

The Role of Women as Missionaries

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Introduction

In John 4, Jesus shares the Gospel with the Samaritan woman, who, having been introduced to the Messiah, returned to her village and shared her testimony in the marketplace and neighborhood with anyone who would listen. Nothing in the text indicates that she held evangelistic crusades or addressed the synagogue or even delivered her message in the local amphitheater (John 4:5-30). Mary Magdalene was instructed by Jesus himself to share her personal testimony about the empty tomb and Jesus' resurrection from the dead with his disciples (John 20:18). Mary of Bethany took advantage of a unique opportunity to sit at Jesus' feet to learn the deep truths of Scripture (Luke 10:38-42). Women have been equipping themselves for service to Christ and have been active in personal evangelism from biblical times.

Despite the many examples found in Scripture and the specific didactic passages addressing church order, some women still struggle with how to apply biblical principles in the midst of a postmodern era that bears little resemblance to the ancient world setting in which Scripture was given. Southern Baptists find themselves drawn into chaos and sometimes despair as gifted and equipped women respond from a heart's passion to pour themselves out in service to Christ even to the ends of the world. The questions have never been: Does a woman want to pour out her life in service to Christ wherever the need is greatest? Is a woman qualified in mind and body and giftedness to do any kingdom service? Rather the overriding question is this: What has the Lord given to women in a positive assignment/calling within the clear boundaries set in Scripture? Can Scripture be immutable and unchanging in its principles and boundaries and remain relevant in presenting a call to service appropriate for this era and generation?

Whereas no one in the International Mission Board or mainstream Southern Baptist life would want to say publicly that ladies are serving as "pastors" on international mission fields, one must beware of a "slippery slope" in attempting to make a distinction between the specific role of pastor and the functions of supervising and/or mentoring national pastors or other missionaries. Team leaders are directed or overseen by a "strategy coordinator," who in reality *functions* much as would the pastor of a church. Unless a woman states clearly (as some women have done) that she does not want to be placed in such positions of leading men, a woman may be considered in-

subordinate for declining to serve in these positions. If the *Baptist Faith and Message 2000* (BFM) is considered the confessional guide for such decisions, “the hinge issue” is the meaning of “pastor.”¹ If any role entails the pastoral type of authority, then by implication the policy should reflect that nuance of meaning.

Foundations: The Role of Confessional Statements

Those who suggest that women are second-class Baptists may do so because they consider teaching the Bible to an audience of women and children as a waste of talent and training and not equal to the assignment of teaching men. In other words, some believe a good female Bible teacher must allow—and in some cases even encourage—men to sit under her teaching.

The discussion of a woman’s role in the church has moved to the front among evangelicals, especially in the last two decades. The issue can divide congregations and destroy the faith of individuals. The problems and confusion accompanying the rise of “biblical” feminism prompted Southern Baptists to address the matter head-on. What better way to clarify one’s position in the midst of a conflict than to establish a clear and unambiguous statement based on the text of Scripture?

Producing a concise, clear statement of the generally held beliefs of Southern Baptists is challenging, especially when Scripture is contra-culture and in contradistinction to popularly held notions. I served on the Baptist Faith and Message Study Committee drafting a statement on the family. The committee examined major passages of Scripture on the family and relationships therein. The article as formulated is positive in its tone and emphasizes what Scripture affirms rather than what it forbids; its words and phrases are documented with Scripture.

As the confessional statement adopted by the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC), the BFM summarizes in a basic way what Scripture says regarding key doctrines of the Christian faith. Since the home and church are linked in the creation and church orders, two articles speak directly to the questions addressed here:

VI. The Church

A New Testament church of the Lord Jesus Christ is an autonomous local congregation of baptized believers, associated by covenant in the faith and fellowship of the Gospel; observing the two ordinances of Christ, governed by His laws, exercising the gifts, rights, and privileges invested in them by His Word, and seeking to extend the Gospel to the ends of the earth. Each congregation operates under the Lordship of Christ through democratic processes. In such a congregation each member is responsible and accountable to Christ as Lord. Its scriptural offi-

¹Personal correspondence with former IMB missionary, April, 15 2014.

cers are pastors and deacons. *While both men and women are gifted for service in the church, the office of pastor is limited to men as qualified by Scripture.*

The New Testament speaks also of the church as the Body of Christ which includes all of the redeemed of all the ages, believers from every tribe, and tongue, and people, and nation.

