



## “Women in the Church”

**Idea:** Women in the church are esteemed image-bearers of God, essential members, and extraordinary servants who should fill every role imaginable except for the office and function of pastor/elder.

**Intro:** Back in June, as the Southern Baptist Convention prepared to convene for its annual meeting in New Orleans, the major news headlines said nothing about the ninety-two missionaries the IMB would commission in a sending celebration. They did not highlight NAMB’s Church Replant Initiative, which works with local churches, associations, and state conventions to replant churches in existing facilities, keeping a gospel presence in local communities. They failed to celebrate the 10,000 SBC churches across North America that had been planted since 2010. Instead, the major headlines revolved around one issue...the role of women in the church.

The subject was one of interest largely because two SBC churches had been deemed to not be in friendly cooperation with the convention by the Executive Committee, and they were appealing the decision on the floor of the annual meeting. One of the churches who appealed the decision was Saddleback Church in Lake Forest, California, one of if not the largest church in the SBC. In recent years, Saddleback has begun ordaining women to the preaching ministry and placing them in positions of leadership as campus pastors. The church also considers the lead pastor’s wife as one of the pastors of the church. The second church that appealed was Fern Creek Baptist Church in Louisville, Kentucky. Its senior pastor is Linda Barnes Popham. She has served on the pastoral staff team for forty years, and she has been the senior pastor for over thirty years. Both churches had been disfellowshipped because of the positions they had taken on the role of women in the church. In the media and within some religious circles, the SBC’s action was highly controversial. The modern, cultural blurring of gender roles throughout society, which has also bled over into the church, forces us to investigate the Bible’s position on this matter. So, as we continue our “In the Church” summer series, we are examining women in the church.

**Inquiry:** As a church, and as an SBC church, we affirm the Bible’s teaching on gender. God created mankind in His own image and likeness. He created them male and female as the crowning work of His creation. Therefore, the gift of gender is part of the goodness of God’s creation. As such, women in the church are esteemed image-bearers of God, essential members, and extraordinary servants who should fill every role imaginable except for the office and function of pastor/elder. You see, while both men and women are gifted for service in the church, the office of pastor is limited to men as qualified by Scripture. With that said, I believe it is important to mention how there is nothing inherent about men that makes them better at putting an argument together, exegeting a biblical text, or communicating to an audience. The truth is women are excellent at these things too.

So, why would we say that women in the church can and should fill every role except that of a pastor? This question is what I want to answer today. As we begin, you need to understand that the argument is not based on

ability but on authority and creation's design. As a Bible-people, we must view all matters through the lens of Scripture and never through the lens of culture. We must also remember that God alone possesses the authority to order and design His creation, the family, and the Church as He wants, and it is our duty to submit to and live by that design.

While some people today might argue this perspective and restrictiveness on women in the church is archaic, misogynistic, and chauvinistic, I would argue it is biblical. While the Bible might restrict some things, overall, it liberates women. All throughout its stories, we read of women being mightily used by God to do extraordinary things. Deborah, Rahab, Ruth, and Mary are just a few examples of this. With that said, there are a few difficult passages for us to wrestle with such as Paul's instruction to Timothy.

Read 1 Timothy 2:11-12.

It is rhetoric like this that will get a preacher in trouble today, yet these words are in the Bible. How should we understand them? They seem like a relic of a past age, but the Bible says of itself that this Word is "*living and active*" (Heb 4:12). In other words, what was said then is still true today. What I want you to understand about women in the church is that this whole discussion has nothing to do with ability, but it has everything to do with authority and God's design in creation. So, let's investigate four areas on the matter.

## **1. The Biblical Case for Authority**

In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. Then He filled the heavens and the earth with creatures that displayed His glory and majesty. The apex of creation was mankind, who were made in God's image and likeness.

Read Genesis 1:26-28.

One of the very first things the Bible tells us about mankind is that God specified two genders. He created them male and female. In this gendering language, we discover one of the duties of humanity. In the ancient world, it was common for kings to make statues of themselves so that their subjects would not forget their greatness and reign. We see this in Nebuchadnezzar who constructed a 90-foot golden image of himself (Dan 3). In Genesis 1:28, God commissioned the man and the woman to fill the earth and exercise dominion over it. They and their offspring would be miniature, living statues who would through their good and just rule over creation reflect God's own higher and better rule. Human beings were called to be royal stewards who ruled under and answered to the High King Himself. This is the great duty of humanity.

