

WOMEN IN MINISTRY

Who said women can't preach?

Should women be silent in the church?

Is a man the head of a woman?

SAMSON AJILORE

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IN NIGERIA WRITE:

Samson Ajilore World Outreach SAWO

P. O. Box 957 Kubwa, Abuja, 901101

CALL: **08067419389**

Email: agapevoice@live.com

IN THE U.S.A. WRITE:

Samson Ajilore World Outreach SAWO

435, Fawcett Ave #213 Tacoma, WA 98402

CALL: **+1(253) 273-7933**

Email: sawousa@live.com

Visit: www.agapevoice.org

DEDICATION

To my beautiful wife and passionate intercessor, Fidelia Ajilore. You're the best thing that has happened to me aside from salvation and the Holy Spirit.

And to women everywhere who have received the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ and desire answers to the many questions of their hearts.

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Chapter 1

WHAT ABOUT WOMEN IN MINISTRY IN THE NEW TESTAMENT?

“The Lord announces the word, and the women who proclaim it are a mighty throng”
-Psalm 68:11 (NIV).

Spiritual gifts are the supernatural endowments of the Holy Spirit bestowed upon believers (both male and female) to serve and build up others. The two Greek words chosen to introduce them in 1Corinthians 12 are: “Pneumatikos”, which means spiritual things and “Charisma”, which means endowments of grace.

These gifts cannot be merited or earned because they're distributed freely by the Holy Spirit as He wills. However, we are encouraged to earnestly desire and eagerly pursue them (1Corinthians 14:1).

God did not shut women out of ministry gifts and calling in the New Testament as

some suppose. The following are some points to ponder:

1. In Joel 2:28, Joel the prophet foretold by the Holy Spirit that when God pours out His Spirit, both sons and daughters (male and female) would prophesy. Peter confirmed that on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:17). God's outpouring of the Spirit on women on Pentecost shows that they're equally empowered for ministry. The purpose of the outpouring was empowerment for evangelism (Acts 1:8).
2. Anna the prophetess was an 84-year-old widow of great devotion to worship who prophesied of Christ as the redeemer (Luke 2:36-38).
3. Mary the mother of our Lord and Elizabeth the mother of John the baptizer both prophesied by the Holy Spirit (Luke 1:39-56).
4. The Samaritan woman did the work

of an Evangelist by bringing many to Jesus (John 4:28-30).

5. Mary the Magdalene was an apostle to the apostles. She was the one that the Lord Jesus Christ first appeared to and personally sent to tell the others that He rose (John 20; Mark 16:9-11). An apostle is from the Greek word "apostolos" which means an ambassador, a messenger or sent one. She was the first to behold the risen Lord, and He sent her with the message of His resurrection to the other apostles.
6. Mary the mother of John Mark held prayer meetings in her house (Acts 12:12).
7. Tabitha, who is also known as Dorcas had a ministry to the widows, the poor and the needy (Acts 9:36-39).
8. Phoebe was a deacon of the Church in Cenchrea. She was also a helper, benefactor or patron of many,

including Paul (Romans 16:1-2). She was caring for others affairs and supporting them from her resources. Some Bible scholars believe that she was an overseer but was referred to as deacon because the titles of overseer, elder and pastor were not yet in use at the time of Paul's writing to the Romans. She was the only woman singled out with those two titles of deacon and benefactor or patron. She travelled to Rome as Paul's representative, and we cannot say that she didn't travel elsewhere for the gospel.

9. Older spiritual women have the ministry of training younger ones (Titus 2:3-5) and encouraging and mothering many, even as one mothered Paul (Romans 16:13).
10. In 1Corinthinas 11:5, Paul spoke of women praying and prophesying during public worship. We know

from the passage that men were also present, keeping quiet and listening to the women that were prophesying (1Corinthians 14:33).