XVIII. The Family

God has ordained the family as the foundational institution of human society. It is composed of persons related to one another by marriage, blood, or adoption.

Marriage is the uniting of one man and one woman in covenant commitment for a lifetime. It is God's unique gift to reveal the union between Christ and His church and to provide for the man and the woman in marriage the framework for intimate companionship, the channel of sexual expression according to biblical standards, and the means for procreation of the human race.

The husband and wife are of equal worth before God, since both are created in God's image. The marriage relationship models the way God relates to His people. A husband is to love his wife as Christ loved the church. He has the God-given responsibility to provide for, to protect, and to lead his family. A wife is to submit herself graciously to the servant leadership of her husband even as the church willingly submits to the headship of Christ. She, being in the image of God as is her husband and thus equal to him, has the God-given responsibility to respect her husband and to serve as his helper in managing the household and nurturing the next generation.

Children, from the moment of conception, are a blessing and heritage from the Lord. Parents are to demonstrate to their children God's pattern for marriage. Parents are to teach their children spiritual and moral values and to lead them, through consistent lifestyle example and loving discipline, to make choices based on biblical truth. Children are to honor and obey their parents.²

Anyone taking issue with the statement needs to address his concerns to the words found in the statement as well as to the Scriptures cited.³ Scripture should overrule experience; facts should overshadow feelings.

²*The Baptist Faith and Message 2000* [online]; accessed August, 4 2014, <http://www.sbc.net/bfm2000/bfm2000.asp>; italics mine. See Dorothy Kelley Patterson, "Article XVIII: The Family," in *The Baptist Faith and Message 2000: Critical Issues in America's Largest Protestant Denomination*, ed. Douglas K. Blount and Joseph D. Wooddell (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2007), 183-92.

³*The Baptist Faith and Message* in its entirety (see n.2) features the Scripture references mentioned here.

Practical Outworking: Application of the BFM 2000 to Missionary Roles

What impact, if any, should the BFM have on missionary roles? What part does a “call” from God play in the mission-sending procedure? Clearly all support the necessity of God’s call to ministry. However, there are divergent views on how the “call” informs appointment and assignment for the respective missionary. From personal conversations and observations, women, for example, do serve as team leaders, even in heavy Muslim areas. In fact, I have known situations in which a single female journeyman was assigned to this role and had under her supervision career missionaries (including married couples) on her team. When IMB leadership assignments are made, the question arises as to the role of secular criteria such as seniority or number of years on the field or allegiance to modern methodology (e.g., CPM/T4T⁴). In some cases such criteria seem to trump spiritual qualifications (e.g., pastoral experience) and biblical mandates (e.g., texts from Scripture on which the BFM is based). For example, at one time the IMB leader in a particular country was a long-serving woman. After she left, a man was given that position. When the paradigm shift occurred in 2000, new church-planting teams were formed, and all of them had male leadership except for one team. A fairly new woman who had come to that country “planning to be a teacher . . . was asked to be the leader of a church planting team. At first, all the members of her team were female. Eventually . . . a married couple was placed on her team.” However, this woman “did not feel prepared or qualified to be team leader of a church planting team.”⁵

Clearly the IMB does not encourage women to pursue becoming pastors of congregations. However, the lines are definitely blurred when the choice is for certain women, whether single or married, to serve as leaders of mission teams. Here the guidelines are not clear.

Is There Confusion or Even Crisis on the Horizon?

