

# Women as Pastors ?

## **Introduction:**

The question frequently comes up whether women may serve in ministry work in the church. Of course, the answer is “yes”, all Christians are called to love, serve, and minister to one another.

But that is not the real question that agitates people these days. If we were to ask a more precise question: “Are there any ministries in the church in which women may not serve?” Then the answer must be qualified by the clear teaching of Scripture.

Right at the start of any study of a question such as this, I hope we would acknowledge the authority of the Word of God to inform us. We should allow God to tell us what He desires, and we should be very careful that we do not impose on the text our own ideas or biases. Agreed?

Herein lies a problem, our culture has bought into the ungodly philosophy of egalitarianism/feminism which says that men and women are equal in *every* way. And so it can be a struggle for those who have unknowingly sipped the Kool-aid to think in biblical categories. However, let us give it a good shot!

## **What Saith the Scripture?**

The fundamental text which establishes that women should not serve as pastor/elders is **1 Timothy 2:11-15**. In this passage, Paul forbids women from engaging in two activities that characterize the bishop/elders’ ministry: teaching and exercising authority. We see this in the qualifications for the office, among other places: ministers must have the ability to teach (1 Timothy 3:2; 5:17; Titus 1:9; cf. Acts 20:17-34), and to

lead the church (1 Timothy 3:4-5; 5:17). Women are prohibited from teaching men and from exercising authority over them, and therefore it follows that they must not serve as pastor/bishop/elders.

## ***Is this prohibition still in force today?***

Many today contend that Paul prohibited women from serving as elders because women in Paul’s day were uneducated and therefore they lacked the ability to teach men well. It is also argued that women were responsible for the false teaching that was troubling the congregation to which Paul wrote in 1 Timothy. According to this reading, Paul would support women serving as pastors after they are properly educated and if they teach sound doctrine.

## ***The prohibition is grounded in creation, not circumstances.***

These attempts to relativize Paul’s prohibition must be judged to be faulty. Paul could have easily qualified what he had written, “I don’t want women to teach or exercise authority over men because they are uneducated,” or, “I don’t want women to teach or exercise authority over men because they are spreading false teaching.” Yet what reason does Paul actually give for his command in verse 12? Paul’s rationale for the command follows in the next verse: “For Adam was formed first, then Eve” (v. 13). Paul says nothing about lack of education or about women promoting false teaching. Instead, he appeals to the created order, to God’s good and perfect intentions when He created mankind. It is important to see that the reference to creation indicates that the command for women not to teach or

exercise authority over men is a prohibition that is binding on the church at all times and in all places. In giving this command, Paul does not appeal to fallen creation, to the consequences in the life of men and women as a result of sin. Rather, he grounds the prohibition in the wholly good creation that existed *prior* to sin entering into the world.

The foundational reason that women should not serve as pastors/elders is communicated here, and so the argument from creation cannot be dismissed as limited by our time in history, or our culture. Furthermore, the New Testament contains many similar appeals to the created order. For instance, homosexuality is not in accord with the will of God because it is “contrary to nature” (Romans 1:26); that is, it violates what God intended when He made mankind as male and female (Genesis 1:26-27). Similarly, Jesus teaches that divorce is not the divine ideal since at creation God made one man and one woman, signifying that one man should be married to one woman “till death do us part” (Matthew 19:3-12).

In 1 Timothy 2:11-15, Paul specifically grounds his prohibition of women teaching and exercising authority in the order of creation, namely, that Adam was made first and then Eve (Genesis 2:4-25). The passage in Genesis is carefully constructed, and Paul, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, helps us see the significance of Eve being created after Adam. Some critics object that the argument fails to persuade since animals were created before mankind, but this misses Paul’s point. Only men and women are created in God’s image (Genesis 1:26-27), and therefore Paul tells us the significance of God creating man prior to the woman, namely, that the man is responsible to lead.

Paul gives a second reason why women should not teach or exercise authority over

men in 1 Timothy 1:14, “Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and became a transgressor.” Paul’s point here is not that women are more prone to be deceived than men, because elsewhere he commends women as teachers of women and children (Titus 2:3; 2 Timothy 1:5; 3:14-15), which he would not do if women by nature were gullible airheads. It is likely that Paul is thinking again of the creation account, for the serpent undermined the created order by deceiving Eve rather than Adam (thereby undermining male headship), even though there is evidence that Adam was with Eve when the temptation occurred. Verse 14 does not teach that women were uneducated, for deceit is a moral issue, whereas lack of education is remedied by instruction.

