

May/June 1997  
Volume 28, No. 3

# Integrity

## Editorial: To What Lengths We Go

### A Fresh Look at the "Silence Scriptures"

Eleanor Smith

### Going Through the Maze with God

Diane G. H. Kilmer

### Toward Completing Our Spiritual House

Noreen Bryant

### What I Like About Anna

Hoy Ledbetter

### Daughter of Abraham

Deborah Jane Choate Shepherd

### Selected Bibliography Regarding Women and the Church

### Bending the Twig

Laquita and Elton Higgs

## Editorial (Continued from page 21)

Some 33 years after my teen experience of how to get around what does not make any sense, I am still amazed at what lengths we go to get around what we know is wrong. We know it is wrong to silence women's participation in the church. We know it doesn't make sense that a woman can lead and teach anywhere but in the church. We know we are losing great gifts for the church when a gifted, spiritual woman must hang her gifts at the church building door and pick them up again when she leaves to go back to her life in the world.

This saddens me, but what saddens me the more are the many male leaders I know who know the way we limit women in the church is wrong, but they are unwilling to do anything to "rock the boat." So not only were the girls of my generation deprived of many opportunities to use and develop their gifts for the church, the next generation is facing much of the same. A few years ago my then 11 year old daughter returned from a Church of Christ camp in tears, vowing never to go back. In a Bible class discussion at the camp, she had suggested that maybe a girl could grow up to be a minister (one of our family's friends is a woman minister). For the rest of the week she was bombarded by several adult volunteers with disapproving rhetoric over her suggestion. She was even pressured by one who asked her: "Do your grandparents know where your parents go to church?"

I understand that some of the churches in the Stone-Campbell movement have loosened up in some areas, and there may be a few more outlets today than in 1964 for young girls to find out if they are leaders. But any teaching going on which says: "You are equal, girls; men and women are equal, they just have different roles; and by the way, all the leadership roles are for men" will continue to hurt and discourage another generation of women, and main another generation of the church.

Men leaders who know this is wrong: when will you have the empathy and courage to end this?

J. Bruce Kilmer  
Co-editor

Integrity has a new  
address on the World Wide Web.  
Please visit us here  
<http://mich.com/~integrity>

(No, that's not  
a typo- our allotment of  
letters for our  
name did not,  
unfortunately, leave us  
room for a "y"!)  
(Don't forget to  
type the title!)

**Integrity**  
4051 S. Lincoln Rd.  
Mt. Pleasant, MI 48858

**ADDRESS  
CORRECTION  
REQUESTED**

Nonprofit Organization  
U.S. POSTAGE  
**PAID**  
Royal Oak, MI  
Permit No. 696

### Editors

J. Bruce Kilmer  
Diane G. H. Kilmer

### Board of Directors

Kathleen Blakely  
Bruce Bryant  
Noreen Bryant  
Brant Lee Doty  
Elton D. Higgs  
Laquita M. Higgs  
Kay Kendall  
Diane G. H. Kilmer  
J. Bruce Kilmer  
Curtis Lloyd  
Curtis D. McClane  
Henrietta C. Palmer  
William Palmer  
Keith Price  
Karl W. Randall  
Steve Sprague  
Jan Van Horn  
John Van Horn

### Editorial Advisors

Hoy Ledbetter  
Joseph F. Jones  
Amos Ponder

### Board Member

**Emeritus**  
Amos Ponder

### Editorial Address:

4051 S. Lincoln Rd.  
Mt. Pleasant, MI  
48858

## To What Lengths We Go

Six of us teens had just returned to our home church in Pontiac, Michigan, from a "campaign" to Groton, Connecticut. It was 1964 and much of the northeastern United States had become a focal point for evangelism by Churches of Christ. Groups of families had made "exoduses" from the south to start churches or help struggling churches in the mission fields of the east. At the World's Fair in New York City, Jimmy Allen had spoken in the open air coliseum and baptized hundreds. We were excited to share our experiences going door-to-door in the campaign at the Groton church.

Back at home, we planned to do a demonstration at our Sunday evening service of what it was like to knock on door after door and receive varying responses to our "survey," to our Bible Correspondence Course offer, and to our attempts to stimulate each person we met to think about their soul. Two of us decided to be the "door knockers" in the demonstration and one would play the part of an unsuspecting person coming to the door. However, one of our three demonstrators was female. What were we to do? Our minister decided we could "get away" with it by having a short worship time, where we would sing, pray, and offer the Lord's Supper to those who hadn't been at the morning service, and have a closing prayer. Then we could do our demonstration, after the "official" service was over. It worked. No complaints, and a female had spoken out loud in the auditorium from the pulpit to the assembled congregation. It was o.k. because the service had been officially dismissed by a closing prayer.

A few months ago the *Christian Chronicle* did a special issue to show the many ways women can and have been able to use their gifts of leadership in the church. Each example had shown a careful rationalization so that the church's preconceived notion that women must be silent "in the church" was preserved. The intellectual gymnastics were amazing.

Many more examples of this inconsistent rationalizing can be found in Robert Rowland's book, *"I Permit Not a Woman . . ." To Remain Shackled*, which is listed in the bibliography elsewhere in this issue.

(Continued on back cover)

Subscriptions are by written request. There is no subscription charge, but we depend on your contributions, which are tax-deductible. Please send c/o: Jan Van Horn, Treasurer, 4860 Livernois, Troy, MI 48098

Back Issues are available from William Palmer, 1607 Rockfield, Troy, Michigan 48098

## A Fresh Look at the "Silence" Scriptures

ELEANOR SMITH

The churches of Christ have maintained that a woman's place, or role, has been scripturally ordained to preclude her from many areas of service, especially from service during the public (corporate) worship. I have been uncomfortable with that position for a long time but there came a time when I knew I had to study this out for myself, using scripture, various reference works, and other materials. And so I embarked on a rather detailed study of the verses generally understood to define and limit "the women's role."

The main arguments used to deny women active roles in the corporate worship and other so-called "leadership positions" have come from the traditional rendering of the scriptures in I Corinthians 14 and I Timothy 2 that address "silence" and women. I believe these scriptures have been misunderstood and, consequently, misapplied.

In I Corinthians 14:26-40, Paul is discussing orderly worship: For God is not a God of disorder but of peace as in all the churches of the saints," i.e., conduct yourselves in accordance with the customary practices of all the other churches (v. 33), which many scholars believe go together and is put together in a number of translations, including most of the earlier manuscripts.<sup>1</sup> We must look at vv. 34-35 in the context in which they are written. The main focus of vv. 27-35 is on speaking, the Greek verb "laleo," to speak or utter words. The verb takes its exact meaning from the context of its use.

Each Christian (man or woman) is told to come prepared to participate with a hymn, a word of instruction, etc. (v. 26) so the church can be strengthened (edified).

Tongues, speaking in a foreign or spiritual language, are limited to at most three speakers, and then only if one is there to interpret (implying only one interpreter for all the tongues speakers, not interpreting in turn)<sup>2</sup>. Otherwise, the tongue speakers are to keep quiet, literally "sigao" (be silent), to stop speaking (the literal phrasing) to the assembly, although the tense of the verb indicates they can silently meditate in tongues between themselves and God. Otherwise, confusion and chaos would result and the church would be held up for ridicule by outsiders (v. 23). The silence is not a total silence, but one necessitated by circumstances.<sup>3</sup>

Similarly, two or three prophets may speak ("Laleitoran") in turn, and the others, probably other prophets, will discern, "weigh carefully" (NIV), or judge (literally, "to separate thoroughly") the prophecy. All (men and women) could prophecy, up to the 2-3 limit, so all (men and women) could learn. But when another receives a revelation, the first prophet must defer to him or her (i.e., stop speaking), literally "sigao", i.e. be silent, and not keep on speaking. Again, presumably to avoid confusion, chaos, and possible shame, prophets are to defer to each other and the assembly. Again, the silence is not a total silence but one necessitated by circumstances.<sup>4</sup>

So, when women are told to be silent ("sigao"), they are actually the third group given this instruction. Since the same verb is used here as with the other groups, the silence is not a total silence, but one necessitated by circumstances.<sup>5</sup> "For it is not allowed for them to keep speaking" (the present infinitive tense).<sup>6</sup> Speaking and asking questions (v. 35) is not what is on

prohibited, but rather the continued speaking and asking of questions.