If there is no course correction to realign missionary assignments with the clear complementarian position defined in the BFM, the consequences will affect not only those currently serving as missionaries but also generations to come. First, one must consider the impact on missionary families. The complementarian model for the home does not seem to be a priority. Second, the effect on the world cultures missionaries are trying to penetrate with the Gospel must be considered. Should their cultural models be respected, especially when they happen to parallel biblical paradigms? Do patterns already established within the home and in churches have any connection to church planting?

⁴CPM stands for “Church Planting Movement,” T4T for the church-planting strategy called “Training for Trainers.” See Stephen R. Smith, “The Basic CPM Plan and T4T” (2011); accessed August 6, 2014; <http://t4tonline.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/02/1-The-Basic-CPM-Plan-and-T4T.pdf>.

⁵Personal correspondence with former IMB missionary, April 14, 2014.

Tried-and-True Missionary Strategies

The Missionary Family

God has used the family as the primary classroom and as the foremost object lesson for teaching his people about himself and for challenging them to embrace the holy lifestyle he demands. Before there were civil governments or communities or assemblies of worship, God established the home by creating the man and the woman and bringing them together in the Garden of Eden to engage in spiritual ministry through companionship, dominion, procreation, and worship. "Christian homes draw people to Christ, both the children that God may bring into the family and those outside the church who witness a love that is committed, sacrificial and selfless, dependent moment by moment upon Jesus as Lord."⁶

Woman-to-Woman Ministry: Married Women

"The revolutionary public justification for including women in the foreign mission enterprise was to reach the otherwise unreachable women and children, since men would have little access to them in the gender-segregated societies of the East."⁷ The role of the missionary wives went far beyond their primary roles of helping their husbands and nurturing their children.

On March 14, 1812, Ann Judson wrote on shipboard bound for India, "I desire no higher enjoyment in this life, than to be instrumental of leading some poor, ignorant heathen females, to the knowledge of the Saviour. To have a female praying society, consisting of those who were once in heathen darkness, is what my heart earnestly pants after, and makes a constant subject of prayer. Resolved to keep this in view, as one principal object of my life."⁸

Judson's pen has left a portfolio of letters. She wrote to her sisters in 1812, articulating her personal reflections on how to do woman-to-woman missions: "Good female schools are extremely needed in this country. I hope no Missionary will ever come out here without a wife, as she, in her sphere, can be equally useful with her husband."⁹

Robert also speaks to the role of missionary wives, who

⁶William Cutrer, "Baptist Faith and Message: Article 18: The Family," *Baptist Press*, 10 September 2002 [online]; accessed August 4, 2014, <http://www.bpnews.net/14221/baptist-faith-and-message-article-18-the-family>.

⁷Dana L. Robert, "The Mother of Modern Missions," *Christian History*, Issue 90 (2006) [posted online April 1, 2006]; accessed August 4, 2014, <http://www.christianitytoday.com/ch/2006/issue90/7.22.html>.

⁸Ibid.

⁹Ibid.

. . . quickly became an invaluable part of the Protestant mission force, because they not only provided companionship for their husbands, but they opened schools for girls, adopted orphans, held female prayer meetings, and mastered the spoken language of the marketplace more quickly than their studious husbands, who were busy translating the Bible and planting churches.¹⁰

The early woman-to-woman ministries, described as “the first gendered mission theory,” resulted in a challenge to Western women who became missionaries “both to create ‘Christian homes’ and to raise the status of women in society by proving that women were intelligent beings who could learn to read, become medical doctors, and so forth.”¹¹ For married women, the question often begins with priorities: Do their husbands need helpers? Do their children need nurturers? Do their households need managers? Again, Scripture carefully guides a woman through Christ-honoring priorities without sacrificing her heart’s desire for service.

