

CAN A WOMAN BE A PASTOR? GOD'S BLUEPRINT FOR MALE LEADERSHIP OF HIS CHURCH

A great debate rages concerning sanctioning women into the leadership of the church. It is primarily a controversy regarding the role of women in the ministry, specifically the office of the pastor. This controversy is a result of a direct attack upon God's design for womanhood resulting in a great effort to erase the distinction between male and female. In the past, there have often been two extremes in the role of women in the church. On one hand, women are treated as second class citizens with no voice or opinion in regards to the operation of the church. On the other hand, women are permitted to occupy positions of leadership in public services of the church. No position is withheld from women, and as a result, women are not only prominent, but we find that they have become dominant in many churches. These are the extremes, but neither one is the biblical role or design for women in the church.

Let us first recognize that God has used women. In the Word of God, we find Miriam, Deborah, Ruth, Queen Esther, Mary, and many other women used specifically and significantly by God. The Bible undoubtedly teaches the equality of the male and female: "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female; for ye are all one in Christ Jesus" (Gal. 3:28). There is equal footing at the cross. God teaches us that there are no second class citizens or second rate people. There is only one human race, and we are all made in the image of God. Understanding that God is not a respecter of persons, based on nationality, color, or sex, does that allow for the removal of gender roles? The previously cited Gal. 3:28 has been one of the key verses used to defend the allowance of the interchangeability of roles. This verse has

erroneously led to the false belief that there are no distinctions between the roles and functions of the male and female; nothing could be further from the truth. Spiritual equality between the sexes does not eradicate the differences to their roles.

The Bible speaks specifically to a woman's role in the church. In 1 Cor. 11, we have a clear teaching on the order of authority: "But I would have you know that the head of every man is Christ; and the head of the woman is the man; and the head of Christ is God" (1 Cor. 11:3). The understanding of this verse is crucial to our understanding of the male and female role. If we follow the verse we see the order as this: God—Christ—Man—Woman. We are not talking about equality relative to function, but an order of authority. The key to understanding this passage is an understanding of the biblical social order: God's chain of command, which the Bible explains by the "headship principle." When the Bible speaks of *head*, it refers to the headship or master. Christ is the head of every man, meaning that He is the ruler, master, and authority of every man. The word for *man* in 1 Cor. 11:3 is not the Greek word *anthropos* which would include all of mankind. The Greek word is *aner* which "is never used of the female sex."¹

After stating in God's chain of command that Christ is the head of all males, we read, "And the head of the woman is the man." If we examine the Greek rendering of this verse it could be simply translated as the head of every *gunay* ("woman," from which we also get the term gynecologist) is an *aner*—the man or male. As Christ is in headship over men, men are in headship over women.

The final definitive statement of 1 Cor. 11:3 is that the head of Christ is God. What does that mean? We know that God the Father and Jesus Christ are equal in

¹W. E. Vine, *Vine's Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words* (Lynchburg, Va.: Old-Time Gospel Hour, 1982), 706.

essence. The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are co-equal in the Godhead. Jesus spoke of His equality with God the Father when He said, "I and my Father are one" (John 10:30). Each person of the Godhead is a distinct person; one in essence, yet different in function. The Father did not die on the cross, that was the role of the Son. The Holy Spirit is the One who convicts and indwells every born again believer in Christ, and He is the Author of Scripture.

The point is that Christ is equal to the Father in essence, but as to function and role, He submitted Himself to the Father. Christ stated that He came to do the will of the Father, and not His own will (John 4:34). To say the woman is inferior to man is to say that Christ is inferior to God, and that is ridiculous. Even though Christ is equal with God, Christ submitted Himself to God. Even though women are equal with men, women are to submit themselves to men. Submission is an aspect of function, not value or importance. For the Trinity to work, for the human race to work, and for a marriage to be functional, God has established a chain of command. There is a divinely appointed order that God has established for all to follow relative to function. The head of the wife is the husband, and he is identified as the leader of the home (Eph. 5:22-24). A difference in function and responsibility is obvious in Eph. 5:23. If a woman is to be under the leadership of her husband in the home, how could she then be in a position of leadership over him and other men in the church? (1 Tim. 3:5). Our responsibility is to fall in line with God's design and order.

The Book of 1 Timothy was written to explain to believers the proper conduct for the local church (1 Tim. 3:15). God addressed women with an emphasis on their role and function in the local church (1 Tim. 2:9-15). He deals with the woman's appearance,

attitude, testimony, role, design, and contribution. From this passage we learn that one of the woman's duties is her role as a learner rather than a teacher during public worship: "Let the woman learn in silence with all subjection" (1 Tim. 2:11). There are two major points made in this passage. The first point is the characteristic of the woman in the public assembly. She is to be a learner, not a leader, and everything else that is written further expounds this command. Notice at the end of verse 12, the same admonition to be silent is repeated, "But I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man, but to be in silence." The word *silence* does not mean she is to be speechless or that she is to have no use of her tongue whatsoever. There is another Greek word for speechless, but the word used in this verse means quietness. Women are to learn in quietness or stillness in the public worship service. In 1 Tim. 2:12, the apostle Paul actually interprets the meaning of verse 11. He defines exactly what he means by women staying quiet in the worship. Women are to keep quiet in the sense of not teaching men.

