

## Should Women Be Pastors and Elders?

In a social climate of complete equality in all things, the biblical teaching of only allowing men to be pastors and elders is not popular. Many feminist organizations denounce this position as antiquated and chauvinistic. In addition, many Christian churches have adopted the "politically correct" social standard and have allowed women pastors and elders in the church. But the question remains, is this biblical?

My answer to this question is, "No, women are not to be pastors and elders." Many may not like that answer, but it is, I believe, an accurate representation of the biblical standard. You make the decision after reading this paper.

First of all, women are under-appreciated and under-utilized in the church. There are many gifted women who might very well do a better job at preaching and teaching than many men. However, it isn't gifting that is the issue, but God's order and calling. What does the Bible say? We cannot come to God's word with a social agenda and make it fit our wants. Instead, we must change and adapt to what it says.

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth, the garden of Eden, and Adam and Eve. He put Adam in the garden and gave him the authority to name all the animals.

Afterwards, God made Eve as a helper to Adam.<sup>(1)</sup> This is an important concept because Paul refers to the order of creation in his epistle to Timothy when he discusses the relationship between men and women in the church context. Let's take a look.

*"But I do not allow a woman to teach or exercise authority over a man, but remain quiet. For it was Adam who was first created, and then Eve. And it was not Adam who was deceived, but the woman being quite deceived, fell into transgression"* (1 Tim. 2:12-14 -- all quotes from the Bible are from the NASB). This passage has several interesting areas of discussion, but for our purpose we will focus on authority. At the very least, there is an authority structure set up by God. The woman is not to have authority over the man in the church context. But this does not extend to the political/economic world. In the Old Testament Deborah was a judge in Israel over men. Also, in the New Testament, Phoebe played an important role in the church at Cenchrea (Romans 16). There is no doubt that women supported Paul in many areas and were great helpers in the church (Act 2:17; 18:24; 21:8). But what Paul is speaking of in 1 Tim. 2 is the relationship between men and women in the church structure, not in a social or political context.

When we look further at Paul's teachings we see that the bishop/overseer is to be the husband of one wife (1 Tim. 3:2) who manages his household well and has a good reputation (1 Tim. 3:4-5, 7). Deacons must be *"men of dignity"* (1 Tim. 3:8). Paul then speaks of women in verse 11 and their obligation to receive instruction. Then in verse 12, Paul says *"Let deacons be husbands of one wife..."* Again, in Titus 1:5-7, Paul says, *"For this reason I left you in Crete, that you might set in order what remains, and appoint elders in every city as I directed you, namely, if any man be above reproach, the husband of one wife, having children who believe, not accused of dissipation or rebellion. For the overseer must be above reproach as God's steward..."* Notice that Paul interchanges the word 'elder' and 'overseer'.

In each case, the one who is an elder, deacon, bishop, or overseer is instructed to be male. He is the husband of one wife, responsible, able to *"exhort in sound doctrine and to refute those who contradict"* (Titus 1:9). We see no command for the overseers to be women. On the contrary, women are told to be *"dignified, not malicious gossips, but temperate, faithful in all things"* (1 Tim. 3:11). Why is it that it is the men who are singled out as the overseers? It is because of the created order of God that Paul references (Gen. 1-2; 1 Tim.

2:12-14). This is not merely a social custom that fell away with ancient Israel. Additionally, in the Old Testament in over 700 mentions of priests, every single one was a male. There is not one instance of a female priest. This is significant because priests were ordained by God to hold a very important office of ministering the sacrifices. This was not the job of women.

Therefore, from what I see in Genesis 1-2, 1 Timothy 2, and Titus 1, the normal and proper person to hold the office of elder/pastor is to be a man.

### **What About Galatians 3:28?**

*"There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus,"* (Gal. 3:28).

This verse is often used to support the idea that women can hold the offices of elder and pastor because there is neither male nor female in Christ. The argument states that if we are all equal, then women can be pastors.

Unfortunately, those who use this verse this way have failed to read the context. Verse 23 talks about being under the Law *"before faith came"* and how we are brought closer to Jesus and have become sons of God by faith. We are no longer under law, but grace and we are *"Abraham's offspring, heirs according to the promise,"* (v. 29).<sup>(2)</sup> The point of this passage is that we are all saved by God's grace according to the promise of God and that it doesn't matter who you are, Jew, Greek, slave, free, male, or female. All are saved the same way, by grace. In that, there is neither male nor female.

This verse is not talking about church structure. It is talking about salvation *"in Christ."* It cannot be used to support women as pastors because that isn't what it is talking about. Instead, to find out about church structure and leadership, you need to go to those passages that talk about it: 1 Timothy 2 and Titus 1.

### **Being a Pastor or Elder is to be in Authority**

God is a God of order and balance. He has established order within the family (Gen. 3:16; 1 Cor. 11:3; Eph. 5:22-33; Col. 3:18-21 ) and the church (1 Tim. 2:11-14; 1 Cor. 11:8-9). Even within the Trinity there is an order, a hierarchy. The Father sent the Son (John 6:38) and both the Father and the Son sent the Holy Spirit (John 14:26; 15:26). Jesus said, *"For I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me,"* (John 6:38). It is clear that God is a God of order and structure.

