

# **“What is the Role of the Church in Women Battering?”**

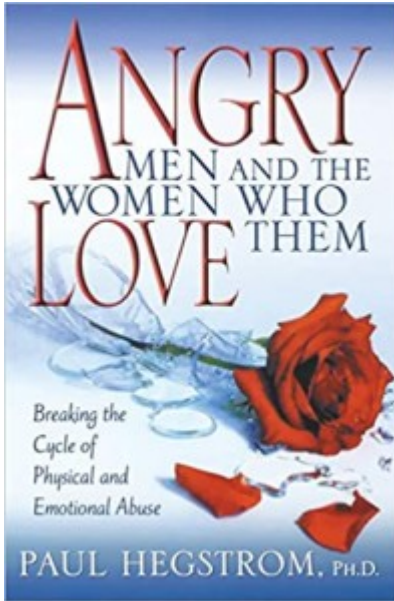
**What is the role of the church in women battering?**

First, let me recommend my colleague Kerby Anderson's article [Abuse and Domestic Violence](#). The final section has a segment called “What the Church Can Do.”

Also, I would respectfully suggest that the role of the church is to challenge battering husbands that their actions are sin and hold them accountable for their behavior, and to provide emotional and physical support to the woman until the home is safe again. The woman and those in church leadership would know it is safe when the offender evidences a changed heart resulting in changed behavior. And a changed heart usually only happens in the context of community, in this case male community, where a small group of men will, in love and commitment, “get in his face” to challenge his wrong thinking, help identify the anger fueling his rage against his wife, and encourage him to move into a deeper relationship with God.

The best specific answer to this question I've heard is the policy of church leadership to meet with the husband and wife, to confront the husband in love: about his responsibility to love and cherish his wife as Christ loves the church (Eph. 5:25–29), about the importance of using his strength to serve his wife, not hurt or threaten her, and to live with her in an understanding way, honoring her as a weaker vessel (1 Peter 3:7). Then—and this is extremely important—the husband is warned that if he tries to retaliate in any way, whether by force or even threatening to hurt his wife, she is to call the elders and tell them. And they will take action, either removing her from the home to safety or moving his stuff out so she can stay in the home. And they promise that retaliation will not be tolerated: if she doesn't press charges for the

domestic violence, they will. Assault and battery is not just a sin; it's a crime.



I know that in many (if not most) churches, those in leadership don't know what to do other than tell the wife "pray harder and submit." (If that had worked, she wouldn't need intervention!) An excellent resource for understanding the dynamics of an abusive husband is Paul Hegstrom's book *Angry Men and the Women Who Love Them*, which is written by a repentant, recovered abuser. And pastor, by the way!

I hope you find this helpful.

Sue Bohlin

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## **"Is It Biblical for a Woman to Lead a Nation?"**

In view of John McCain's pick for Vice President [Sarah Palin, Governor of Alaska]: Is it biblically sound for a women to be in charge of a nation? I feel very sound on the fact that the husband should lead the family and in a church structure a man should be in charge of the church. Can a woman lead on the national scale?

We are in total agreement with you that God's plan is for men to lead in both the church and the family. But the Bible does

not prohibit women from exercising leadership in civil governments. Note that the references to the Queen of Sheba and Queen Esther contain not even a hint of anything negative. It does seem to be understood that men will generally be the ones in authority, but there are no restrictions for systems and hierarchies outside the church and the family. So there's nothing intrinsically wrong or evil about women ruling in civil matters.

The created order, before the fall, makes Adam and Eve co-regents and co-stewards of the earth:

*Gen 1:26 Then God said, "Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; and let them rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over the cattle and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth."*

*Gen 1:27 God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them.*

*Gen 1:28 God blessed them; and God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth, and subdue it; and rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over every living thing that moves on the earth."*

God's plan for the future is that believers who endure, both men and women, will reign with Christ (2 Tim. 2:12). So the idea of women reigning is biblical within a certain context.

I do feel compelled, however, to note the sadness of Isaiah 3:12 where women ruling over God's people is a sign of judgment. However, the context is that of a theocracy, and that makes a difference. The United States is definitely not a theocracy, with our strong lines of demarcation between church and state!

Hope this helps!

Sue Bohlin

*Shortly after this answer was posted, we received this email:*

**Re: Your article “Is it Biblical for a woman to lead a nation” – Why was Deborah never mentioned when she is a prominent figure all through Judges?**

I addressed the issue of Deborah in the answer to email “Should Women Be Pastors?” here: [www.probe.org/should-women-be-pastors/](http://www.probe.org/should-women-be-pastors/)

By the way, there are 21 chapters in Judges, and Deborah’s story is in only two of them, chapters 4 and 5. She’s a major player to be sure, but not all through Judges.

Thanks for asking.

Sue Bohlin

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## **“Single Men Struggle, Too”**

**Dear Probe,**

Even though I am a man, I found the article on the role of women ([5 Lies the Church Tells Women](#)) quite interesting. I especially enjoyed the section on the struggle/opposition faced by single women engaged career/ministry activity. Though perhaps not as intense, I have also found a similar attitude toward single men with the verses saying a pastor should be the husband of one wife being taken out of context and meaning unmarried men aren’t fit for leadership either. It might be fruitful for Probe to conduct a similar study for singles.

Thank you for taking the time to share your response to my article! What an insight. It does seem, doesn’t it, that sometimes people in the church are better at excluding than

making people feel like they belong. . . .sigh . . . . I'm so sorry. The people with the anti-single-man attitude would probably have a problem with the Lord Jesus and the Apostle Paul as well!

