

Women Pastors & Deacons

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Introduction

Many churches today find themselves confronted with the question of whether women should be Pastors or Deacons in the church. After prayerful consideration and study of God's word, I have come to the firm conviction that it is not God's intent that a woman should be the Pastor or Deacon of a church. Having said that, I am eager to emphasize that for the life of me I do not know what the church would do without dedicated Christian women. Women play a crucial role in the life of the New Testament church by serving, working and teaching faithfully. God calls all believers to serve in the work of furthering his kingdom. Women play an important role in every aspect of church ministry.

In considering the question of women serving in the role of Pastor or Deacon our thoughts and opinions are often affected by numerous external influences. Most of these influences should not be considered while others should have limited impact. For example, what the world thinks should be irrelevant. The trends of society are likewise of no relevance. What is acceptable to the world does not constitute right and wrong. Just because something is accepted by society does not make it right for the church. For Christians, God's word should always be the first and final measurement for what we believe and do. We are called to live a life of godliness (god-likeness). To this end we must trust God's word for what is best for us, and how God would have us conduct ourselves.

Tradition played a limited role in my considerations of the subject of women serving as a Pastor or Deacon. With the full intent of letting God's word be the guiding light in my consideration, I felt compelled to research commentaries and viewpoints of Bible scholars past and present. No doubt these scholars are more educated in theology than me and it would be foolish to completely ignore their writings. That is the limit to which tradition entered into my conclusions. In the end, my conclusions come from a personal study of the scripture under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

The Pastor

"Be shepherds of God's flock that is under your care, serving as overseers – not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be..." 1 Peter 5:2 NIV

The terms Pastor, Elder and Bishop are synonymous. They refer to one who is an overseer in the church. The Greek words translated Pastor, Elder and Bishop are "*presbuteros*" (translated presbytery) and "*episkopos*" from which the Episcopal Church gets its name. Both words mean overseer or spiritual leader and carry the connotation of one who is older and more mature in spiritual matters. The local Pastor is therefore one who is an overseer in terms of spirituality, ministry and the leadership in the local church. The qualifications of the Pastor are clearly stated in the Bible and will be discussed in limited detail later.

The Deacon

“Brothers, choose seven men from among you who are known to be full of the Spirit and wisdom. We will turn the responsibility over to them...” Acts 6:3 NIV

The word deacon comes from the Greek word *“diakonos”* which means servant. The word also carries the connotation of a minister or ministry helper. The office of Deacon is a position of service through ministry. A Deacon is one who serves God by serving the needs of the local body of believers. The word deaconess is not found in the Bible, but used among some Christian denominations. Some believe a deaconess is a woman deacon while others believe use the word to refer to the wife of a deacon. Since the word is not used to describe a position of leadership in the New Testament; it holds no meaning of significance in the church. Why not just refer to Deacon’s wives as “Deacon’s wives”. The qualifications of a person being considered for the position of Deacon are clearly outlined in the Bible and will be discussed later.

Principle of Headship (reason #1)

The church is a living organism referred to routinely in God’s word as the body of Christ. Like the human body and any other organism, there must be organization. If the local church is to carry out its ministry and responsibilities to our Lord, it must understand the Principle of Headship. That is to say there must be organization and hence leadership. The positions of leadership include the Pastor as well as Deacon and many other positions. In order to function properly, a church must have many leaders to fulfill its ministries.

Like a family, without an understanding of the “principle of headship”, a church is destined for much confusion and disruption. The “principle of headship” includes a three-fold concept in the local church.

1) Christ is the headship over the body of believers. *“And he is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy.” Colossians 1:18 NIV*

2) The Pastor is the headship over the flock. *“Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. Be shepherds of the church of God, which he bought with his own blood.” Acts 20:28 NIV*

3) The husband is the headship over the family. *“Now I want you to realize that the head of every man is Christ, and the head of the woman is man, and the head of Christ is God.” 1 Corinthians 11:3 NIV*

This principal is clearly presented in God’s word. While it is acceptable for women to be in positions of overseer and leadership over men in the secular workplace, the Bible does not support such an arrangement in the church. It is neither permissible nor practical in the church. Part of growing in our faith is learning that when God says something is a bad idea, it is a bad idea no matter how much we might reason otherwise. Our loving God always has the best interest of his people at heart.

