

# THE ROLE OF WOMEN IN THE CHURCH AND IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

**Mr. G. AMALRAJ**

Research Scholar

Research and Development Centre  
Bharathiar University, Coimbatore, Tamil Nadu

**Dr. K.M. SUMATHI**

Associate Professor

Department of English  
M.V.M. Govt. Arts College for Women, Dindigul, Tamil Nadu

## Abstract

*Women's position in the church has been a contentious topic of contention. The reasons range from word studies, exegesis, emotion, and, worst of all, hermeneutics. Anyone who has participated in heated discussions can relate to the fact that, in general, not much gets done. The New Testament's portrayal of women any group hoping to draw its church order from the new scripture must discuss church evidence. In numerous church communities, diverse customs have developed regarding women's involvement in singing, prayer, witnessing, teaching, and other facets of church life. Scripture alone is the source of our devotion, not any tradition. The Greek term for woman is used 214 times in the New Testament, with 104 of those instances occurring in the Acts and Epistles, demonstrating the significance of this topic in the Bible. The congregation that is willing to discover and adhere to the biblical guidance regarding women's roles in the church will undoubtedly experience blessings and advantages. The ideas pertaining to women's roles in the New Testament church and how these principles should be applied to women's roles in the New Testament church generally as well as specifically in church meetings are found in scripture.*

**Keywords:** Church, Leadership, Ministry, New Testament, Service, Women

## Introduction

Women play important roles in the New Testament that go beyond the social mores of the day, influencing the early Christian community by their service, leadership, and faith. Mary, Jesus' mother, is revered as a model of obedience and loyalty since she defied social expectations by being chosen by God to bear the Messiah (Luke 1:26-38). Her crucial part in the Incarnation highlights how important women are to God's divine purpose. Mary Magdalene, renowned for her unshakable devotion, is the first to see the risen Christ and is given the responsibility to tell the disciples the Good News, confirming the role of women as crucial gospel-bearers (John 20:11-18).

Women's contributions are further highlighted by the appearance of Priscilla and Phoebe as significant characters in early Christian groups. Acts 18:26 describes how Priscilla and her husband Aquila assist Paul in his mission by teaching and mentoring Apollos in the faith. Paul praises Phoebe for being a deaconess and

philanthropist who helped a lot of people, including the apostle himself, and for being an example of service and leadership in the Church at Cenchreae (Romans 16:1-2). Their positions subvert gender norms and highlight the crucial role that women had in educating and fostering the early Church.

Hence, despite prevailing cultural and societal standards, women in the New Testament represent boldness, faith, and leadership—qualities crucial to the development and organization of the early Church.

## Core Concepts about Women in the New Testament Church

Regarding women's roles in the New Testament church, there are two tenets. Women and men are equal before God, according to the fundamental premise.

"You are all one in Christ Jesus; there is no such thing as male or female" (Gal. 3:28b). But according to the Lord, neither man nor women are independent of one another.

Because everything comes from God, just as the woman came from the man, so too does the man have his birth through the woman (1 Corinthians 11:11–12). Because women are equal before God, they are therefore entitled to vital truths like personal salvation. The indwelling of the Holy Spirit ('But if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to him' Rom.8:9b), through Christ ('Knowing that you were not redeemed with perishable things... but with precious blood, as of a lamb blemished and spotless, the blood of Christ' 1 Pet.1: 18, 19), 'You also, as living stones, are being built up as a spiritual house for a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices to God through Jesus Christ; but you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God's own possession, that you may proclaim the excellences of him who has called you out of darkness into his marvelous light', according to 1 Peter 2:5,9, and the priesthood of all believers.

All of the scriptures concerning women's roles in the New Testament church align with these two concepts. An interpretation of a scripture about women's roles can be put to the test by determining whether it affirms a woman's spiritual equality with men or grants her headship over them.

### **Jesus's Conduct with Women**

An excellent starting point for researching women's roles in the church is to examine Jesus' earthly ministry. Naturally, it is understood that the church was founded after Jesus ascended into heaven (Mark 9:1; Acts 1:8; Acts 2:1–4), not during His earthly ministry (Matthew 16:18). Nevertheless, by examining how Jesus saw women throughout His earthly ministry, we can gain some insight into their place in the church.

