

MINISTERIAL INTERNSHIP PROGRAM

SEMINAR IV

Theme: "The Pentecostal Minister and Relationships"

Women in Ministry

H. Lynn Stone

I. THE BIBLICAL FOUNDATION FOR THE MINISTRY OF WOMEN

A. Introduction

The world abounds with the marvelous ministry of women. From the opening chapters of Genesis to the closing verses of the Apocalypse, and from the time Adam was elated with the presence of Eve until the last newborn baby was cradled in its mother's arms, women have comforted, soothed, encouraged, strengthened and enlightened mankind, and bettered the earth upon which we live. Yet, many despise their ministry, degrade their capabilities, and resist the Spirit of God's grace working through them.

B. Both Male and Female Reveal the Glory of God

By himself alone, the male human does not completely reflect the glory of God nor can he fulfill the Divine commission. After God said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness," He then said, "and let THEM have dominion" (Genesis 1:26); and after the author states, "So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him," He then adds, "MALE and FEMALE created he THEM" (Genesis 1:27). After God "blessed THEM," His commission was, "Be FRUITFUL and MULTIPLY and REPLENISH the earth and subdue it"

(Genesis 1:28). Just as the male is dependent upon the female for the continuation of the race, so he is also dependent upon her in order to show forth the fullness of the glory of God.

Therefore, if the church is to completely reveal the glory of God to this world and ultimately to fulfill His commission, we must always allow God's Spirit to work among us in His own sovereign way, dividing to "each one" as He wills (1 Corinthians 12:11).

C. Women as Priests and Kings

Some have thought to excuse woman from ministry because of the Old Testament predominance of males in the Levitical Priesthood and the Davidic Monarchy. However, the New Testament declares every born again believer to be a priest in the Kingdom of God. John is clearly writing to the entire church, making no distinction between male and female, when he wrote, "Unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood, and hath made us kings and priests unto God and his Father" (Revelation 1:5, 6).

Likewise, the apostle Peter says, "For as much as ye know that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things as silver and gold... but with the precious blood of Christ, as a lamb without spot" (1 Peter 1:18, 19). To these same redeemed ones he says a few verses later, "But ye are a chosen generation, a ROYAL PRIESTHOOD, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvelous light" (2:9).

In Christ Jesus women have the full rights of the royal lineage of the Lord of Lords and the full responsibilities of the priesthood after

the order of Mechisedec, King of peace and righteousness. As Paul says, "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus" (Galatians 3:28).

D. Women as Pentecostal Prophets

No group of Christians should appreciate the Biblical mandate for the ministry of women more than Pentecostals. When Peter explained to the multitude the outpouring of the Spirit, he was not satisfied to simply quote from Joel the promise that God would pour out His Spirit on "all flesh." But he continued, "And your sons AND YOUR DAUGHTERS shall prophesy . . . And on my servants and on MY HANDMAIDENS I will pour out in those days of my Spirit; AND THEY SHALL PROPHESEY" (Acts 2:17, 18).

II. THE HISTORICAL INTERPRETATION OF WOMEN AND MINISTRY

A. Jesus and the Ministry of Women

1. The Heathen Cultures of Christ's Day

In order to truly appreciate the emphasis of Jesus on the privileges and roles of women, one must have a little knowledge of the manner in which women were so often degraded and despised in the heathen cultures of His day. Kittle gives an excellent opening summary in describing the woman in the contemporary world of the New Testament. "Characteristic of the traditional position and estimation of woman is a saying current in different forms among the Persians, Greeks, and Jews in which

man gives thanks that he is not an unbeliever or uncivilized, that he is not a woman and that he is not a slave" (TDNT, p. 777).

Whereas, the Bible places woman alongside of man, the heathen cultures almost universally considered the female to be an inferior creature. Hinduism teaches that "woman has no soul and it is a sin for her to read the Vedas, the holy books of the Brahman" (Russel Prohl, Woman in the Church, p. 50). Buddhism treats woman with similar disdain, seeing her not simply as a being to be rejected but as an object to be despised. "It is said that for the Buddhist woman there are eighteen special hells, but if she lives virtuously through 1,500 births she may be born as a boy and at last reach Nirvana" (Prohl, p. 50).

