

Women Pastors

Genesis 1:26-28; 1 Timothy 2:11-12

A sermon given to the Plymouth Presbyterian Church August 20th 2023

by Elder Bill Eagle

This will be the third time at Plymouth that I have had the opportunity to speak on the subject of women pastors. I first spoke about them in May of 2006 and again in June 2012. On both times, I did it to support Marilyn Allen, our first woman pastor.

This time I was inspired by two recent events.

On June 17th, Claudia and I celebrated our 56th wedding Anniversary

Also that month, The Southern Baptist Church, our nation's largest Protestant, denomination held their Annual Convention in New Orleans. At this conference, the delegates voted to disassociate themselves with two of their largest churches. They did this because these churches had women in influential teaching and pastoral positions.

They based this decision on 1 Timothy 2:11-12 where Paul was purported to have said:

“Don't let women take over and tell men what to do. They should be quiet and obedient...”

The strange thing about this decision is that in 2006, the Southern Baptist Church had over 1000 women as ordained pastors.

Different people do see things differently.

Now why did I mention my wedding Anniversary? I remember it well. During the rehearsal the pastor went over our wedding vows. He looked at Claudia and said “do you promise to love honor and cherish...”

“Hey wait” says I, “shouldn’t that be obey?”

Little Claudia Sherrell (she weighed about 110 pounds then) looked up at me and said: “I have news for you!”

It was at that time that I was given a major lesson in theology. I started learning very quickly about a woman’s role in marriage, religion, culture and life.

Different people do see things differently.

Because of this lesson that Claudia taught me, I gained a help mate. a partner, and a friend. I was given the opportunity to share my life with someone who was smarter, more talented, better educated and certainly prettier, than me.

Paul also said: Galatians 3:28; In Christ’s family there can be no division into Jew and non-Jew, slave and free, male and female. Among us you are all equal. That is, we are all in a common relationship with Jesus Christ.

Hey... wait a minute; doesn't that contradict what he told Timothy or at least what the Southern Baptists seem to think he said to Timothy?

The Apostle Paul was probably one of the greatest church-planting individuals the world has ever known. He led teams of women and men to create churches. Some of his best church builders were women. Do you think that women could be silent and still build churches?

I am a lay person, not a theologian. I don't intend to get into any deep theology. The truth of the matter is that I am not a very deep person. I have a hard time comprehending concepts that are "profound". To me my favorite church ceremony is "The Presbyterian Pot Luck."

So, I may not have a proper prospective in why Paul purportedly wrote 1 Timothy 2:12, but Let me list a few items on why some people think Paul may have made these comments to Timothy.

You need to understand the historical and cultural context in which Paul's letter was written. First of all you need to realize that this is not a letter to a church, but rather a personal note to Timothy. Timothy had some big problems in dealing with the Church in Ephesus. Ephesus was not the easiest city for a Christian to establish a ministry. It was the center of worship for the fertility Goddess Artemis and the Artemis temple was a woman run enterprise. The first chapter of Timothy addresses false teachings, wrong doctrines, myths, and those who are shipwrecked in the faith.

I don't see Paul as a misogynist at all. I see him as a man who appreciates a woman's accomplishments, and is sensitive to the existing culture and to the needs of people in that culture.

In Acts 16, we learn that there were no Synagogue in Philippi. Paul finds a woman named Lydia. Lydia is conducting a prayer meeting along the river and he gets her to start a church in her home.

How about that?

Paul gets a bunch of women together and tells them to start a church. Do you think that he told them to keep silent? It turns out that the church of Philippi became a favorite church with Paul. In Paul's letter to the Philippians Paul speaks about his great joy in this church and he mentions two women as his co-workers who struggled beside him in the work of the gospel. I suspect that Paul had no problems with women teaching the Gospel to men as well as to other women. This church was started by a group of women, but it was by no means limited to women and accepted men as members as well.

The late Alvera Mickelson an American academic, author, and [women's equality](#) activist pointed out that Paul was not the only one who recognized women as leaders of churches. The little letter of 2 John is addressed to "The elect lady and her children whom I love in the truth" it closes with "the children of your elected sister send you, their greeting." A reading of this letter points that these churches were led by women.