According to Matthew 10:2–4, none of the apostles were female. Nonetheless, a few of Jesus' closest followers were female. Luke 8:2–3 lists Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Susanna, and "many others" as individuals who assisted in giving Jesus and his apostle's financial support while they preached. A few devoted and distraught women stayed to see his death on the cross when the apostles later left the scene of the crucifixion out of fear (Matthew 27:55–56).

We can deduce from these and other allusions in the Gospels that Jesus did not regard women as less worthy

of being His disciples in any manner. He did distinguish between the roles that men and women should play when choosing men over women to be His apostles. These two fundamental ideas—that is, the equality of value in Christ's eyes and the distinction between the roles assigned to men and women—were preached in the early church and ought to, of course, still be present in the church today.

### **The Place of Women in the Church**

Both men and women joined the church in large numbers on the Day of Pentecost, marking its founding (Acts 5:14). The requirements for membership did not differentiate between the sexes. Moreover, the early church's concern for widows in need of assistance and care is indicative of the value of women to the entire body of Christ (Acts 6:1–6).

Scripture makes frequent reference to the excellent deeds of women. Acts 9:36–39 cites Dorcas as an illustration of obedient, loving service. Acts 16:1–15 describes Lydia as a gracious hostess who "constrains" Paul and his companions from staying in her home. "Servant of the church that is in Cenchrea" is how Phoebe is referred to in Romans 16:1. Paul outlines the requirements for women who were to dedicate their full time to Christian activity and receive support from the church, which further reflects the many excellent deeds done by women in the church.

These criteria were listed as widowhood, being sixty years of age or older, not having any family to support them, and being "well reported of their good works" in 1 Timothy 5:9–10. Then, these good deeds were listed as follows: (1) raising children; (2) providing hospitality to strangers; (3) washing the feet of the saints; (4) providing relief to the suffering; and (5) meticulously carrying out every good deed.

Scripture also mentions women's role in the private teaching of God's Word. Acts 18:26 describes how Priscilla and her husband Aquila secretly instructed a decent but ignorant preacher named Apollos "the way of God more accurately." Older women are commanded in Titus 2:4 to mentor younger women in Christian living.

Galatians 3:28 is crucial to comprehending the significance of women in God's eyes. "There can be neither Jew nor Greek, there can be neither bond nor free, there can be no male and female, for ye all are one in

Christ Jesus.” People in the world of Jesus’ day made clear divisions between themselves based on their perception of one another as superior or inferior. As a result, they distanced themselves from one another. These distinctions included sex (male and female), special status (slave or slave owner), and religious origin (Jew and Greek). Paul stated that, in terms of merit, none of these distinctions held water. He did not, of course, mean that a person lost their identity as a man or a woman, a slave or a free man, a Jew or a Gentile, simply because they became a Christian. But since each of these has equal value in Christ Jesus, none of them should lead to division.

### **Women in Training, Teaching, and Education**

Huldah, who is considered to be one of the seven prophetesses in Jewish tradition, is another striking observation. But she is the most significant prophet in Deuteronomistic history because of her official duties and acknowledgment in the account of Josiah’s reform (Scheuer 2015). The monarch trusted Huldah with important affairs because of her official position, which may be defined as a leader ordained by God. Significant theological shifts were sparked by one of her prophecies (2 Ki 22:14–20; 2 Chr 34:22–33; Willmington 2019).

According to all four of the Gospels, the majority of the female disciples who watched and supported Jesus on the cross were women; as for the male disciples, at the time of his arrest, “everyone deserted him and fled” (Mk 14:50). Moreover, as Jesus had said, Peter publicly condemned him that very evening when they questioned him about his relationship with Jesus, to which he vehemently replied, “I don’t know this man you’re talking about” (Mk 14:71).

As already known, all four of the Gospels claim that women, such as Mary Magdalene, were the first to discover that Jesus’ tomb was empty and, as a result, the first to proclaim his resurrection (e.g., Mk 16:4; Jn 20:18). Another noteworthy event that amply illustrated gender equality was the attendance of “the women” (Act 1:14) on the Jewish Pentecost, when the Holy Spirit came upon those present.

The explanation above makes it very evident that women have been given importance and groundbreaking responsibilities in the Bible related to teaching, prophecy,

apprenticeship, education, and, most importantly, being the mother of Christ.

### **Critique**

The way women are portrayed in the New Testament presents an enticing blend of restriction and empowerment in the early Christian setting. Although women have played important roles in foundational Christian events like the Resurrection and the Incarnation, and Mary, the mother of Jesus, is a prime example of faith and courage, their prominence contrasts with scriptural directives that occasionally limit women’s roles in worship and leadership (1 Timothy 2:9-15; 1 Corinthians 14:34-35). There is constant disagreement regarding these verses’ relevance in the modern era because they represent societal conventions of the period rather than indisputable theological precepts.