Eve’s deception cannot be attributed to intellectual weakness, but was due to her rebellion, her desire to be independent of God. In addition, the reference to deceit here does not indicate that the women of Ephesus played a primary role in spreading false teaching, for the false teachers named in 1 Timothy are men (1:20). Indeed, if the women were banned from teaching because they were advocates of the false teaching, we have the strange and very unlikely situation where all the Christian women in Ephesus were deceived by the false teaching. Rather, Paul’s point is that Satan’s temptation of Eve instead of Adam subverted male leadership, for he deceived and tempted the woman even though Adam was present with Eve when the temptation occurred. Indeed, even though Eve was deceived first by the serpent, the primary responsibility for sin fell on Adam’s shoulders. This is evident in Genesis 3, for the Lord speaks to Adam first about the sin of the first couple, and this is confirmed by Romans 5:12-19 where the sinfulness of the mankind is traced to Adam and not Eve.

In summary, 1 Timothy 2:12 forbids women from teaching or exercising authority over men in the church. This command is grounded in the order of creation and is confirmed by the reversal of roles that occurred at the fall. It is not a culturally or contextually limited prohibition that no longer applies to churches today.

### **From other Scripture Passages...**

What we see of men and women's roles in the rest of Scripture confirms this reading of 1 Timothy 2:11-15. The book of Genesis gives us six pieces of evidence that husbands have the primary responsibility of leadership in marriage: 1) God created Adam first and then Eve; 2) God gave the command not to eat of the tree to Adam rather than Eve; 3) Adam named the "woman" just as he named the animals, signifying his authority (Genesis 2:19-23); 4) Eve is designated as Adam's "helper" (Genesis 2:18); 5) The serpent deceived Eve rather than Adam, thereby subverting male headship (Genesis 3:1-6); and 6) God came to Adam first, even though Eve sinned first (Genesis 3:9); cf. Romans 5:12-19.

Such a reading of Genesis fits with what we discover about marriage in the New Testament. Husbands have the primary responsibility of leadership, and wives are called upon to submit to the leadership of their husbands (Ephesians 5:22-33; Colossians 3:18-19; 1 Peter 3:1-7). The call to submission for the wife is not grounded on mere cultural norms, for a wife is called upon to submit to her husband just as the church is called upon to submit to Christ (Ephesians 5:22-24). Paul designates marriage as a "mystery" (Ephesians 5:32), and the mystery is that marriage mirrors Christ's relationship to the church. The mandate for men rather than women to serve as pastors, then, fits with the biblical

pattern of male leadership and authority within marriage.

It is crucial to observe that a different role for women does not signify the inferiority of women. Women and men are equally created in God's image (Genesis 1:26-27). They have equal access to salvation in Christ (Galatians 3:28), and they are heirs together of the great salvation which is ours in Jesus Christ (1 Peter 3:7). The biblical writers do not cast aspersions on the dignity, intelligence, and personhood of women.

Nor is 1 Timothy 2:11-15 the only text that requires a different role for men and women in the church. In 1 Corinthians 14:33b-36 Paul teaches that women must not speak in church. This passage does not forbid women from speaking in the assembly absolutely, for Paul encourages women to pray and prophesy in church (1 Corinthians 11:5). The principle is that women should not speak in such a way that they rebel against male headship or take upon themselves authority that does not belong to them.

### **Conclusion**

The Scriptures clearly teach about the unique roles of women in the church and in the home. They are equal with men in dignity and value, but they have a different role during this earthly sojourn. God has given them many different gifts by which they can minister to the church and to the world, but they are not to serve as pastors. The Lord has not given His commands to punish women, but so that they can joyfully serve him according to His will.

# COME, MAKE A JOYFUL SHOUT TO GOD

BRIAN L. PENNEY, 2013  
FROM PSALM 100

HUW ANGEL, 1764-1843

1. Come, make a joy - ful shout to God the Lord,  
2. Know that the sov - reign Lord is God a - lone;  
3. En - ter in - to His courts with thank - ful praise;

Serve Him with glad - ness, Praise Him with sing - ing;  
And He has made us, We are His peo - ple,  
Sing of His good - ness, Sing of His mer - cy,

Come to Him peo - ples of the earth. Hal - le - lu - jah,  
We are the sheep un - der His care. Hal - le - lu - jah,  
Sing of His truth for - ev - er - more. Hal - le - lu - jah,

Hal - le - lu - jah, Come, you peo - ples of the earth.  
Hal - le - lu - jah, We, the sheep un - der His care.  
Hal - le - lu - jah, Sing His truth for - ev - er - more.