

CHAPTER XXWHAT ABOUT WOMEN IN THE CHURCH

When we visited Corinth many years ago I could see that the Church meetings Paul conducted in public would be very close to the pagan temples, temple priestesses, and the prostitutes. This, by itself, would certainly be a reason for Paul to put restrictions on women in the ekklesia. As I said in the introduction my original reason for writing a book was to explain my opinion on why Paul said what he did about women speaking in the Church. It soon became obvious I couldn't explain this without knowing a lot more about the actual operations of the Church during Paul's time.

I knew the Church of today was much different from the Biblical one, so I undertook some serious research. I wanted to know when this change occurred and what caused the change. After studying the Church Fathers through 461 A.D. along with the Bible itself, I was frankly amazed at the results. The Church began to change radically during Paul's time and the Judaizers were the reason. By the time Apostle John wrote his writings in 98 A.D., the change was well under way with many opting for the more staid, organized and Judaizer caused synagogue-like meetings. From this time forward most of the problems told in Church history were caused by the original Church, the ekklesia-Body of Christ, trying to reemerge in the hostile territory dominated by the synagogue-like formal Church.

I believe the democracy and its ekklesia were an integral part of God's plan because Jesus used them to spear-head His ministry right in front of the Jewish hierarchy in Jerusalem. Paul, Peter, and the rest used the ekklesia as a legitimate public meeting to tell the world about the salvation of Jesus and to exhibit the power of God to the public through the Gifts of the Holy Spirit. When Paul wrote to the Corinthians he addressed his letter to all Christians meeting as an ekklesia-Body of Christ. At this time the Judaizers were making inroads and his letter was meant to boost the ekklesia meetings and instruct them on the conduct of the meetings in public. This was obvious in the fourteenth chapter where he told them not to speak in tongues excessively and to let those who were sitting by, speak if they had a revelation from God

(I Cor 14:30-31). Paul was being true to the democratic nature of the ekklesia.

In I Cor 14:34, Paul said the women should keep quiet in the ekklesias. Women speaking caused a problem because in those times women could not belong to the democratic ekklesia. They could attend but they could not participate in the open discussions. If a woman spoke or taught men it would not be an ekklesia meeting. Paul was protecting the legitimacy of the ekklesia, which in turn was protected by the Romans. Of course the Christians met in their own homes and this was where the women excelled in the Gifts of the Holy Spirit. The ekklesia met in the covered porches or colonnades of the Temple Mount and in their homes (Acts 5:42). Paul said he taught in the public and from house to house (Acts 20:20). I Cor 14:34 was a part of the specific instructions about the Christian ekklesia in public. They couldn't have it both ways and Paul considered the ekklesia more important than the Christian women being featured in the public places.

Women were very important to Paul's ministry; he was prayed for and healed in Lystra. Two women, Timothy's mother and grandmother, Eunice and Lois, were probably part of that group (Acts 14:20). (FIGURE 7) Lydia in Philippi provided her home for Paul and his group. She was a dealer in purple clothes and was well acquainted with the important people. Someone told the magistrates to release Paul and Silas from the Philippian jail and someone also paved the way for Paul in Thessalonica and Berea among the leading women (Acts 16 & 17).

Priscilla and her husband were coworkers with Paul in Corinth and Ephesus. . She and her husband had an ekklesia in their home in Rome (Rom 16:5). She and her husband probably prayed for Apollos to receive the Holy Spirit in Ephesus (Acts 18:26). Paul asked the ekklesia in Rome to greet Phoebe a deaconess from Cenchreae. She evidently had some ministry for the home groups in Rome (Rom 16:1-2). Nympha had an ekklesia in her house at Laodicea (Col 4:15). She probably participated in some of the Gifts of the Holy Spirit in her own home. And, of course, there were the four daughters of Phillip in Caesarea, he being one of the original deacons from Jerusalem. How

else could they be known as prophetess if they hadn't prophesied at the home meetings (Acts 21:8-9)? It is obvious the women in Paul's day were very active in the Gifts of the Holy Spirit except in the public ekklesia.

The synagogue-like meeting, copied from the Jewish synagogues had male leaders and offered the women no outlet for any kind of ministry. In some synagogues the women were separated from the men. The synagogue-like formal church more or less copied this arrangement (Apostolic Constitutions). According to James 2:2, the Judaizers had their own synagogues. In these Judaizer-caused meetings, they didn't participate in the Gifts because most continued to be zealous for the Law and the Temple rites. These groups were probably what John called the "synagogues of Satan" in Smyrna and Philadelphia (Rev 2:9, 3:9).

In the early part of the second century, there were groups who met as an ekklesia-Body of Christ. These meetings would have home meetings as a counterpart and provided the opportunity for women to participate in the Gifts. At the same time there were meetings similar to the synagogues where they were well-organized with rigid rules and a hierarchy.