The examples set by some extraordinary women in missionary history reveal their purposeful application of Scripture to kingdom ministry as they poured energy and creativity into woman-to-woman evangelism and discipleship. “The activities of missionary wives were not random: they were part of a mission strategy that gave women a particular role in the advancement of God’s kingdom.”¹² The extraordinary work of these missionary women included especially their meeting the physical needs of women, investing in educational and medical ministries for them, and innovative outreach by targeting such needs as orphan care.¹³ Dana Robert notes at least two important “positive effects” from the woman-to-woman mentoring that is built upon “close involvement in the daily lives of the people.” First, women’s work served to “soften the effects of cultural imperialism,”¹⁴ which “tarnished much of the early missionary movement. Second, it created a model for gender-based missions (i.e., women ministering to women) for subsequent generations.”¹⁵ Robert is not alone in this positive assessment of the Titus 2 “spiritual mothering.” As Zoba writes,

Throughout the history of missions, women have become Christians as a result of other women who have touched them at their point of need—as teachers, health workers, reading tutors, or visiting neighbors. Women can reach the heart[s] of other women

¹⁰Dana L. Robert, “Gospel Bearers, Gender Barriers: Issues for Women and Mission Today,” *Currents in Theology and Mission* 29, no. 4 (August 2002): 248.

¹¹Ibid.

¹²Dana Lee Robert, *American Women in Mission: A Social History of Their Thought and Practice* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1997), xvii.

¹³Wendy Murray Zoba, “Trends in Missions: Women Reaching Women is Key to the Future of Missions,” *Christianity Today* 7 (August 2000): 42–43.

¹⁴Robert, *American Women in Mission*, xix.

¹⁵Zoba, “Women Reaching Women,” 43.

and connect on a level that is closed to men.¹⁶

Historically, in many countries only female missionaries have been able to gain access to the women. Recognizing this fact, the legendary missionary to China, J. Hudson Taylor, said concerning “woman’s work”:

This Conference should make clear the need of women. The results of their work are indeed a surprise. Are not the parts of China which are closed to us open to women? There is less fear of women as political agents. They are allowed to go where male missionaries cannot enter. Women often have invitations to go and stay as guests. The influence of these visits prepares the way for the male missionaries who may follow. In some place where male missionaries are coldly received, women can get a footing.¹⁷

Furthermore, educating and training (in all-female schools) those who become Christians has frequently been a key evangelization strategy as these “Bible women” shared the Gospel among their own families and communities. Ruth A. Tucker points out that in many ways, “Bible women were the backbone of women’s work in missions.”¹⁸

Woman-to-Woman Ministry: Single Women

Single women have left a powerful legacy of this model. There are some women who impacted my own life through their contributions to the evangelization and discipleship of women. For example, Lottie Moon, in a letter from her location in Chinkiang¹⁹ to “Rev. Dr. H. A. Tupper” (Aug. 27, 1888), wrote:

Nobody who has not seen can imagine the wide field opened there for woman’s work. I would I had a thousand lives that I might give them to the women of China! As it is, I can only beg that other women & many of them be sent. Above all, we need mature women. The Chinese have a high respect for such, but, for many reasons, I think young women had best not be sent. It would not be proper, in Chinese eyes, for young women to go out in the independent way necessary in doing rough country work in the interior. Besides, it seems to me too hard on the young ladies themselves. Of course, there may be exceptional cases.²⁰

¹⁶Ibid., 46.

¹⁷Quoted by Lottie Moon (in Tungchow) to “Rev. Dr. H. A. Tupper,” 1 July 1890, in *Send the Light: Lottie Moon’s Letters and Other Writings*, ed. Keith Harper (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2002), 142. As of January 1872, Tupper was the Corresponding Secretary of the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board.

¹⁸See Ruth A. Tucker, “The Role of Bible Women in World Evangelism,” *Missiology: An International Review* 13, no. 2 (1985): 133–46 (quoted statement on 134).

¹⁹Zhenjiang, in modern transcription.