Cheerily,

Sue Bohlin  
Probe Ministries

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## **“Sue Bohlin a Hypocrite for Teaching at Probe.org”**

If women are not to teach men or have authority over them, I find it odd that Sue Bohlin responds to questions on this website. Doesn't that constitute teaching authority???? And doesn't the fact that she writes a response ABOUT women in ministry absurdly ironic (i.e., if women are not to teach men or have authority over them by instructing them, then a woman speaking about women in ministry is absurd)???

Scripture does not forbid men to learn from women. It says we are not to be in teaching authority over men. I have no authority over anyone. I just offer my perspective on this website. If a man chooses to consider what I say and learn from it, that's fine, but it's a very different (and indirect) thing than me standing in the pulpit or on a platform in a position of spiritual leadership over him.

Thanks for writing.

Sue Bohlin

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# **“Should Women Be Pastors?”**

Hi Sue,

I hope it is ok to email you and ask your opinion (biblical) of this whole issue with–

1. Should woman be pastors?
2. In a church is there any ministry a woman can lead, whilst men are in that group?
3. In 2 Tim the verse regarding women not to teach and have authority etc. I have come across an interpretation which says that it is talking about wives, because the word translated women can either mean wife or woman... but the word translated man... is actually translated husband. Which should therefore give the whole sentence its context...(What is your opinion)?
4. The Bible shows that Deborah was a married woman who led the people of Israel and from the character portrayed, she seemed to be a woman of God as opposed to someone like Jezebel. Hence I would assume that she was submitted to her husband at home as the word of God says to all married woman, but her role as wife did not hinder her ministry as a leader over the country....So isn't it possible for a married woman to maintain her submissive role in the home, but does not necessarily need to be carried over into the church sphere ...Also, isn't submission when mentioned in the bible only mentioned in the context of marriage...and hence all women are not submitted to all men...so why is it that she cannot teach or lead men?

Thanks in advance,

A (hopefully) teachable young woman of God...who just wants to

## **get a right understanding on this whole issue**

*I hope it is ok to email you and ask your opinion (biblical)*

Sure!

*1. Should woman be pastors?*

I make a distinction between exercising the GIFT of pastor (shepherd) and holding the OFFICE of pastor. Many, many women are given the spiritual gift of being a pastor-teacher (Eph. 4:11), including me, and we are given the responsibility and privilege of being a shepherd to other women. The OFFICE of pastor, however, is biblically limited to men. 1 Tim. 2:12 makes that very clear.

*2. In a church is there any ministry a woman can lead, whilst men are in that group?*

That's the tough question. I think so, if it's a support ministry. For example, I think a woman can function very well as the director of children's ministries, where there are male Sunday School teachers who serve under her leadership—AS LONG AS she is under the leadership of the church pastor and elders and not in any position of final authority.

There is a book called *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood: A Response to Evangelical Feminism* that is excellent, and one chapter gives some suggested guidelines to what women can do in the church without crossing the line. Christian bookstores can get it, and you can also check the website for Council of Biblical Manhood and Womanhood: <http://cbmw.org>.

*3. In 2 Tim the verse regarding women not to teach and have authority etc. I have come across an interpretation which says that it is talking about wives, because the word*

*translated women can either mean wife or woman.... but the word translated man... is actually translated husband. Which should therefore give the whole sentence its context... (What is your opinion)?*

In the Greek, the word translated *man* means “male adult.” It is not limited to “husband,” and generally is not translated husband. So this translation you came across was done by someone with an agenda, seeking to read a loophole into this verse that’s not there. Particularly when you read the REASON for limiting women to positions of authority over men, which comes immediately after that verse.

*4. The Bible shows that Deborah was a married woman who led the people of Israel and from the character portrayed, she seemed to be a woman of God as opposed to someone like Jezebel. Hence I would assume that she was submitted to her husband at home as the word of God says to all married woman, but her role as wife did not hinder her ministry as a leader over the country.*

I think it’s important to look beyond the FACT that Deborah was a leader at the values associated with Deborah being a leader:

1. Deborah considered the fact that she was Israel’s leader (judge) as a shameful indictment of the men who refused to take leadership. In Judges 4:6, in her role as prophetess she gives Barak instruction from the Lord to take the responsibility of military leader to go and attack the wicked Sisera. The apparently wimpy Barak balks, telling her (vs. 8), “I’ll only go if you go with me. If you aren’t going, neither am I.” Deborah responds with a reproach: “Well, okay, I’ll go with you, but because of the way you are going about this, you lose the honor in this expedition. Yahweh is going to deliver Sisera into the hand of a woman.” God was going to discipline Barak for his lack of leadership by giving the honor of



killing Sisera to a woman. Yes, that says something positive about women's ability, but we shouldn't lose track of the fact that awarding the honor to a woman was a slap in the face to the man who was SUPPOSED to earn it.

2. Consider Deborah's and Barak's song in Judges 5, which starts out: "When the princes in Israel take the lead. . .praise the Lord!"(NIV) Something is wrong when men fail to take their God-given place of leadership.

3. I found this recently and it was a real eye-opener for me: In a passage where the context is the judgment of God's people, Isaiah 3:12 says, "Youths oppress my people, women rule over them." When women rule, it is in the context of judgment. Again, something is wrong.

*So isn't it possible for a married woman to maintain her submissive role in the home, but does not necessarily need to be carried over into the church sphere?*

Two thoughts here:

1. We need to draw a distinction between women in church leadership, and women in leadership OUTSIDE the church. The Bible never forbids a woman to assume political or civic leadership. It is only church hierarchy that is addressed in the scriptures.

2. If a married woman is submissive to her husband in the home, how would she take off that submissive hat in the church and be the spiritual leader of her husband? A wife is NEVER to be the spiritual leader of her husband; it's the other way around. Ephesians 5:23 says that the husband is the head of the wife, as Christ is the head of the church. The wife's role is to lovingly, respectfully submit; the husband's role is to lovingly, sacrificially lead.

