



Can Women Be Preachers, Pastors, Or Deaconesses?

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Can women be preachers, pastors, or deaconesses? There are many religious organizations that accept women to serve in these various positions. However, there are still some churches that claim women cannot serve in these ways. So, what does the Bible say? Let's investigate.

An Issue Of Bible Authority

Today, it is often thought to be an “outdated” or “old fashioned” idea for churches not to permit women to serve in the capacities of preachers, pastors, or deaconesses. However, please appreciate (first and foremost) that God's word never goes out of style or needs to be revised in order to “keep up with the times.” Instead, 1 Peter 1:25 says that “the word of the Lord endures forever.” Therefore, whatever the Bible says on this subject it says for all time – not just for a limited period of time!

Now, please understand that this discussion is not about whether women are “second class citizens” of God's kingdom (His church). They absolutely are not! Women come into Christ's church in the exact same way men come into His church (see Galatians 3:26-27). In addition, women have been given the same opportunity to partake of the blessings in Christ Jesus as men have been given. This is the sense in which Paul said, “There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus” (Galatians 3:28).

While women are *not* “second class citizens” in God's kingdom, we are investigating whether men and women have been given different roles to fulfill within God's kingdom. So, this is an issue regarding Bible authority. Does the Bible permit women to serve in the capacity of preachers, pastors, or deaconesses? You will want to know and obey the answer to this question – if you are interested in doing everything in the name of (by the authority of) the Lord Jesus Christ (Colossians 3:17).

Now, let's search the Scriptures to see whether there is any Bible authority for women to serve in any of these capacities. As we do this, let's investigate each one of these points separately.

Can Women Be Preachers?

There are really two questions to consider in this first question. Can women preach God's word before a local church? And, can a woman be involved in preaching God's word in *any* capacity?

Let's take the second question first. "Can a woman be involved in preaching God's word in *any* capacity?" The Bible's answer to this question is, "Yes." God expects for all of His people to be working to teach His saving message to others (2 Timothy 2:24-26; Romans 10:13-18). There are even some examples of women who taught the gospel of Jesus Christ in private settings. For instance, whenever Aquila and Priscilla (a woman) heard a man named Apollos teaching falsely concerning baptism, the Scriptures say, "they took him aside and explained to him the way of God more accurately" (Acts 18:26). Priscilla was involved in this teaching with her husband. Another example can be found with Timothy's mother and grandmother (Eunice and Lois). In 2 Timothy 1:5, Paul considers the faith of Timothy – which, he said, first dwelt in Timothy's mother and grandmother. And, 2 Timothy 3:15 says that Timothy had "known the Holy Scriptures" from his "childhood." The implication is that his mother and grandmother were influential in teaching Timothy the Scriptures. A final example can be seen in the references to women who possessed the spiritual gift of prophecy (i.e. Acts 21:9; 1 Corinthians 11:5). The work of a prophet was to take God's message to the people. Clearly, then, women can and should be involved in the work of teaching (preaching) the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Now, let's consider the second part of this question. "Can a woman preach God's word before a local church? That is, is a woman authorized to preach God's word to the assembly of a local church (when both Christian men and women are present)? Consider 1 Corinthians 14:34-35: "Let your women keep silent in the churches, for they are not permitted to speak; but they are to be submissive, as the law also says. And if they want to learn something, let them ask their own husbands at home; for it is shameful for women to speak in church." The context of this passage demonstrates that it is addressing God's law regarding times when the whole church comes together in one place (see verses 23 and 26). At these times, God says that women are forbidden to speak, saying that it is shameful to do so. Certainly, this eliminates the opportunity for women to preach God's word before the entire congregation.

Another passage that directly addresses this question is found in 1 Timothy 2:11-14: "Let a woman learn in silence with all submission. And I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man, but to be in silence. For Adam was formed first, then Eve. And Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived, fell into transgression." God has clearly limited the role of women to be a submissive role. They are not to "teach or to have authority over a man." This is the will of God. And, notice that God even explains two reasons why this is His law. First,

He says it is because “Adam was formed first, then Eve.” Second, He says that “Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived, fell into transgression.” Notice (in both of these reasons) that God’s reasoning is *not* limited to a specific period of time. Instead, this is the law of God for all time!