11. Giving was mentioned as a spiritual gift in Romans 12:6-8, and it was the women disciples that funded Jesus and His male disciples (Luke 8:1-3).
12. On Pentecost, when the Spirit was poured out UPON people for ministry, the women also got filled. They weren't left out, and one cannot say that they should not use their anointing to advance God's Kingdom just because they are women (Acts 1:14; 2). God's intention for pouring the Holy Spirit upon women is not different from why He gave Him to the men.
13. Paul acknowledged several women as his major workforce in ministry. They were co-labourers with him (Romans 16:1-16).

14. Who said that women can't teach? Priscilla alongside her husband Aquila both explained the doctrine of Christian baptism more clearly to Apollos (Acts 18:26). A female preacher helping a male preacher to be more theologically accurate. They were apostles just like Paul. Paul referred to them as his fellow workers who risked their necks for his life (Romans 16:3-4). Four out of the six times that these couple's names were mentioned in the New Testament, the wife's name appears first. This indicates that her ministry may have been more prominent than that of her husband. They hosted a Church in their house wherever they lived. First at Ephesus (2Corinthians 16:19), and later at Rome (Romans 16:3-5).
15. Euodia and Syntyche were leaders in the Church in Philippi (Philippians

4:2-3). Paul remarked that these women had contended at his side for the cause of the gospel just like he said of Timothy in Philippians 2:22.

16. If women ministry was forbidden, Paul or Agabus would have rebuked the four unmarried daughters of Phillip the evangelist who were all prophetesses (Acts 21). Prophecy was their ongoing ministry, not something that they just did once or twice. It was quite remarkable that the author of Acts recognized their prophetic ministry just like he did that of Agabus. One early Church historian said that their ministry was the benchmark for the prophetic ministry in the early Church.
17. God didn't shut women out of ministry gifts and calling in the New Testament as some would have us believe. Junia was a female apostle. She and Andronicus (who was most

likely her husband) may have been the founder of the Church in Rome where they worshipped (Romans 16:7). They were even imprisoned for the gospel at one point just like Paul. Paul himself remarked that they were outstanding among the apostles. Some translators have tried to change Junia to the masculine form, Junias. Wikipedia cites early Church historians and theologians like Chrysostom and Jerome referring to Junia as a female and not male apostle. (<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Junia>).

18. Modern women ministers include such as:

- i. Late Maria Etter, an unusual evangelist with miracle, signs, and wonders who lived between 1844 - 1924.
- ii. Late Aimee McPherson, the founder of Foursquare Church (1890-1944).
- iii. Late Kathryn Kuhlman, the great

healing evangelist (1907-1976).

- iv. Heidi Baker, the great woman missionary to Mozambique Africa. According to Wikipedia, Heidi and her husband Rolland have pioneered over 5000 Churches in Mozambique and a total of over 10,000 Churches in well over 20 nations of the earth. (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Heidi_Baker).

There are countless others that time will fail me to write about here.

BIBLE TRANSLATION

Today, many Bible readers use Old English Bibles and struggle to understand the language. What is your experience with using several translations of the Bible?

A good example is the King James Version popularly known as the KJV. This Bible translation was written in 1611. That's over 400 years ago. There is such a thing as the evolution of language. This is a process by which word meaning changes over time.

For example, the word "Gay" means you look good hundreds of years back, but it means homosexual today. Using multiple Bible translations can enhance your understanding of the Scriptures.

Why do we have so many translations of the Bible? Well, the answer to that question is that people speak different languages, and the goal of the Bible is to reach every tongue.

Here is another question to consider. How do multiple translations impart the meaning of Bible text or what God is saying to us? Without any doubt, there have been errors in various Bible translation but the original manuscripts are error-free.

The KJV calls the Holy Spirit "Holy Ghost" but we know that He is not a ghost. It also refers to the Holy Spirit as "it" instead of "Him" in Romans 8:16. Compare that with John 16:13. These errors have been rectified in the New King James Version (NKJV).

The epistle or long letter of Paul to the Corinthians was in answer to some questions

asked by the Church members. Sometimes, he would cite their question before giving his answer to it.

If his quotation of the questions were not related properly by the translators, the modern readers could end up saying that Paul said what he did not say.

