

Why the Church Needs to Stop Silencing Women's Prophetic Voices

Women play a vital role in the Bible, in the home, in the world and in the church. Jesus, we know, had twelve main male disciples (Luke 9:1) plus at least 70 part-time disciples (Luke 10:1). In addition to this group of mostly men, there were also "Some women who had been healed of evil spirits and infirmities: Mary, called Magdalene, from whom seven demons had come out, and Joanna, the wife of Chuza, Herod's steward, and Susanna, and many others, who supported Him with their possessions" (Luke 8:1-3). Jesus had many female followers as He preached in various villages who supported His ministry monetarily and otherwise.

When Jesus was arrested, the male disciples forsook Him fearing they too would be crucified. Only John and a few courageous women followed Jesus to the bitter end of His torture and death. "There were also women looking on from a distance, among whom were Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James the Less and of Joseph, and Salome. They also had followed Him and had ministered to Him when He was in Galilee. And many other women who came up with Him to Jerusalem were there" (Mark 15:40-41).

After His resurrection, Jesus appeared to Mary Magdalene first (Mark 16:9). She became the first female evangelist to proclaim the Easter message. Then He appeared to another group of women who notified the male disciples who were still in hiding (Matt. 28:8-10). After Jesus' ascension, several women were present in the upper room on the Day of Pentecost who were filled with the Holy Spirit along with the male disciples (Acts 1:14). This was the birthday of the New Testament church in which women would play a key role.

One major and needed change the church world has experienced is the rise of women to greater roles of ministry. It is common now for women to hold positions such as worship leaders, Bible teachers, ushers, missionaries, evangelists, children's directors and even associate and lead pastors. This, I believe, is the ongoing fulfillment of Joel's prophecy, "And it will be that, afterwards, I will pour out My Spirit on all flesh; then your sons and daughters will prophesy, your old men will dream dreams, and your young men will see visions" (Joel 2:28). Peter, in his powerful Pentecost sermon, quoted this prophecy and continued, "Even on My menservants and maidservants I will pour out My Spirit in those days; and they shall prophesy" (Acts 2:18). Notice it wasn't just the men doing the prophesying; it was both men and women. To prophesy doesn't only mean to foretell the future; it also means to forthtell or proclaim the truth of God's Word (i.e. to preach, teach, exhort, witness or testify—1 Cor. 14:3).

Consider the prominent women in the New Testament who filled major ministry roles:

- **Anna:** Mary and Joseph encountered this prophetess in the temple, who spoke prophetic words over baby Jesus (Luke 2:36-38).
- **Mary, the Mother of Jesus:** Mary was among the 120 in the upper room on Pentecost (Acts 1:14). What an impact she must have had as she shared stories about Christ from her unique perspective.
- **Mary Magdalene:** Catholics celebrate her as a saint; Protestants consider her a heroine of the faith. Church tradition claims she continued to be a bold witness for Christ, leading many idolaters to salvation then retiring to a life of seclusion after years of public preaching.
- **Other Women:** An unnamed, unnumbered group of women were

among the 120 on the Day of Pentecost who were empowered by the Holy Spirit to proclaim the Gospel (Acts 1:8, 14).

- **Mary, Barnabas' Sister:** Also the mother of John Mark, author of the Gospel of Mark, who hosted prayer meetings in her house (Ac. 12:12, Col. 4:10).
- **Lydia:** This prosperous businesswoman, a seller of purple cloth, opened her heart, house and purse to support Paul's ministry as a leader in the Philippian church (Acts 16:13-16).
- **Priscilla:** This dynamic lady assisted Paul's ministry in Corinth and Ephesus and was a spiritual leader with her husband, Aquila, of the church that met in their house. Tentmakers like Paul, they enlightened Apollos, a powerful preacher, in the deeper things of God (Acts 18:1-3, 24-26; Rom. 16:3-4; 1 Cor. 16:19).
- **Philip's Four Daughters:** Philip preached in several cities then settled in Caesarea (Ac. 8:40) where he continued in ministry with his daughters' assistance. Not much is known about them except they were all unmarried virgins and prophesied (Ac. 21:8-9). The verb tense indicates that they prophesied regularly or habitually, and they had a visible and vocal role in ministry not just behind the scenes.
- **Phebe:** Paul recognized her as a deaconess using the Greek word *diakonos* which is translated "minister," "servant" or "deacon" (Rom. 16:1). Paul used the same term to characterize his own ministry and that of Apollos and Timothy (1 Cor. 3:5, 1 Thess. 3:2).
- **Junia:** Paul commended Andronicus and Junia, probably a husband and wife team, as being outstanding among the apostles (Rom. 16:7).
- **Lois and Eunice:** Timothy's godly grandmother and mother trained him, a future associate of Paul and Bishop of Ephesus, with a rich spiritual heritage (2 Tim. 1:5;

3:14-15).

- **Apphia:** Probably Philemon's wife, she apparently assisted in the Colossian church that met in their house (Philem. 2).

The point is that God uses women in mighty ways too. Yes, I'm fully aware of what Paul wrote about women being "silent in the church" (1 Cor. 14:33-35, 1 Tim. 2:11-12). But notice he didn't write that to every church as a blanket statement. He wrote it specifically to the churches in Corinth and Ephesus, cities that had extreme feminist cults. Corinth was home to the Temple of Aphrodite which featured over 1,000 priestesses (prostitutes) who engaged in vile pagan worship. Ephesians worshipped the Roman goddess Diana (Acts 19:24-41). Both corrupt cultures tried to dominate men which seeped into the churches causing confusion in worship services. Furthermore, in those days, women were often illiterate and uneducated. So, Paul was addressing specific problems in those churches to minimize chaos and maximize ministry.

Consider this, how could Philip's four daughters prophesy if they had to keep silent? How can our daughters prophesy today if they aren't allowed to speak in the church? We are living in the last days and God is still pouring out His Spirit on ALL flesh. Our sons and *daughters* can, should and will prophesy if given the freedom. Christ has millions of female followers worldwide, and He is raising up more lady leaders in this hour—anoointing and appointing women into every area of ministry.

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