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# THE HERALD

## Newsletter of the Orrville Grace Brethren Church

### Poking Holes in the Egalitarian Beachball: Seven\* Arguments against Female Pastors

By TRENT HUNTER

What are we to tell our young daughters when they ask, “Can I be a pastor?” Or when they’re a bit older and ask, “Why can’t women be pastors?” Wouldn’t it be nice for our girls not only to know God’s answer but also to understand and embrace his reasons? Here’s another scenario: you’re on a plane with a business partner when a youngster a seat away says, “My mommy is a pastor.” Your colleague asks, “Can women be pastors at your church?” That’s similar to the situation a member of my church was in just recently. ...

In our age, women do many of the same things that men do. While trash collectors and plumbers are mostly men, men and women often work side-by-side in sales or management or hospitality. There are a few reasons for this apparent interchangeability of the sexes. Our economy in America is based on knowledge-work and depends less on the physical body, where differences between men and women are obvious and pronounced. Reproductive ethics aside, medical technology means that we also have less children to bear and nurture. The world around us also assumes a given of equality between the sexes in virtually every way. For these reasons, to teach that pastoring and preaching are reserved for qualified men may seem arbitrary at best or cruel and dismissive (even abusive) at worst. Whatever we make of the reasons for the ordering of the sexes in our modern world, this is the context we inhabit.

Here are concise and conversational responses to seven popular arguments for women pastors and preachers. These answers are written to poke holes in the egalitarian beachball. It’s the nature of hole-poking that not everything is getting said, but just enough to hopefully move the hearer in the right direction.

Let’s get on the plane together and pick up that con-

versation with our seatmate. We’ve just heard a little girl introduce her mom as a pastor. A discussion kicks off when our seatmate offers up a simple question, and then another, and then another. ...

#### 1. Doesn’t the Bible teach that women can pastor and preach?

This is a good question. This question starts in the right place, with the Bible. It esteems pastoring and preaching as honorable. I’m also glad for the opportunity to answer it, as many are confused and curious about what the Bible says. Having said that, no, this is not what the Bible teaches. I assume you are talking about the office of pastor/elder, and the work of teaching and preaching when the church gathers.

Maybe you have heard of instances in Scripture of a woman teaching—even correcting—a man in private (Acts 18:26), or of how women were the first to testify to the resurrection of Jesus and did so to men (Matt. 28:8). Or perhaps you’ve heard that every church member speaks God’s Word to each other (Eph. 4:15). All of that is wonderfully true. But none of these instances actually describe the authoritative monologue given to an audience from Scripture that is preaching. Furthermore, we actually have passages written directly at this specific question. These passages are clear: the roles of pastoring and preaching are reserved for qualified men.

Where does the Bible teach this and, importantly, why? The Apostle Paul instructs Timothy, “I do not permit a woman to teach or to exercise authority over a man” (1 Tim. 2:12). Some attempt to deny the force of this passage by saying that Paul restricts teaching to men because of something specific to the first century culture. The argument usually goes like this: the Apostle Paul prohibits only uneducated women from preaching; but if they just got educated, then the prohibition no longer exists. Some argue, alternatively, that feminism overran Ephesus (the city where Paul wrote 1 Timothy) so that Paul was offering a corrective for that cultural context alone, but not ours. Paul, however, roots his argument not in culture but in creation; he grounds his prohibition by saying, “For Adam

was formed first, then Eve; and Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and became a transgressor” (1 Tim. 2:13, 14). By grounding his argument in creation, Paul’s argument cannot be bound to the first-century, but rather it applies to all men and women across cultures.

As we might expect, in the very next passage, Paul outlines qualifications for the office of pastor (also called an elder or overseer): “The saying is trustworthy: If anyone aspires to the office of overseer, he desires a noble task” (1 Tim. 3:1, emphasis mine). Paul assumes that this office of elder—an office that includes public teaching and shepherding—is for qualified men only (see also 1 Tim. 3:2).

All of this sounds restrictive, but in truth it is freeing. Here’s what this means: men and women are made in God’s image. In that way, they are the same. Yet they bear God’s image as men and women, to reflect his glory in ways inflected according to their gender. These roles assigned by God correspond to his design for men and women not only in his creation, but also among his redeemed new creation people, the church.

This may seem odd to us, but that is because our world is at odds with God’s design for men and women.

## **2. Don’t churches that restrict women from pastoring and preaching actually protect male hierarchies that oppress women?**

We can imagine that this evil motive restricts the roles of women in some places, just as all good authority can be misused. Where that is the case, however, the answer is not for women to assume the roles of men. Rather, the answer is for both women and men to fulfill their biblical roles. Men who oppress women are not being true to the servant-hearted masculinity God calls them to. And pastors who oppress women are directly disobeying their charge of “not domineering over those in your charge, but being examples to the flock” (1 Pet. 5:3). These are unfaithful pastors.