²⁰Keith Harper, ed., *Send the Light: Lottie Moon’s Letters and Other Writings* (Macon,

Amy Carmichael was an example. She “left her native England in 1890 at the age of 23. She made her way to India, where she rescued girls from temple prostitution and established a home and school for them called Dohnavur Fellowship.”²¹ Similarly, Bertha Smith, appointed by the Southern Baptist Convention Foreign Mission Board in 1917 to serve in China, “took charge of a girls’ boarding school . . . where she began to teach the Bible in Chinese in addition to English classes.” Lewis Drummond writes:

Bertha felt she was doing one of the greatest works in the world now that she led the girls’ school. The girls came to the school from country villages spanning more than five counties. . . . Bertha exercised her gift of evangelism well, and a good number came to faith in Christ under her teaching. Often when a student who had come to know the Lord returned to her village, she would be the only Christian in the entire area. Her home would then become an ideal place for Bible study, and Bible women or missionaries would invite the neighbors in and share the gospel with them. Some of the school girls themselves became teachers, and a few entered full-time Christian service.²²

The question has never been whether or not women can make a difference in the work of the kingdom on the international mission field and certainly whether or not they are needed. Rather, one must ask *if how* they do their service for Christ overrides their commitment to the clear boundaries of Scripture.

Transition from Woman-to-Woman Relationships to Interchangeable Roles

Among the IMB’s field personnel, 53.6% are women. Some married women work alongside their husbands as Team Strategy Leaders (TSLs). Although the IMB does not promote “pastoral roles” for women, all personnel are active in planting churches, yet “all TSLs are under the authority of their cluster leadership, affinity leadership, global strategy leadership team and Vice President for the Office of Global Strategy, and all of these leaders are men.”²³ This dilemma is the same one faced domestically in the local churches in which women assume teaching positions or authoritarian leadership over men based on the consent of their respective husbands or by permission of the pastor. Perhaps we need to bypass human authorities regardless of how capable and spiritually sensitive they may seem to be and go directly to the written Word of God—that clear message uncolored by

GA: Mercer University Press, 2002), 132.

²¹Zoba, “Women Reaching Women,” 43.

²²Lewis Drummond, *Miss Bertha: A Biography* (Nashville: B&H, 1996), 42.

²³Personal correspondence with IMB personnel, 14 April 2014.

people or culture or circumstances.

Application of Scripture to Missionary Roles

Historically, one is hard put to present a case for Southern Baptist women in teaching/ruling positions in their churches. Because of this fact, a number of women have left Southern Baptist ranks to accept positions in other denominations in a quest for achieving a role with pastoral authority, thereby bearing eloquent testimony that their commitment to Baptist doctrine was superseded by their desires to attain a particular ecclesiastical office. Perhaps this movement based on personal choice illustrates a determination to be ruled more by emotional and intuitive impulses, i.e., a “call,” instead of by the authority of the immutable written Word. In no sense does this belittle the importance of calling. Rather it puts into perspective the importance of *what you can read that God has written over what you feel He is saying to your heart in an inaudible voice*. Although the practices of God’s people through the years deserve careful attention, one must know that tradition—without scriptural authority—is not binding. Nor is God’s voice you heartily believe you are hearing to trump the Word of God he has inspired to be written so his message can be certain despite human frailties.

How, then, do you decide what ministry roles are appropriate for women? God has provided a standard—his written Word—against which you are to test your human feelings and desires. The ultimate question, then, is whether or not you are going to obey the unchanging principles God has written in his Word (1 Sam 15:22) just as surely in every subsequent generation as when they were delivered.

1 Corinthians 11:3-10 – A Biblical Model for the Home and Church

Paul shows that the relative position of men and women is like the hierarchical structure within the Godhead: “The head of every man is Christ, and the head of the woman is man, and the head of Christ is God” (v. 3). Complementarians and egalitarians agree that all believers are equal in the image of God (Gen 1:27-28), in their position in Christ (Gal 3:28), and in their responsibility before God (1 Pet 3:7). However, this equality does *not* imply uniformity and the erasure of roles, as the egalitarians argue. The members of the triunity, though equal, have different offices and functions.