Even though there may have been some exceptions from time to time, as a general rule the Greek philosophers were no better in their esteem. An all time low may have been reached by Plato when he said women originated from immoral men who were cowards, implying they were little better than beasts. Aristotle, Plato's prodigious student, did not agree with his master in all matters but he differed little in his attitude toward women. He not only "regarded the inferiority of women as inherent in the sex" but also argued that only homosexual love "is capable of satisfying a man's highest and noblest aspirations" (Charles Ryrie, The Role of Women in the Church, p. 2).

2. Women and the Jews of Christ's Day

However, the heathen cultures that had little revelation of the truth of God were not much worse in their attitudes toward women than the Jews who began to look to their own traditions rather than to hold firmly to the truths of Scripture. Consider these excerpts from the Talmud.

Do not converse much with women, as this will ultimately lead to unchastity. He who gazes at a woman eventually comes to sin, and he who looks at a woman's heel will beget degenerate children ("Nedarim," XIX, p. 56).

A man shall never walk behind a woman along a road, even his own wife ... and whoever crosses a stream behind a woman will have no portion in the world to come. A man should walk behind a lion rather than a woman ("Berakoth," XXXI, p. 383-384).

It is small wonder that Jesus said of the Pharisees who followed these oral traditions that they "bind heavy burdens and grievous to be borne" (Matthew 23:4), and when one had been persuaded to their beliefs, "ye make him twofold more the children of hell than yourselves" (Matthew 23:15). Through their traditions they did "transgress the commandment of God" (Matthew 20:3) and "made them none effect" (Matthew 15:6). This was the attitude toward women prevalent among the religious leaders when Christ came to minister to all mankind.

3. Jesus' Teaching Concerning Women

Jesus' teaching concerning women was revolutionary. This is illustrated in His teaching on divorce. Even though Moses did grant a bill of divorce (because of "the hardness of man's

heart"), that is not what God intended from the beginning. Woman does not belong to the man any more than the man belongs to the woman. Marriage is founded on God's creation in which He made them one. What He has put together, "Let not man put asunder." If man does put away his wife for any reason other than fornication, he has sinned against her, degrading her in the eyes of society and making her to "become adulterated."

Such a radical teaching precludes all of those biased opinions which view women as mere possessions of men or which in any manner would make them have an inferior position to men. This does not destroy the headship of the husband. Rather, it forces the man to found his headship on the spirit of love rather than on physical, mental, emotional, social, or spiritual superiority. This was the manner of God's creation and the spirit in which Adam received Eve.

4. Jesus' Personal Ministry to Women

This radical emphasis of Christ is made even stronger by His own personal ministry in which women played such a prominent part. Women were involved in practically every aspect of His ministry, from the first annunciation to Mary until His ascension from the Mount of Olives. Not only did He minister to women (Matthew 15:21-28; Mark 5:21-34; John 4:6-42, etc.), but women were involved in His ministry (Luke 8:2, 3), ministered to Him (John 12:1-8), followed Him even to Calvary (Matthew 27:55, 56), determined to give Him a proper burial (Mark 16:1), were the first to

see Him after His resurrection (Mark 16:9), and were the first evangelists of His glorified estate (Matthew 28:1-10).

B. The Ministry of Women in the New Testament Church

The appreciation for women and their capabilities for ministry was not lost in the New Testament Church. Even though the church adhered to the cultural restrictions of that day, women were involved in nearly every aspect of the New Testament Church. Russel Prohl gives an overview (p. 70).

In the infant Apostolic Church, women played both a prominent and an important part. Priscilla instructed Apollos for the Christian ministry, but because of Hebrew and Greek custom, and Roman law, she taught him only when her husband was present. There are a number of Bible critics who suggest that Priscilla wrote the Epistle to the Hebrews. Some day we may learn that this is true. The four daughters of Philip served the Lord as women evangelists for many years, but to keep with the law their father supervised and assumed responsibility for their activity. Phoebe was a "servant of the church," a female deacon, a minister. She and Priscilla are two of the nine women mentioned by name in Romans 16.