In the home, a true man and husband provides for and protects his family. He leads with love and consideration. He uses his authority for the good of his family. But if a husband abuses his wife, the answer is not for the wife to become a husband! The answer is for the husband to be a real man and to actually husband—and not hurt—his wife. So it is in the church. In fact, the Apostle Paul drew on these broadly understood household relationships to instruct on roles within the church, or what he calls “the household of God” (1 Tim. 3:15). Hence, a pastor “must manage his own household well . . . for if someone does not know how to manage his own household, how will he care for God’s church?” (1 Tim. 3:4). This is another reason that the role of pastor is reserved for men. In the household of God, pastors are the men of the house.

In the same way that it is not possible for the wife to

become a husband no matter what she may call herself, so it is impossible for a woman to become a pastor, biblically understood. As there are realms of authority in the home, so there are in the church, with one clarification: in the household of God, God is the father, the chief caregiver and authority. It is his household. And in his household, every sister has “elder” brothers, pastors who care for these women and provide for and protect the whole family.

True pastoral leadership is not oppressive but protective. For, Jesus, our chief shepherd, did not oppress women. Quite the opposite, Jesus suffered oppression in order to protect both women and men. Men who abuse their wives should be disciplined (Matt. 18:15–17). Pastors who abuse their sheep should be charged and removed (1 Tim. 5:19, 20). That’s how Jesus protects women in the local church, not by erasing the distinction between men and women in his house.

## **4. The Bible doesn’t prohibit women from pastoring and preaching, so why should we?**

The Bible does prohibit women from pastoring and preaching. In fact, in the passage we explored, 1 Timothy 2:11–14, Scripture forbids this. It was a temptation then as it is now, and it is a sin just the same.

But for the sake of the argument, let’s imagine for a moment that 1 Timothy 2 and its prohibition of female preachers/pastors was not in the Bible. Still, the other commands the Bible gives to women point in the same direction. Women are to instruct younger women, to love their husbands and be workers at home (Titus 2:3–5), all activities that don’t immediately call to mind preaching to men and women on a Sunday morning. Further, Jesus, the Apostles, and the elders of the New Testament are all men. Should we observe these other passages and still conclude that the genders are interchangeable in the role of preacher and pastor? Are there not many things the Bible does not prohibit that are nevertheless clearly out of bounds by way of inference?

Thankfully, the Bible leaves us with more than an inference but with specific instruction.

## **5. Aren’t spiritual gifts given equally to men and women? If giftedness is what matters, shouldn’t women who are gifted to teach be permitted, even encouraged to preach and pastor?**

Are men and women both gifted by the Spirit in many ways for the church’s good? Yes. The Bible does not give us one theology of gifts for men and another for women (with the one exception that apostleship was exclusively for men). Are some women gifted to teach? Certainly. Does this contradict or cancel the Bible’s instruction for only qualified men to pastor and preach in 1 Timothy 2–3? Clearly it does not, since the Bible itself restricts the roles of women in pastoring and preaching.

Giftedness is not the foundation for the pastoral office and preaching in the church. Equally true, the pastoral office and preaching are not the foundation for a woman's value in the church. That's what this above question implies. This question makes the roles and responsibilities of men the standard for a woman's value. Yet the Bible goes beyond restricting women from responsibilities designated for men; it positively invests women with unique roles and unique responsibilities of their own that are deeply important for the church and precious to God.

Additionally, this question implies two things that I would urge you to reconsider. First, the question assumes that a believer's gifting by the Spirit can only find its right expression in a formal programmatic assignment at church—preaching on Sunday (for those with the gift of teaching), or being on the finance committee (for those with the gift of administration)—rather than within the normal interactions of members one with another in everyday life. Second, and more dangerous still, this question implies that God would be arbitrary or even unjust to assign different roles to men and women in his own household. To this I say: God can be trusted in creating gendered distinctions.

At the same time, I do hear a different and good assumption behind this question. If the Spirit gives gifts to his people, shouldn't we desire for the church to benefit from those gifts? Most certainly, yes, we do! Which means that we want women using their gifts to contribute to the church's unity and maturity in biblically appropriate ways: teaching God's Word to other women in a Bible study or over coffee, instructing children in the home or in the preschool class, or exercising the gift of hospitality for Sunday lunch, to name just a few examples. This means that women should teach. That's one reason women are required to learn (1 Tim. 2:11). ...

#### **6. Don't we know by experience that women are called, gifted, and capable of pastoring and preaching?**

Experience sure seems like a good authority. Until we think about it. We may have experienced a setting in which a woman was preaching on a Sunday where she assumed the title "pastor." Perhaps that congregation acknowledged and even gave her that title. But what if God's Word makes it plain that God has not authorized her for that role? Do we really know this by experience?