We find a further example of Adam's rule over creation in Genesis 2:19-20. In these verses, we read that Adam named all the creatures God had made. He exercised authority by naming the animals. I have told you many times that one of the reasons God included this scene in the Bible was to highlight the fact that Adam was missing something in Eden. He had no helpmate at this point. There is, however, another reason for its inclusion. After Eve was created by God from Adam's rib, Adam named her (Gen 2:21-23). He exercised authority by naming the woman.

Now, in no way should we discern from this naming of Eve that women are beneath men. We read at least four times in Genesis 1:26-27 that Eve, like Adam, was made in the image and likeness of God. Then, in verse 28, the commission to "*have dominion*" is in the plural and applied to both genders. There is then equality between men and women. With that said, while Adam and Eve both rule over God's creation as king and queen, God did institute within creation and within their marriage a structure of authority. Adam was given the responsibility of holding loving authority over his wife, which is seen in his naming of her.

Therefore, in these early chapters of the Bible, we discover that God designed a beautiful framework of royal authority within His creation. Hopefully, we can see this good and gracious gift on the pages of our Bibles. While we may see it, the problem is that we often do not view authority as a good and gracious gift from God because of how we have seen it abused by humanity. Let's not throw the baby out with the bath water. Authority is not inherently bad. It is not a secondary theological issue in Genesis. It is also not a concept formed by man. Authority is an integral part of God's created order, and God spoke over it that it was good.

This brings us to a second area to investigate as we contemplate women in the church.

## **2. The Diabolical War Against Authority**

Genesis 2 ends with everything being good within God's created order. Well, it was not long till a war was waged against God and His authority.

Read Genesis 3:1-6.

The serpent pointed out the one tree that was off-limits to Adam and Eve. He questioned God's goodness, and he directed his question to Eve rather than to Adam. Some theologians have wrongly argued the reason the serpent attacked Eve was because she was an easier target and could serve as a great seductress to Adam. The real reason he attacked Eve was because of the authority structure established by God. Satan's goal was not just to get Adam to sin against God. It was to completely overturn the entire structure of authority God had established within His creation. Satan wanted the woman to convince the man to rebel against God. Not just that, Satan wanted creation itself to rebel, so as an animal he deceived the woman who deceived the man who rebelled against God. The result was a declaration of war against God by all.

Let's move a step farther and investigate a third area that affects our understanding of women in the church.

## **3. The Results of Rebellion**

In Genesis 3:7-19, we see the fallout of Adam and Eve's decision to rebel, and that is exactly what they did. Sin is rebellion against God and His commands, and sin brings God's judgment. Moses tells us here that God cursed the serpent, Eve, Adam, and creation itself. Part of His curse on Adam and Eve was that they would experience the results of their rebellious decision. Sin had brought depravity into every facet of their lives. Therefore, according to verse 16, the woman's desire would now be for her husband. Genesis 4:7 provides clarity on how we should interpret this statement. This desire is not good. Her desire would not be to submit under the loving leadership of the man. Instead, sin's depravity would lead her to desire to rule over, dominate, and destroy him. Likewise, sin's depravity had shattered Adam's just and good rule. Now, it would lead the man in one of two directions. He would respond violently or passively. He would be domineering in his leadership or abdicate his responsibility altogether.

Is this not exactly what we struggle with today in every aspect of life? Whether it is the home, the workplace, or society in general, women labor to usurp the authority of men. In response men, if they do not passively throw up their hands, will twist their authority into an abusive domination over women. Our struggle, as God's people who seek to know and follow God's Word, is to fight against this natural disposition. We "*must rule over*" this desire of sin (Gen 4:7). We must strive to submit ourselves under God's good and gracious order of authority, which means we adopt and follow God's structure in the home and in the church. This brings us to a fourth area to investigate as we seek to understand the role of women in the church.

#### 4. The Implications of a Reconstructed Authority

The first verses we read today were from 1 Timothy 2. There Paul instructed the women in the church to be quiet and did not allow them to exercise authority over men through teaching. Now, it is important to remember that this letter was written to address specific issues within the Ephesian church. Clearly, there were false teachers whose instruction threatened to bring down the entire church. Without knowing the specifics, it seemed to involve extreme asceticism and extreme licentiousness (1 Tim 1:6-11; 4:1-5). These teachers also called believers to abdicate their earthly roles and responsibilities, to deny the authority of the government, and to reject the particular roles and responsibilities of men and women (1 Tim 5:14-16).