There are several theories on why Paul singles out women. I think they related to Paul's focus in these verses of not bringing shame or dishonor to the church/assembly. One thought involves the role of questions in the ancient world; questions were often used to teach and to challenge then, just as they often are now.<sup>7</sup> A woman continuing to ask questions, especially of a man, would have been seen as challenging him and that would have been very disruptive, especially in first-century society. So the women had to restrain themselves, just as the prophets and tongues speakers before them, to prevent chaos in the assembly and dishonor to the church or the gospel. The fact that he tells the women he is addressing to ask any additional questions of their husbands at home (v. 35) indicates that he is addressing married women, and so presumably a subset of the women in the Corinthian church.<sup>8</sup> Additionally, first-century women did not tend to have as much formal religious education as men<sup>9</sup>, so the questions they were asking may well have been very basic ones, ones that could be better answered at home by their husbands anyway.

Some believe Paul is addressing women who have prophesied, telling them they are not to keep speaking after they have finished prophesying, but to leave the judgment of the prophecies to the men. But others mention that when "laleo" is used in regard to prophesying, it has a qualifying ending identifying it as a special kind of speaking, as was tongue speaking. However, the basic word "laleo" is used here to address the prophets, the tongue speakers and the women, and in the tense indicating an ongoing quality to the speaking,<sup>10</sup> so I don't think Paul is addressing women prophets.

Like many others, I believe Paul was speaking directly to certain disruptive Corinthian wives. However, his instruction

on not being disruptive or doing anything that would cause shame or dishonor on the church or the gospel would not have been lost on the rest of the congregation.

I Timothy 2:11-12 is the other set of verses cited most often to keep women from full participation in the teaching and public worship in the churches of Christ. I believe these verses have been misunderstood and misused also.

To properly consider I Timothy 2:11-12, I think we must begin with verse 8. In it, Paul instructs the men on the right attitude (no arguing or anger) for prayer. Verse 9 begins, literally, "in like manner" in Greek, reflecting the thought back to Paul's teaching in the previous verse on prayer. The actual reading would be "...in like manner, the women dressing modestly and decently..." In like manner, what? In the Greek, the main verb is missing. Since it reflects back on the previous verse, it takes its verb from there and can only mean to pray. "In like manner, the women (to pray), dressing modestly..." (i.e., "in like manner, the women are to pray, dressing modestly and decently").<sup>11</sup>

We read in I Corinthians about the importance of the mode of dress for a woman who prayed during the assembly, so it is not surprising to see it brought up here, too. In Jewish and pagan texts, rejection of external adornment showed a woman's spirituality (in rejecting material extravagance) and modesty.<sup>12</sup>

So, in verses 8-10, Paul is telling the men to pray without anger or disputing and for women to pray in the modest and decent clothes befitting a woman who claims to believe in God. That is, be known for your attitude and service to God, not your influence or financial status.

In I Timothy 2:11 the word translated "silence" in many versions is actually the word "hesuchia," meaning "quietness" or "a quiet spirit".<sup>13</sup> The same word is used in II Thessalonians 3:12 ("That with

quietness they work and eat their own bread") and earlier in I Timothy 2:2 ("that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life"). It has to do with attitude, not literal quietness or silence. No one understands those verses to mean that Christians are being told to work in silence or lead a silent life. Likewise, I don't think it should be understood as "silence" here, either.

In I Timothy 2:12 a number of authors conclude the tense of the Greek word "epitrepo" (to allow or permit) is rendered more accurately as "I am not permitting" instead of "I do not permit" or "I forbid." That is, Paul is stating a preference or initiating a temporary bar to women teaching.<sup>14</sup>

The verb "to teach" (didasko) was usually understood to mean doctrine. The verb we translate "authority" ("authentain") actually goes well beyond our usual understanding and use of the word. Had Paul meant the idea of simple authority he would have used "exousia." But the word "authentain" means to dominate or be domineering.<sup>15</sup> This is the only place it is found in the whole New Testament.<sup>16</sup> A better rendering of verse 12 is thus: "I am not permitting a woman to teach doctrine or to be domineering over a man, but to conduct herself in a quiet spirit or demeanor."

There are a number of credible reasons for why Paul gave this teaching, besides the usual interpretations:

1. Teachers were accorded great honor in Jewish, Greek, and Roman societies.<sup>17</sup> But there was widespread negative feeling towards women teachers. In antiquity, any woman teacher was likely seen as domineering, no matter how non-threatening she was.<sup>18</sup> Women's testimony was not usually considered

credible anyway<sup>19</sup> (i.e., the women reporting Jesus' resurrection were not believed even with Jesus' message), and women generally received less religious (or other) education than men, as noted earlier. Early Christians may have felt it was wiser and more effective for men to be the only public teachers of these new doctrines about Christ.<sup>20</sup>

2. False teaching was a problem in Ephesus and the women were the focus of the false teachers (II Tim. 3:1-9).<sup>21</sup> The Ephesian women evidently did not have enough knowledge yet to see the errors of the false teachers.

3. The Ephesian women may have been trying to teach in a domineering way. That Paul chose this verb lends extra credibility to this perspective.

I do not believe these verses say that women cannot teach men, but that they must not teach in a domineering way. I do not believe these verses teach that women must be silent for all time, but that they addressed a particular reason for excluding some women from active teaching in the first century. I also do not believe these verses teach that a woman cannot have simple authority over a man; instead, they teach us that a domineering, overbearing attitude is inappropriate. However, this attitude is inappropriate for all Christians, women or men, as we see in other scriptures (e.g., Phil. 2:3-4 and Eph. 5:21).

In the first century women were not public figures. However, the world is considerably different now, and women have gained more equality with men. It is time to reevaluate the traditional ways in which scriptures about "silence" and women were understood in the past, to see the deeper truth and understanding we were incapable of seeing until this time in history.

---

Eleanor Smith has been a Christian for 20 years, mostly in the Churches of Christ, and lives with her husband and dog in northern Virginia. She is a meteorologist, has been in the USAF/USAF Reserve for 18 years, and works as a senior engineer on a weather contract.

<sup>1</sup> Carroll D. Osburn, "The Interpretation of I Cor. 14:34-35" in "Essays on Women in Earliest Christianity, Vol. One" (Joplin, MO: College Publishing Press, 1993), 229.

<sup>2</sup> Osburn, 227.

<sup>3</sup> Walter L. Liefeld, "Women, Submission and Ministry in I Corinthians," in "Women, Authority & the Bible," ed. Alvera Mickelsen (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 1986), 151.

<sup>4</sup> Osburn, 228.

<sup>5</sup> Liefeld, 150.

<sup>6</sup> Osburn, 234.

<sup>7</sup> Liefeld, 150.

<sup>8</sup> Osburn, 236.

<sup>9</sup> Gundry, Patricia, "Woman, Be Free" (Grand Rapids, MI: Smith Gundry Productions, 1977), 76; and Liefeld, 222.

<sup>10</sup> Osburn, 233-234.

<sup>11</sup> Dr. Walter Kaiser, "Paul, Women and the Church," in "Worldwide Challenge" (Sept. 76):9-12, as quoted in Linda Raney Wright's "A Cord of Three Strands" (Old Tappan, NJ: Fleming H. Revell

Company, 1987), 215; also, Thomas C. Geer, Jr., "Admonitions to Women in I Tim. 2:8-15", "Essays on Women in Earliest Christianity, Volume 1," 292.

<sup>12</sup> Liefeld, 144, citing David Scholer, "Women's Adornment," *Daughters of Sarah* 6 (1980): 3-6.

<sup>13</sup> Kaiser, quoted by Wright, 216.

<sup>14</sup> Kaiser, quoted by Wright, 218; Aida Dina Besancom Spencer, "Eve at Ephesus," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* (Fall '74): 215-222 as quoted by Gundry, 77; also Geer, 292.

<sup>15</sup> David Scholer, "I Timothy 2:9-15 and the Place of Women in the Church's Ministry," in "Women, Authority and the Bible," 205.

