

HOPEFELLOWSHIP

WOMEN IN MINISTRY

First, it is essential not to read a passage of the Bible in isolation from the rest of Scripture. In other words, we cannot take one or two verses and build an entire doctrine on them. Instead, we must hold those passages in their proper and meaningful place and seek the full perspective of what the Bible as a whole teaches on the subject.

Second, it is crucial to understand the original context of each passage. Who was it written to? What specific situation was being addressed? Only after answering those questions can we apply the passage to our lives today. Without that grounding, we risk misapplying God's truth in ways that the biblical authors never intended.

With those principles in mind, we turn to an important question: **the role of women in ministry**. This issue matters greatly because in most churches, women make up more than half of the congregation and are increasingly asked to fulfill ministry roles. However, there are some key passages that point out that the roles of ministry may be reserved for men only. So how does God want to use women in ministry? What roles are they called to fulfill? To answer well, we must let the whole counsel of Scripture speak.

WOMEN IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

From the very beginning, God used women in significant ways:

- **Miriam** is called a prophet (Exodus 15:20), one who heard from God and proclaimed His word.
- **Deborah** (Judges 4–5) was a prophetess, a judge over Israel, and a military leader.
- **Huldah** (2 Kings 22:11–20) spoke God's word to King Josiah, the high priest Hilkiah, and the leaders of Jerusalem. Her authority was acknowledged and obeyed.
- **Esther** delivered her people from destruction.
- **Hannah's prayer** stands as one of the most powerful prayers in Scripture.
- **Ruth** is commended for her faithfulness.
- **Rahab** is honored for her courage and faith in aiding Israel.
- **Women are even listed in the lineage of Jesus** as a testimony to their role in God's plan.

In short, women were called to speak God's word, lead His people, intercede in prayer, and carry forward His purposes. The Old Testament gives a clear answer: God uses women in ministry in varied and significant ways.

The prophet Joel foresaw this when he wrote, "Your sons and daughters will prophesy... Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days" (Joel 2:28–29). Peter confirmed this prophecy of all people carrying out the work of the Spirit was fulfilled at Pentecost (Acts 2).

WOMEN IN THE MINISTRY OF JESUS

Jesus elevated and included women in remarkable ways:

- **Anna** was a prophetess who recognized the infant Messiah (Luke 2:36–38).
- Jesus' ministry was financially supported and accompanied by women such as **Mary**, **Joanna**, and **Susanna** (Luke 8:1–3).
- Women often demonstrated spiritual insight before others did: **the Samaritan woman**, **the widow with her offering**, **Mary of Bethany**, and **others**.
- Women were the first witnesses of His resurrection, entrusted to proclaim the Good News (Mark 16:9; John 20:17–18).

WOMEN IN THE EARLY CHURCH

The New Testament church continued this pattern:

- **Women joined the disciples in prayer** (Acts 1:14).
- **Philip's daughters** prophesied (Acts 21:8–9).
- **Priscilla**, alongside her husband Aquila, taught Apollos and was called a “fellow worker” by Paul (Acts 18:24–26; Romans 16:3–4). Notably, Priscilla's name is often listed first.
- **Phoebe** was a deacon and a trusted leader (Romans 16:1–2).
- Paul recognized women such as **Tryphena**, **Tryphosa**, and **Persis** for their hard work in the Lord (Romans 16:12).
- Paul also commended **Junia** as an “outstanding apostle” (Romans 16:7).

Like the Old Testament, the New Testament demonstrates that God calls women into diverse and influential roles. Based on what he saw in the early church and what his understanding of Jesus' teaching led him to believe, Paul affirmed in Galatians 3:26–28 that men and women alike are equal heirs in Christ.

WRESTLING WITH THE DIFFICULT PASSAGES

Of course, we must also acknowledge the passages that speak of women involved in ministry in very restrictive terms (1 Corinthians 11:3–16; 14:32–38; 1 Timothy 2:8–15). These appear to contradict the many examples of women leading, prophesying, and teaching that appear throughout the rest of the biblical narrative.

We must in no way ignore these passages and they must be deeply considered because they are an insight into the early church and its practices.

So, we start with context questions. Were these instructions written for specific situations in particular cities, rather than meant as universal prohibitions? Were they reflections of cultural realities in the first century? Or was Paul making a point that has been misunderstood outside its context?

These are the questions that have fueled much debate. And yet, as stated at the outset, we cannot take one or two passages and build an entire doctrine. We must weigh them against the broader witness of Scripture. When we do, I believe the evidence points to the above passages as being contextual to a specific concern (yet important) but throughout Scripture it is apparent God calls and women to minister fully to His people.

OUR CONVICTION AT HOPE FELLOWSHIP

At Hope Fellowship, we believe Scripture provides ample support for women serving in any role of ministry. We do not dismiss the more restrictive passages but interpret them in light of the whole counsel of God's Word. We recognize that every believer—man or woman—must take care not to be a stumbling block to the gospel and that a person is not called or disqualified from ministry based on gender but rather based upon a sense of calling both individually and corporately, a commitment to being a student of God's Word, and a character being molded and shaped by God's people and God's Spirit.

Above all, we remain open to the guidance of the Holy Spirit and committed to praying for wisdom as we navigate the entirety of God's counsel. After looking at the entirety of Scripture, we believe God invites all His children, including women, to use their gifts fully to build up the church and advance the Good News of Jesus Christ.