The Bible clearly states that Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are equal in being and personhood (John 1:1; 5:23; 10:30; 14:6-7, 9, 11). Yet Scripture is just as clear that there is a difference in office and function within the triunity. The Father planned the redemption; the Son enacted the plan; the Spirit revealed that plan to us. The Son voluntarily becomes subject and even subordinate to the Father (John 5:19-20; 6:38; 8:28-29, 54; 15:9-10; 1 Cor 15:28; Phil 2:5-11). The Holy Spirit, sent by and under the direction of the Father, glorifies the Son (John 14:26; 15:26; 16:13-14).

The hierarchy within the Godhead does not pertain to worth—to be-

ing more or less God—but rather addresses function within the divine plan. The same is true of role assignments for men and women. Just as Persons within the triunity have separate and distinct functions, God gave different responsibilities to men and women. In God’s plan, man was given authority over woman. Just as Christ is not less than fully God because the Father is His head or “authority” (Phil 2:5-11), the woman is not an inferior person because man is her head or “authority” (Eph 5:22-24). The Son’s deity is not dependent upon a denial of the Father’s headship. God sovereignly set the general boundaries for Christian leadership among men and women without regard for an individual’s ability to perform the service involved.

Paul appeals to the account of creation (1 Cor 11:9) rather than to the story of the Fall because the divine assignments are clearly given before the Fall (Gen 2:15-24). These distinct roles have never been abolished, but only *distorted* and *perverted* in the Fall (Gen 3:16). Women are free to pray and prophesy in the church, but they are admonished to do so with an attitude of submission to male leadership, an attitude illustrated in that first-century culture by wearing a head covering. Thus the unchanging principle of headship is illustrated by the changing application of that principle.

1 Corinthians 14:33-35 – A Reprimand and Reminder

In this passage Paul speaks authoritatively concerning spiritual gifts in the church—see his use of the Greek verb *epitrepō*, “permit,” in verse 34 and in 1 Timothy 2:12. Again, the apostle emphasizes that the divine order be honored not only by speakers and prophets but also by women. In verse 33 Paul adds “as in all the churches of the saints,” a phrase that more naturally introduces verse 34, indicated by the punctuation of both the Nestle and Aland Greek texts,²⁴ as well as being so placed in numerous translations. Such construction certainly does not suggest a temporary or culturally-relative condition or happenstance but the straightforward statement of a general apostolic principle revealed in two different settings chosen by God “in the fullness of time” (Gal 4:4) as being most appropriate for transmitting His clear message. Paul alludes to the matter of personal preferences and “relevant” interpretations with some pointed rhetorical questions (1 Cor 14:36), making it clear that no one should suppose that he originated God’s Word and order or that he has some new word from God contrary to the understanding and practices of the apostle and other churches with centuries of understanding and practice throughout the Christian era.

Obviously, the silence mandated for women in 1 Corinthians 14 does not *exclude* their vocal participation in worship services since both praying and prophesying are permitted (1 Cor 11:5). Yet, certain restrictions, specifically that the women not take charge of the worship service within the teaching/ruling function, do prevail.

²⁴Eberhard Nestle, *Novum Testamentum Graece* (New York: American Bible Society, 1963), 451; Kurt Aland, Matthew Black, Carlo M. Martini, Bruce M. Metzger, and Allen Wikgren, *The Greek New Testament* (Stuttgart: United Bible Societies, 1983), 611.