<sup>16</sup> Wright, 212.

<sup>17</sup> Liefeld, 152.

<sup>18</sup> Geer, 293.

<sup>19</sup> Richard N. Longenecker, "Authority, Hierarchy & Leadership Patterns in the Bible, in "Women, Authority & the Bible," 72.

<sup>20</sup> Liefeld, 222.

<sup>21</sup> Geer, 299.

---

---

## Going Through the Maze with God

DIANE G. H. KILMER

The purpose of this written reflection is to inform people of "the tip of the iceberg" of one woman's experiences and feelings during a specific era in the Church of Christ's history, in the hope that those women who have had similar experiences would feel some understanding and fellowship, and to encourage current church leaders to identify and develop all of their people's gifts, regardless of gender, rather than repeat our Spirit-quenching history for another generation.

As a little child I loved God and wanted to please him. My parents faithfully took my three sisters and me to church, and I loved going--singing the harmonic hymns, hearing the Bible stories, and learning the "right doctrines." One summer as a little girl I organized the "Way To Heaven" Club for my sisters and myself and our friends where I taught

Bible lessons in the backyard and ran it like Sunday School. One of the leftover cardboard club badges still in my memoirs box displays five penciled steps leading up into a cloud.

One Sunday morning when I was about ten, while sitting near the front of the church's auditorium taking sermon notes, a visiting minister taught us to personalize John 3:16 by putting our own name into each "whosoever" spot. I was so moved by how much more meaningful the verse became to me that I began a habit from then on of inserting feminine pronouns into all the worship songs I sang or inserting "daughters" instead of sons. I responded to this need for a more adequate language a decade before I ever heard of gender inclusive language. I continue to do this today automatically with songs and scripture.

By fifth grade the Sunday School

lessons were evidently not enough for me because I (rudely) declared to the teacher that class was boring. She asked me if I would like to teach it (I wonder now if she meant it) and I eagerly said "yes" and began preparing and presenting lessons on a weekly basis. The boy who eventually became my husband was in that class and remembers this "era." By the time I was 12 I had read the Bible all the way through plus numerous other books from the church library. I engaged public school classmates in religious discussion on a regular basis, showed leadership ability in elementary school such as being elected class president one year and captain of the Service Squad another. My model for the best Christian life we can lead was Paul.

### Era of confusion

During junior high one year I organized and led a girls' chorus at church, based upon my experience in school choruses since sixth grade. Boys my age were being trained in church to make little "talks" on Sunday night, and they got to take classes in how to lead singing during worship service. I remember watching them Sunday evenings and thinking to myself that I could do at least as well as they were doing, if not better.

When I was about 14 years old I was asked to be a teen member of a parachurch board affiliated with the local Christian college. The purpose of the board made up of teenagers and adults was to plan a monthly activity for teenagers from throughout the metropolitan area which would bring the teens to campus and, ideally, usher them into college there. We usually had 500 to 600 teens attend those events.

Although I started out as Secretary on that board, I quickly became Vice Chairman, and year after year I helped plan the events, made many of the phone calls for program arrangements, was entirely responsible for refreshments, and often as

planned the devotionals (if the male Chairman was not capable of doing so) which he then carried out. What I loved the most was planning those devotionals. What became progressively more frustrating for me during those high school years was the inability to carry out those devotionals myself, the way I had envisioned them and prayed over them, with the appropriate remarks and train of thought. I wasn't even allowed to stand before the group and offer a "welcome" or share some of my excitement for the upcoming program.

A different male was chosen Teen Chairman each year, some of them lacking in leadership gifts or not particularly spiritually mature for their age--as I look back on it now. At the beginning of my senior year, the new male teen Chairman called me up, asked what he could do to help with the monthly program, and began carrying an equal share of the responsibilities. That person was Bruce, now my husband.

### High school years

Church services during my high school years became more and more frustrating for me to sit through. My interest was still passionately high in church matters such as Bible study, doctrine, evangelizing (from my classmates to my dentist), missionary activities, how members of the body of Christ should treat each other, what transpired in the business meetings. I couldn't put my finger on why I was so restless. I expressed my frustration by claiming that the services were "boring." My sister Judy and I came up with what we thought would be a good solution: organize "Teen Church" in the basement of the church building Sunday nights, where only teenagers led the services.

The minister and elders wisely indulged us, and we began organizing our Church of Christ teen male friends from our own and other congregations in the area for

speaking and song leading. Sometimes I would start the hymns from my front row seat when we couldn't find a guy who could lead singing and my sister would often persuade some of our male friends to preach, if she promised to provide the sermon. Already considered a gifted children's teacher at our church, Judy discovered as she prepared those sermons during this time how much she enjoyed teaching on an adult level. Teens attended from throughout the city and Teen Church continued on after I left for Christian college.

In my senior year my Sunday School teacher gave us students a long questionnaire to help us determine what spiritual abilities we had and how we could serve God with them. I still have the letter my teacher gave me after analyzing my gifts. Among other things, he wrote that the test showed I had an understanding of spiritual matters that was "beyond the perception of conventional thinking," that my personality had the capability of influencing people, that I had the ability to provide people spiritual direction, to help others find themselves and God; that I had the ability to make decisions on my own, and to teach others. Then, my Sunday School teacher seemed to struggle in his letter to me to convey in what capacity I would be able to utilize these abilities in the church. He suggested that perhaps I could become a dorm mother, or an elder's wife, or a preacher's wife.

During high school and college my close Christian male friends would tease me when I articulated some strongly-felt view on the church or the Bible, and they would jokingly accuse me of "just wanting to be a preacher." Although all of us would laugh at such an idea, I remember sometimes fighting back tears and forcing myself to join in the laughter at myself. I felt frustrated and confused, yet my own mind was so closed to such a possibility as a

woman really becoming a minister that it never occurred to me how blinded I was to the true cause of my frustration. I did not know what to do with myself (nor did anyone else in my Church of Christ sphere), nor did I know what to do with the passionate interest I had in the kind of church activities reserved for male leaders only.

I began dating Bruce our senior year in high school. By that age Bruce's ability to communicate the gospel effectively by preaching and teaching had already been affirmed by the church and even a junior high school speech teacher. Bruce was invited to be the teen representative on a prestigious panel regarding evangelism at the age of 14 and was asked to speak at numerous youth rallies in the Midwest churches. A Presbyterian church in his home town asked him to preach at their Sunday morning worship services (which he did). He preached several times as a teen in his own home Church of Christ, and received affirmation from the members, even after he mentioned in one of his sermons that he thought Billy Graham would be in heaven. At age 16 he believed it was right for women to pray aloud, and would ask them to in the small Bible study groups in which he was involved. All this by the time he was 17.

It did not occur to me to feel envious of Bruce's opportunities in those days. But upon reflection I know what it looks like for a church to fully acknowledge a young person's leadership and teaching gifts and to make room for those gifts to be developed and used.

### **Reflecting thirty years later**

Looking back now from my 30-year vantage point, it is obvious to me that if I had been a male, the church would have encouraged me to become a minister. Children raised in Christian families often show gifts of the Spirit such as service or teaching or evangelism *at a very early age*

I had (and my sister). In fact, today many church growth programs teach members what "signs" to look for which indicate their gifts and abilities, so that the church may discern how God has already equipped his people for effective service. Members are encouraged to notice what they feel passionate about, to notice what they feel the most satisfaction from doing, to notice what they do that gets "affirmed" by others by comments such as "You really do this well" or "You did such and such, or said such and such, just when I needed it." In a congregation trained to look for abilities, my own small successes in exhortation, teaching, leadership, and spiritual understanding during my youth would have, ideally, been acknowledged and deliberately nurtured.

The fact that my high school Sunday School teacher gave us a kind of "gifts" survey 30 years ago was probably revolutionary by Church of Christ standards in those days. Yet even though the test proved that gifts were given by the Spirit oblivious of gender, our church's cultural bias limited the practical positions within the church life context in which my gifts could be developed and practiced.

Two metaphors come to my mind in an effort to explain to you what it has felt like to be me in the Church of Christ. I have felt like a rat in a maze, running down one path until I got as far as I could go, then turning and heading on as far as I could go another way, running until I reach a wall, running until I reach a wall, repeatedly, on and on. Sometimes I have felt like a dog on a long chain, discovering that I'm made to run like the wind, then unexpectedly getting jerked to a halt by the choking collar of a limited length of chain.

