

The Biblical Case for Fully Spiritually Empowered Women

1. Warm up: Tell us about a woman whose spiritual leadership you greatly admire.
2. Before diving into the Biblical case for empowering women, Jeff reminded us of a couple general principles that should guide our approach to theology and Biblical interpretation. One of those principles is found in Matthew 13:52, where Jesus says, “Every scribe who has been trained for the kingdom of heaven is like the master of a household who brings out of his treasure what is new and what is old.” The term “kingdom of heaven” refers the movement Jesus launched to make earth more like heaven. The term “scribe” refers to serious students of the Scriptures and theology. So Jesus is telling us how we who are students in his movement should approach theology. We should value many things that are beautiful and old, while also embracing other things that are new and exciting.
 - a. What’s something new and exciting that you’ve learned to embrace in your understanding of God and theology in recent years?
 - b. What’s something beautiful and old that you still cling to in your theology?
 - c. Generally speaking, conservatives treasure that which is old (preserving the past), while progressives treasure that which is new (reaching for the future). Does Matthew 13:52 mean that Jesus followers should always be moderates (i.e., a nearly equal blend of old and new)? Theologically speaking, do you tend to lean conservative or progressive? Is it ok to lean one way or the other? Why or why not?
3. If Jesus wants us to be open to the new things God wants to say in our time, that raises the question: How do we know when God wants us to let go of something old to embrace something new? For guidance, Jeff pointed us to John 16:12, where Jesus said, “I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. When the Spirit of Truth comes, the Spirit will guide you into all truth. . . .” Suppose someone were to ask you, “How do you know when the Spirit is speaking to you and telling you to change your mind about something? How do you know it’s God’s Spirit speaking and not your own internal thoughts?” How would you answer?
4. There are three “new” things that our church champions that most churches still oppose. We believe women, gays and lesbians, and transgender people should be full, equal partners in spiritual community. This week we focused on the Biblical case for full equality for women. Jeff highlighted three Bible stories that make that case. The first is the story of Jesus’ female disciples. Read Luke 8:1-3, as printed on p. 3.
 - a. We’re very familiar with the 12 male disciples, but seldom focus on the female disciples who also traveled with Jesus. That Jesus had female disciples is especially noteworthy because, at the time, Jewish rabbis uniformly refused to take female disciples. But Jesus was different; he was clearly breaking the mold and making a statement. In ancient times, why do you think women were almost

always excluded from senior leadership roles in virtually all ancient religions? How did that happen? What dynamics were at play?

- b. In ancient Jewish culture, women were considered “incompetent” to testify and be witnesses in Jewish courts of law. But when it came time for Jesus to decide which disciple he would choose to be the first to witness and testify to his resurrection, he chose Mary Magdalene (John 20:11-18). Why do you think Jesus chose a woman for that critical role?
 - c. When Mary first proclaimed Jesus’ resurrection to the male disciples, “These words seemed to them an idle tale, and they did not believe them.” Luke 24:11. Why do you think they didn’t believe? How do you think Mary felt? What do you think we’re supposed to learn from all this that we can apply to our lives?
 - d. If God is speaking through women, but most churches aren’t listening, what are the implications for those churches, for women everywhere, and for the world?
5. The second key story is found in Acts 2. After Jesus ascended into heaven, his core disciples (both male and female) gathered regularly for intense prayer to try to discern next steps (Acts 1:14). One the 40th day, the Day of Pentecost, they became so full of the Spirit, they broke out of the room and began preaching Jesus and his resurrection to the crowds gathered in Jerusalem in many different languages. Both men and women did this. Peter explained to the crowds that this marked the beginning of a new era of spiritual history, fulfilling a prophecy of Joel. Read Acts 2:14-21, as printed on p. 3. Tell us about a time when you experienced God’s Spirit speaking through a woman in powerful ways in a personal situation or in a spiritual community?
6. The third story is found in Romans 16, where Paul acknowledges and honors 29 early church leaders, including 11 women. In verse 1, he acknowledges Phoebe as a deacon. In verse 7, he says, “Greet Andronicus and Junia, my compatriots who were in prison with me; they are prominent among the apostles.” Andronicus is a male name, but Junia is female. So here Paul celebrates a prominent female apostle.
- a. This is the same Paul who, on another occasion, said women should never be allowed to speak in church. I Corinthians 14:34. Why do you think Paul was so inconsistent on this issue, and what can we learn from that about creating change?
 - b. In one of his better moments, Paul said, “In Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith. . . . There is no longer Jew or Greek, slave or free, male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus.” Galatians 3:26. What does this verse mean?
 - c. How does it make you feel to know that Jesus and the early church were on the cutting edge, championing empowerment of women? How does it make you feel to know that in the 2nd and 3rd centuries the institutional church snapped back to a patriarchal structure, reversing progress? What can we do personally and as a church in our time to be God’s positive change agents for equality for women?

Luke 8:1-3

Soon afterwards Jesus went on through cities and villages, proclaiming and bringing the good news of the kingdom of God. The twelve [male disciples] were with him, ²as well as some women who had been cured of evil spirits and infirmities: Mary, called Magdalene, from whom seven demons had gone out, ³and Joanna, the wife of Herod's steward Chuza, and Susanna, and many others, who provided for them out of their resources.

Acts 2:14-21 (emphasis added)

¹⁴ But Peter, standing with the eleven, raised his voice and addressed them: "Men of Judea and all who live in Jerusalem, let this be known to you, and listen to what I say. ¹⁵Indeed, these are not drunk, as you suppose, for it is only nine o'clock in the morning. ¹⁶No, this is what was spoken through the prophet Joel:

¹⁷ 'In the last days it will be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit upon **all flesh**, and your sons and **your daughters** shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams.

¹⁸ Even upon my slaves, **both men and women**, in those days I will pour out my Spirit; and they shall prophesy.

¹⁹ And I will show portents in the heaven above and signs on the earth below, blood, and fire, and smoky mist.

²⁰ The sun shall be turned to darkness and the moon to blood,

before the coming of the Lord's great and glorious day.

²¹ Then everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved."