

Why don't we ordain women as pastors, and what is the role that women should play in the authority structure of the church?

In this day and age, the practice of ordaining women and allowing them to serve in the office of pastor is more and more widely practiced by many churches and many denominations. None of the apostles ever appointed a woman to the position of elder in the early church, and women are not found in positions of church authority anywhere in the New Testament. Many would argue that the early church's exclusion of women from being ordained as pastors was "culturally" driven by the first century and therefore does not have to be applied today. However, a study of 1 Timothy 2:9-15 illustrates that the Apostle Paul was *setting forth a doctrine that only men should exercise pastoral authority in the church*. Because it's a doctrine, its truth is timeless.

The following principles apply:

- 1) 1 Timothy 2:13-14 demonstrates that Paul's reasoning for not allowing women to pastor was not the result of the "culture" but the result of "creation"!

The pattern God set forth by creating the man before the woman is clearly important to Paul's reasoning that women are not to hold authority in the church.

God deliberately formed man first for a reason – because the man is to exercise authority.

1 Corinthians 11:3, "But I want you to know that the head of every man is Christ, the head of woman is man, and the head of Christ is God."

In God's authority structure, the man is to exercise headship over the woman, not out of "superiority" but out of "function."

- 2) This does not mean women cannot exercise leadership in the church. Remember, positions of leadership do not necessarily mean positions of authority.
- 3) This does not mean that women can never teach men under any conditions. This is the traditional teaching of the text. But a close evaluation of the text reveals that Paul is merely making a larger point!

The whole context of the passage is church authority, which is why Paul immediately goes into the qualifications of a pastor in chapter 3.

Women are not to be in positions of authority (i.e., pastors). They are not to teach as one in a position of authority.

They are not to set forth church doctrine or make directional decisions on behalf of the church. This is to be reserved for those who are serving in positions of authority.

But Paul is not saying in no uncertain terms that women are never to teach men.

Many have read 1 Timothy 2:12 to mean literally that women are to be “in silence” in the church to the extent that in some churches, women are even forbidden to speak. Others take this to mean they are to be silent when it comes to teaching and are only to be learners. But an examination of this word shows us it’s the same word translated in verse 2 as “peaceable.” It’s the same word we find in 2 Thessalonians 3:12, where it’s translated as “quietness.” Paul is dealing here with a woman’s attitude.

The context of this passage is the phrase “or to have authority,” translated from a Greek word (authentein) which means, “to domineer, to usurp authority, to take what is not rightfully yours.” Paul is saying, “to do so by the process of teaching.”

In other words, women are not to take over in church and become the final, authoritative voice, BUT women were clearly teaching and even preaching in the public assembly of the church in the 1st century.

There are various examples of women teaching men while under authority in the New Testament:

In Acts 18:26, it says Aquila and Priscilla “expounded unto him [Apollos] the way of God more perfectly.” Priscilla was clearly helping to teach Apollos the Scripture, but she was doing it under Aquila’s authority as her husband.

The context of 1 Corinthians 11 is that of a public church assembly, and verse 5 acknowledges that women could “pray or prophesy” in the church. Prophecy means “to comment on the Scripture or expound it.” The context, though, is that she should not do it with her “head uncovered.” In other words, not without being under authority.

In Acts 21:9, we’re told about a man who “had four virgin daughters who prophesied.” They’re not called prophets because a “prophet” was an office of authority in the first-century church. But it says they did “prophesy,” meaning they imparted some knowledge about God’s truth.

The key is to understand God’s structure of authority. We are all to live under authority and in submission to authority, even those in positions of authority. Watchman Nee said, “Every problem in the church can be traced back to a failure to submit to authority.” When we consider the many problems, conflicts, and ugly divisions facing so many churches, he may be exactly right.