

Should women be pastors?

By

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In 1 Timothy 2:12 the apostle Paul writes: “I do not permit a woman to teach or to exercise authority over a man; rather, she is to remain quiet.”

First, we have to be clear about what this does not mean.

It does not mean that women cannot serve God. In the letter to the Philippians Paul writes that Euodia and Syntyche “ labored side by side with me in the Gospel ” (Philippians 4:3).

It does not mean that a woman can never teach a man about spiritual matters. In Acts 18:24-25 we read that Apollos started to preach, but he had no clear grasp of the Gospel. Then it says “ when Priscilla and Aquila heard him, they took him and explained to him the way of God more accurately ” (Acts 18:26). Interestingly, Priscilla is mentioned here before her husband Aquila, and she might have played a more important role in teaching Apollos.

It does not mean that a woman may never speak in church. In 1 Corinthians 11:5 Paul is writing about women who pray and prophesy in the church meeting. So it is clear from what Paul wrote and did that he valued the contribution of women to the church and to the ministry.

What does 1 Timothy 2:12 mean?

Now about what the verse does mean. It means that Paul teaches us here (as he does in 1 Timothy 3) that the main responsibility for spiritual authority and preaching of the Word of God should rest with men. So women should not be pastors and elders.

Many churches nowadays disregard this teaching from Paul. Their reasoning is that this was a rule from Paul's culture, not from God's plan for all time. However, from the passage it become clear that this reasoning is false. As reason for Paul's command he gives: "For Adam was formed first, then Eve" (1 Timothy 2:13). So basically he says: there is a difference between men and women that we can see from creation. God created man and gave him responsibility over the garden of Eden. Then God created

woman to help him shoulder that responsibility. Men are called to loving leadership, taking initiative and responsibility in their relationships with women, especially with their wife. Women are called to responding to initiative and assist men in their calling.

The normal pattern

We all know that women can take initiative and lead, and in many cases they need to. But the normal pattern, in which men and women display their God-given manhood and womanhood, is for men to initiate and for women to respond and support. Wives are called to loving submission to their husbands (Ephesians 5:22). That this is far removed from a dull and uninteresting life can be read in Proverbs 31. There we find the description of a woman with a very full and active life in a way that honors her husband.

How God created this world

So Paul's command that women should not be pastors and elders in church is not a random one, or culturally conditioned, but rooted in how God created this world.

Paul even teaches that the marriage relationship is a picture of Christ and the church (Ephesians 5:22-33). The husband is leading and taking responsibility for his family, so much that he should be ready to die for her. The wife lovingly submits to her husband. This is how it should be, for marriage should be a picture of Christ (the bridegroom) who gave himself for his church (his bride).

Christ as Head

This male headship in the family then logically is also reflected in God's family, the church. It allows men to be real men and women to be real women. With Christ as Head, and spiritually mature men as pastors and elders, all members of the church, men and women, are called to serve God with the spiritual gifts that they got from Him.

Source: <https://www.biblword.net/should-woman-be-pastors/>

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