In creation, God made Adam first and then Eve to be his helper. This is the order of creation. It is this order that Paul mentions in 1 Tim. 2:11-14 when speaking of authority. Being a pastor or an elder is to be in the place of authority. Therefore, within the church, for a woman to be a pastor or elder, she would be in authority of men in the church which contradicts what Paul says in 1 Tim. 2:11-14.

### **But Doesn't This Teaching Belittle Women?**

No, male leadership does not belittle women. Jesus was given his authority by God the Father (Matt. 28:18). He was sent by God (John 6:38). He said the Father was greater than He (John 14:28). Did this belittle Jesus? Of course not. Women are of great value in the church and need to be used more and more according to the gifts given them.

Does the wife's submission to the husband mean that she is less than the husband, less important, or belittled? Again, not at all. Not having a place of leadership in the church does not mean a woman is less of a person, less important to God, or inferior. All are equal before God whether it be Jew, Gentile, free, slave, male, or female. But in the church, God has set up an order the same way he set one up in the family. The chain of command is Jesus, the man, the wife, and the children.

## **What About Women Who Say They are Called By God to Be Pastors?**

There are women pastors in the world who love their congregations and have stated that they are called by God to be pastors. Of course, I cannot agree with this considering the previous analysis of the biblical position. Instead, I believe they have usurped the position of men and gone against the norm of scriptural revelation. Additionally, those who state that they are called by God because of the great job they are doing and the gifting they have received are basing their theology upon experience and not scripture. The issue is simple: are they submitting to the word of God or are they making the word of God submit to their desires?

## **What About a Missionary Woman Who Establishes a Church?**

Scripture establishes the norm. As Christians we apply what we learn from the word, to the situations at hand. So, what about the situation where a woman missionary has converted a group of people, say in the jungle somewhere, and she has established a church? In that church, she is then functioning as a pastor and teacher having authority over men in the church. Should she not do this?

First of all, she should not be out there alone. She should be with her husband or, at the very least, under the oversight of a church body in the presence of other women and men. Missionary work is not a lone endeavor to be handled by single women.

Second, if in some highly unusual set of circumstances there is a woman in a lone situation, it is far more important that the word of God be preached and the gospel of salvation go forth to the lost than not. Whether it be male or female, let the gospel be spoken. However, I would say that as soon as there is/are males mature enough to handle eldership, that she should then establish the proper order of the church as revealed in scripture and thereby, show her submission to it.

## **Does this also mean that women shouldn't wear jewelry?**

*"Likewise, I want women to adorn themselves with proper clothing, modestly and discreetly, not with braided hair and gold or pearls or costly garments;<sup>10</sup> but rather by means of good works, as befits women making a claim to godliness.<sup>11</sup> Let a woman quietly receive instruction with entire submissiveness.<sup>12</sup> But I do not allow a woman to teach or exercise authority over a man, but to remain quiet.<sup>13</sup> For it was Adam who was first created, and then Eve," (1 Tim. 2:9-13).*

Some argue that if we are to forbid women to be elders then the context of 1 Tim. 2:9-13 demands that we require women to not have braided hair, wear gold, or have costly garments. Since no one wants to put that sort of a demand on a woman (since it is cultural), then why should we also demand that they not be elders since it would logically follow that it was also a culturally based admonition?

The problem here is that multifaceted. First, the objection ignore what the scriptures plainly teach about the elder being the husband of one wife. Second, it fails to address the real issue of biblical headship residing in the male. Third, it fails to properly exegete the scripture in question.

In 1 Tim. 2:9-13 Paul tells us that women should be modestly dressed. He uses the example of then present day adornment as an example of what not to do, definitely culturally based assessment by Paul. Notice that Paul emphasizes good works and godliness as a qualifier (as does Peter, see 1 Pet. 3:2). This is not a doctrinal statement tied to anything other than being a godly woman in appearance as well as attitude.

In verse 11, Paul says that a woman should quietly receive instruction. Please note that "The word, *hepsychia*, translated "quietness" in 1 Timothy 2:11 and silent in verse 12, does not mean complete silence or no talking. It is clearly used elsewhere (Acts 22:2; 2 Thes.

3:12) to mean "settled down, undisturbed, not unruly. A different word (σιγαομ) means "to be silent, to say nothing" (cf. Luke 18:39; 1 Cor. 14:34)."<sup>3</sup> Paul is advocating orderliness in this verse.

Then in verse 12-13, Paul says, "*But I do not allow a woman to teach or exercise authority over a man, but to remain quiet.*"<sup>13</sup> *For it was Adam who was first created, and then Eve.*" Notice that Paul directly relates the authority issue with the created order. He does not do this with the woman's dress code. Therefore, the dress code can be seen as cultural and the authority issue as doctrinal since the later is tied to the creation order and the dress code and authority issue are not, especially since they are separated by the conjunction "but" which is showing contrast, i.e., here we have one thing, but over here we have another.

### **Conclusion**

God's word clearly tells us that the elder is to be the husband of one wife. A woman cannot qualify for this position by virtue of her being female. Whether anyone likes it or not is irrelevant to the fact that this is what the Bible teaches.

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1. An important note here is that the Holy Spirit is also called the Helper and is no less God than Jesus and the Father.
  2. The Promise is God's promise to Abraham to bless all the nations in Him (Gen. 12:3; Gal. 3:8).
  3. Walvoord, John F., and Zuck, Roy B., *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*, (Wheaton, Illinois: Scripture Press Publications, Inc.) 1983, 1985.