While some have accused the apostle Paul of being unfair to women, it is he who gives the greatest declaration of their absolute freedom in Christ. "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus" (Galatians 3:28). This verse serves as the manifesto in the light of which all others must be viewed. Those of us who believe in "the verbal inspiration of the Bible" (Declaration of Faith, Article 1), simply cannot accept the contention of some that Paul taught

contradictory doctrines in his messages to the churches of Galatia when compared to his words given in his other writings.

C. The Ministry of Women in the Early Church

But the freedom of women in ministry did not continue for long in the early church. Possibly there is a hint of restrictions already present in Paul's exhortation to Timothy when he warns of evil days to come in which some would "depart from the faith ... forbidding to marry" (1 Timothy 4:1-3). By the time of Tertullian (160-230 A.D.) not only were women not allowed to minister freely, they were being blamed for the sins of the entire human race.

And do you not know that you are each an Eve? The sentence of God on this sex of yours lives in this age: the guilt must of necessity live too. You are the devil's gateway: you are the unsealer of the tree: you are the first deserter of the divine law: you are she who persuaded him whom the devil was not valiant enough to attack. You destroyed so easily God's image, man. On account of your desert -- that is, death -- even the Son of God had to die (Ryrie, p. 116).

Another extreme can be seen in the Gnostic Gospel according to Thomas. (The Gospel According to Thomas, Logion 114).

Simon Peter said to them (the risen Jesus and his disciples): Let Mary go out from among us, because women are not worthy of Life. Jesus said: See, I shall lead her, so that I will make her male, that she too may become a living spirit, resembling you males. For every woman who makes herself male will enter the Kingdom of Heaven.

Even though these may be considered extremes of the early church, nevertheless Kittel's summary presents a bleak picture of the ministry of women as time progressed further and further from the days of the apostles (Kittel, vol. 1, p. 789).

With the passage of time these women clergy were more and more restricted to activity in divine service, assistance at the baptism of women, visitation of women, the bringing of the elements for the Lord's Supper, etc. The true sacral functions ardently desired by some were not granted to them ... The history of the ministry of women finally ended for the time being in the convent; the title of deaconess was borne by the abbess in the early Middle Ages.

D. The Ministry of Women in the Church of God

Even though the reformers carried over many of the restrictions of the early church fathers toward the ministry of women, and most of the American denominations followed their example, in its formative years the Church of God was receptive to the ministry of women. As Dr. Dirksen says, "Five of the eight founding fathers of the Church of God were actually founding mothers" (Carolyn Dirksen, "Let Your Women Keep Their Silence," Lee College Library, p. 1).

One of the actions taken at the first General Assembly in 1906 was to provide for an annual meeting which would include women. "We, therefore, conclude an Assembly composed of elders and chosen men, and the women from each church, once each year to be of vast importance" (L. Howard Juillerat, "Brief History of the Church that is Now Recognized as the Church of God," in the Book of Minutes, General Assemblies, Church of God, 1922, page 8).

When the second annual assembly convened in Bradley County in January 1907, it is recorded that "Sister N.J. Lawson spoke briefly on the ministry of prayer," and the following year women were appointed as deaconesses, even though this action was rescinded in 1909.

It was decided that women who are qualified and feel the call to the work as given in Romans 16:2 in connection with Acts 6:3, which indicates that she is a female deacon and her work similar to a deacon, should be appointed by the church to minister. We further recommend her as the woman mentioned in Titus 2:3-5, which duty she should exercise as directed by the Spirit. She may also, along with the elder men, take her part of 1 Peter 5:1-4 (Minutes, 1908, p. 29).

While women played a vital role in the growth of the young denomination, as it took on more and more of an organizational structure they were increasingly forbidden to participate in most of the administrative activities and policy setting functions of the church. Nevertheless, even with all the restrictions, ladies in the Church of God have continued to be a powerful force through their strong evangelistic efforts, their zealous endeavors, their compassionate benevolence and their worldwide missionary ministries.

Tragically, however, the continued resistance to female ministry has begun to have a damaging effect upon the tremendously successful ministries of Church of God ladies. The percentage of female ministers in the Church of God shrank from 29% in 1913 to 9.2% in 1978 and dropped to approximately 8% in 1993.