In the early verses of 1 Timothy 2, Paul addressed all believers (male and female). Then in verse 8 he spoke specifically to men, which is followed in verse 11 by speaking to women. Paul's instruction to both genders was rooted in Genesis 1-3. He saw the sin in the Ephesian church as the results of the sin that took place in Eden.

In verse 8, he instructed the men to pray, "*lifting holy hands without anger or quarreling.*" This verse is a continuation of the instruction given in verses 1-7. Its addition highlights for us the reality that as these men prayed, it often resulted in anger and fights. Paul recognized the default position of men controlled by sin. They will either be passive or domineering. Christian men must be neither. Instead, they are to remember their place in God's authority structure and lovingly lead.

Similarly, Christian women should remember their place and role within God's authority structure (2:9-14). It seems the Ephesian women sought to overturn authority in the church by taking on the leadership role of teaching. The phrase "*teach or to exercise authority over a man*" in verse 12 refers to the office and function of eldership. This is clear because Paul often combined teaching and authority when describing the office and function of elders (1 Tim 3:2; 4:11; 5:17).

By instructing women to be quiet and not to teach, Paul was not forbidding women to speak or to never teach. Instead, he was defining the borders for those things. As we read through the New Testament, we see that women held leadership positions in the church. Priscilla instructed Apollos in the Scriptures (Acts 18:24-26). We also can see how women likely exercised authority over men in various areas of ministry. Phoebe seemed to have served as a deacon leading a ministry team (Rom 16:1). And so, there is nothing wrong with a woman in the church scheduling a man to serve in the kid's ministry or on a hospitality team. The border, however, that must not be crossed is that of authoritative and conscience-binding teaching. This is the kind of teaching that comes from the office of elder and the doctrinal instruction of the church.

Paul's command that women be quiet in verse 12 is the same root word as that found in verse 2. From it we derive that Christians ought to lead "*a peaceful and quiet life*" instead of rebelling against God's established order in the church. Paul makes the point that this authority structure was established in the created order (2:13) and then attacked by the serpent through the woman (2:14).

Men in the church, therefore, must not dominate, and the women must not usurp authority. Instead, what we should see in the local church is a reconstruction of biblical authority lost in Eden. There are three implications necessary for us to see this reconstruction.

- 1) The office and function of elder is reserved for men.  
This means that the preaching/teaching ministry during the worship gatherings of the church are administered solely by men who are elders or invited by the elders. One of the reasons for this is due to the fact that preaching is authoritative as the preachers says, "This is what the Bible says." He is stating the position of the church on the matter.

A woman pulling aside a man and instructing him further like Priscilla did is her saying, “I believe this to be what the Bible says.” She is stating her position on the matter.

- 2) The teaching role of small group leaders where men are present is reserved for men. Small group leaders serve as an extension of the pastoral preaching ministry of the elders. Their teaching material is selected and approved by the elders. It carries the weight of authoritative doctrine. For that reason, and following creation’s order, only men should teach and lead men’s groups or co-ed groups.

The same is true of our Life Development Classes.

- 3) Women are free and encouraged to use their giftedness and passions to serve the Lord and His church in all other areas of ministry. Women can and should serve with children, with women, in hospitality, in evangelism, on mission trips, in worship, in media, and everything else the church is doing. We believe that women in the church are esteemed image-bearers of God, essential members, and extraordinary servants who should fill every role imaginable except for the office and function of pastor/elder.

The reservation of the pastoral office of elder for qualified men is not arbitrary but rooted in the very structures of authority that God instituted in Eden. For this reason, they are good, even very good.

**Conclusion:** Ladies, while many today want to argue about the unfairness of the complementarian viewpoint and stress the fairness and inclusion of the egalitarian perspective, our responsibility and duty as Christians is to know and obey the Bible. The media and many church leaders throughout America were tuned in to the debate that took place on the floor of the SBC’s annual meeting this summer. They wanted to know where the convention of churches would land on this doctrinal issue. We landed on the side of the Bible. For me and Red Lane, as I voted on behalf of our church, we were standing on the side of Scripture. We were standing on the side of God’s good, authoritative structure. We were standing on the promised safety and blessing that comes when we stay within the borders God has defined. We were standing for a reconstructed order brought about through the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Ladies, we celebrate the life of Christ in you and your gifts, passion, intentionality, gentleness, nurture, and strength. Where would the Lord’s church be without the blessing of its women? While we celebrate the gift that you are, we also refuse to transgress the borders set out for the church’s office of elder. It alone is reserved for men. All else is for women.