I fully realize that I'm not the only person in the world who has been hindered from reaching her full potential. I also recognize that the feelings I describe are exactly what any person feels who

experiences discrimination over a factor which she neither caused nor has control. My hope for today's church is that it may become one place in the world where spiritual potential is realized and where discrimination of any kind disappears.

### **Long term effects**

So how did this loss of recognition and opportunity affect the last 30 years of my life? And where was God in all of this? I will answer the second question first. God is my constant Companion as I continue to go through the maze. God is completely familiar with the problem of an unjust, stifling human culture. The amazing thing to me is that God continues to be quite willing to dip himself down here into the mire of my sinful world and walk in it with me in Spirit form as much as he did in physical form--not that I always notice or appreciate his presence. But at my 30-years-later vantage point I can see that he has been **leading me** through the human-made maze toward any opportunities available where my gifts could be used within and without the Restoration Movement. God has paid attention to my pain and hurt, my anger and bitterness, and continues to gently deal with my feelings, bit by bit. He regrets even more than I do the stifling of his gifts.

### **In my 20s during the 1970s**

I felt no particular ambition or direction for a career while in college. In retrospect, I understand now that I felt this lack of direction because my true life's vocation to preach and teach and be a church leader was stifled. I made good grades in my Christian college Bible classes, but since success in those classes seemed almost like personal indulgence and would get me nowhere careerwise, it was easy to quit school, get married, and "put my husband through"--a pretty common practice in those days anyway. *But God* opened up an opportunity for me to work for *Herald of Truth*, the acappella Church of Christ's national television program. The show

generated lots of responses, Bible studies, and questions from viewers. My boss, loaded down with work, learned he could entrust me with answering many of the correspondents' Bible questions as part of my secretarial duties. I loved that.

When Bruce was recruited to teach at Ibaraki Christian College in Japan right out of college, the schools there hired me, also, to teach conversational English to junior high students. We would invite the students to our home in the evenings for English Bible study, and together Bruce and I developed a curriculum for presenting the gospel starting from the most basic point in order to teach an almost completely pagan culture. The opportunity was challenging intellectually and spiritually and we both grew.

When we returned 2<sup>o</sup> years later (the early 1970s), the church we attended decided to study "the women's issue," properly starting with the treatment of Jewish women prior to Christ's coming, then studying Christ's treatment of women, Paul's writings, and the church's changing stance from early years down through the centuries until now. It was during this study that I concluded that the restrictions made on women in I Timothy 2:11-12 and in I Cor. 14:29, 34-35 were temporary limitations for those situations in history, and were not ever meant to nullify the broad, overall mandates of equality for all taught in Galatians 3:28, I Cor. 11:11-12, Mark 10:42-45, Eph. 5:21, and other passages. I already knew from my own personal study of the scriptures regarding spiritual gifts (as listed in Romans 12, I Cor. 12, and other passages) that gifts from God are given without regard to gender. This church study on the "women's issue" was the point at which my frustration and anger became understood, articulated, and focussed. I concluded at the end of the study that women's gifts and abilities, even if they are what we consider "leadership" gifts

such as teaching (of male and female adults), preaching, worship leading, administration (church treasurer, deacons in charge of education, benevolence, missions, etc.) should be properly recognized, nurtured, and given room to be practiced in ministry to the glory of God.

### **Another church, another study**

Soon after that in-depth study, (in the 1970s while I was still in my 20s) Bruce finished law school and we moved to another city, and became part of the small Church of Christ campus ministry fellowship there at the state university. The "women's issue" was studied there, too. And not just because of Bruce and me. Most denominations were exploring the issue in those days if they hadn't already, so historically it's not surprising that a university fellowship would, too.

Those most vehement against more freedom for women were some of the women and, to my great regret, I let my angry attitude get between me and one of my closest female friends, a woman who was quite gifted in the quieter, behind-the-scenes gifts (including service and mercy). She was afraid she would be forced into leadership roles. I learned at that time that some men are afraid of the same thing, of being expected to fill leadership roles divvied out by gender, rather than by spiritual giftedness.

One of the opportunities for growth that God gave me during this period of time came about because the fellowship was small and needed everyone to help carry the load and do whatever they were able to do. I began helping to plan the worship services, developing the theme through scripture, song, and communion. I did not carry out those plans, of course.

Because this same fellowship was so small in number, much of the "business" of the church was discussed by the whole group, men and women. These meetings provided me opportunities to "speak forth"

words of encouragement and exhortation which often flooded my mind.

During this "era" God gave me a handful of people on the periphery of the group whom I felt responsible for spiritually and otherwise. In my mind I referred to them as "my handful of people" and I see now that it was the beginning of his opening an opportunity for me to shepherd, or pastor others. He continues to make me responsible for certain people even to this day, though my "flock" may be scattered across the globe.

### **In my 30s during the 1980s**

In my early 30s our fellowship merged with an Independent Christian Church in the same city. Some of the older women at that congregation quickly recognized my ability to lead, but became very critical of me when I resisted their attempts to recruit me to carry out some of their traditional social events which held very little spiritual content. As a mother of young children, I had just so much time and energy to devote to the church; teaching and leading small study and prayer groups got priority in my mind. I remember feeling very hurt by their criticisms, and at least once crying up to heaven against them, saying, "Lord, please never let me discourage young women when I get to be their age like these older women are doing to me." That congregation also studied women's role in the church. Although there was not unified agreement, it was decided that women with leadership gifts be allowed more room to practice them.

Soon after that study, the elders asked me to speak at our congregation's church retreat for both men and women--a first for me and them outside of my own home. I clearly remember standing up to speak and scanning the upturned faces, some of them with expressions of anticipation, but a few faces sprinkled here and there featuring resentment or a "wait and see" attitude. My confidence waned. At that moment I

understood for the first time why some kind of ordination was needed, some kind of public blessing by the accepted leaders. I felt the need for someone in spiritual authority to say something like: "Here is a beloved daughter of the church, equipped by God and through appropriate training to bring us God's message. Here ye her." The "victory" of getting the opportunity to teach both men and women tasted bitter.

At this point in my life I decided to quit fighting for the right to be a female leader in the church. I was sick of studying the issue "one more time." Because there was more freedom for me in that particular Christian Church, I decided to concentrate my time and energies on developing my gifts on my own, on developing a closer relationship with God, on becoming the kind of Christian woman who would be ready to step into leadership positions if they were opened to me in my lifetime. I decided to leave it up to those males in leadership positions to articulate the arguments and make room for women. I submitted the fight to others and became more deliberate in developing the gifts as much as I could. My bitterness diminished somewhat.

Over the years that congregation grew to accept me teaching adult classes occasionally, and they encouraged such leadership initiatives on my part as starting the prayer chain ministry, or beginning an annual Maundy Thursday Passover meal celebration. Eventually, I was even installed as chairperson of the Worship Committee, where I got to help plan worship services, among other duties.

In the midst of this era I recall a troubled woman visitor to our Sunday School class. I had heard her speak at a women's workshop once and remembered wishing that men could have heard such a gifted teacher. After attending my Sunday School class she came up to me and said that although it was clear that I was a good

teacher, she wondered how I could in clear conscience teach adult men. I told her that the elders had asked me to, and I asked her if she thought the men in my class had learned something. She said "yes" but suggested that perhaps I should be teaching through writing instead. I knew she was trying to find a legalistic loophole for me to get around I Timothy 2:11-12--a scripture she believed condemned what I was doing.

One other opportunity God opened for me at this congregation was a class in leading singing for worship. I remember thinking on the Sunday I "debuted" that I wished I could have gotten over this "first time" experience at age 12 or 13 like the boys at my childhood church instead of as a grown woman. But the congregation was patient and gracious with me. The opportunity to actually lead the songs myself and direct the thoughts of people toward the main theme which I had prayerfully planned was a real blessing to me and evidently to the congregation, who affirmed those services with positive comments.