The book of Acts mentions Priscilla and Aquila. They were friends of Paul, and tentmakers. Paul was also a tent maker. Other than temple priests, the Jews had no professional clergy. All Jewish Rabbi's had a means of making a living, and in Paul's case, he made tents. Priscilla and Aquila are mentioned and commended eight times in Paul's letters.

To Quote Alvera Mickelson:

"More often than anyone, except Timothy, and in all but two instances Priscilla's name is mentioned first although that was contrary to the custom of the day (and ours as well). Mickelson theorizes that when Paul thought of them; he thought of Priscilla first, which may indicate that she was the stronger leader of the two. She was at very least Aquila's equal. In Romans 16, when Paul is sending greetings to many people, Priscilla and Aquilla lead the list and he says, "They worked with me in Christ Jesus, and risked their necks for my life to whom, not only I give thanks, but all of the churches of the Gentiles..."

Priscilla and Aquila started churches wherever they went. It is obvious that they would not have been able to do this were Priscilla to keep silent and not teach others.

There is Phoebe, who is mentioned in Romans 15:1 as a "Deacon" in the church of Cenchrea. In the King James version, the word "deacon" was translated as servant. Other versions translate it as deaconess. Paul, however describes her with the same word that he uses to describe Apollos, Tychicus, Epaphras, Timothy, and himself. In all these other instances the word is translated as "Deacon". Pheobe must

have had an important job in Cenchrea, since Paul says that she was a benefactor of many, including himself.

A number of women are honored by Paul in the book of Romans as his “Co-laborers.” His act of commendation honored these people and affirmed their authority as ministers of the Gospel. Included Pheobe, Priscilla, Prisca, Juna (A female Apostle), Mary and Neureus’s sister.

I believe that Paul did not practice what we are told that he preached. Paul may have been the result of a Judeo Roman first century culture but he was imbued with a vision of Christ, a knowledge of God that allowed him to overcome both his culture and his time.

In the Old Testament there are five women shown in Hebrew scriptures as prophets. Deborah, for example, is named in the Hebrew scriptures as both prophetess and Judge. People came to her for words from God: She was a leader of her nation. No one seemed to object to her gender.

The scriptures imply that the people wouldn’t fight on their own behalf, unless it were under her leadership.

In Judges 5 she led the people in song after leading them to victory in battle. “They held back until I, Deborah arose, until I arose, a mother of Israel.”

Other honored in the Old Testament as prophets are Huldah, a prophet and reader of the law. (2 Kings 22:11-20; 2 Chronicles 34: 14-33)

Miriam, sister of Moses. (Exodus 15:20-21)

Noadiah (Nehemiah 6:14)

Isaiah’s Wife (Isaiah 8:3)

The ancient Hebrews didn't have any problems in recognizing women as leaders and prophets, even if some Christian denominations now do.

We may on occasion practice selective literalism in our interpretation of the Bible, but let me share with you seven Biblical Truths (which I borrowed from the Christians for Biblical Equality web site).

1. The Bible teaches that women and men were created for full and equal partnership. (Gen 2:18, 1Samuel 7:12; and Psalms 121:1-2)
2. The Bible teaches that Jesus came to redeem woman as well as men.
Through faith in Christ, we all become children of God, one in Christ, and heirs to the blessings of salvation without reference to racial, social, or gender distinctive.
3. The Bible teaches that the Holy Spirit comes upon men and women alike. Without distinction, the Holy Spirit lives in both woman and men and distributes gifts without preference to gender.
4. The Bible teaches that both woman and men are stewards of the grace of God. Both men and woman are divinely gifted and empowered to minister to the whole Body of Christ under His authority.
5. The Bible defines the function of leadership as the empowerment of others for service rather than as the exercise of power over them.
6. The Bible teaches that husbands and wives are heirs together of the grace of life and that they are bound

together in a relationship of mutual submission and responsibility

7. The Bible teaches that both mothers and fathers are to exercise leadership in the nurture, training, discipline and teaching of their children.

Different people may see things differently. Southern Baptists may see things differently than American Baptists or other Protestant denominations.

To Quote Galatians 3:28 again: "There is neither Jew nor Greek , there is neither slave or free. There is neither male or female: for you are one in Christ Jesus.

Let's face it folks...If women had "Kept silent in Church", there would be no Church.

"Viva la difference", I am so thankful for God's love and that God uses both men and women to do our maker's work.

For this we all need to give thanks.

Amen