Pastor Qualification (reason #2)

The qualifications of a Pastor are plainly defined in the word of God (1 Peter 5:1-4, Titus 1:6-9, 1 Timothy 3:1-7). While a Pastor is not expected to be sinless or perfect, he is expected to be a man of integrity; “without reproach.” This literally means he should be a person that cannot be laid hold of; that is to say that nothing about his life can give the enemy a way to lay hold or hinder his work. The standards of qualification for a Pastor encompass every aspect of the man’s life including his spirituality, wisdom, temperament, soberness, ability to communicate, self control, marriage standards and even his family activity. I suggest you take the time to read 1 Timothy 3:1-15 to fully understand the expectations of character for a Pastor. Frankly, I find them quite intimidating, and they always leave me feeling inadequate.

When outlining the qualifications of the Pastor, Paul makes it perfectly clear that he is speaking of a man. Paul specifically refers to men and the responsibilities unique to men. He goes to great length to be very specific about what a man must do and be in order to serve as a Pastor. If the position were permissible for a woman, he would have addressed specifics relating to women just as he does in other areas when addressing women (Ephesians 5:22-32).

Furthermore, Paul states that the Pastor must be “*..The husband of but one wife,..*” 1 Timothy 3:2 NIV. Though our “modern” society might disagree, the Biblical authority of marriage is one man and one woman. No amount of reasoning or rationalization by a Christian can get around the statement that a Pastor must be the husband of one wife. There are simply no Biblical words about the Pastor that support evidence that a woman should serve in the role of Pastor in the New Testament church.

Deacon Qualifications (reason #3)

The qualifications of a Deacon are also clearly defined in the word of God (Acts 6:3-6, 1 Timothy 3:8-12). Verse 8 of 1 Timothy 3 follows the qualifications of the Pastor and begins with the words “Deacons, likewise.” The implication is that Deacons are to have the same or very similar qualifications as that of a Pastor. Like the Pastor, Deacons are to be men of respect and must have proven themselves to hold to the truths of God’s word. There is no room in the church for Pastors or Deacons who choose to rationalize away the word of God. The leaders of the church must strive to live by God’s teaching and set an example to their fellow believers.

God’s qualifications for the Deacon parallel that of the Pastor in that they too must be “*the husband of but one wife*” (vs 12). In verse 11, speaking of Deacons, Paul specifically states “*In the same way, their wives are to be women worthy of respect, not malicious talkers but temperate and trustworthy in everything.*” This directly addresses the attributes a Deacon’s wife must possess and leaves no room to interpret that a Deacon might be a woman. There is no mention of the relationship between a deacon and her husband or how a deacon’s husband should conduct himself. One might rationalize that I am interpreting the scripture too literally. We are instructed to take nothing away from or add to the word of God. To take the liberty of discarding specific instructions is to open the door to all manner of misinterpretations; something the world had done for centuries to its own detriment.

Women's Role (reason #4)

People often misunderstand the scripture when it specifically addresses the conduct of women in the church. Defensive attitudes sometimes cause us to miss the richness of God's word and the revolution of freedom it reveals. Christianity has in fact elevated the position of women and children more so than any other religious faith. Paul makes it clear that salvation is for all who believe in Christ the son of the living God. Christianity's doors are wide open to both genders and to people of all colors, all ages, all nationalities, etc. The "Whosoever..." is broad; every bit as broad as God's amazing grace.

At the same time, the scripture outlines the conduct of men and women in the New Testament church. In stating the conduct of women, one can clearly see that it is not meant for women to be the head or overseer over men (1 Timothy 2:8-15, 1 Timothy 3:1-15, Ephesians 5:22-32). Such an arrangement runs in direct contradiction to creation. This does not mean the bar is higher for men or women. The bar is high for both if they are Christians. We are to love like Christ and live like children of God who have been born again through the blood of Christ.

"I do not permit a woman to teach or have authority over a man.." 1 Timothy 2:11 NIV

"Wives, submit to your husbands as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church.." Ephesians 5:22-23 NIV

I encourage you to read the scriptures referenced above in their entirety. They are rich in describing a godly woman who has been saved by grace and filled with the Holy Spirit. Such women are loving, modest and pure; characterized with humility and understanding. A Christian woman doesn't boast or flaunt her sexuality but rather preserves it for the sanctity of her marriage. Many great Pastors and Deacons owe their saving knowledge of Jesus Christ to a Christian mother or wife. A Christian woman is a leader by her example of faith and obedience to God's word. There are many tasks in families for which women are uniquely qualified. The same is true in the church. Serving as an overseer of men is simply not one that God's word supports.