In the latter part of the second century, a group called the Montanist tried to reemerge as the Body of Christ with the attendant Gifts in an area where the synagogue-like church was the dominate force. The Montanists were headed by a man named Montanus and two prophetesses, Prisca and Maxmilla. Several bishops from synagogue-like churches came together and excommunicated them from the church. At this time, there were meetings going on in other areas where the Gifts of the Spirit were active. There was Irenaeus in Lyons on the frontier in France and the group that included Tertullian in Carthage in North Africa. Clement of Alexandria, the first theologian, located in Alexandria was obviously against the Montanist. So you see there was a dichotomy going on within Christianity.

In the latter part of the third century, the formal Church which came from the synagogue-like Church became highly organized with writ-

ten rules from the Apostolic Constitutions. These rules did nothing for women and only enhanced the position of the hierarchy in the formal Church. As a result, people begin to leave the formal Church. They went to the desert and formed cells where they could pray and participate in the Gifts of the Holy Spirit. This was how the monks started and the women or virgins were their counterparts. We know something about what they did by the Life of Antony written by Athanasius. This move of the Spirit in the hinterlands greatly concerned the formal church. .

Arianism was proposed to blunt this move of the Holy Spirit and caused a battle within the formal Church. Emperor Constantine was made a part of this when he made a decree making Montanism illegal in an attempt to protect the formal church from this move of the Spirit. Constantine also built many buildings for the formal Church and did away with the pagan gods and their temple worship.

During Constantine's time it seemed the women should have been given more consideration for leadership in the formal-church. It had moved inside and was no longer considered a democratic ekklesia. The pagan gods were gone and the prostitutes were no longer a part of the people's religion. However, the leaders exhibited selective obedience by falling back on Paul's statement regarding the women when he was actually protecting the integrity of the ekklesia. At the same time they completely disregarded his teaching about the Gifts of the Holy Spirit. By this time the formal church was in a struggle against the move of the Holy Spirit in the desert and was being dominated by Arianism which made Jesus less than God. These Arians were violent toward the monks and virgins because they represented the opposite view point from the hierarchical organization of the formal church.

After Constantine's time, some of the monks became active in the formal churches. By such stalwarts as Athanasius, Basil of Caesarea, Hilary of Poitiers and Martin of Tours, the Holy Spirit was again taught and was able to make some inroads into the formal church. The council of Constantinople in 381 A. D. was agreed to with a reasonable approach to the deity of Jesus and a statement about the importance of the Holy Spirit. Although many of the churches were dominated by

Arians, this council marked a new beginning for the Holy Spirit. This showed the ekklesia of Jesus was not completely overshadowed by the Gates of Hades (those in charge, worldly leadership) (Matt 16:18).

A wealthy man named Priscillian in Spain was inspired by the Holy Spirit and he persuaded people to meet in their own churches as an ekklesia. There, both women and men together, along with some bishops participated in the Gifts of the Holy Spirit. This was like the ekklesias of old and Priscillian wrote several tracts explaining his position with regard to the Word of God and the Gifts. He thought the formal church should have these Gifts.

He and this group were opposed by several Arian bishops and they used the old law of Constantine's to declare them heretics. They were subsequently tried in a sham trial and convicted of sorcery. An overzealous emperor who wanted to ingratiate himself to the formal church leaders had several of the Priscillianists beheaded for this crime. Their real crime was participating in the Gifts of the Holy Spirit. The fact that women were involved was what alerted the Arian bishops in the first place. It's interesting; women were involved in all of these moves of the Holy Spirit that confounded the synagogue-like formal church.

This incident cast a pall over the formal church where Christians were essentially executed by other Christians because of their beliefs which agreed with the Word of God. Augustine wrote during this time (early fifth century) and basically said the formal church was going to be this way so get used to the situation. He even proposed predestination to go along with this attitude. As a result of all this, the formal churches came together and named a "Pope", a single man to decide all issues concerning the formal church.

The Council of Chalcedon in 451 A.D. named Leo I as the first "Pope" and passed several canons that would solidify the authority of the "one man rule". These rules also put a lid on the activity of the Holy Spirit. They made sure there would be no more Antony's, the monk, or Priscillians as everything of a religious nature would be tied to a formal church and this under the reign of the "Pope". This of course left

out the women as well as all the laity from any kind of active participation in the formal church. Everything from God would be funneled to the people through the leadership. This was hardly what Jesus told his disciples He wanted for His ekklesia (Matt 16:18) (Luke 10:21).

If a woman desires to be a part of the organized formal church and be a part of the ruling hierarchy, then by all means go ahead; however, always know it is not God or his Word that is holding you back, but the Gates of Hades. The answer is, to have an ekklesia-Body of Christ with the accompanying Gifts where men and women together can receive revelations from God for the good of the group. In this situation, there is neither male nor female, Jew or Greek, when it comes to the Grace from God.