

## Women in Ministry

The question of ordaining women as pastors, evangelists, and deacons is really more a question of biblical scholarship methods than of whether or not women are ordained. In Wesleyan-influenced churches, we approach the Word of God with a balanced view that considers all scriptures on all topics. No matter the subject, we don't isolate one or two key scriptures to prove a limited stance that is created by ignoring any verse(s) that refutes that stance. Scholars call this method of scholarship "proof texting," and it is an erroneous method of biblical interpretation that creates unbalanced theology and concepts. (Slave owners used the same method of scholarship to prove owning and abusing slaves was God-approved and biblical since the New Testament tells slaves to submit to their masters.) Therefore, when the topic of the ordination of women is approached, we consult all verses that deal with women in ministry and then come to the most logical and balanced conclusions based upon the full body of information found in the Bible—not just one or two verses. Due to this balanced approach to scripture, many Wesleyan-influenced churches have ordained women since their inception. For instance, the Church of the Nazarene has been ordaining women for over 100 years. The first group of Nazarene pastors and evangelists who were ordained in 1908 was one-third women.

Paul made a few direct statements against women participating in church life, even commanding them to silence in church. "A woman should learn in quietness and full submission. I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man; she must be silent" (1 Tim. 2:11-12). "As in all congregations of the saints, women should remain silent in churches. They are not allowed to speak, but must be in submission, as the Law says. When they want to inquire about something, they should ask their own husbands at home; for it is disgraceful for a woman to speak in church" (1 Cor. 14:33b-35). However, Paul also affirmed women who weren't silent in the church and who were prophets and teachers. In 1 Cor. 11:5, Paul references women praying and prophesying in church. This scripture occurs three chapters before he tells women to be silent. Also in Romans 16, Paul affirms many women in ministry, including Phoebe, a deacon (v. 1) and Junias (v. 7), a female apostle—the highest office of the First Century church. Given the wide body of biblical evidence in favor of women in ministry, the long-standing stance of Wesleyan-influenced is that either Paul contradicted himself and much of the Bible when he told women not to teach/preach and to be silent, or there was a specific problem in each of these two cases that he was dealing with concerning women who were inappropriately out of hand. Wesleyan-influenced churches teach that Paul was addressing a specific issue with women who were either disrupting the service in 1 Corinthians or being domineering in 1 Timothy and that he was not refuting his other statements that support women in ministry or the other portions of the Bible that support women in ministry. For a look at passages that do support women as preachers/prophetesses and/or spiritual leaders see: Exodus 15-20; Judges 4; 2 Kings 22:14; Micah 6:4; Joel 2:28-29; Luke 2:26-38; Acts 2:16-21; Acts 18; Acts 21:9.

Interestingly enough, no denomination that I am aware of fully applies a literal interpretation of what Paul said against women participating in church life. In every denomination in the world, women are not silent. They may be teaching and/or preaching, singing in the choir, serving on boards, playing instruments, testifying, laughing, talking, and participating in church life. No denomination applies a strict, literal interpretation of Paul's telling women to be silent because the church at large would suffer greatly and perhaps fail if all women went silent. Likewise, the spreading of the Gospel is significantly hindered when women are told they are not to proclaim the Good News of the Gospel.

The most balanced biblical scholarship on any subject is solidified when we start with the teachings of Jesus Christ and don't interpret any scripture in a way that violates what Jesus said. Jesus Christ was the sinless son of God, and His words must be the underlying force and influencer in all biblical interpretation. Whatever Paul wrote must be interpreted in the context of his own teachings as well as in the context of Jesus Christ's teachings. Any concept on any subject that is created by ignoring the teachings of Christ is out of balance. Using scripture as a tool of subordinating or limiting anyone due to gender, age, race, or economic status is a direct violation of what Jesus said and most of what Paul himself said. According to Paul, "There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus" (Galatians 3:28). Jesus Christ stated, "So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you" (Matthew 7:12). This Golden Rule applies to everything, including how we view and treat the opposite gender.