So does that mean an unmarried woman could be a spiritual

leader in the church? No. 1 Tim 2:12 is a categorical statement against women exercising authority over men. Marital status doesn't matter.

*Also isn't submission when mentioned in the Bible only mentioned in the context of marriage...and hence all women are not submitted to all men?*

No, submission is a much bigger concept than merely wives toward husbands:

- *Luke 10:17 – Demons submitted to the 72 disciples in Jesus' name*
- *Rom. 13:1 – Everyone is to submit him/herself to the governing authorities*
- *1 Cor. 14:34, 1 Tim 2:11 – Women are to have an attitude of submission in church*
- *1 Cor. 16:16 – Paul exhorted the Corinthian believers to submit to a certain group of mature believers in the church*
- *Eph. 5:21 – Submit to one another [a general rule, but not always reciprocal: I mean, do you want parents submitting to their children, or employers (masters) submitting to their employees (slaves)?]*
- *Eph. 5:22 – Wives, submit to your husbands*
- *Eph. 5:24 – The church submits to Christ in everything*
- *Heb. 5:7 – The Lord Jesus submitted to the Father*
- *Heb. 12:9 – We are to submit to the Father*
- *Heb. 13:17 – The church is to submit to our church leaders*
- *1 Pet. 2:13 – Submit yourself to every authority instituted among men*
- *1 Pet. 2:18 – Slaves, submit yourselves to your masters with all respect*
- *1 Pet. 3:22 – Angels, authorities and powers (various kinds of angels, I believe) are in submission to Christ*
- *1 Pet. 5:5 – Young men, in the same way be submissive to those who are older.*

You're right, all women are not to submit to all men. As a woman, I am called to submit to my heavenly Father, to my Savior, to the Holy Spirit, to my husband, to church leaders, and to governing authorities. But not to my next-door neighbor, or my friend's husband, or *any* man just because he has a Y chromosome! <grin> On the other hand, we are all called to submit to each other (Eph. 5:21), meaning to serve and help each other in humility. This attitude of submission should carry over into all areas of life because it is the only attitude appropriate for a believer, who is to live his or her life in submission to God.

*So why is it that she cannot teach or lead men?*

It goes back to the creation order. In Genesis 2, when God created man and woman, he created man first as the initiator, and created woman second to be his helpmate and to be the responder. Adam and Eve got into trouble in the Garden of Eden when Eve was deceived by the serpent, and talked Adam into disobeying God by eating the forbidden fruit. Adam knew Eve was being deceived; she didn't. He was with her when the serpent tempted her to distrust God's goodness and provision for them, and instead of speaking up to defend God's word to them and defend Eve against the deceptions of the enemy, he was silent and became her follower instead of her leader. This went against the created order. Men are to lead and women are to respond, generally speaking, although on an individual basis there are times for men to respond and women to lead (each other, and our families).

Paul explains this in further detail in his first letter to Timothy (2:11-14):

11 A woman should learn in quietness and full submission.

12 I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man; she must be silent.

13 For Adam was formed first, then Eve.

14 And Adam was not the one deceived; it was the woman who was deceived and became a sinner.

Paul invokes the creation order (Adam was formed first, then Eve.) Then he reminds us that Eve was the one deceived, and became a sinner. The reason God doesn't want women in leadership over men isn't that we're second-class or less gifted than men; to the contrary, God says "woman is the glory of man" (1 Cor. 11:7)! What a great statement of the value of woman! It's because we do need the protection that God gives us through men, and we need to maintain the creation order. We can be deceived more readily than men, because of the way God was pleased to make us; more emotional, more relational, where men tend to be more analytical. That doesn't make one better than the other, and it doesn't mean that women are deceived all the time, but it does set the mold for the roles He wants us to take.

I do think it's interesting that God never forbids a man to LEARN FROM a woman; indeed, Apollos was discipled by both Priscilla and Aquila, a married couple who were very instrumental in his spiritual growth and training. (See Acts 18.) I think the prohibition against women teaching men needs to be seen in the context of the Ephesian church to whom Paul was writing, where apparently women teachers were bringing in false doctrine from the pagan culture into the church.

But when a pastor who knows and respects a woman's knowledge and insight asks her to share it with a group of people under his care, I think a case can be made that that pastor is stewarding the gifts of the Body of Christ without handing over authority and leadership to a woman. It's not that a woman's teaching is inherently suspect (after all, a man and a woman can teach the exact same thing using the exact same words), but that leadership and authority in the church is designed by God to be held by men. (I know, this is very politically incorrect, but that's our position.)

Let me get personal with you here and share how God has opened doors for me as a woman gifted to teach. Probe Ministries has a 3-minute daily radio program that airs on about 400 stations. I am one of the writers and speakers for that program. Every time a man listens to our program when I'm on, he might learn something he never knew before or gain an insight he didn't have before. There's nothing wrong with men learning from a woman. There's nothing wrong with men reading books written by women.

As a teacher of women, I have the privilege of standing before groups of women to teach the Bible and other subjects from a Christian world view, both in our church and in other churches and conferences. I have full freedom to teach here.

Probe also holds conferences for young people and adults to help them learn to think biblically. I am often the only woman speaker at these conferences. But I am not speaking as a church authority, only as a resource person.

I would not be comfortable filling the pulpit of a worship service as a preacher or teacher, although I am very comfortable in front of the church participating in a drama with a lesson in it that people, both men and women, can learn from. [Full disclosure since I originally wrote this article: a dear pastor friend asked me to give a short "Messages to Moms" on Mother's Day. I directed my remarks to the women, inviting the men to listen, but my intended audience was women.] Again, there's a difference between standing up as a teacher in authority over men, and being in a position where men can learn something without me being in a position of spiritual authority over them.

One final thought in this category. One day when I was praying about this issue, I asked the Lord to show me His heart about the whole subject of women teaching, and He led me to see that what He most cares about is that a woman gifted to speak and teach, cultivate an attitude of submission and humility.

*A (hopefully) teachable young woman of God.. who just wants to get a right understanding on this whole issue*

I am so delighted to hear you say you are teachable. I think maintaining a teachable attitude is so very vital to our spiritual growth and maturity, and it's something I consciously seek in my life as well.

As a young woman, you have a challenge before you to think biblically on this issue of men and women in the church, because the world has squeezed many people in the church into ITS mold instead of people going to the scriptures for understanding that allows us to be transformed by the renewing of our minds (Rom. 12:1).

Please feel free to ask for clarification on anything I've said. Let me add one point. The American actor James Dean was purported to have defended his bisexual preferences by saying, "I refuse to go through life with one arm tied behind my back." It was his way of saying he refused to be limited to only 50% of the population for his sexual expression.

I think God gives women teachers a broad range of ministry opportunities and ways to use our gifts with a full 50% (at least) of the church. Why isn't that enough (as it apparently wasn't for James Dean), when God knows better than we do? There are SO MANY women in the church who are desperate for godly, mature Christian women to teach them; why should some women resent the fact that men should teach men when there's this huge need that already exists?

Paul, when instructing Titus how to pastor his flock on Crete, told him to teach the older women so that THEY could mentor the younger women. Paul knew that the most effective way for young women to be taught many things was by older women, not by male pastors. It's God's plan, and it works, and there's always going to be more work to be done than there are people willing to do the work.

I think the place to put our energies is NOT in trying to force open doors for women to be pastors over entire churches, but to educate both men and women in the value and worth that God gives women so they don't see "women's ministry" as something lesser-than, something second-class—but as something exciting, vital, and important.

Most warmly in the Lord,

Sue Bohlin

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**See Also *Probe Answers Our E-Mail*:**

- [I Have Some Questions About Women in the Church](#)
- [So Are All Women Pastors Deceived and Going to Hell?](#)
- [Your Position Against Women Pastors Is Outdated](#)

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# Christianity: The Best Thing That Ever Happened to Women

*Sue Bohlin examines the facts to show us that a Christian, biblical worldview of women lifted them from a status equivalent to dogs to a position a fellow heirs of the grace of God through Jesus Christ. Christianity, accurately applied, fundamentally changed the value and status of women.*

## The Low Status of Women in Jesus' Day

Some feminists charge that Christianity, the Bible, and the Church are anti-female and horribly oppressive to women. Does

God really hate women? Did the apostle Paul disrespect them in his New Testament writings? In this article we'll be looking at why Christianity is the best thing that ever happened to women, with insights from Alvin Schmidt's book *How Christianity Changed the World*.[{1}](#)

"What would be the status of women in the Western world today had Jesus Christ never entered the human arena? One way to answer this question," writes Dr. Schmidt, "is to look at the status of women in most present-day Islamic countries. Here women are still denied many rights that are available to men, and when they appear in public, they must be veiled. In Saudi Arabia, for instance, women are even barred from driving an automobile. Whether in Saudi Arabia or in many other Arab countries where the Islamic religion is adhered to strongly, a man has the right to beat and sexually desert his wife, all with the full support of the Koran. . . .[{2}](#) This command is the polar opposite of what the New Testament says regarding a man's relationship with his wife. Paul told the Christians in Ephesus, 'Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her.' And he added, 'He who loves his wife loves himself.'" [{3}](#)



Jesus loved women and treated them with great respect and dignity. The New Testament's teaching on women developed His perspective even more. The value of women that permeates the New Testament isn't found in the Greco-Roman culture or the cultures of other societies.

In ancient Greece, a respectable woman was not allowed to leave the house unless she was accompanied by a trustworthy male escort. A wife was not permitted to eat or interact with male guests in her husband's home; she had to retire to her woman's quarters. Men kept their wives under lock and key, and women had the social status of a slave. Girls were not allowed to go to school, and when they grew up they were not allowed to speak in public. Women were considered inferior to men. The



Greek poets equated women with evil. Remember Pandora and her box? Woman was responsible for unleashing evil on the world. {4}

The status of Roman women was also very low. Roman law placed a wife under the absolute control of her husband, who had ownership of her and all her possessions. He could divorce her if she went out in public without a veil. A husband had the power of life and death over his wife, just as he did his children. As with the Greeks, women were not allowed to speak in public. {5}

Jewish women, as well, were barred from public speaking. The oral law prohibited women from reading the Torah out loud. Synagogue worship was segregated, with women never allowed to be heard.

## Jesus and Women

Jesus' treatment of women was very different:

*The extremely low status that the Greek, Roman, and Jewish woman had for centuries was radically affected by the appearance of Jesus Christ. His actions and teachings raised the status of women to new heights, often to the consternation and dismay of his friends and enemies. By word and deed, he went against the ancient, taken-for-granted beliefs and practices that defined woman as socially, intellectually, and spiritually inferior.*

*The humane and respectful way Jesus treated and responded to the Samaritan woman [at the well] (recorded in John 4) may not appear unusual to readers in today's Western culture. Yet what he did was extremely unusual, even radical. He ignored the Jewish anti-Samaritan prejudices along with prevailing view that saw women as inferior beings. {6}*

He started a conversation with her—a Samaritan, a woman—in

public. The rabbinic oral law was quite explicit: "He who talks with a woman [in public] brings evil upon himself." Another rabbinic teaching prominent in Jesus' day taught, "One is not so much as to greet a woman."[\[7\]](#) So we can understand why his disciples were amazed to find him talking to a woman in public. Can we even imagine how it must have stunned this woman for the Messiah to reach out to her and offer her living water for her thirsty soul?

