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(link above also includes comments)

Church of Christ Practice Harms Girls Long-Term, Suggests 2018 Study



Date: November 28, 2018 Author: Steve Gardner 4 Comments

Does the Churches of Christ denomination inflict long-term harm on girls by prohibiting women from what many refer to as “leadership roles” in the congregation—by prohibiting women from speaking in the Sunday morning assembly, leading singing or prayer in the assembly, reading scripture for the assembly, etc.?

Yes, suggests a detailed study published earlier this year that surveyed multiple religious traditions.

2018 Study

The study by Dr. Benjamin Knoll of Centre College and Cammie Jo Bolin, a Ph.D. student at Georgetown University, and published in their book *She Preached the Word* (Oxford University Press) found, for all types of religious congregations (combined):

Of U.S. adults who attended religious congregations growing up, nearly two out of three never had a female congregational leader.

For Women, Having All-Male Congregational Leaders While Growing Up Results in, On Average, ...

... Lower Self-Esteem

Women who had a female congregational leader at least “some of the time” while growing up had, as adults, levels of self-esteem “consistently just as high as men’s.”

But women who never had a female congregational leader growing up had lower self-esteem than men as adults.

Low self-esteem is associated with greater levels of depression and anxiety and “lower levels of relationship success, job satisfaction, and motivation for personal improvement.”

... Less Education

Women who had only male congregational leaders growing up had lower levels of education when compared to women who had influential female congregational leaders.

“[W]omen ... whose most influential leader was a woman had gained, on average, a full additional year of education compared to those whose most influential leader was a man.”

... Higher Unemployment

“[T]he gap in full-time employment between men and women is present only among those whose most influential youth congregational leader was a man. Women whose most influential leader growing up was a woman are equally likely to be employed full-time as men.”

... Authoritarian/Judgmental View of God: Psychological-Emotional Health

Adult women who had only male congregational leaders growing up are more likely to think about God in “a more authoritarian/judgmental way” rather than in “more graceful/loving terms.”

One’s view of God has been linked to psychological and emotional health.

... Psychological and Economic Gender-Gap

For adult women, “the gender gap in psychological and economic empowerment is present only among those whose religious congregational leaders growing up were exclusively men.”

... Long-Term Comparative Harm

Thus, this study found, having only male congregational leaders comparatively worsens future levels of education, employment, health, and psychological and economic empowerment of young women and girls in the congregation long-term.

(“[T]hese results held true even when controlling for a variety of other potential mitigating factors including demographics and individual/family socioeconomic background.”)

In Church of Christ Congregations

Turning from the 2018 study’s results, which were based on data from multiple religious traditions and were for all types of congregations, to considering their implications for girls in the Churches of Christ denomination—

Even beyond being barred from serving as a preacher, women are barred from reading scripture to the worship assembly, leading the assembly in singing or prayer, making communion remarks, assisting at the communion table, and teaching adult (and even middle school and above) Sunday School in the vast majority of Churches of Christ.

In many Church of Christ congregations, girls and boys under 10 regularly see women in active congregational service as teachers in Sunday School. But those over 10 generally see women (besides those in their family) in such service only as chaperones on infrequent youth trips or projects or in the kitchen or the nursery because women are barred from teaching classes that include baptized boys or men.

Generally, in their church classrooms and worship services: Women become absent for them as religious teachers. Women are absent for them as readers and students of scripture. They do not hear women praying to God. Women are absent as showing joy in leading the congregation in song. They do not see women serving communion. Women are absent in the group assembling up front to lead the service. They do not hear women giving the communion address. Women are absent as being designated servants of the church, aka deacons. Women are absent from leading the congregation. They do not see or hear women as congregational leaders.

Didn't Need a Survey to Know This

Did we *need* a survey to realize this prohibition is harmful to girls and young women?