It was also during my 30s (in the 1980s) that God opened up the opportunity to me to become part of the *Integrity* ministry, and for ten years Bruce and I have co-edited this journal. Through this ministry I've been allowed to teach, encourage, and exhort through both the written page and personal contact with many ministers, lay leaders, and "regular" members.

### Questions and Ponderings

Some of these questions and others may have come to your mind as you've listened to part of my personal story:

- If it is true that God equips a few women (as he equips a few men) to lead both men and women in church life, and if my sense of conflict and dilemma is not simply a result of being a non-submissive, domineering, refuses-to-stay-in-her-place female Christian, then why would God's

Spirit give me the kind of gifts he knew would be difficult to use in the Church of Christ? The answer: I don't know yet.

- Why didn't God move someone across my path who would encourage me to go to seminary and become a minister in another denomination? I'm not sure, although I could make some guesses, but it would all be conjecture.

• Would I have been happy and fulfilled as an ordained minister in another Christ-centered, Bible-respecting denomination? I don't know. I am close friends with two women ministers. And a few years ago I interviewed several women ministers for a paper I wrote for school. The married ones struggle with typical two-career problems and all of the women interviewed still struggle with discrimination from within their own congregations and from church hierarchy. Yet their eyes lit up at the memory of "that moment" when they knew Jesus was calling them into the ministry. They recount beloved mentors who gave them direction and encouragement along the path toward ministry. They know the joy of preaching the good news to the entire gathered family of God entrusted in their care, and they freely oversee their congregation's spiritual development toward maturity in Christ with the gifts God has given them.

• Why not enter seminary now? I've looked into it and it's always in the back of my mind as a second career once my teenagers are finished with college. But when I look at my current minister who is about my age with 20 plus years' experience under his belt, I know there is no replacing the lost time and experience I've missed.

- Do I want you to feel sorry for me? No, this article is not intended to make you feel sorry for Diane Kilmer. My life has not been wasted because I did not become a preaching minister. I believe that when we give our life to God, he meets us at the point of our brokenness and redeems as much of

it as possible within our cultural context on this sin-riddled planet. He's used to working within our closed-minded system of sin and injustice and ignorance, changing what is open to change, yet respecting his own self-imposed limitations in order to provide us free will.

### In my 40s--the 1990s

During the last eight years of the maze (my 40s) God has led me down corridors of opportunity to speak throughout Michigan at various denominational events on prayer and other topics. When we moved to Mt. Pleasant in 1990 we walked into the doors of a church whose motto is: "In essentials unity, in non-essentials liberty, in all things charity." Our Stone-Campbell unity background seems ideal for this eclectic community church. A serious attempt is made here to plug people into the life of the church according to their abilities, not by gender, so I have plenty of opportunities to teach teens and adults. I often lead in public prayer at the morning worship services and sometimes give little five minute "exhortations" from the pulpit Sunday mornings. God has also provided numerous opportunities for me to serve as a spiritual mentor to men and women younger than me--a direct answer to my anguished prayer years ago that I not be a discourager to younger Christians.

My 16-year-old daughter was recently asked to participate in a small group for developing leadership characteristics in teens--males and females--who already display such abilities. She's also in two choirs at school and would like to use her voice more directly for the Lord, so from time to time our worship team has asked her to help lead singing in worship. She's not at all interested in teaching or preaching (unlike her mother or her father), but her ability to evangelize her school friends one-on-one has been in evidence since elementary school and is nurtured by the current youth director--a woman.

- Shall we conclude, then, that everything is fine?

Rarely do I think about this issue these days. I am busy with very fulfilling activities which channel a portion of my abilities. However, I'll think everything is going along fine... until my own unexpected reaction to something proves differently. For instance, when I interviewed one of the women ministers for my paper five years ago, she began describing entering a chapel at seminary and, for the first time, hearing other women sing all the old familiar hymns, automatically changing nouns and pronouns into "she" and "her" and "daughters." Tears began pouring down my cheeks. I could hardly stop them. Somehow her story touched my loneliness and offered company to my own struggle with inadequate, biased language.

Just this past winter I was caught unawares again when I perused a Disciples of Christ publication at our kitchen table and came across a photo of young Christian Korean women dressed in beautiful native dress participating in a ceremony of ordination after completing their course in seminary. I burst into tears. I was stunned at my own flood of emotion. Somehow the picture of their joyful faces touched me deep down, where I had buried a longing to experience the same approval and blessing they were receiving.

### What Next?

The opportunities to use my leadership abilities in my current church home keep me very busy and, spiritually, this is one of the most exciting and satisfying times of my life. A more recent event should be mentioned here in closing, because it reflects the Great Physician's continuing care of my woundedness toward healing. A year ago I presented much of this article's material as a guest speaker to an adult Sunday School class at the end of their study of men's and women's roles in the church. Dredging the memories up and reflecting upon

their meaning had been a serious, emotional task for me, but God enabled me to share it.

After that class a man in his early 20s came up to me. We had gotten to know each other as members of the same, small church Care Group which meets bi-weekly in our homes. I consider him a deeply spiritual man who I'm sure will be a pillar in the Church wherever God places him. He said, "Diane, I never really knew about

all this. And on behalf of all the men in Christ's church, I want to apologize to you for the discrimination you experienced in the church. And I promise that whatever church I am in, I will do everything in my power for this not to happen to women again." The medicine of his words penetrated to the very deepest part of my pain, and the wound is healing.

---

Diane Kilmer earned a B.A. in English from Michigan State University and is occupied as a free-lance writer for businesses and magazines. She and her husband Bruce have two teenaged children.

## Toward Completing Our Spiritual House

NOREEN BRYANT

*As you come to him, the Living Stone--rejected by men but chosen by God, and precious to him--you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. I Peter 2:4-5.*

As Peter says, our house is *being built* as God continually works in us as individuals and as congregations. At this particular time in the life of our brotherhood, it is time to fill in some gaps in our house. Up to now, the stones which will fill these gaps have been sitting in a pile next to the house, anxiously awaiting the time when they will be pressed into the service which "God has prepared in advance for (them) to do" (Eph. 2:10). When these stones are put to the use God has intended, we will have a sturdier structure, better able to please God than before.

Throughout the Church of Christ these living stones are ready to serve as God has designed them. They are women who have been given certain talents specifically for supporting and enhancing the life of the body as a whole, and in contributing to the corporate worship of God. However, within our brotherhood they are forbidden to use their spiritual gifts in the same way men can. While

women can and do serve in innumerable ways, and while some churches are loosening traditional restrictions on women's roles, many women are prevented from serving in ways in which they are specifically gifted and called to serve.

For example, women are often not allowed to read from scripture in the assembly, lead a prayer, serve communion, or even usher. They cannot baptize. They cannot lead discussions where a male adult or a male teenager is present. They cannot serve in any administrative, decision-making, or planning capacity, such as is often done in the role of deacon. In some congregations, women feel prohibited even from participating in Sunday School discussions. Because we suppress women from participating in these types of service, we are undermining the spiritual and numerical growth of our congregations. We are also not doing what we strive to do: we are not following

the Bible "without addition or subtraction," and we are not imitating as closely as we can the ideals of the body life and worship of the first century church.

### Defining Terms

I would like to stress that in this article I am not discussing any type of service which carries with it any authority of one person over another, such as the office of elder. I am specifically talking about the various services Christians are commanded to perform for each other in two areas: administration of the Body as a whole, and the planning and carrying out of some of the various functions of corporate worship. What these two areas have in common are that they serve to help the *body as a whole* as it strives to glorify God.

There are certain types of people, men and women, who have been given gifts by God to perform such service. While they can and do serve in other areas, they are best used when they can serve with the talents God has given them.

### Women's Motivation for Service in the Body

Why can't women who feel called to serve the Body as a whole be content with the status quo? Why can't they just serve in other ways? What's their *real* motivation for working in what are the more visible and managerial areas of service in the church? Is it because they want the attention? Is it because they think they can do it better than those who are doing it now? Aren't they just disregarding what the Bible says about women being quiet?

Women who want to serve the Body as a whole have three main motivations:

1. They believe that the church is not following the Bible when women are suppressed from such service.

2. They have been called, i.e., they have identified their God-given talents as those which would be put to best use in administration or worship.