1 Timothy 2:8-15 – A Presentation of Defined Boundaries

In verses 13-14, Paul chooses to document this statement by a reference to the order of creation, which from the beginning established the man's natural and spiritual headship and the woman's complementary role as his helper. Thus, that women not teach or exercise authority over men is not a directive for the first century alone. Paul then shows the disastrous result when Eve reversed these roles in the garden (Gen 3:1-17). Eve not only disobeyed God by eating the forbidden fruit, but she also reversed the divine order by making this important decision independently of Adam, thereby refusing to submit to his leadership. Adam was not without guilt in this matter—from the words recorded in the text he apparently abdicated his spiritual leadership in that he not only gave no warning to Eve but also joined her in the act of disobedience.

Frequently egalitarians disregard the directive in 1 Timothy 2:12 by a process of deculturalization, pointing to the lifting of holy hands as a posture for men when praying and the prescribed wearing apparel with which women were to adorn themselves in the church assembly. This process of hermeneutical creativity, however, does not erase the meaning of the plain words in the text about conduct and demeanor in church gatherings. Even in the matter of posture for prayer and guidelines for wearing apparel, an obvious timeless principle is illustrated in a natural way. That natural manifestation could vary from generation to generation, but the principle is an immutable word from God, not “selective literalism”²⁵ but rather a means for preserving the pure Word of God, which endures across cultures and throughout history and appropriates itself from age to age with vigor and relevance.

Titus 2:3-5 – The Reward of a Unique Contribution

Although women are instructed not to teach or to have authority over men, they are given an equally important duty: the “spiritual mothering” of other women. Spiritually mature women are to teach and demonstrate both personal holiness and voluntary submission to the order and welfare of the family. As a woman, I am concerned when self-styled “biblical feminists” imply that teaching men is more important than teaching women, children, and young people. The curriculum in Titus 2:3-5 includes a woman's relationships in the home, her personal holiness and character, and her domain of activity as a springboard for all other service to Christ. Interestingly, the list begins and ends with the younger woman's relationship to her husband. Single women are not excluded from this challenge to teach and model Christian character. They can exercise their divinely-given nature by acting as “spiritual mothers” to others. This includes keeping their homes as a refuge for those whom God may send to them.

²⁵Alvera and Berkeley Mickelsen, “May Women Teach Men?” *Standard Magazine* 74, no. 4 (1984): 39.

Summary: The Application of Biblical Guidelines

Nowhere in the New Testament does Jesus compromise on moral issues because of cultural pressures. Such an implication impugns his integrity and courage, and even his deity and sinless nature. Jesus was part of the culture of his day, but he was above and sometimes even against that culture. Certainly he was never bound by it! The pure Word of God endures across cultural changes and appropriates itself from age to age with vigor and relevance. This principle is just as true internationally as it is locally.

Ultimately, appeals to intelligence and logic and even displays of gifts and abilities will not settle this issue. What is relevant today may be irrelevant by the turn of the century. One cannot abandon the principles that have linked and governed God's two most important institutions—the home and the church—based on the whims of cultural revolution. Maleness and femaleness are the very foundation of God's created order, carefully chosen as the divine vehicle for maintaining his order and purpose. Our personhood is not then dependent upon our subjective discernment but is established by God's handiwork, and our roles in the kingdom in a similar way are not determined by open doors or even needs as much as by divine directive and biblical guidelines.

The church that follows God's plan seeks not to suppress women but to ensure full and proper use of their gifts in a divinely-given framework. One cannot accept the Bible as authoritative while rejecting its teaching concerning creation order and kingdom function, which are absolutely consistent. The home and church are inextricably bound together in principle and metaphor as well as in purpose and practice. One cannot negate truths concerning the structure of home and church—such as the images of the relationship between God and Israel and between Christ and the church—just to satisfy cultural whims or to accommodate higher plateaus of education and opportunity. These passages concerning the role of women in the kingdom are grounded in timeless, historical, theological arguments. They are not illustrations for a particular church or cultural era; they are commands for Christians through the ages.