Among Jesus' closest friends were Mary, Martha and Lazarus, who entertained him at their home. "Martha assumed the traditional female role of preparing a meal for Jesus, her guest, while her sister Mary did what only men would do, namely, learn from Jesus' teachings. Mary was the cultural deviant, but so was Jesus, because he violated the rabbinic law of his day [about speaking to women]."[\[8\]](#) By teaching Mary spiritual truths, he violated another rabbinic law, which said, "Let the words of the Law [Torah] be burned rather than taught to women. . . . If a man teaches his daughter the law, it is as though he taught her lechery."[\[9\]](#)

When Lazarus died, Jesus comforted Martha with this promise containing the heart of the Christian gospel: "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?" (John 11:25-26) These remarkable words were spoken to a woman! "To teach a woman was bad enough, but Jesus did more than that. He called for a verbal response from Martha. Once more, he went against the socioreligious custom by teaching a woman and by having her publicly respond to him, a man."[\[10\]](#)

"All three of the Synoptic Gospels note that women followed Jesus, a highly unusual phenomenon in first-century Palestine. . . . This behavior may not seem unusual today, but in Jesus' day it was highly unusual. Scholars note that in the prevailing culture only prostitutes and women of very low reputation would follow a man without a male escort."[\[11\]](#) These

women were not groupies; some of them provided financial support for Jesus and the apostles (Luke 8:3).

The first people Jesus chose to appear to after his resurrection were women; not only that, but he instructed them to tell his disciples that he was alive (Matt. 28, John 20). In a culture where a woman's testimony was worthless because she was worthless, Jesus elevated the value of women beyond anything the world had seen.

## **Paul, Peter, and Women**

Jesus gave women status and respect equal to men. Not only did he break with the anti-female culture of his era, but he set a standard for Christ-followers. Peter and Paul both rose to the challenge in what they wrote in the New Testament.

In a culture that feared the power of a woman's external beauty and feminine influence, Peter encouraged women to see themselves as valuable because God saw them as valuable. His call to aspire to the inner beauty of a trusting and tranquil spirit is staggeringly counter-cultural. He writes, "Your beauty should not come from outward adornment, such as braided hair and the wearing of gold jewelry and fine clothes. Instead, it should be that of your inner self, the unfading beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is of great worth in God's sight. For this is the way the holy women of the past who put their hope in God used to make themselves beautiful."

Equally staggering is his call to men to elevate their wives with respect and understanding: "Husbands, in the same way be considerate as you live with your wives, and treat them with respect as the weaker partner and as heirs with you of the gracious gift of life, so that nothing will hinder your prayers." Consideration, respect, fellow heirs; these concepts sound good to us, but they were unheard of in the first century!

The apostle Paul is often accused of being a misogynist, one who hates and fears women. But Paul's teachings on women reflect the creation order and high value God places on women as creatures made in his image. Paul's commands for husbands and wives in Ephesians 5 provided a completely new way to look at marriage: as an earthbound illustration of the spiritual mystery of the union of Christ and His bride, the church. He calls wives to not only submit to their husbands as to the Lord, but he calls husbands to submit to Christ (1 Cor. 11:3). He calls men to love their wives in the self-sacrificing way Christ loves the church. In a culture where a wife was property, and a disrespected piece of property at that, Paul elevates women to a position of honor previously unknown in the world.

Paul also provided highly countercultural direction for the New Testament church. In the Jewish synagogue, women had no place and no voice in worship. In the pagan temples, the place of women was to serve as prostitutes. The church, on the other hand, was a place for women to pray and prophecy out loud (1 Cor. 11:5). The spiritual gifts—supernatural enablings to build God's church—are given to women as well as men. Older women are commanded to teach younger ones. The invitation to women to participate in worship of Jesus was unthinkable—but true.

## **Misogyny in the Church**

Author Dorothy Sayers, a friend of C.S. Lewis, wrote:

*Perhaps it is no wonder that the women were first at the Cradle and last at the Cross. They had never known a man like this Man—there had never been such another. A prophet and teacher who never nagged at them, who never flattered or coaxed or patronized; who never made arch jokes about them, never treated them either as 'The women, God help us!' or 'The ladies, God bless them!'; who rebuked without querulousness and praised without condescension; who took*

*their questions and arguments seriously, who never mapped out their sphere for them, never urged them to be feminine or jeered at them for being female; who had no ax to grind and no uneasy male dignity to defend; who took them as he found them and was completely unselfconscious.*

She continues: "There is no act, no sermon, no parable in the whole Gospel that borrows its pungency from female perversity; nobody could possibly guess from the words of Jesus that there was anything 'funny' about woman's nature."[{12}](#) And this is one of the unfortunate truths about Christianity we have to acknowledge: over the centuries, many Christ-followers have fallen far short of the standard Jesus set in showing the worth and dignity of women.

In the second century Clement of Alexandria believed and taught that every woman should blush because she is a woman. Tertullian, who lived about the same time, said, "You [Eve] are the devil's gateway. . . . You destroyed so easily God's image, man. On account of your desert, that is death, even the Son of God had to die." Augustine, in the fourth century, believed that a woman's image of God was inferior to that of the man's.[{13}](#) And unfortunately it gets even nastier than that.

Some people mistakenly believe these contemptuous beliefs of the church fathers are rooted in an anti-female Bible, but that couldn't be farther from the truth. People held these misogynistic beliefs *in spite of*, not because of, the biblical teachings. Those who dishonor God by dishonoring His good creation of woman allow themselves to be shaped by the beliefs of the surrounding pagan, anti-female culture instead of following Paul's exhortation to not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of our minds (Rom. 12:2). The church in North America does the same thing today by allowing the secular culture to shape our thinking more than the Bible. Only nine percent of Americans claiming to be

born-again have a biblical worldview.[{14}](#) The church in Africa and Asia does the same thing today by allowing animism, the traditional folk religion, to shape their thinking more than the Bible.