3. They want to follow the biblical command to use the gifts that God has given them.

Here is an expansion of these three points:

**Motivation #1:** *The church is not following the Bible when women are suppressed from such service.* I Corinthians 14:34 and I Timothy 2:11-12 (where Paul commands women to "learn in quietness and full submission" and "remain silent in the churches") are the primary passages that are being used to support all suppression of women from serving the Body as a whole. But even these passages do not prohibit women from serving the Body as a whole in many ways. There is no biblical reason why certain strictures against women have developed in our brotherhood--implicit or explicit prohibitions against such things as serving communion, being an usher, taking up the collection, leading singing, or interpreting the service for the hearing impaired, for example.

Furthermore, if we do not take these passages in isolation, but rather treat them in the context of the original audience and in the context of the overall message of the New Testament, we can see that Paul was not issuing an order for all women to remain silent for all time. Instead, he was concerned "that the church be strengthened by believers showing respect for others and for God as they exercise their spiritual gifts. Such respect must necessarily take account of accepted social practices. If within a particular social order, it is disgraceful for women to speak in church--and it was in this case--then she shows disrespect by doing so and should remain silent" (NIV Study Bible, p. 1755). Obviously, it is not disrespectful or shocking for a woman to speak anywhere in public in today's social order. Given this interpretation, there is no reason why women cannot serve in corporate worship.



No matter how we interpret Paul's "women in silence" passages, it is clear that we are currently erring by overemphasizing these verses and elevating them beyond their intended meaning. Overtly or covertly, intentionally or unintentionally, we as a church wave these passages as banners for wholesale suppression. This is often defended as "erring on the side of caution," but it is erring nonetheless. The negative repercussions of our error is evident--both on individuals who have been suppressed and on the Body as a whole.

Furthermore, blanket suppression of women from service to the Body as a whole is clearly not indicated anywhere in the Bible--and women's participation in serving the Body is treated as a given in some passages. For example, from I Corinthians 11:5 it is clear that women indeed prayed and prophesied in the assembly in the early church. Jesus had close women friends and followers, including Mary, Martha, and Magdalene. Then, too, Paul begins his list in Romans 16 with commendation of Phoebe, a deaconess, and lists nine other women in that passage as being of special note. Finally, there is no mention of gender limitation in any of Paul's descriptions of how the Body is to work together (Phil. 2:2-4; Romans 12:3-8; Eph. 4:11-13; Col. 3:15-17, I Cor. 12:12-31, I Peter 4:10). Rather, the emphasis is on love, on humility, and on Jesus. As Galatians 3:28 says, "there is neither male nor female in Christ."

**Motivation #2:** *They have been called specifically to such service.*

Besides being motivated by obedience to the Bible, women are motivated to serve the Body as a whole because they have identified their talents as those which would be put to best use in administration or worship. (There are many other roles in the church. In fact, most men and women are not called to roles of administration, and can easily identify and thrive in the area in which

God has called them to serve.) As with all gifts and calls to service, the talent for administration is from God and, through past performance in other areas, such women have shown to themselves and others that they possess the qualities necessary to get things done or to edify in the overall life of the Body. We all can easily identify the women in our congregations who possess these particular talents, just as surely as we can name the women leaders in the Bible, including Deborah, Priscilla, Esther, Lydia, Magdalene, and Phoebe.

Precisely because our brotherhood does prohibit women from serving the Body as a whole, women who feel called to do so make doubly sure that their motives are pure. They do indeed follow Paul's words concerning one's role in the life of the congregation: "Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the measure of faith God has given you." They are convinced of their calling to the depths of their souls after much prayer, discussion, research, struggle, and Bible study.

**Motivation #3:** They believe they must obey the calling.

The third motivation for women who have been gifted to serve the Body as a whole is that, as Paul says in II Corinthians 5:14-15: "Christ's love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died. And he died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves, but for him who died for them and was raised again." Christ's love motivates us to live for him and for those he loves by serving in the way God constructed us to serve.

Women desire to serve the Body because, as Paul says in Ephesians 6:7, "Serve wholeheartedly, as if you were serving the Lord, not men." Women with administrative and edification gifts cannot

serve wholeheartedly if they are prohibited from using their gifts. They also take very seriously, as all Christians do, the admonition that "each one should use *whatever gift has been received* to serve others, faithfully administering God's grace in its various forms. If anyone speaks, he should do it as one speaking the very words of God. If anyone serves, that person should do it with the strength God provides, so that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ (I Peter 4:10-11).

A final note on motivation: Women who desire to serve in administration or in the worship service are often handed an immediate judgment that goes something like this: "If you want to do such visible things, you are lacking in humility; that's reason enough to prevent you from doing such things. You'd better examine your motives." Why do some in the brotherhood automatically believe that a woman's motivation to serve in such an area is less than pure? Men are not typically accused of a lack of humility if they want to serve the Body as a whole. They are instead evaluated and, if found gifted in that area, they are encouraged and used in that particular capacity. We must be careful to assume the best from our brothers and sisters.

### **Why Won't We Take the First Step?**

Now that we have looked at why women are motivated to serve in the areas of administration and worship, we can analyze why it is so difficult for us as congregations to take any steps toward rectifying their suppression.

#### **Reason 1: A continuum of beliefs**

The issue of women's roles in the church is not a simple matter of two opposing viewpoints. It's very hard to pin down a place at which to begin any kind of discussion, because there is a long, detailed continuum of beliefs and positions based on those beliefs. There are also those who

do not even consider this an issue. People's interpretation of scriptures regarding individuals' roles varies widely. However, no matter where we fall on the continuum, we're brothers and sisters in Jesus, and that's our common ground.

#### **Reason 2: An emotional issue**

This issue is particularly emotional for men and women. It touches us to the core of our identity as Christians (our "place" in God's kingdom)--the most precious facet of who we are.

#### **Reason 3: The "Police"**

Many churches indeed have begun discussing this issue as a body, and are working through the questions such a discussion generates. However, they may fear "policeman" congregations or groups within congregations. These people may speak out against, intimidate, or even threaten to formally disfellowship congregations or groups which pay attention to the issue of women's roles. These "policemen" squelch or at least scare other congregations into avoiding discussion of this topic. Often their suspicions and threats are not based on adequate knowledge of the situation. Is this brotherly love?

Whatever the difficulty, we must begin the process of letting women serve as they have been called. To put it off any longer has many negative effects, on individuals and on our churches.

### **Avoiding the Issue of Women's Roles: Negative consequences on individuals**

1. *We are not connecting with each other as brothers and sisters.* Because we don't often discuss the issue of women's roles, nobody knows exactly where he or she stands in relation to the rest of their fellowship. People on both extremes have no way to get a "reality check" by hearing what others honestly believe. People in the middle have no platform on which to air their questions and opinions. People

who can't decide how they feel have no opposing viewpoints or interpretations to help them decide. We forget that we are brothers and sisters, and that God's love will transcend all our differences. As Christians we ought to be able to talk about our differences. For "speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ" (Eph. 4:15). Talking about this issue will help us grow closer to each other and closer to Christ.

2. *Wasted time and energy.* When people who have gifts to support the Body of Christ are stifled, they won't let themselves sit still and be wasted: they try all manner of ways to channel their motivation to serve the Body. Their energy is wasted trying to creatively and innovatively work within or around the existing parameters, or trying to fit their talents into modes of service for which they are not suited.

3. *Participation in corporate worship is incomplete.* The formal, Sunday morning worship of God--what should be the most precious, sacred, beautiful time of the week--that time where the Body grows closer to each other and closer to God--is often a source of frustration for women with gifts such as song leading, public prayer, and public encouragement. Women who have spiritual gifts which would benefit corporate worship are being hindered from fully praising God, and the assembly is less rich for their exclusion. For women with the gifts of corporate edification, the worship service can become a passive exercise. How horrible it is that this frustration can overshadow a time meant only for fellowship, for praise, for love, for sacredness.

4. *Would-be servant-leaders will not be able to recognize their gifts or practice using them.* Many books have been written and countless seminars have been held on the topic of discovering and using one's talents. It's telling that this is

an issue for so many women. They spend years trying, and can't figure out what "part of the Body" they are supposed to be. Many can't identify their niche because they have been called to some form of administration, but they are unable to point to this as valid use of their talents.