### **Summary**

- Regardless of what other people teach and do, the church should teach what the Bible says regarding women’s roles.
- Although Christ did not name any female apostles, he nevertheless welcomed women as his followers on the same terms as males.
- Women had a significant role in the life of the church and were among its first members. Their ability in showing hospitality, assistance by providing for the poor, and by demonstrating through service showed the quality of love that define the church as God’s family which was exceptional.
- Because God respects both men and women equally, men and women should accept each other as equals.

### **Conclusion**

The aforementioned results show that the Bible is full of instances of powerful women in formal or informal leadership roles in society. Even though women have experienced social, societal, cultural, and economic injustice throughout history, the Bible cannot reasonably be used to defend gender discrimination. The way that women are portrayed in the Bible does not condone the exclusion of women from leadership positions in businesses or organizations. Even though the Bible

doesn't give names to all of the women, the ones that do are frequently portrayed as significant figures in history.

They are exercising significant formal and informal influence, providing women in today's society with leadership, corporate, and organizational perspectives, as well as motivation and direction, regardless of the social perspective being used. Many of them are portrayed as strong, self-driven women who have the bravery to take charge in any situation, including normal family life and conflicts and emergencies. The roles that women play in learning, teaching, apprenticeship, and education are evident, and Jesus' interactions with the women in his life and with women generally are noteworthy.

As has been shown, the Christian community made use of the leadership skills possessed by women despite the unequal treatment of women in the Mediterranean culture of antiquity, both in the pre-Roman era of the Old Testament and during the Roman era of the New Testament, and the concomitant desire for subordination. They not only adopted the surrounding culture, but they also brought forth a revolutionary, gender-sensitive culture. Since prominent women in the Bible were given significant and vital responsibilities in all spheres of society, we can take inspiration and direction from biblical texts today to promote gender equality in all spheres and levels of organizations, businesses, and society. To highlight that depending on their social, cultural, and geographic context, women may relate to the biblical scriptures covered above in different ways.

## References

1. Alexander, T.D. & Baker, D.W. (eds.), 2002, *Dictionary of the Old Testament: Pentateuch: A compendium of contemporary biblical scholarship*. InterVarsity Press. Alter, R., 2018, *The five books of Moses: A translation with commentary*, Norton, New York, NY.
2. Baldock, J., 2018, *Women in the Bible*, Arcturus Publishing, London.
3. Bøsterud, C.E., 2020, 'Gender equality in corporate South Africa: A Christian ethical approach', in C.E. Bøsterud, *Christian ethics and political economy: Markers for a developing South Africa*, pp. 101–136, AOSIS, Cape Town. (Reformed Theology in Africa Series, vol.3). Cady Stanton, E., 1895, *The woman's Bible*, <https://archive.org/stream/thewomansbible09880gut/wbibl10.txt>
4. Bruce, F. F. *The Acts of the Apostles, the Greek Text with Introduction and Commentary*. London: Tyndale Press, 1952
5. Bruce, F. F. *The Letters of Paul an Expanded Paraphrase*. Exeter: The Paternoster Press, 1965
6. Clines, David J. A. "Women in the Church - A Survey of Recent Opinion". *The Journal of the Christian Brethren Research Fellowship*.X (December 1965), 10, pp.33-40.
7. Conybeare, W. J., and Howson, J. S. *The Life and Epistles of Saint Paul* Hartford: S. S. Scranton and Co., 1900. Ellison, H. L. *The Household Church*. London: Paternoster Press, 1963. Grosheide, Frederick Willem *Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians*. *The New International Commentary on the New Testament*; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1953.
8. Hay, Alexander R. *The New Testament Order for Church and Missionary*. New Testament Missionary Union, 1947.
9. Lang, G. H. *The Churches of God*. London: Paternoster Press, 1959. MacDonald, William Christ *Loved the Church*. Oak Park, Illinois: Emmaus Bible School, 1956.
10. Morris, Leon *The First Epistle of Paul to the Corinthians*. Tyndale New Testament Commentaries; Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 1958.
11. Morgan, G. Campbell *The Corinthian Letters of Paul*. Westwood, New Jersey: Fleming H. Revell Co., 1946.