Let us take 1Corinthians 7:1 in the King James Version for example, *“Now concerning the things whereof ye wrote unto me: It is good for a man not to touch a woman.”*

The immediate assumption of any reader of this verse is that the apostle Paul said it is good for a man not to touch a woman. However, that is not true. He was citing the question that they asked him. The people said so, not Paul.

The New International Version corrects that and makes it clearer, quoting the people’s question. *“Now for the matters you wrote about: “It is good for a man not to have sexual relations with a woman.”*

That letter was a response to the people's question. Paul's answer begins in the second verse. *"But since sexual immorality is occurring, each man should have sexual relations with his own wife, and each woman with her own husband"* (1Corinthians 7:2 NIV).

If we do not study the Bible contextually and carefully, we can easily become guilty of assumptive interpretations. We must allow the Bible to speak for itself instead of reading what we think into it.

Chapter 2

IS EVERY MAN THE HEAD OF EVERY WOMAN?

“But I want you to know that the head of every man is Christ, the head of a woman is man, and the head of Christ is God”

-1Corinthians 11:3.

One must learn to read the Scripture in context and not out of context. This “women in ministry” problem has suffered at the hand of out-of-context preachers and teachers. Some even believe that every man is the head of every woman. And as such, they have a wrong and controlling approach towards women generally. They believe that their wives must obey them in everything, even if it means going against the Word. That’s silly!

A better translation of 1Corinthians 11:3 makes clear that it is in agreement with Ephesians 5:23 that reads that the husband is the head of his wife. Both passages address

marriage relationships and must be read in that context only. In fact, the Message Bible relates 1Corinthians 11:3 this way, *“In a marriage relationship, there is an authority from Christ to husband, and from husband to wife. The authority of Christ is the authority of God.”*

Now, let us see 1Corinthians 11:3 in the English Standard Version (ESV) and Weymouth’s New Testament (WNT);

1CORINTHIANS 11:3 (ESV)

3 But I want you to understand that the head of every man is Christ, THE HEAD OF A WIFE IS HER HUSBAND, and the head of Christ is God.

1CORINTHIANS 11:3 (WNT)

3 I would have you know, however, that of every man, Christ is the Head, that OF A WOMAN HER HUSBAND IS THE HEAD, and that God is Christ's Head.

You may be someone’s husband, but you’re not their Lord and Saviour. Even Mother Sarah did not always follow Father Abraham in all things. Remember when they had issues over Hagar and Ishmael? God took

sides with Sarah on that matter and told Abraham to listen to her. Abraham didn't treat his wife like a slave who is under compulsion to always follow his own way no matter what.

GENESIS 21:8-14 (NLT)

8 When Isaac grew up and was about to be weaned, Abraham prepared a huge feast to celebrate the occasion.

9 But Sarah saw Ishmael—the son of Abraham and her Egyptian servant Hagar—making fun of her son, Isaac.

10 So she turned to Abraham and demanded, “Get rid of that slave woman and her son. He is not going to share the inheritance with my son, Isaac. I won't have it!”

11 This upset Abraham very much because Ishmael was his son.

12 BUT GOD TOLD ABRAHAM, “DO NOT BE UPSET OVER THE BOY AND YOUR SERVANT. DO WHATEVER SARAH TELLS YOU, FOR ISAAC IS THE SON THROUGH WHOM YOUR DESCENDANTS WILL BE COUNTED.

13 But I will also make a nation of the descendants of Hagar's son because he is your son, too.”

14 So Abraham got up early the next morning, prepared food and a container of water, and

strapped them on Hagar's shoulders. Then he sent her away with their son, and she wandered aimlessly in the wilderness of Beersheba.

Relationships and marriage covenants fail when folks ignore the Word. Wives must submit to their husbands as the Church submits to Christ. Now, that wouldn't be a problem if the husbands love like Christ loves the Church. Some husbands are so quick to jump at their wives now and then, literally yelling, "I am the head of this family!" But they fail to realize that it is as Christ is the head of the Church. Being such a head comes with the responsibility of loving your wife enough to be able to lay down your life for her as Christ did for the Church.