It's unfortunate that some of the church fathers did not allow the woman-honoring principles found in Scripture to change their unbiblical beliefs. But that is the failing of imperfect followers of Jesus, not a failure of God nor of His Word. Jesus loves women.

## Effects of Christianity on Culture

As Christianity spread throughout the world, its redemptive effects elevated women and set them free in many ways. The Christian ethic declared equal worth and value for both men and women. Husbands were commanded to love their wives and not exasperate their children. These principles were in direct conflict with the Roman institution of *patria potestas*, which gave absolute power of life and death over a man's family, including his wife. When *patria potestas* was finally repealed by an emperor who was moved by high biblical standards, what a tremendous effect that had on the culture! Women were also granted basically the same control over their property as men, and, for the first time, mothers were allowed to be guardians of their children.[{15}](#)

The biblical view of husbands and wives as equal partners caused a sea change in marriage as well. Christian women started marrying later, and they married men of their own choosing. This eroded the ancient practice of men marrying child brides against their will, often as young as eleven or twelve years old. The greater marital freedom that Christianity gave women eventually gained wide appeal. Today, a Western woman is not compelled to marry someone she does not want, nor can she legally be married as a child bride. But the practice continues in parts of the world where Christianity has little or no presence.[{16}](#)

Another effect of the salt and light of Christianity was its impact on the common practice of polygamy, which demeans women. Many men, including biblical heroes, have had multiple wives, but Jesus made clear this was never God's intention. Whenever he spoke about marriage, it was always in the context of monogamy. He said, "The two [not three or four] will become one flesh." As Christianity spread, God's intention of monogamous marriages became the norm.{17}

Two more cruel practices were abolished as Christianity gained influence. In some cultures, such as India, widows were burned alive on their husbands' funeral pyres. In China, the crippling practice of foot binding was intended to make women totter on their pointed, slender feet in a seductive manner. It was finally outlawed only about a hundred years ago.{18}

As a result of Jesus Christ and His teachings, women in much of the world today, especially in the West, enjoy more privileges and rights than at any other time in history. It takes only a cursory trip to an Arab nation or to a Third World country to see how little freedom women have in countries where Christianity has had little or no presence.{19} It's the best thing that ever happened to women.

## Notes

1. Schmidt, Alvin. *How Christianity Changed the World*. Originally published under the title *Under the Influence: How Christianity Transformed Civilization* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001), which is the copy I reference in these notes.

2. "Men stand superior to women.... But those whose perverseness ye fear, admonish them and remove them into bedchambers and beat them; but if they submit to you then do not seek a way against them" Sura 4:34, as quoted in Schmidt, p. 97.

3. Schmidt, p. 97-98.

4. Ibid., p. 98-99.
5. Ibid., p. 101.
6. Ibid., p. 102-03.
7. Ibid.
8. Ibid.
9. Ibid., p. 103-104.
10. Ibid., p. 104.
11. Ibid., p. 104-105.
12. Dorothy L. Sayers, *Are Women Human?* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1971), 47.
13. Schmidt, p. 109.
14. "A Biblical Worldview Has a Radical Effect on a Person's Life," The Barna Research Group, Ltd.  
<http://www.barna.org/FlexPage.aspx?Page=BarnaUpdate&BarnaUpdateID=154>.
15. Ibid., p. 111.
16. Ibid., pp. 111-112.
17. Ibid., p. 115.
18. Ibid., pp. 118-119.
19. Ibid., p. 115.



# **“Where Does Scripture Say That Men Should be Strong and Women Should be Soft?”**

**Re: God’s order for the “strong, leader” capabilities of men, and the “soft, nurturing” capabilities of women.**

**Chapter and verse, please, where is this laid out in scripture?**

**In the Bible we seem to have a wide mix of all characteristics in both genders, and no specific statement that “strong” characteristics belong only to men, and “soft” only to women.**

Hi \_\_\_\_\_,

Thanks for your letter.

*Re: God’s order for the “strong, leader” capabilities of men, and the “soft, nurturing” capabilities of women. Chapter and verse, please, where is this laid out in scripture?*

Well, I was thinking of Joshua 1:6-9, where Joshua is exhorted three times to be strong. And I was thinking of the role of the helpmate in Genesis 2, where Eve was created to respond and complement Adam, and a wife’s responsibility is further spelled out in the New Testament to submit to and respect her husband. Are there “chapter and verse” delineations where the observations about men and women are laid out? No, I don’t think so. We can’t point to specific chapters and verses for many of the things we believe (there is no specific verse, for instance, that says “abortion is sin” or “do not go into pornographic chat rooms”), but I do think we can draw conclusions based on our observations of life that correspond with what we DO know in scripture.

*In the Bible we seem to have a wide mix of all characteristics in both genders, and no specific statement that “strong” characteristics belong only to men, and “soft” only to women.*

I agree, we do have a wide mix of all characteristics in both genders, and I see problems that arise when men and women go against the way we were created to be. For instance, when men become passive, weak responders (Adam, Ahab) and when women become harsh controllers (Jezebel, Michal, Rebekah).

I would agree with you that strength is not a male-only characteristic, for we see many examples of strong, godly women in scripture. But that doesn't cancel out God's call for men to be strong. (For instance, the qualifications of elder and deacon in the pastoral epistles.)

