews, Gentiles (and all ethnicities), enslaved and free, men and women.

The Weight of the Evidence and the Burden of Proof

The number of biblical texts that affirm women in church leadership far outnumber the texts that potentially impose restrictions on women in leadership. Therefore, the burden of proof lies with those who would exclude women, not with those who would include them.