



In His Dust – 6. The Role of Women in the First-Century Church

Restoring her calling and gifts

February 23, 2023

In His Dust is a series based on my notes from Dwight Pryor's teaching. (For details, please see *In His Dust – An Overview*.) Yeshua and His disciples were thoroughly Jewish and immersed in the study of the Tenakh (the Torah, the Prophets, and the Writings). Therefore, it is valuable to learn the Hebraic context, meanings, idioms, and culture of the New Testament.

Outline

- Introduction Points
- Examples of the roles women assumed in the first-century church
- The beautiful, breath-taking meanings of “head” and “submission”
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Introduction Points

- The word *church* was first coined in the thirteenth century. The original Greek word *ekklesia* means *the called-forth ones or the summoned ones*.
 - Yeshua (Jesus) was born and lived on earth in the first century. His chosen disciples formed the first church. Their story is written in the pages of the New Testament.
 - The church is an organism (not an organization) designed to meet the needs of the community of the *called-forth ones* (those who have been born again by the Spirit of God).
 - The gifts and functions of each member are not offices.
 - Leaders are servants; their purpose is to equip the *called-forth ones* so they can each fulfill God's calling on their life.
- The primary function of a woman in the first century was to serve as a wife and mother within her home. Her position was highly exalted in the community. In Genesis 2:18, she is called an *ezer* – a strong, suitable, equal complement to her husband with qualities to nurture and rescue. (For more on this subject and the subject of single people, see my writing *Missing Perspectives*.)
- A man was required to learn Torah every day and observe regular prayer times. A woman was not so required because of her need to care for her family. However, she was not precluded from study if she wished. Based on her calling and gifts, she could even be a rabbi influencing others within her home.
- Only later in the 300s AD were women deprived of their former high status. Roman and Hellenistic forces influenced this suppression, but this view was an abhorrent disgrace to Judaism. These forces moved the church away from its Jewish background and:
 - made leadership an elevated priestly office (rather than a function) in which only the leaders could serve communion with men appointing men;
 - considered sexuality to be base leading to celibacy and the view of women as distractions.

Examples of the roles women assumed in the first-century church

- **Phoebe** was a **deacon**. (Romans 16:1-2) *Deacon* means *servant*.
- **Priscilla** was a **teacher** and an **evangelist**. (Romans 16:3-4; Acts 18:2)

- **Mary** (Romans 16:6), **Tryphaena**, **Tryphosa**, and **Persis** (Romans 16:12) were all women who *worked hard*. The Greek words mean *labored in ministry as leaders*. (See also 1 Thessalonians 5:12-13.)
- **Junia** was an **apostle** (*one who is sent out on a mission*). After the thirteenth century, her name was changed in translations to the masculine Junias, but the earliest, most reliable manuscripts contain *Junia*.
- In 1 Timothy 3:8-13, we see that both men and women were **deacons**. Verses 8-10 give the qualifications for the men; Verse 11 gives the qualifications of the women in the context of deacons. The word *women* is actually *deaconess* which can be seen in most study Bibles.
- In Titus 2:2-3, the words *older men* and *older women* are from the same Greek word that means **elders and elderesses**.
- Other passages to consider are: Luke 8:1-3; Matthew 27:55-56, 28:8-10; Acts 1:14, 2:18.

For more on other difficult passages about women, please see my writing *Missing Perspectives*.

The beautiful, breath-taking meanings of “head” and “submission”

Let’s start by reading Ephesians 5:21-27 in the NASB (words of discussion are bold):

...and **subject** yourselves to one another in the fear of Christ. Wives, **subject** yourselves to your own husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband is the **head** of the wife, as Christ also is the **head** of the church, He Himself being the Savior of the body. But as the church is **subject** to Christ, so also the wives ought to be to their husbands in everything. Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her, so that He might sanctify her having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word that He might present to Himself the church in all her glory, having no spot or wrinkle or any such thing; but that she would be holy and blameless.

Man is the head of women only within the context of marriage. In the following list, you will see a beautiful progression as these words unfold like a fragrant rose:

1. *Head* does not mean *chief, boss, ruler*, nor does it mean a *superior authority, rank, or position*.
2. *Head* means *source* like the source of a river. Yeshua is our Head, our Source.
3. A husband is the wife’s *source*. The key characteristic of a source is *responsibility*.
4. A husband is responsible for his wife, to care for, encourage, give life, guide, guard, and most of all, love her as Christ loves the church.
5. Christ was a servant, not a ruler. He laid down His life. A husband’s response is utter self-sacrifice.
6. The Greek word for *submit* or *subject* translates into ten different Hebrew words; none refer to authority. *Submission* is a voluntary renouncing of yourself and an adapting to the other person, a giving preference to the other. To *submit* is to *humbly adapt*. It is an issue of total sacrificial love.
7. Then, the wife will respect her husband.

Conclusion

The New Testament gives clear precedence for women leading in the church. Women were teachers, apostles, deacons, prophets, leaders of home churches, rulers, judges, heads of synagogues, rabbis, elders, and evangelists. These roles of service have nothing to do with authority but with gifts and functions as God anoints.

The call to the church today is to remove all barriers to women and to find ways for them to serve in their callings and gifts. Women’s talents have been buried; it is time to restore them to the church. We all, brothers and sisters in Messiah, are all called to *humbly adapt* to one another in love.