God's Providence (reason #5)

In creation, God spoke everything into existence. As he created all the creatures of the earth, he also created woman to be a help mate to man. *"The Lord God said, "it is not good for man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him." Genesis 2:18 NIV*

God's creation is not limited to the heavens and earth. His creation does not stop with man and woman either. God also spoke into being his Word. God's word is one of the primary ways we understand his attributes, personality and principles. In God's word, he gives each of us different callings and responsibilities in life. One might make the argument that it isn't fair to not allow women to be pastors and deacons. We must not question God's providence but rather accept it with faith and obedience. *"Nevertheless, each one should retain the place in life that the Lord assigned to him and to which God has called him. This is the rule I lay down in all churches." 1 Corinthians 7:17 NIV*

Summary

This explanation of my study and position on the subject of women as Pastors or Deacons is not meant to be a study of the qualifications of pastors or deacons. It is simply intended to address the topic at hand. However, as usual, God has revealed other truths to me in the course of reflecting more deeply in his word. I have been reminded once again of just how blessed one is to be called to the responsibility of Pastor or Deacon. Sadly, I am also reminded of how many Deacons and Pastors fail to understand their position and the importance of their being an example to the rest of the congregation.

The mere fact that our churches have discussions about the need to have women serve in positions of pastor and deacon is a pathetic reminder of where we are as Christian men. The scriptures mentioned here all make a major assumption; that Christian men will live, act and serve God with integrity and responsibility. The scripture implies there will be ample men in the church willing to stand up for their faith; they will give of their time and talents to teach, serve and minister to the flock along with the Pastor. Such is not the case. Many men in our churches today have subrogated their God given spiritual responsibilities to others including their wives. Many women long for their husband to attend church with them and take the leadership role in spiritual matters but find themselves having to bear all such responsibilities alone. No doubt God is displeased.

While I have tried to understand the word of God and convey its principles with boldness, it is awkward expressing my position on the topic with frankness and resolution. The reason it is awkward is because I am keenly aware of the many sacrifices women make for their husbands, families and the work of our Lord. I pray that this paper in no way discourages or fails to recognize the great labor of women in the church. Without women, our churches would not have ample Bible study teachers, children's ministries, mission activities, hosting, decorating, and much more. Without the labor of Christian women our churches would be empty in many ways. A Christian woman is a beauty to behold.

Discussion Outline

1. Introduction
 - a. What influences our thoughts on the subject?
 - b. What should be the primary influence on our conclusion?
2. Principle of Headship (reason #1)
 - a. Who is the headship of the church? Colossians 1:18
 - b. Who is the headship of the flock? Acts 20:28
 - c. Who is the headship of the family? 1 Corinthians 11:3
 - d. Why is this principal so important?
3. Pastor Qualifications (reason #2)
 - a. What are the qualifications of a Pastor? 1 Peter 5:1-4, Titus 1:6-9, 1 Timothy 3:1-7
 - b. What areas of a Pastor's life do the qualifications include?
 - c. What statements in the qualifications include or exclude women from being a Pastor?
4. Deacon Qualifications (reason #3)
 - a. What are the qualifications of a Deacon? 1 Timothy 3:8-12, Acts 6:3-6
 - b. How do the qualifications of a Deacon compare to that of a Pastor?
 - c. What statements in the qualifications include or exclude women from being a Pastor?
5. Women's Role (reason #4)
 - a. How does Paul describe the role of women in the church? 1 Timothy 2:8-15
 - b. Does this mean women cannot teach men in the church?
 - c. What is the bar of conduct for both men and women?
 - d. Does the Bible support women being and overseer over men in the church? 1 Timothy 2:11, Ephesians 5:22-23
6. God's Providence (reason #5)
 - a. In what manner did God create Adam and Eve? Genesis 2:18
 - b. How are we to accept our calling and position in life? 1 Corinthians 7:17
7. Summary
 - a. How do the trends of the world and society affect this topic?
 - b. How important are women in the life of the church?