

## Essay on The Role of Women in the Church

Women's role in ministry is one of the most debated issues to date. The role of elder and deacon are described in the Bible. The most commonly used passages are 1 Timothy 3:1-13 and Titus 1:5-9. However, the term elder was first used in the Old Testament. They usually helped Moses when dealing with the Hebrews (Exodus 3:16), administered local government (Josh 20:4), helped in national affairs (1 Samuel 4:3).<sup>1</sup> The office of deacon is a New Testament institution. "The word group surrounding *diakoneo*, 'to serve'...initially referred to a waiter at a meal" (John 2:5,9).<sup>2</sup> It is said that the first deacons were the men chosen by the 12 apostles in Acts 6; chosen to wait on tables. As the term is usually applied to men, the Weymouth New Testament translation uses the term deaconess in 1 Timothy 3:11. It is the only translation to use this term, while the others use "wives" or "women". According to John MacArthur, "Paul likely here refers not to deacon's wives, but to the women who serve as deacons."<sup>3</sup>

The biblical requirements for the office of elder are: blameless, the husband of one wife, temperate, sober-minded, of good behavior, hospitable, able to teach, not given to wine, not violent, not greedy for money, but gentle, not quarrelsome, not covetous, one who rules his own house well. He must be spiritually mature and have a good testimony. (1 Timothy 3:2-7) An elder is typically an overseer. According to the same chapter, the requirements for deacon are "reverent, not double-tongued, not given to wine, and not greedy for money." He must also have a pure conscience. (3:8,9)

According to these passages (Gal. 3:28, 1 Tim. 2:11 - 15 and 3:2, 1 Cor. 14:34 - 35, and Rom. 16:1 and 16:7), one could easily get confused as toward the New Testament role of women in the church. These verses seem to contradict each other. In some Paul praises certain women for their active participation and in others Paul says they are to learn in silence and not have authority over men. When it comes to the office of elder, there is nothing in these verses that seem to indicate that women are permitted this role. However, when we remember that the word deacon basically means servant, one can see how women can have roles in church. If a woman should not have authority over a man, then, perhaps she could do women's Sunday school or bible study geared towards women. Women could be greeters, ushers, singers and musicians, book-handlers, treasurers, etc. One could also argue that because of the times when Paul was writing, these restrictions are no longer valid. We must remember that Paul was writing in a time women had little or no say, especially in public. They were just arriving from a time when, culturally, women had even less value during the Old Testament times.

I believe in the latter. I believe God used Galatians 3:28 to introduce a godly form of equality that the early church and, perhaps, the world still had yet to grasp. I believe it was forgotten that God used Israelite women in powerful positions in the distant past. Women like Miriam (Exodus 15:20-21) and Deborah, a judge (Judges 4-5) were gifts from God who held high positions. In the New Testament we hear of Anna the prophetess (Luke 2:36). MacArthur says, "She was a teacher of the OT, not a source of revelation."<sup>4</sup> However, it is my personal conviction that a man should be the overall shepherd of a church, as long as it is possible. This comes from the fact that God held Adam accountable first, not Eve even though she sinned first.

If a woman is more spiritually mature and able to teach than her male counterpart she should do so, all the while making sure a male is being readied for the position.

As for women's roles in the work place I believe the biblical women like Miriam, Deborah, and Esther show that women are capable of being strong, powerful, leaders.

### **Bibliography:**

<sup>1</sup>Wallace, R. S. "Elder", *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology* (2001) Baker Academic. Grand Rapids, MI, (p.369)

<sup>2</sup>Burge, G. M., "Deacon, Deaconess", *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology* (2001) Baker Academic. Grand Rapids, MI, (p.320)

<sup>3</sup>MacArthur, John, *The MacArthur Study Bible* (1997) Thomas Nelson, Nashville, (commentary on p.1865)

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., (p.1516)