Underlying this question is an assumption that if a positive outcome results from a situation..., then the situation must be blessed by God. But this is faulty logic; the Bible is full of examples showing why this is not necessarily the case. The very Balaam who led Israel into sexual immorality also truly prophesied about God's Messiah (Rev. 2:14; Num. 24:17–19). The very Samson who was a slave to his fleshly passions also delivered Israel from their

enemies (Judg. 14:3; 16:1, 4; 15:14–16). We could go on, but these examples show that an edifying act or a good deed does not sanction disobedience to God.

In the unsearchable providence of God, a person who is in sin may nevertheless edify or help us. A child may grow up with an unmarried cohabiting mom and dad while still experiencing the positive benefits of their instruction and relationship. God forbid, a pastor may be caught in the sin of adultery—and yet still see people come to true saving faith under his ministry. But the "experience" of seeing these conversions does not validate or excuse his sin. And this same concept applies to women preachers and pastors: no matter the fruit of their ministry, the root is still sin.

To answer your question simply, no, we do not "know" this by experience. In this matter, as with every question of importance, Christians submit themselves to the authority of God's Word. Where our experience and God's Word depart, we take God at his word because we trust him.

#### **Conclusion**

Now that we've considered how we might answer our seatmate on the plane, we're in a better position to speak to these matters in other settings. Every context will require its own considerations for directness, biblical reasoning, and tone. These are not the only arguments being made for female pastor and preachers, nor do these answers cover all of the exegetical and theological bases in this discussion. Nevertheless, these are the arguments getting the most purchase among street-level evangelicals.

In conclusion, the conversation above is only half-finished; I wouldn't stop my friendly airplane conversation at these "defensive" answers only. I would explain positively that God is the creator of men and women, and that his wise design can be trusted. When we live within the limits and lanes that God has set for us, we find beauty and flourishing there. We don't argue that preaching and pastoring is for qualified men in order to throw water on the zealous young woman who has a knack for understanding the Bible. If our young daughters ask, "Can I be a pastor?" Our answer doesn't stop at "no," as if we've just clipped some wings. Rather, our answer is to explain that God has so composed the church body in his divine wisdom such that her gifts are to be used in a thousand possible constructive and upbuilding ways, but that God has the particular task of pastoring and preaching for qualified men. We want to direct God's people to the God-ordained avenues that will bring most blessing to the church, the most flourishing to men and women, and the most glory to God—precisely because we trust him.

\* Because of space two arguments were removed.

See Pastor Joshua for the full article.

# FUNNIES

My mother taught me LOGIC...“If you fall off that swing and break your neck, you can’t go to the store with me.”

My mother taught me MEDICINE...“If you don’t stop crossing your eyes there going to freeze that way”.

My mother taught me about the science of OSMOSIS...“Shut your mouth and eat your supper.”

My mother taught me TO THINK AHEAD...“If you don’t pass that spelling test you’ll never get a good job.”

My mother taught me ESP...“Put a sweater on; don’t you think that I know when you’re cold?”

My mother taught me TO MEET A CHALLENGE...“What were you thinking? Answer me when I talk to you... Don’t talk back to me!”

My mother taught me HUMOR...“When the lawnmower cuts off your toes don’t come running to me.”

My mother taught me how to BECOME AN ADULT...“If you don’t eat your veggies, you’ll never grow up.”

My mother also taught me GENETICS...”You’re just like your father.”

“My mother also taught me ROOTS...“Do you think you were born in a barn?”

My mother also taught me WISDOM OF AGE...“When you get to my age you will understand.”

My mother also taught me about ANTICIPATION...“Just wait until your father gets home.”

And my favorite: my Mother taught me – JUSTICE...“One day you will have kids, and I hope they turn out just like YOU... then you’ll see what it’s like.”

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A minister decided that a visual demonstration would add emphasis to his Sunday sermon. Four worms were placed into four separate jars. The first worm was put into a container of alcohol. The second worm was put into a container of cigarette smoke. The third worm was put into a container of chocolate syrup. The fourth worm was put into a container of good clean soil.

At the conclusion of the sermon, the Minister reported the following results: The first worm in alcohol – Dead. The second worm in cigarette smoke – Dead. Third worm in chocolate syrup – Dead. Fourth worm in good clean soil – Alive. So the Minister asked the congregation – “What did you learn from this demonstration?”

Maxine was sitting in the back, quickly raised her hand and said, “As long as you drink, smoke and eat chocolate, you won't have worms!”

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While assembling furniture for a friend, Donald asked his friend’s five-year-old son to bring him a screwdriver. "Do you want a 'Daddy' screwdriver or a 'Mommy' screwdriver?" the little boy asked. Confused but preoccupied, Donald absentmindedly said, "Bring me a 'Mommy' screwdriver." The child came back and handed him a butter knife.