Not only does scripture (like 1 Cor 14:34-35 and 1 Tim 2:12) **not require prohibiting** women from doing so, scripture **asks** women to speak and actively serve, in the assembly and elsewhere. Women in the Bible (for a start):

- prophets (Luke 2:25-38; Acts 21:8-9; Acts 2:17-18; Judges 4-5)
- the first evangelist (John 4:1-42)
- deacon (Romans 16:1)
- speaking before men and women, in the assembly and elsewhere (Luke 2:25-38; 1 Cor 11:5, 16; 1 Cor 14:5, 23-25, 26, 27-33, 39; Acts 21:8-9; Acts 2:17-18)
- spoke and prayed before the whole church (1 Cor 14:5, 12-17, 26, 27-33; 1 Cor 11:5, 16)
- taught assembled men about scripture and God's message (2 Kings 22:11-20)
- told by Christ to speak to and tell assembled men about the risen Christ and to tell the assembled disciples what Christ wants them to do next (Matt 28:8-10; John 20:17-18)
- taught men about the way of God (Acts 18:24-26)
- told to teach what is good to all, both men and women (Titus 2:3), especially to younger women (2:4-5)
- given other authority over men (Judges 4-5; Ephesians 5:21)
- risked their lives to help spread the Gospel (Romans 16:3-4)

Growing Number Ask Women to Speak in the Assembly

A growing number of Church of Christ congregations—after studying scripture—ask women to speak in the assembly, teach adult Sunday School, etc. A

(incomplete) list of them, as well as links to scripture-study materials from some, are at the end of the Sources and Notes below.

Most colleges affiliated with Churches of Christ, recognizing scripture does not bar it, also no longer prohibit women from speaking in worship chapel.

Conclusion: See the Mirror

These are probably the most important points—

Women are gifted by God, and God asks them to serve. And we block them.

And, this study suggests, we inflict long-term harm on girls—we inflict long-term harm on our daughters and granddaughters, and we inflict long-term harm on the daughters and granddaughters of others in our church—by our inaction and silence on this issue and by our going along with the exclusion.

What, exactly, is worth harming these girls even one more day?

You Can Do Something About It Now

You can ask your elders and congregation to reconsider, and you can visibly support them as they do.

Or inaction, silence, and going along with it will continue, as will the harm to the people around you.

Sources and Notes

Benjamin R. Knoll and Cammie Jo Bolin, *She Preached the Word*, New York: Oxford University Press (2018). Pages 119 – 194 report the results of the study. Pages 195-218 provide Dr. Knoll and Ms. Bolin’s conclusions. Pages 219-235 describe further details of the study. The book is well done and dense with information, much more than is reported here and also on other, related topics.

The quotes in this article come from two articles by Dr. Knoll and Ms. Bolin based on their book and study: Benjamin R. Knoll and Cammie Jo Bolin, “[It’s good for girls to have women in the pulpit,](#)” *Religion News* (July 17, 2018), visited November 24, 2018; Benjamin R. Knoll and Cammie Jo Bolin, “[Ten things to know about women’s ordination in the United States,](#)” Oxford University Press Blog (June 2018), visited November 23, 2018.

Not only does scripture [not require prohibiting](#) women from doing so, scripture [asks](#) women to speak and actively serve, in the assembly and elsewhere.

For a discussion about relevant scripture, see Steve Gardner, “[20 Scripture Passages Telling Women to Speak, Teach, Lead, and Have Authority Over Men in the Assembly and Elsewhere,](#)” AuthenticTheology.com (September 3, 2018).

A discussion regarding the Church of Christ college chapels is here: [Most colleges](#) affiliated with Churches of Christ, recognizing that scripture does not bar it, no longer prohibit women from speaking in worship chapel.

A (incomplete) list of some of the Churches asking women to speak in the assembly is [here](#). Links to scripture-study materials from some of the Churches of

Christ explaining why scripture does not prohibit women from actively serving in the assembly, etc.:

- [Glenwood Church](#)
- [Providence Road Church of Christ](#)
- [Sycamore View Church of Christ](#)
- [Springfield Church of Christ](#)
- [Oak Hills Church](#)
- [Fourth Avenue Church of Christ](#)
- [Southern Hills Church of Christ](#)
- [Meadowbrook Church of Christ](#)
- [“The Inclusion of Women in Worship: The Highland Church of Christ, Abilene, Texas”](#)

[Click Here to Show More Detailed Sources & Notes](#)