This tragedy is illustrated in the life of a promising young lady who graduated from Lee in the early eighties. She testified openly to a call of God to full-time ministry. She was the recipient of the prestigious Tharp Award, which is given annually to the Lee graduate who demonstrates the potential of making the greatest contribution to the Church of God. After enrolling at the School of Theology she was told by a respected friend, "Why don't you just face the facts? There's no room today for a woman preacher in the Church of God." Having

dropped out of seminary without graduating, she is now a secretary for a secular business firm in central Florida.

We must encourage and train Church of God ladies for ministry. But where will we begin? What will we do? How can the Church of God "return to its first love" of the truth of Scripture and encourage every individual, whether male or female, to listen to the voice of a calling from another world, "Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature" (Mark 16:15).

III. THE APPLICATION TODAY

A. We Must Re-Emphasize the Scriptural Foundation

It is sad that some have taken two or three Scriptures out of context and used them to make over half of the Christians of the world actually feel guilty at times because of the call of God upon their lives.

An example of this "wrestling of Scripture" can be seen in the misuse of Paul's words to the Ephesians, and the companion passage in Colossians. They inevitably will begin with the instruction, "Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church" (Ephesians 5:22, 23). This is somehow seen as though the only "ministry" a woman can have is to make sure the male preacher becomes successful in HIS ministry.

However, notice that in verse 21 Paul says, "Submitting yourselves one to another in the fear of God." If the Christian characteristic of submission prohibits one from having a personal

ministry, then none of us could minister and fulfill Paul's directive of being submissive one to another. For a wife to be submissive unto her husband in no way forbids her to have a call of God upon her own life. As Paul says earlier in Ephesians, "But unto every one of us is given grace according to the measure of the gift of Christ" (4:7).

In reality, it is in submission that every saint finds the greatest strength. Consider the words of Paul to the Philippians.

"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. Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death -- even death on a cross" (Philippians 2:3-8, NIV).

"Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus!"

Every minister, male or female, should have the mind of Christ. However, herein lies one of the greatest opportunities for ladies to minister. You know how to demonstrate the true spiritual character of submission.

Therefore, we can see that some of the passages of Scripture, taken out of context, which have been used to DISCOURAGE ladies in ministry, are in reality, when placed in the proper setting, the very Scriptures that provide the foundation of why ladies should be involved in ministry. So the first priority must be to re-emphasize the Scriptural Foundation that all men and women stand equal before the Cross of Christ. Every Christian is called to minister. Each and every one can

say, "I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me" (Philippians 4:13).

B. We Must Learn From History

The history of both the world and the church stands as a grand instructor to inform us of what happens to mankind when women do not equally share in both the privileges and the responsibilities of human life on earth.

What happened to a heathen world whose wisest philosophers thought of women as being little more than beasts with no souls? It produced a Greco-Roman kingdom that collapsed because of its own inner rot and decay.

What happened to God's own chosen people whose leaders thought they would be contaminated to walk down the road side by side with a woman? They gave to us the Pharisees who rejected and crucified the very Son of God.

What happened to a Roman church whose men taught that the sin of woman was somehow more heinous than the sin of the male? It codified the error of celibacy with its monks, monasteries, cardinals, pope, and Vatican City.

What happened to a European church that, even in reform, insisted that there is no place for women in ministry? It brought forth a religious intellectualism that provided the human rationale for the holocaust.

What happened to an American church that insisted the only place for a woman to minister is at home? It turned into a dead formalism that wrote its own epitaph from a seminar bed, "God is dead!"

What has happened to the Church of God since the percentage of licensed female ministers has dropped from almost thirty percent to less than five percent? We now have men and women, ministers and laymen, leaders and followers who are crying out with hurting hearts for someone to minister to them with a motherly heart of compassion.

Let us learn from history. Let us shun the mistakes of our forefathers. Let us proclaim the truth of Scripture. All men, whether male or female, are equal to sin. All men, whether male or female, are equal at the foot of the cross. All men, whether male or female, are called by God to minister. "Now there are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit. And there are differences of administrations, but the same Lord. And there are diversities of operations, but it is the same God which worketh all in all. But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to every man to profit withal" (1 Corinthians 12:4-7).