A woman is not only to learn in silence, but she is to do it with all subjection (1 Tim. 2:11). Why is the woman commanded to learn in quietness and in subjection? It is possible for a woman to learn in quietness with a rebellious and resistant spirit. God first addressed the outward action, but He also deals with the inward attitude regarding this matter. Women, in their hearts, are to be in subjection to the ministry of men. Subjection means *to line up under*. It is a military term referring to rank as it relates to order, authority, and responsibility. In the context of worship, women are to be silent and content in the role of the learner.

Furthermore, in 1 Tim. 2:12 we see that the woman is not to be a teacher over men. She is not to be instructing the church in doctrine. The word *teach* is the word for

teaching doctrine. She is forbidden to stand up in an authoritative role as teacher before men. There are no prohibitions in the giving of a testimony, singing, or ministering through special music. The Bible, in a very straightforward manner, forbids women from exercising any type of authority over men in the church (1 Tim. 2:12). This does not entirely rule out women teaching. The Bible says the older women should teach the younger women (Titus 2:3-4). Timothy was taught at home by his mother and grandmother (2 Tim. 1:5; 3:15). Priscilla and Aquila both instructed Apollos (Acts 18:26) in private and not in the setting of a church. In a woman's teaching ministry, she must not *usurp authority over the man*. God does not forbid women to teach under appropriate conditions and circumstances. However, to fill the office and role of the pastor or teacher over men in the context of the local church is not her biblical role.

God explained the reason for the woman's submissive role in the church by citing two significant events in human history: the creation and the fall of man. These events are the fundamental reasons for the teaching in 1 Tim. 2:9-12. Why is a woman to be a learner not an instructor of men in the church assembly? The first reason is the order of creation: "For Adam was first formed, then Eve" (1 Tim. 2:13). The Bible establishes a woman's subordinate role in the divine order of original creation. In 1 Tim. 2:13, we are reminded that Adam was formed first; therefore, he is the leader. The Bible also says, "For the man is not of the woman; but the woman of the man" (1 Cor. 11:8). Headship by the man was part of God's design from the beginning, and Adam bears the responsibility for its success or failure.

The second reason for God's instruction pertaining to women's role within His church has to do with man's fall into sin. The Bible refers back to the fall of man and

says, “And Adam was not deceived, but the woman, being deceived, was in the transgression” (1 Tim. 2:14). Do we realize that when Adam and Eve sinned, Adam did it with full knowledge? He was not deceived at all. In other words, Adam’s eyes were wide open when he sinned. Eve, being deceived, was in the transgression; Eve was fully deceived. How does this relate to women’s subjection to men in the church? The Bible is teaching that Adam did not sin because he was deceived; Adam sinned as a result of submitting to the woman’s leadership. Gen. 3:1-7 chronicles the tragic account of what happened when Eve usurped the headship role. Adam was the follower; even though he had full knowledge, he submitted to the woman who was deceived. Adam’s disobedience brought sin and death into the world. The whole human race thus fell into depravity and judgment because the first man and woman violated their God-given positions. When Adam violated his leadership role and followed Eve, the perversion of God’s order was successful. The fall resulted, not simply from disobedience to God’s command, but from violating God’s appointed roles for man and woman. That is why the New Testament relates the fall to Adam’s sin, not Eve’s (Rom. 5:12-21). “For since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive” (1 Cor. 15:21-22). When we consider the fall of woman and man into sin, they are lessons for us in the tragic result of role reversals.

Women may be highly gifted teachers and leaders, but those gifts are not to be exercised over men in the services of the church. For the church to depart from this divine order is to perpetuate the disaster of the fall. God’s teaching through the Apostle Paul was not based on cultural standards but on two historic and foundational facts: (1) Adam was first created, and then Eve and (2) it was not Adam who was deceived, but

the woman. When women usurp a God-ordained role for men, they inevitably fall into other unbiblical practices and delusions.

Let us examine several examples used by those who promote female pastors. In the Old Testament, Deborah served as a judge (Judg. 4:4-5:31). At such times, God may use women to accomplish His purposes even as he used Deborah. It is significant that Deborah declined to lead the military campaign against the Canaanites, deferring instead to a man, Barak. No women served as priests; none of the authors of the Old Testament were women. No woman had an ongoing prophetic (speaking before people) ministry like that of Elijah and Elisha, or the other prophets. Miriam, Deborah, Huldah, and Isaiah's wife are called prophetesses because they had the gift of prophecy. Miriam, Deborah, and Huldah gave only one recorded prophecy, and Isaiah's wife none. God spoke through women on a few limited occasions, but no woman had an ongoing role of preaching and teaching. Furthermore, we must also be reminded that the church did not exist in the Old Testament, and thus these examples cannot dictate female leadership in the church.

