

## "THE PROMINENT ROLE OF WOMEN IN GOD'S AGENDA"

(Acts 21:1-16)

(Ajith Fernando)

How can we apply the principle evident in Luke's writings that women and other people marginalized in society have a prominent place in God's kingdom? We ought to follow Luke in demonstrating to such people that they are truly important to God and to the church. Our application of Scripture should be relevant to all segments of God's people. We must show how biblical principles apply to men and women, to the rich and the poor, and to adults, youth, and children. In our illustrations, we should be representative in our use of examples. For us in poorer nations, where much of our literature comes from the richer nations, we should look diligently for examples from our part of the world. In multiethnic societies, we should look for examples from the different ethnic groups.

We should also avoid examples that entrench people in their prejudices. Things have become a bit sensitive recently because of an overemphasis on political correctness, and inclusive language has been used even for God. While we deplore such excesses, that should not prevent us from using language that does not eliminate one group of people (e.g., women). What was legitimate a generation ago may mean something different today, as meanings attributed to words change over time.

Having said this, we must also remember that the New Testament letters say some things about the roles of men and women that grate against the way many people are thinking today. We should be careful about radically reinterpreting these passages to mean something Paul did not mean. Insofar as our cultural backgrounds can cause us to be blind to certain facets of scriptural truth, we should always be willing to submit traditional interpretations to fresh study. But we have no mandate to reject a passage or to reinterpret it so that it ends up saying something clearly not intended by the author. This is a difficult issue, as the plethora of books with conflicting conclusions from authors, all of whom are firmly committed to the authority of Scripture, shows. But whatever our views, there should be no doubt in the minds of all biblical Christians about the equality, importance, and significance of those whom society considers unequal, unimportant, or insignificant.