However, the concept of a “soft man” seems to call up unfortunate, unflattering images of milque-toast characters. Who wants a man to be spineless and too-easily influenced or intimidated? I don't see any place in scripture where wimps are held up as role models. **\*\*BUT\*\***—there is a huge difference between a “soft man,” and a “gentle man,” or a “sensitive man.” The Lord Jesus was hardly a soft man, but He was certainly gentle and sensitive, while at the same time charismatically attractive to the most masculine types of men.

I hope this has communicated my heart better than my article apparently did.

In His grip,

Sue Bohlin  
Probe Ministries

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# **“Should a Woman Work or Stay Home with Children?”**

Dear Sue,

I was wondering if you could help me to understand more about your studies from the Bible on the lies of the church. From my understanding from Titus women are called to be at home and bring up the children. Of course some single mothers have to work. But, when the husband is the bread winner, the women is called to bring up the children, and maintain the home. Of course our society tells us for a women to be productive she must work to be fulfilled. Can you explain a little bit more about what the implications are from the Bible. Thank you. Because I don't know what to think? My mother has taught me to work, and the church teaches to stay home.

I'm so glad you wrote me!! I can understand why you might be confused since there are MAJORLY conflicting views on the role of women in our society and even in many churches.

You're right, Titus does instruct women with children to be industrious and to take care of our children. It's important for women to keep our “Focus on the Family,” so to speak, because God has ordained for the family to be the place where children are loved and taught and raised to become the people He intends for them to be. I think that whenever possible, in whatever way possible, mothers should be the caretakers of their children because no one can do as good a job as a parent.

But feminism has changed the view of the wife and mother. That worldview says that the only work that matters is work for which you get paid money. It says that the only way to be fulfilled is to produce something that has economic value, either products or services. That's because the feminist

viewpoint values material things above people. And the feminist viewpoint really disrespects children and the women who care for their own children. For a philosophy that is supposed to empower women, it's actually very disrespectful toward women unless they agree with feminism's very narrow perspective on what is acceptable.

A big reason for that is that feminism is, at its heart, humanistic. That means that they value mankind as the highest thing there is. No room for the God of the Bible or for God's values and commandments, nor for His heart toward women and the family. So feminism doesn't care that God longs for children to feel safe and loved and cared for, and the best place for that to happen is with a mom who's intensely THERE, with and for her children, instead of a daycare center. Feminism also doesn't understand that a Christian woman who invests her time and energies and gifts into her family will receive eternal rewards. The only thing that matters to a feminist mindset is money and the approval of the world.

Should a woman work? I don't know any who don't. Some get paid for their labor in dollars, and others get paid in other ways. Like the joy of creating a well-run, balanced home for a family that's not stressed out all the time because there's never enough time to get everything done.

In Proverbs 31, the "excellent wife" has several home-based businesses. She keeps a well-run home, is a great wife and mother, and she works at a business. The biblical pattern is that godly women are industrious workers (as opposed to busybodies who gossip and chatter all day). There are business women mentioned in the New Testament whom Paul praises as godly women. And then, young women are instructed to be homemakers, taking care of their children and homes. (There weren't many choices for employment for women in that culture.) There is no one-size-fits-all pattern for all women.

God's plan is that we all work. It's a sin to be a lazy do-

nothing. The question isn't about working or not working, it's WHERE you work and how you get paid. The other question is, will your children suffer because you work? Or does the fact that you work mean your children will have food to eat and clothes to wear? It's not a cut-and-dried answer. What you need to do is what God leads YOU to do after praying and seeking His face.

I heard a pastor say on the radio recently that a young mother came to him and said, "I would love to stay home and care for my toddler, but I have to work. We don't have enough money for me to stay home." He had occasion to visit her and was stunned; they lived in a large, new home, with two late-model luxury vehicles in the driveway. Their problem wasn't that they didn't have enough money for her to be her child's caretaker; their problem was that they had chosen a standard of living that put things above people. If they moved to a smaller house and older, less expensive cars, they could have done it.

But then, there are people who literally cannot make it on the husband's salary because it really isn't enough. God understands that, too. And in that case, a wife's outside job is His gift and His provision for a family. That's why it's not a cut-and-dried issue.

If you have children, you might ask why working outside the home is so important. Because you can? Because you're smart? Because you're trained? Because Mom thinks you should? It's pretty cool when gifted, smart, capable women pour all those strengths into their children instead of the workplace. The whole family benefits. Especially in the long run. Because, now that my children are young adults, I see the benefits of pouring myself into them, and I am so very glad I did.

I hope this helps. Feel free to write back if I didn't really answer your specific needs or questions.

Sue

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# **“You Are Too Harsh on Women Who Are Gender-Sensitive”**

Dear Sue Bohlin,

In your article [“Probe Answers Our E-Mail: What’s Your Position on Gender Neutral Bibles?”](#) you write,

*“I am also bothered by the unspoken assumption that women are too self-centered and hyper-sensitive not to be able to figure out that when the Bible—the very words of God Himself—uses the word “man” or “mankind” to refer to all humans, we can’t figure that out without getting upset. Just about every language on the face of the planet uses the generic male pronoun to represent all people, but apparently our sensibilities are too finely-tuned to allow for readers of these newer translations to make the mental jump. . .! “*

**I think it sounds a bit harsh. As a Christian woman, I have struggled for years to see that women have as much value to God as men because it seems to me that the Bible is mostly for men and about men. Women were created for men, must submit to men, and to be the help mate to men. I know that most people claim that women are not inferior to men but when I read the Scriptures, I see the inferiority very clearly. However – I find it helpful to read a Bible that uses pronouns and nouns that clearly show which verses refer to males only and which refer to all mankind. I don’t appreciate the comment about not being able to make the mental jump to understand the idea that male pronouns are often inclusive. I don’t think I am being**

self-centered, since I truly believe that women are inferior to men in God's eyes, but I am learning to accept that God has a right to make us for what ever purpose He chooses, even if this hurts very deeply and doesn't make sense to me. Was there really a need for you to be so hard on those of us who struggle with these issues?