Both of these passages clearly limit the role of women with regard to the preaching of God’s word. While we have seen that God permits women to preach His word privately, God does not permit women to preach His word before an assembly of a local church where Christian men are present.

Can Women Be Pastors?

One office in the local church is the office of the eldership (Philippians 1:1; 1 Timothy 3:1). The Scriptures are clear that those who serve in the capacity of elders are often identified as pastors (shepherds) and bishops (overseers), see Acts 20:17-31 and 1 Peter 5:1-4. Their work is one of overseeing the local church and shepherding the members of that congregation to help them live in ways that are pleasing to God. However, the question for us to consider at this time is, “Does God permit women to serve as elders/pastors of local churches?”

In order to answer this question according to the teachings of God’s word, we have to acknowledge that God has given specific qualifications to those who will serve Him in this capacity. These qualifications are found in two places in the Scriptures: 1 Timothy 3:1-7 and Titus 1:5-9. Let’s consider each one of these passages before we focus on how these passages answer our question specifically.

1 Timothy 3:1-7 says, “This is a faithful saying: If a man desires the position of a bishop, he desires a good work. A bishop then must be blameless, the husband of one wife, temperate, sober-minded, of good behavior, hospitable, able to teach; not given to wine, not violent, not greedy for money, but gentle, not quarrelsome, not covetous; one who rules his own house well, having his children in submission with all reverence (for if a man does not know how to rule his own house, how will he take care of the church of God?); not a novice, lest being puffed up with pride he fall into the same condemnation as the devil. Moreover he must have a good testimony among those who are outside, lest he fall into reproach and the snare of the devil.”

Titus 1:5-9 says, “For this reason I left you in Crete, that you should set in order the things that are lacking, and appoint elders in every city as I commanded you — if a man is blameless, the husband of one wife, having faithful children not accused of dissipation or insubordination. For a bishop must be blameless, as a steward of God, not self-willed, not quick-tempered, not given to wine, not violent, not greedy for money, but hospitable, a lover of what is good, sober-minded, just, holy, self-controlled, holding fast the faithful word as he has been taught, that he may be able, by sound doctrine, both to exhort and convict those who contradict.”

These are the qualifications and characteristics God expects to be possessed by those who should be appointed as elders/pastors of local churches. Therefore, this implies that those who do not meet these qualifications do not have God's approval to serve as elders/pastors. Now, specifically notice that both passages indicate that only men are permitted by God to serve in this capacity. Both passages begin with the expression, "if a man..." Also, both passages state that the elder/pastor must be the "husband of one wife." Therefore, women cannot serve God in this capacity and be approved of God for doing so.

Can Women Be Deaconesses?

A final point to consider is the question, "Can women serve as deaconesses in a local church?" The "deacon" is also an office in the local church (Philippians 1:1). These are special servants of the local church. However, once again, God has given those who will fill this office some specific qualifications he/she must possess. These are identified in 1 Timothy 3:8-13.

"Likewise deacons must be reverent, not double-tongued, not given to much wine, not greedy for money, holding the mystery of the faith with a pure conscience. But let these also first be tested; then let them serve as deacons, being found blameless. Likewise, their wives must be reverent, not slanderers, temperate, faithful in all things. Let deacons be the husbands of one wife, ruling their children and their own houses well. For those who have served well as deacons obtain for themselves a good standing and great boldness in the faith which is in Christ Jesus."

Once again, recognize that these God-given qualifications restrict women from serving in this capacity. Again, the passage says that the deacons must be "the husbands of one wife." Now, one objection to this point is sometimes offered from Romans 16:1-2. That passage makes reference to a woman (Phoebe) who was described as a "servant of the church in Cenchrea." Some identify her as a "deaconess" because of the use of the same Greek word for "deacon." However, since both of these passages must harmonize, we can conclude that women should be servants of local churches (in a general sense); but, they do not qualify to fill the office of a deacon (discussed in 1 Timothy 3).

Conclusion

Though man often permits and encourages women to serve in the capacities of preacher in the assemblies of local churches, pastor, or deaconess, we have seen that God's word forbids each one of these practices in His church! Therefore, if you want to be part of Christ's church and practice true, New Testament Christianity, you must listen to God rather than to men and do all things by Bible authority (Colossians 3:17)!

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