A man who loves that much is so easy to submit to because that submission won't be domination or enslavement.

The Bible says that husbands should love and wives submit. I believe that this is because while men interpret respect for love, women interpret affection for love. Do to

your wife only what Christ would do to the Church. Treat your husband as the Church should reverently treat Christ!

You see, I've even been around preachers who are very harsh towards women. They maltreat their wives because they believe that all women are demonic and wicked. They let the enemy use them to incite hatred towards the women folks. God is not in hatred and women domination. He's not behind all the domestic violence that women suffer today.

I remember a certain preacher who told me at one time that a mysterious scorpion stung his wife in the house one day because she disobeyed him on a certain domestic matter. He was bragging about it in his foolishness, adding that the woman now fears him. That's not true love.

You see, Ephesians 5:23 in context doesn't read that a man is the head of a woman as Christ is the head of the Church. Rather, it reads, "*The HUSBAND IS THE HEAD*

OF THE WIFE as Christ is the Head of the Church". Every man is not the head of every woman, but only the head of his own wife.

A man's authority is only over his own house, and it ends there. You cannot come to my house and dictate how things work there or correct my wife. You cannot teach her how to live or dress. That's unscriptural. *"For a husband is the head of HIS WIFE as Christ is the head of the church. He is the Savior of His body, the church"* (Ephesians 5:23 NLT).

It is also wrong for a man to feel superior to any woman at all, either at home, in the Church, or at work.

There is no such thing as a superior gender. It is nothing but a creation of some misguided and ignorant minds. *"But among the Lord's people, women are not independent of men, and men are not independent of women. For although the first woman came from man, every other man was born from a woman, and everything comes from God"* (1Corinthians 11:11-12 NLT).

Chapter 3

SHOULD WOMEN KEEP SILENT IN CHURCH TODAY?

“LET YOUR WOMEN KEEP SILENT IN THE CHURCHES, for they are not permitted to speak; but they are to be submissive, AS THE LAW ALSO SAYS. And IF THEY WANT TO LEARN SOMETHING, LET THEM ASK THEIR OWN HUSBANDS AT HOME; for it is shameful for women to speak in church”

-1Corinthians 14:34-35

In 1 Corinthians 11, Paul began to instruct the Corinthian Church about their disorganized worship services. Their situation was particular to them, and not all Churches. It was a Church full of spiritual babes. Paul, who rebuked the unruly wives in Corinth from disrupting public worship in 1Corinthians 11 and 14 says in Galatians that there is neither male nor female (1Corinthians 14; Galatians 3:28). He was addressing a specific situation in the

Corinthian Church, and it was particular to their time and culture.

The context reveals that some married women were most likely asking questions or creating arguments that were causing a commotion during public worship. Perhaps, they were even gossiping just like some women do in the Church today.

Women were basically uneducated in the first century. That was why the apostle advised them to ask what they want to learn from their more knowledgeable husbands, instead of bringing every issue to the Church.

I remember one woman who used to ask silly questions in a Bible study I conducted years back. The husband would feel embarrassed each time. People will laugh. She wasn't so knowledgeable. Her husband finally told her to always wait and let them discuss her questions at home, instead of bringing them to the Church and disgracing him in the public. The idea helped them.

Notice that Paul advised such women to ask their husbands at home if they have any question (1Corinthians 14:35). This gives us a clue that it was a married women's problem, and not involving the single and young girls. Those married women were probably using their comments and arguments to create disorder in public worship and dishonour their husbands.

Paul thought that it would be wiser to treat such issues domestically. So, he was forbidding the act of speaking out of order in public worship, but not saying that women should not speak at all. Otherwise, he would not have allowed them to prophesy as we see in the 11th Chapter. Paul was not contradicting himself. *"But EVERY WOMAN WHO PRAYS OR PROPHESES with her head uncovered dishonors her head, for that is one and the same as if her head were shaved"* (1Corinthians 11:5). His emphasis was on doing everything decently and in order (1Corinthians 14:33).