Interestingly enough, Jesus Christ repeatedly told his male disciples to not even call themselves leaders and never to think of themselves in authority over others. "Also, a dispute arose among them as to which of them was considered the greatest. Jesus said to them, 'The kings of the Gentiles lord it over them; and those who exercise authority over them call themselves Benefactors. But you are not to be like that. Instead, the greatest among you should be like the youngest, and the one who rules like the one who serves...But I am among you as the one who serves'" (Luke 2:24-27b, NIV). "But do not be called Rabbi; for One is your Teacher, and you are all brothers...And do not be called leaders; for One is your Leader, that is, Christ. But the greatest among you shall be your servant. And whoever exalts himself shall be humbled; and whoever humbles himself shall be exalted (Matthew 23:8, 10-12, NASB). Note: the King James Version states, "Do not be called masters" (v.10); the New International Version states, "Do not be called teachers" (v.10). Using the "proof texting" method of biblical scholarship, these and other sections of the Bible could easily be used to subordinate men and stop them from entering any ministry position as teachers or pastors or assuming any role as leaders. However, churches don't use scripture to limit men in the church or ministry, and they should not. As already mentioned, whatever Paul wrote concerning ministry and church life must not be interpreted in a way that violates what Christ said; and He stressed servanthood, a lack of thinking in terms of hierarchy, and putting others before ourselves—whether male or female.

**Below is a list of some of the denominations who do ordain women as pastors and affirm women in ministry:**

- Church of the Nazarene
- Mainstream Baptists
- Alliance of Baptists
- American Baptist Churches USA
- Church of God, Anderson
- Brethren in Christ
- The Wesleyan Church
- Presbyterian Church (USA)
- Mennonite Church USA
- Episcopal Church in the USA
- Vineyard Movement
- Evangelical Catholic Church
- Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

- Lutheran Congregations in Mission for Christ
- African Methodist Episcopal Church
- African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church
- Salvation Army
- The Free Methodist Church North America
- Evangelical Covenant Church of America
- International Church of the Foursquare Gospel
- International Pentecostal Holiness Church
- Christian Reformed Church in North America
- Religious Society of Friends (Quaker)
- United Church of Christ
- United Methodist Church
- Wesleyan Reform Union

**Sothern Baptist Church:** Lottie Moon is an applauded, highly educated Southern Baptist missionary who spent her life preaching the Word of God in China during the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> Centuries. Even though the Southern Baptist church currently does not recognize women as pastors or missionaries, they still applaud Lottie Moon’s groundbreaking work as a missionary and take up an annual Christmas offering for missions in her memory. “In 1964 Addie Davis became the first Southern Baptist woman ordained to the ministry. By the 1970’s hundreds of women were enrolled in ministerial degree programs at Southern Baptist Church seminaries. By the early 1990’s more than 1,000 women had been ordained; more than 50 ordained SBC women served as pastors in Southern Baptist churches; and others served as professors at Southern Baptist universities and seminaries. In 2000 the Southern Baptist Church stopped recognizing the ordination of women.” However, all Southern Baptists do not agree with this decision (Prescott & McClatchy; Copyright 1999-2003 Mainstream Oklahoma Baptists.)

**For more detailed information on the subject of balanced, biblical interpretation and women in ministry, please consult the following books, and websites:**

- *The Tie that Binds: A Marriage Revolution of Love* by Debra White Smith, specifically the chapters, “Ruling and Drooling” and “Leading and Following.”
- *Reclaiming Eve* by Suzanne Burden, Carla Sunberg, and Jamie Wright.
- *25 Tough Questions about Women and the Church* by J. Lee Grady.
- Christians for Biblical Equality: [www.cbeinternational.org](http://www.cbeinternational.org)
- Wesleyan Holiness Women Clergy: [www.whwomensclergy.org](http://www.whwomensclergy.org)
- Timeline of Women in Methodism: <http://www.umc.org/who-we-are/timeline-of-women-in-methodism>

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