Dear friend,

I regret that my article caused you pain. I'm not sure that it was me being harsh as much as your unfortunate (albeit understandable) tenderness and sensitivity at having been lied to about the inferiority of women. I think the high value of women starts in the very beginning of the Bible when God deliberately makes Adam incomplete without Eve, and says it is not good for man to be alone. . . and then Paul fine-tunes that truth in 1 Cor. 11:7 when he says that man is the image and glory of God, but woman is the glory of man. If woman is the glory of the image and glory of God, then we are the best and most beautiful aspect of His creation! I love what John Eldredge writes in *Wild at Heart*: "Eve is the crown of creation, remember? She embodies the exquisite beauty and the exotic mystery of God in a way that nothing else in all creation even comes close to." Please also note the poignancy of his next sentence: "And so she is the special target of the Evil One; he turns his most vicious malice against her." I would respectfully suggest that your sensitivity may have been triggered by the arrows of the Evil One's "vicious malice" against you.

There is a strength and glory to men that is different from the strength and glory of women. When we look at the way the Lord Jesus treated women with such tenderness and respect and dignity, attributes totally unknown in the world at that time, we see what God REALLY thinks of women. He likes us; He loves us; He delights in us! He does not think we are, nor did He make us, inferior to men. We are different from men. He put the most beautiful and tender parts of Himself in US, to

reflect His image in a way men cannot—just as there are wonderful parts of the Fatherhood of God that men reflect in ways we cannot. That is not a difference of value, but of function.

I truly ache that you struggle with the issue of women's value in the sight of God. My guess is that the way you've been treated by misogynistic men who do not protect and cherish women as God tells them to, has given you the wrong impression of what God thinks of us. I pray He shows you how very much He esteems you as a wonderful creation of His hand and heart.

I would like to invite you to listen to a powerful, encouraging and comforting recording of the Lord Jesus speaking to His Bride, based on what He has said in His word and produced by a good friend of ours, Bob Singleton, [here](#). This has been very touching to the people who have heard it, and I pray it will minister to your heart as well.

Warm blessings,

Sue Bohlin  
Probe Ministries

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## **“I Have Some Questions About Women in the Church”**

Dear Sue,

I have read [your answer to email](#) “Should Women Be Pastors?” and have a few questions for you.

- Do you believe a woman can teach a man under any circumstances?



- Do you believe women can be preachers?
- Do you believe women can be elders?
- Do you believe women can be deacons?
- Are there any limitations for women in scripture?
- Do you belong to any church (congregation)?

Hello \_\_\_\_\_,

*1. Do you believe a woman can teach a man under any circumstances?*

If a pastor or the spiritual leaders of a congregation ask a woman to come in under their authority and address a topic on their behalf, and if she maintains an attitude of submission and humility in the process mindful of the restrictions of 1 Tim. 2:12 ("But I do not allow a woman to teach or exercise authority over a man"), I think a case can be made for it. Also, if a woman is teaching women and a man wants to come in and listen, I think that's fine since the scriptures do not prohibit a man from learning from a woman. The problem, as I understand it, is for a woman to be in a position of spiritual authority over men.

I like how the Council for Biblical Manhood and Womanhood puts this: "The teaching inappropriate for a woman is the teaching of men in settings or ways that dishonor the calling of men to bear the primary responsibility for teaching and leadership. This primary responsibility is to be carried by the pastors or elders." ([www.cbmw.org/Questions-and-Answers](http://www.cbmw.org/Questions-and-Answers))

*2. Do you believe women can be preachers?*

Absolutely—to other women. The Women of Faith conferences are a good example of that.

*3. Do you believe women can be elders?*

No. 1 Tim. 3:2 states the requirement of elders being the husband of one wife. It is limited to men. The biblical pattern of spiritual leadership and authority in the church is of male leadership.

*4. Do you believe women can be deacons?*

Yes, but this is not a hill I'm willing to die on. Romans 16:1 commends Phoebe as a servant of God, which can also be translated "deacon." It also seems to me that 1 Tim. 3:8-13, which describes the qualifications for deacon, can and does include women.

Even if they're not called deacons, a lot of women serve the Lord through serving the church. This is how much of the work gets done, and since we are all called to service in one way or another, the needs of God's people are met. People hung up on titles are focusing on the wrong thing; if we're focused on loving and serving Jesus, it doesn't matter if someone else puts a label on it. Personally, I believe a lot of women will receive the reward of "Well done, good and faithful servant" from the Lord regardless of whether they were ever called deacons or not.

*5. Are there any limitations for women in scripture?*

1 Timothy 2:11-15

restricts women from teaching or exercising authority over men.

1 Corinthians 14:34-36

says that women are to be silent in the churches in a spirit of submission. My understanding is that this protects the orderliness of the worship and teaching times from the disruptions of inquisitive and verbal women. It also helps us to maintain an attitude of submission to the Lord and to the church leadership. However, 1 Cor. 11:5 permits women to pray

and prophesy, so TOTAL silence is not what the above passage is prescribing. This call to silence is about not dishonoring the role of men as leaders of the congregation.

1 Corinthians 11:2-16

teaches male headship in the marriage relationship and male leadership in the church.

*6. Do you belong to any church (congregation)?*

Yes, I'm a member of Watermark Community Church in Dallas, Texas.

Sue Bohlin

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**See Also Probe Answers Our E-Mail:**

- [Should Women Be Pastors?](#)
- [So Are All Women Pastors Deceived and Going to Hell?](#)
  - [Your Position Against Women Pastors Is Outdated](#)