Some Bible scholars even believe that Paul never wrote these words as divine law. They claim that he was simply quoting what some converts of Judaism in the Corinthian Church were saying. That could be true, considering our previous exposition of 1Corinthians 7:1. Nevertheless, we also see something similar in 1Timothy 2:11-12, but it didn't forbid women from teaching at all. Rather, he prohibits them from teaching men or usurping authority over them in a leadership position.

Women can teach. Priscilla was involved in teaching Apollos in Acts 18:25-26.

Supposing the teaching in the early Church was following the lecture format that we use in our modern Churches today, it would have been unnecessary to tell the women to remain silent. This is because today everyone is silent when the pastor or speaker is speaking. The early Church must have been based on questions and answers. It was a time in which people could not wait

to get to Church to share their thoughts and revelations.

Most people go to Church today to get something, but the early believers went to Church because they had something to share to the edification of others. *“How is it then, brethren? Whenever you come together, each of you has a psalm, has a teaching, has a tongue, has a revelation, has an interpretation. Let all things be done for edification”* (1Corinthians 14:26).

Notice that both in 1Timothy and 1 Corinthians, the circumstances regarding silence for women deal with "learning". Paul is not making a blanket prohibition that says women can never speak in Church.

The Old Testament has no prohibition for women speaking in public worship. It even records women in both spiritual and political leadership. Miriam, Moses' sister was a prophetess. *“Then Miriam the prophetess, the sister of Aaron, took the timbrel in her hand; and all the women went*

out after her with timbrels and with dances”
(Exodus 15:20).

Deborah the prophetess was a Judge in Israel who gave commands to even men and headed Israel’s army (Judges 4-5). She judged matters for both men and women.

JUDGES 4:4-8

4 Now Deborah, a prophetess, the wife of Lapidoth, was judging Israel at that time.

5 And she would sit under the palm tree of Deborah between Ramah and Bethel in the mountains of Ephraim. And the children of Israel came up to her for judgment.

6 Then she sent and called for Barak the son of Abinoam from Kedesh in Naphtali, and said to him, "Has not the LORD God of Israel commanded, 'Go and deploy troops at Mount Tabor; take with you ten thousand men of the sons of Naphtali and of the sons of Zebulun;

7 'and against you I will deploy Sisera, the commander of Jabin's army, with his chariots and his multitude at the River Kishon; and I will deliver him into your hand?'"

8 And Barak said to her, "If you will go with me, then I will go; but if you will not go with me, I will not go!"

Huldah the prophetess advised the great King Josiah (2Chronicles 34:22).

Therefore, when Paul said that the law prohibits women from speaking in public worship in 1Corinthians 14:34, I believe that he was talking of a particular law, norm or custom which was known to those people he was writing to at the time. Not the Torah law of God, or a commandment for all Churches at all times. Consequently, it cannot be applied to all Christian settings. We are not bound by that custom today. The Holy Spirit never contradicts Himself. He will not put the burning passion for ministry in the heart of women, anoint them for the same purpose and then forbid them from carrying out the divine calling. Women can pray, prophesy, teach, or speak in public worship provided that they do so in an orderly manner.

Not only is history full of women greatly used of God, but there are still women of God among us today. I strongly believe that God still uses women today.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Samson Ajilore is a strong apostolic voice and anointed prophetic teacher, theologian, pastor, publisher, and author of over fifty life-changing books. Sam is a living evidence of God's grace and divine destiny. He's a son of prophecy, separated unto the Lord from the womb as His messenger of divine love to the nations. He came from a long line of apostolic and prophetic ministers and has been in the ministry since the age of five, following a divine encounter with the Lord Jesus Christ Himself. He's president at SAWO and Senior Pastor at Agape Church of the Supernatural.

Sam is a widely sought-after keynote speaker in conferences and crusades. He holds a Degree in Theology from the U.M.C.A. Theological College, Ilorin, Kwara State, Nigeria. He's married to Fidelia and they're blessed with children. They live in Abuja, Nigeria's Federal Capital Territory.

CONTACT THE AUTHOR:

Email: agapevoice@live.com

Call or SMS: 08067419389.

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