There was a woman deaconess by the name of Phoebe mentioned in Rom. 16:1. What is a deacon? A deacon is a servant, not an overseer. While the four daughters of Philip are said to have prophesied (Acts 21:9), the occasion, location, or the message is not defined. There is no reason or evidence to assume they had an ongoing preaching ministry or that they taught during the public worship. They, like Mary the mother of Jesus (Luke 1), or Anna (Luke 2:36-39), delivered some message of truth, but it was not in the church setting. Dr. John R. Rice interestingly noted that, "There were no women preachers, no women pastors nor evangelists nor Bible teachers, in the New Testament

churches.”² The New Testament nowhere records a sermon or teaching of a woman, and the examples of pastors given in the New Testament are all males.

In Acts 2:18-19 we read, “Your daughters will prophesy.” There is no question that women could have this gift. But what is prophecy? Prophecy can mean one of three things. First, prophecy can mean to speak direct revelation from God. We do not have prophecy in this sense today because we have the complete Word of God contained in the Holy Scriptures. Second, prophecy also means to speak for God: “And Judas and Silas, being prophets also themselves, exhorted the brethren with many words, and confirmed them” (Acts 15:32). Third, prophecy could be a musical ministry to people: “Moreover, David and the captains of the host separated to the service of the sons of Asaph, and of Heman, and of Jeduthun, who should prophesy with harps, with psalteries, and with cymbals” (1 Chron. 25:1). Once again, we cannot use these examples as a valid reason for women to pastor.

Others will say that the Bible teaches that we are one body in Christ (Rom. 5:12), and therefore it does not matter who serves as pastor. This verse does not demonstrate our interchangeability of roles but our unit of purpose. Obviously, there is a difference in responsibility and our roles. In Titus 2, the older women are to teach the younger women. Just because we are one in Christ does not mean we perform the same functions.

Another objection often heard is that we do not have any leaders that are male; therefore, we must fill the role with who is available. Lack of men does not give us the right to disobey the Scripture. King Saul learned this lesson the hard way when Samuel was late and he decided to go ahead and lead the services himself. Saul lost his kingdom

²John R. Rice, *Bobbed Hair, Bossy Wives and Women Preachers* (Wheaton, Ill.: Sword of the Lord Publishers, 1941), 48.

for this failure (1 Sam. 13). Circumstances do not relieve us from the requirement of obedience to the Word; to obey is better than sacrifice. Disobedience is as the sin of witchcraft, so let us not use foolish situations to infringe upon the holy and inerrant Word of God.

The question of whether a woman should preach or pastor cannot be decided by logic, feelings, or ability, but what God says about it in His Word. There are women who are more organized, intelligent, and better speakers than men, but that does not qualify a woman to be in the pastoral position in the church. A woman may say that she has been called into the pastoral ministry. A correct biblical response, according to Dr. Rice, is that “the Holy Spirit will never contradict His own Word. Any leading that is thought to be of the Holy Spirit should be checked by the Bible. Any call that does not coincide with the clear teaching of the Word of God is false, and is not from God’s Spirit. For this reason the Scripture commands us, ‘Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world’” (1 John 4:1).³

Maleness is the overriding qualification for any pastor according to the explanation of 1 Tim. 2:9-15. Directly following this passage, the qualifications for the office of a pastor are given in 1 Tim. 3:1-7. These qualifications can also be found in Titus 1:6-9. In these two passages, all male pronouns and adjectives are used for the position of pastor in the local church. The Scripture says that the pastor is to be “the husband of one wife” (1 Tim. 3:2, 12; Titus 1:6). A further qualification for the pastor is “one that ruleth well his own house” (1 Tim. 3:4). Therefore it is biblically impossible for a woman to be a pastor. She is not to lead in the home or in the church. Consistently and

³Ibid., 39.

without exception, all references to church leaders are shown as males (through implicit statements or implied from the Bible). Susan Foh, in the book entitled *Women and the Word of God: A Response to Biblical Feminism*, correctly states that “the entire doctrine of the church is concerned and will be affected by decisions made about the woman’s role.”⁴ If both male and female roles are blended or if the Bible is marginalized or disregarded in its gender teachings, this opens a Pandora’s Box for all types of perversion in the church. When any part of God’s design or order is ignored or rejected, His church is weakened and He is dishonored. There is nothing in Scripture to promote the idea of women serving as pastors in the local church. This may not be popular, especially in our culture, but our call as believers is not to be conformed to the culture and its standards. We are to be obedient to the Word of God.

⁴Susan T. Foh, *Women and the Word of God: A Response to Biblical Feminism* (Phillipsburg, N.J.: Presbyterian & Reformed Publishing Co., 1978), 2.