5. *Some women use it as an excuse to do nothing.* The most insidious result of the suppression of women from certain roles in the church is that some women have used the idea of submission and being silent in the churches as an excuse to justify their own laziness or unwillingness to serve. As James says, "Anyone, then, who knows the good he ought to do and doesn't do it, sins" (James 4:17).

### **Avoiding the Issue of Women's Roles: Negative consequences on the Church as a body**

While keeping women from serving the Body is harmful to those women, it is infinitely more harmful to the church itself in several ways:

1. *Leaders are frustrated.* Imagine that you are an elder with a large pool of talented people with the ability to get things done and to organize meaningful worship services. Each one of these people is willing--no, yearning--to contribute their talent to the church. Each one feels specifically called by God to serve the Body as a whole. You just *know* that God has given you this ideal mix of people to turn your congregation into a wonderful instrument to glorify God. But wait! You can't let half of them so much as read a scripture or serve communion, much less serve in any official capacity in the church because they're women. I believe most church leaders have dealt with this frustration in some degree.

2. *Service is inefficient.* If people cannot serve in a way in which they are gifted, they will try other forms of service. For example, perhaps my talent lies in

administration, but in my congregation that is strictly the purview of the elders and deacons. However, I deeply desire to serve in some capacity, so I try other methods of service for which I am not suited, or which can be performed far better by others. I won't be very good at what I'm not gifted to do, and my stepping into an unsuitable role may indeed prevent someone else from serving more effectively as they have been called.

3. *Information is lost.* When women cannot be specifically designated to serve as administrators, half of the information and knowledge available to us is lost. Women are not involved in meetings, in decision-making, in information sharing, in strategic planning. I'm sure each one of us has a story about how keeping women out of the loop has had detrimental effects on the church.

4. *We build unnecessarily complicated organizational structures.* With the best of intentions, some congregations have sought to include women in administration without upsetting those who do not believe such inclusion is biblical. To do so, they build organizational structures wherein women do the work of deacons but are called something else, such as "Coordinators." This is a good solution to enabling women to serve, but sometimes the leaders then feel they should also maintain the traditionally all-male group known as deacons--and they must give them something to do which differentiates the deacons from the coordinators. Because the deacons are another layer of organization, wrongful assumptions about authority of one group over another may develop. People begin to think of the church organizational structure in worldly terms of power, hierarchy, and position rather than the way we should think about the church's organization: a convenient way for different groups of equal Christians to work together to nurture the Body.

5. *We aren't using all of our resources.* It's clear to see that, statistically speaking, if we only use half the adults in the congregation as servants, we are unlikely to come up with the best possible pool. Just like in the parable, we are wasting our talents. Because we do not view our resources as including women servants, we are forced sometimes to press into service some men who may not be ideally suited for the particular job. This is harmful to those men and to the church.

6. *We are a city on a hill, but our lights are dimmed.* How can we "let (our) light shine before men, so that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven" (Matt. 5:16) when, in suppressing women, we are doing something that both the world and many in the church see as wrong? A friend of mine points out that, if he had any daughters, he would have serious reservations about raising them in such an oppressive environment as our church. He also points out that it bothers him that the church teaches his sons to suppress women in so many ways. Craig Keener in *Paul, Women, and Wives* points out that, because of the church's discriminatory views on women, we are seen as anachronistic and oppressive by those looking for a church home. If we continue to ignore the issue of women's equality, we will certainly not be seen as "above reproach" (1 Tim. 3:2) or have a good reputation with outsiders (1 Tim. 3:7). As Keener says, "It is necessary to challenge our culture where it departs from the values of the Kingdom; it is likewise necessary to relate to our culture where it has preserved some of the values of the Kingdom." He adds, "Our witness is at stake!"

### **Toward Completing Our Spiritual Home**

Those who advocate increasing women's roles as servants to the Body as a whole don't want to cause a church split. They also know better than to advocate overnight change. However, they know

women's talents are currently being underutilized and often completely wasted. They know how harmful this is to individual Christians and to the church as a whole. They also know that many church leaders agree with them. And, being gifted by God with the ability to serve the Body as a whole in administrative capacities, they know that without the support and the impetus of the church leadership, no orderly or biblical change can be made.

### What church leaders must do to solve the problem

The inclusion of women to serve in administrative areas and in the worship service must begin with our leaders--our elders. We ask that our leaders acknowledge the urgency and importance of resolving the issue of biblical church roles. In humility and confidence, we trust our leaders to shepherd our individual congregations through the process in the way they know best.

We must also place a great deal of emphasis on communicating *proactively* with our neighboring congregations about what we are doing. We can maintain unity, clarity, and good fellowship only by openly informing others of our direction, our reasoning, and our motives with regard to this issue.

### What we must do as a church family

In order to strengthen our spiritual house, we must acknowledge the need to forsake our erroneous exclusion of women from serving the Body as a whole. In order to determine where and how women may serve, I suggest the following steps:

---

Noreen Bryant, who holds a B.A. from the University of Michigan, works free-lance as a marketing copy writer and editor. Although she is currently in West Germany for six months with her husband Bruce and their two pre-school children, Noreen normally serves as layout editor for *Integrity* magazine. She is an active member of the Heritage Church of Christ in Clawson, Michigan.

**CHURCHES OF CHRIST INCONSISTENCIES!** "I Permit Not a Woman..." To Remain Shackled by Robert H. Rowland. "Can a woman ask aloud for the song leader to repeat the number he has announced for the next song?" "Can a woman confess her Lord aloud before she is baptized?" These are only two of hundreds of questions asked by this very relevant book. Rowland's book needs to be read by all who are dealing with this issue in the church today and by those that are ignoring this issue at the peril of being irrelevant in the 21st century. How inconsistent have we been in the Churches of Christ in the roles we have allowed women? Read this book and see. It is \$11.50 (postage paid), Lighthouse Publishing, 525 Northwest St., Newport, OR 97365, phone (541) 265-9856.

1. We must spend time together as congregations in prayer and study about the issue.

2. We must frequently check ourselves to make sure our motives spring from love and service, not from any desire to think of ourselves as better than others.

3. Finally, as each Christian deals with this issue, we must keep Paul's admonition before us:

If you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any fellowship with the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and purpose. Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others (Philippians 2:1-4).

The cement that binds us living stones together in our spiritual house is Jesus. His love and his example of serving in love make us like-minded--one in spirit and purpose. As Paul says in Ephesians 2:21: "*In him* the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. And *in him* you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit." Only in Jesus can our spiritual house be complete. Let us give glory to God by strengthening our spiritual house: let each and every stone be used to support the others as God "prepared us in advance to do."

## What I Like About Anna

HOY LEDBETTER

I have been reading the Christmas texts and so have had another interesting visit with an elderly woman named Anna. As you no doubt remember, she was present in the temple when Jesus' parents brought him up to present him to the Lord.

And why was she there at the very hour Jesus arrived? Providence, we might truly say. But, as a matter of fact, her presence was to be expected, for she was always there.

Luke said, "She never left the temple but worshiped there with fasting and prayer night and day." That probably does not mean that she actually lived in the temple, but, as we would put it today, she "never missed a service." I have a special fondness for believers like that.

Anna was a "prophetess." Some versions call her a "prophet," but Luke used the feminine form of the word.

There is no real difference in meaning; both terms denote the same task: declaring the message of God. I think of my work as being essentially similar to hers, since the prophet appears to be the closest New Testament counterpart of the modern preacher.

Anna's task relative to Jesus was ongoing: "She continued to speak of him to all those who were looking for the redemption of Jerusalem." In other words, she had a protracted public prophetic ministry.

I have learned a hard lesson from Anna. Her presence in the record helped to convince me, many years ago, that the ministry of the word was open to women as well as to men. My presuppositions resisted that conclusion, but the only escape was to define prophesying in a way that would be both unreasonable and unscriptural. And that just would not do.

---

Hoy Ledbetter, founding editor and Editor-in-Chief of *Integrity* for 15 years, currently ministers to the Christian Church in Rome, Georgia.

