

“A Woman’s Contribution To The Local Congregation”

(This article is the first of a two part series)

In the Lord’s Church attention is often given to the limitations placed on women in the assemblies of the church. This is probably because of what is said in a couple scriptures.

I Corinthians 14:34-37- As in all the congregations of the saints, 34 women should remain silent in the churches. They are not allowed to speak, but must be in submission, as the Law says. 35 If they want to inquire about something, they should ask their own husbands at home; for it is disgraceful for a woman to speak in the church. *And* 1 Timothy 2:11-12- Let the woman learn in silence with all subjection. But I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man, but to be in silence. In spite of such limitations, which were placed to bring about order in the worship service of the church, the early church benefited greatly from the contributions made by many women. Let’s look at some of the many contributions made by women in the early church.

In Romans 16:1-2 We can read of Phoebe- *“I commend unto you Phoebe our sister, which is a servant of the church which is at Cenchrea; that ye receive her in the Lord, as becometh saints, and that ye assist her in whatsoever business she hath need of you; for she hath been a succourer of many, and of myself also.”*

The Bible doesn’t tell us much about Phoebe, in fact these are the only two verses in the whole Bible in which she is mentioned. We can see from these verses that Phoebe was important to the church in Cenchrea and to the Apostle Paul. Phoebe was a member of the church in Cenchrea which is just a little south and east of Corinth. Phoebe must have been a very helpful person. She was perhaps a woman of some wealth as Paul states that she was a succourer of many, and myself also. A Succourer- According to Dictionary.Com is *someone who gives help in times of need or distress or difficulty [syn: succorer]* The Bible itself is silent on what Phoebe did, other than helping those in need, but of course many commentators have speculated on that. Some say that the church at Cenchrea met at her house. Others say that this was a well traveled area and she assisted those passing through with food and shelter. Others say that she assisted Paul in particular with food, material needs and making sure his clothes were washed and mended. But the Bible as I said is silent about this. All of this may be true, but what God wants us to know is that she was a Godly woman and is an example of a Godly woman to every age.

Let’s look at another woman who contributed to the church, that is Priscilla. *Romans 16:3 Greet Priscilla and Aquila my helpers in Christ Jesus: 4 Who have for my life laid down their own necks: unto whom not only I give thanks, but also all the churches of the Gentiles.* Priscilla was a helper of Paul and even risked her own life for his. This was a dangerous time for Christians, but Priscilla considered the Lord’s work more important than her own life.

In Romans 16:6 read have reference to another woman that assisted the Apostles. We don’t know for sure what she did, but it was great enough to be mentioned in God’s word. Romans 16:6- *Greet Mary, who bestowed much labour on us.* Mary bestowed much labor. In other words she helped them greatly.

In Romans 16:12 we read of the twin sisters Tryphena and Tryphosa, and the beloved Persis- *12-Salute Tryphena and Tryphosa, who labour in the Lord. Salute the beloved Persis, which laboured much in the Lord.*

All these women, even with the limitations placed upon them labored much in the Lord. Even today the growth of some churches is largely dependent on the work, or “Much labour” as the Bible calls it of women.

So, how can this be? If, women are limited in what they can do in public assemblies how can their contributions be so great? Well for one thing, public assembly is only a small part of the overall work of a congregation of the Lord’s people. There is much work outside the assembly that must be done if a church is to grow. Women are often in a position to provide much of this needed work.

So, what can a woman do? How can she contribute to the work, growth and success of a local church?

Well it definitely isn’t in the way one alleged Church of Christ web site stated. I found a web site called Church of Christ.com. It defined the work of men, women and children in the Church of Christ. It actually listed the work of women in the Church as being silent. I didn’t bother checking any further on what they considered the work of men or children for it was obvious they weren’t following the examples provided in the Bible.

Let’s look at a women’s contribution in benevolence. Benevolence is a very important work. James 1:27 defines it as Pure and undefiled religion. *If anyone considers himself religious and yet does not keep a tight rein on his tongue, he deceives himself and his religion is worthless. 27Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world.*

Ministering to brethren who are sick, poor, imprisoned, etc. is a service rendered to the Lord Himself.

Matthew 25:34-40 (NIV) 34 *“Then the King will say to those on his right, ‘Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. 35 For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, 36 I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.’ 37 “Then the righteous will answer him, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? 38 When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? 39 When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?’ 40 “The King will reply, ‘I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me.’*

All Christians, women no less than men, are to be involved in this work.

James 2:14 What good is it, my brothers, if a man claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save him? 15 Suppose a brother or sister is without clothes and daily food. 16 If one of you says to him, "Go, I wish you well; keep warm and well fed," but does nothing about his physical needs, what good is it?

1 John 3:17 If anyone has material possessions and sees his brother in need but has no pity on him, how can the love of God be in him?

Some women may consider this a copout and say that men are just as capable of benevolent work, and they are and this may be true to some extent, but women are well suited for benevolence.

1. Women bring a grace and beauty of which men are normally not capable.

a. The unique attributes of femininity lend themselves well to benevolent work.

b. Normally mercy and compassion are almost second nature to women.

c. And mercy is one of the gifts the Lord has given to His church.

Romans 12:6 We have different gifts, according to the grace given us. If a man's gift is prophesying, let him use it in proportion to his faith. 7 If it is serving, let him serve; if it is teaching, let him teach; 8 if it is encouraging, let him encourage; if it is contributing to the needs of others, let him give generously; if it is leadership, let him govern diligently; if it is showing mercy, let him do it cheerfully.

(Continued next week)

Arne Kohl