

San Juan church of Christ

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What Does God's Word Say About...

The Various Roles of Women - Part 3

Part 1 and Part 2 of this study on the roles of women can be found on our website, sanjuanchurchofchrist.org, under "weekly articles."

In this week's article we begin with 1 Cor. 11:5, "But every women who has her head uncovered" [i.e. not submitting to the authority of man and God],... disgraces her head" [i.e. the man]. The problem in Corinth was NOT that the women were neglecting to put on their head coverings [cultural]. Their problem was that they were taking them off [i.e. spiritually removing the symbol of their submission to men]. Paul mentions two specific activities of women praying and prophesying in this verse. Prophesying is listed in the next chapter as one of the spiritual gifts (1 Cor. 12:10). "Prophesying" in scripture is applied to the act of speaking forth the message of God while being guided by the Holy Spirit. The word "prophesy" is NEVER used in scripture to describe delivering a message of one's own understanding (2 Pet. 1:21). Joel prophesied "In the last days, God says, 'That I will pour forth of My spirit on all mankind; and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy... Even on My bond slaves both men and women, I will in those days pour forth of My spirit and they shall prophesy' " (Joel 2:28-32).

In the first century church they did not have the complete written word of God (1 Cor. 13:10-12). Because of this, both men and women had the gift of prophesy and this is made clear from the mention of Philip's four daughters who prophesied (Acts 21:9). In Luke 2:36-38, Anna, called a prophetess, wandered the temple grounds speaking to people privately. Paul is making it clear in our text that women who pray and prophesy remain in the same relationship to men [i.e. men having authority over women]. They are not, therefore, to remove that covering which, in the Corinthian society [culture] was a sign of the distinction between women and men [the length of their hair]. Even the women who had the spiritual gifts of prophesy and prayer were not exempt from God's order: God, Christ, man, woman. There were opportunities for women to exercise their gifts outside the assembly [church worship] and there are plenty of opportunities today for women to use their abilities to serve God outside of the church worship.

In verses 7-12 Paul demonstrates the priority of man in the creation (Gen. 1:26-27, 2:7-20). On the other hand, the woman was created of and for the man (Gen. 2:21-25). Therefore, man's priority and consequent authority over the woman was established by God in the beginning. In verse 10, a woman who refuses to submit herself to her spiritual head [i.e. the man], is being rebellious to the One [God] who placed man in this position. Paul summarized this doctrine when he wrote in verse 16, "we [apostles] have no other practice." The apostles were the ones to whom God had given direction for this doctrine of authority, (1 Cor. 14: 37-38).

Please send any comments, questions, or requests for a Bible study to:
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