C. We Must Affirm Ladies in Ministry

In the New Testament, the apostle Paul is presented as having one of the most fruitful ministries of all the apostles. From the very beginning of his ministry as recorded in Acts, Paul gathered around him faithful men such as Barnabas, Mark, Silas, Timothy, Titus, Demas, Luke, Jason, Sosipater, Tertius, and others. He lovingly referred to these men, who were so faithful in assisting the apostle, as

fellow laborers in the Gospel. Who could deny that even though Paul was the spokesman, that Barnabas also was a faithful minister? Even though Paul preached the sermon, will any dare say that Silas had no part in the Philippian jailer's conversion? Were they not ministers themselves, even though they spent much of their lives assisting the apostle in order that he could preach the Gospel?

Today, there are not many men who gather evangelistic parties around them in order to go forth to proclaim the Gospel. Not many men can support a half dozen men to write letters, run errands, wash clothes, cook meals, settle disputes, cover mistakes, pray, and serve as personal physician and companion.

Today, instead of a half dozen men, God gives a wife.

And it is ministry! Not just HIS ministry. YOUR ministry. Not just ministering to him, but ministering to the Lord as the husband/wife team goes forth into the vineyard to reap the harvest. You must be affirmed in your ministry. You must affirm one another in ministry. And you must affirm other women who have been called to ministry.

D. We Must Train Ladies for an Even Broader Ministry

Though the ministry of Apostolic Helper is a wonderful work, the ministry of ladies cannot stop there. Many women never marry. Most that do marry will outlive their husband by several years. Many other women feel a call from God whose husbands are just not concerned about spiritual matters. These must be given an opportunity of ministry. At the same time, the Church of God must

have more ministers if we are to reach the whole world. In order to meet this need, Church of God ladies need to be trained for ministry.

One of the areas of ministry in which women excel is that of teaching. It seems to be a natural innate ability. Were it not for the teaching skills of American women, where would our educational systems be today? Likewise, if it were not for the teaching talent of women in the Church of God, where would our Sunday schools and Family Training Hours be today? All seem to agree that women make excellent teachers.

If women are such excellent teachers, does it not seem reasonable that they also would be skilled in teaching teachers? Furthermore, does it not seem reasonable that if they can teach teachers, that they could also teach those who teach the teachers? If a woman can be an excellent teacher, can she not also be a Master teacher? If she can be a Master teacher, can she not also become a Doctor teacher? With proper training, whoever can teach a child can teach a doctoral student.

But if women are going to enter into such a ministry, they must be trained in the same way a man must be trained. It is no easier or more difficult for a woman to learn the Biblical languages than for a man. This takes time, money, and hard work for both.

The Church of God currently has the most extensive Ministerial Development Program in its history. It is designed to reach individuals on every level of educational background. It is urgent that ladies as well as men be a part of these exciting new training programs.

IV. THE CHALLENGE

Perhaps the greatest obstacle to be overcome is to be found in the hearts of women themselves. I hope you do not misunderstand what I'm about to say, but are able to accept it in the spirit it is intended to have. Many ladies simply have a feeling of inadequacy that makes it extremely difficult to accept new challenges. "I can't do that," is one of the most common phrases of womanhood. "I can't understand theology." "I can't learn Greek." "I can't go to school." "I can't get a degree."

But ladies, you can do that! Whatever it is that God calls you to do, you can do it! Not only must you yourself come to that realization, but you must also be able to convince other women as well.

Esther stood at her castle window and sent a message to her adopted father, Mordecai, and said, "I can't do that. Don't you know that if any person dares to come unto the king uninvited, and if he does not stretch forth the golden sceptre, there will be certain death?" But Mordecai quickly sent a message back saying, "But don't you know that if someone does not do this thing that has to be done, that you will not escape just because you are in the king's house. Who knoweth whether thou are come to the kingdom for such a time as this?"

CONCLUSION

I say to you today, there is a work to be done. You cannot escape that responsibility. The feeling of inadequacy does not excuse one from the call of God upon your life. Whether it be teaching children in a basement Sunday school class, or teaching young ministers in a seminar class; whether it be frying chicken to pay the church bills or administering a billion

dollar trust fund; whether it be praying for your preaching husband to be anointed with the Spirit, or wrestling before God for your own message to proclaim; when God calls, and you answer, you can do it. And, "Who knoweth whether THOU art come to the kingdom for such a time as this?"