## A Daughter of Abraham

DEBORAH JANE CHOATE SHEPHERD

For many years, I have enjoyed teaching children to sing "Father Abraham." Singing the song involves some jumping around and waving arms--which we don't get to do that often in church--but the thing I have always loved best is that it puts into the minds and hearts of children that we are all sons of Abraham:

*"Father Abraham had many sons,  
Many sons had Father Abraham.  
I am one of them, and so are you,  
So let's just praise the Lord!"*

You see, I always willingly made a little translation in my mind whenever I read or heard that we are "sons of God," or "sons of Abraham," or "the brethren"...It was not ever difficult for me to say to myself, "Of course, that means me, too." I had long understood that both male and female were created in the image of God, and that the Bible has a great deal of feminine imagery about God. I have even argued that to call us all sons is a good thing, since in the times of the Bible

writers, only sons could inherit, so it raises women to the status of inheritors to refer to them as sons.

Then one Sunday morning, just a few months ago, Stephen Eckstein, Bible professor at Rochester College (previously Michigan Christian College) was speaking to our congregation. His lesson was from Luke 15:10-19. To tell you the truth, I couldn't tell you much about what he had to say about it because when he started to tell the story and read, with emphasis, the passage "...And here is this woman, a daughter of Abraham...", I was overcome! It was the first time I heard, from the pulpit, the words "daughter of Abraham" attributed to Jesus--I didn't have to do that little translating thing I always did! I can hardly put into words what a feeling it was to be able to simply know that **I am a daughter of Abraham!**

---

Deborah Jane Choate Shepherd was brought up among women of faith: mother, sisters, aunts, grandmothers--daughters of Abraham all. Debi now resides in Troy, Michigan, and works and worships with the Troy Church of Christ.

## Selected Bibliography Regarding Women and the Church

Bilezikian, Gilbert, *Beyond Sex Roles: What the Bible Says About a Woman's Place in the Church and Family*, Baker (1985).

Grenz, Stanley J. with Kjesbo, Denise Muir, *Women in the Church: A Biblical Theology of Women in Ministry*, InterVarsity Press (1995).

Groothuis, Rebecca Merrill, *Women Caught in Conflict: The Cultural War between Traditionalism and Feminism*, Baker (1994).

Gundry, Patricia, *Heirs Together*, Zondervan (1980).

Hayter, Mary, *The New Eve in Christ: The Use and Abuse of the Bible in the Debate about Women in the Church*, Eerdmans (1987).

Hull, Gretchen Gaebel, *Equal to Serve: Women and Men in the Church and Home*, Revell (1987).

Jewett, Paul K., *Man as Male and Female, A Study in Sexual Relationships from a Theological Point of View*, Eerdmans (1975).

Jewett, Paul K., *The Ordination of Women: An Essay on the Office of Christian Ministry*, Eerdmans (1980).

Keener, Craig S., *Paul, Women, and Wives: Marriage and Women's Ministry in the Letters of Paul*, Hendrickson (1992).

Kroeger, Richard Clark and Kroeger, Catherine Clark, *"I Suffer Not a Woman": Rethinking 1 Timothy 2:11-15 in*

I began to cry. When the service was over, I was exultant. I tried to tell several people what had been so overwhelming, but few seemed to understand. I thanked Stephen--I think he really knew what it meant.

Okay, the point of this story is: please, for the sake of half of the congregation before you, do not ignore the feminine in reference to God and the people of God. When it is appropriate, emphasize it, and not just on Mother's Day. It is not necessary to start calling God "she," but there are plenty of ways to refer to God as simply God. When asked, "Who are you?" the answer from God was: "I Am"--not "I am He..."

By the way, I'm going to keep on singing "Father Abraham had many sons"--"many daughters" just doesn't scan. Let's just praise the Lord!

*the Light of Ancient Evidence*, Baker (1992).

Malcolm, Kari Torjesen, *Women at the Crossroads: A Path Beyond Feminism and Traditionalism*, InterVarsity Press (1982).

Martin, Faith McBurney, *Call Me Blessed: The Emerging Christian Woman*, Eerdmans (1988).

Osburn, Carroll D. (ed.), *Essays on Women in Earliest Christianity* (2 Vol.), College Press (1993).

Rowland, Robert H., *"I Permit Not a Woman..." To Remain Shackled*, Lighthouse Pub. Co., Newport, Oregon (1991).

Tucker, Ruth A. and Liefeld, Walter, *Daughters of the Church: Women and Ministry from New Testament Times to the Present*, Academic Books, Zondervan (1987).

Van Leeuwen, Mary Stewart, *Gender and Grace: Love, Work and Parenting in a Changing World*, InterVarsity Press (1990).

Wright, Linda Raney, *A Cord of Three Strands*, Revell (1987). [Out-of-print; a few copies are available from Christians for Biblical Equality, (see address below).]

**Christians for Biblical Equality**

PO Box 7155  
127 West Winifred Street  
St. Paul, MN 55107-0155  
(612) 224-2416

## Bending the Twig

LAQUITA AND ELTON HIGGS

Twice a month I attend a M.O.M.S. (Meeting with Other Mothers for Support) group at church, which some of the young women lead. I'm always the oldest mother there, but the young women graciously include me. We pay a dollar per child for babysitters to watch our children play together, so it is a time for us mothers to get to know each other better and talk about our children. Sometimes we have a speaker or do a craft, but our ongoing activity is centered on a book which is particularly well-suited for group discussion, *What Every Mom Needs* by Elisa Morgan and Carol Kuykendall, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 1995, \$14.99). It is not a book on parenting, but is designed to encourage and help a mother grow as a person and as a woman of God, and thus be a better Mom. The nine chapters are based on the nine basic needs of mothers of young children (identified by the authors through questionnaires), such as knowing that being a mother is truly significant, and the need to keep perspective on what is important in life. You might want to start a M.O.M.S. group in your congregation.

\*\*\* Keeping hold of what is important in life came up in a recent conversation with a woman who, six months ago, lost her only child, a 16-year-old daughter, in a car accident. Great grief forces one to concentrate on hard-core truths, and Karen repeatedly mentioned two things about parenting. First, don't get upset about the "fluff," as Karen put it, by which she meant such things as hairstyles, or the number of holes pierced in an ear. In other words, choose the battles that are truly important, else you may find yourself fighting constantly with your child, particularly if he or she is in the teen years. Karen's second piece of advice: do your best to prepare your child for Heaven. That may sound overly dramatic, but we all need to be reminded that we have no greater job than doing all that we can to help our children to know and obey God. These dear children are lent to us only for a time, and we must use that time well.

Training our children is only one step in

the process of parenting. The next one is often just as hard: at the proper time we must let go of control over our children's lives. Parents of young children should occasionally remind themselves that they are preparing their children to be independent adults, responsible before God, and that there will come a time when they must step back and let the children stand alone. On the other hand, parents of adult children need to take stock and evaluate whether they are deliberately keeping their children dependent. We've been disturbed recently by seeing good, well-meaning Christians fall into the trap of too much interference in the lives of adult married children, whose marital problems have been made far worse by such "help."

Certainly, the parents of adult children should be there to pray and give temporary help when needed, and in some special circumstances longer-term help must be given, but not with the expectation that such help is permanent. Grandparents are especially valuable as they love and lend stability to the lives of the grandchildren, but such things as constantly giving the adult children advice, expecting the families to take vacations together every year, and giving major financial support on a long-term basis all too quickly become harmful and then a focus for problems in the marriage.

\*\*\* Suggestion: The Hanna-Barbara video series for children, *The Greatest Adventures*, are re-tellings in cartoon version of some of the major stories of the Bible, with each video being about 30 minutes long. Some titles: "Noah's Ark," "David and Goliath," and "Daniel and the Lions' Den." Each story begins on a modern archeological dig, where three of the workers fall into a hidden hole and find a door which takes them into the past, and thus into the Bible story. The three modern cartoon characters are in the story; otherwise the narratives adhere closely to the biblical accounts. The tapes are distributed by Sparrow and are \$9.99 each.

\*\*\* We need and welcome more suggestions for Christian parenting from YOU. Contact us at 9 Adams Lane; Dearborn, Michigan 48120; or by e-mail, "Ehiggs@umich.edu".