Conclusion

The real issue is not what women can or cannot do in the church/kingdom but how they respond to the authority of the Bible and its guidelines for their service. When a woman “feels called” to do a work that on biblical grounds is not only beyond God's design for her in creation but also in violation of his written Word, she must carefully consider the choices before her. Then those choices must be judged by the church.

Nowhere in Baptist history, except perhaps in this generation, has religious freedom come to mean that one can be a Baptist and believe and teach anything he personally desires.

There have appeared men in these later days who feel persecuted if they are not allowed to enter pulpits established to uphold a given set of principles, and there overthrow the very doctrines the church is set to defend. . . . But when he [a man in a denominational school] claims the right to use an institution, its money, prestige and opportunities to overthrow the faith which the institution was found to build up, he passes the bounds of liberty and enters the realm of arrogant license.²⁶

A partial biblical truth or one taken out of context is even more dangerous than a lie. Told often enough, it will soon be believed, just as when Satan encountered Adam and Eve in the garden.

Doctrine and practice, whether in the home or the church, are not to be determined according to modern cultural, sociological, and ecclesiastical trends or according to personal emotional whims; rather, Scripture is to be the final authority in all matters of faith and conduct (2 Tim 3:16-17; Heb 4:12; 2 Pet 1:20-21). God chose to reveal himself to his people through family language: he used the metaphor of the home to describe the heavenly dwelling where believers will join him for eternity. He selected the analogy of family relationships (husband/wife and parent/child) to illustrate how believers are to relate to him: God identifies himself as the Husband and Israel as his wife (Hosea 2:19-20). God calls himself Father, and Jesus is the Son; Jesus is the Bridegroom, and the church is the Bride; believers are brothers and sisters in Christ, having been adopted by the heavenly Father as his children. The most basic and consistent spiritual teaching, character development, and discipleship training should occur within the family circle (Deut 6:4-9). A Christ-centered family has the potential to give a “word about God” to a world indifferent to spiritual truths. Those within the family circle have a unique opportunity to study the Bible and to learn theology through object lessons built into the very structure of the family.

Godly families help build the church just as churches ought to help build godly families. Scripture makes frequent connections between the life of the family and the life of the church (1 Tim 3:5; 5:1-2). Leadership patterns in the family are consistently reflected in the church as well (1 Tim 2:11-14; 3:1-7; Titus 1:5-9). Believers would do well to affirm heartily and to commit themselves devotedly to upholding the concept of the family as God’s original and primary means of producing godly offspring. Thus, forevermore they ought to develop in their own hearts a holy passion and devoted commitment to pass on godly values from generation to generation (Deut 6:4-9; Ps 78:5-7).

Success is not a criterion for sanctifying a task and making it right. I have three graduate degrees in theology, considerably more theological education than most pastors. I have experience on the public platform, and

²⁶J. B. Gambrell, *Ten Years in Texas* (Dallas, TX: Baptist Standard Printing Co., 1909), 129.

some even suggest that I have gifts for biblical exposition and teaching. Others have testified that I have met their needs through my messages. Some men have expressed appreciation for my ministry. However, ministry success, public affirmation, spousal permission, pastoral blessing, widespread opportunity—none is the biblical criterion for what I should or should not do in the Kingdom of Christ. In the Pastoral Epistles within the context of church order are found explicit boundaries that cannot be violated by what I perceive to be my calling, whether to service in the church or to ministry in an international setting (1 Tim 2:9-11).

Any calling I believe to be from God is filtered through my human frailties. What I feel may not be what God wills. That is why Scripture is ever the monitor and governor of all I desire to do for God. I do not have ultimate jurisdiction over my own actions, nor should I try to dictate or control the actions of others. Yet, I have the responsibility not to put myself in a situation where I am regularly or willfully violating boundaries of Scripture, and as a theologian devoted to teaching women I am equipped and commissioned to open God's Word to women as they struggle to find places of service in the kingdom.

Doctrine and practice, whether in the home or in the church, are not to be determined according to modern cultural, sociological, and ecclesiastical trends. Nor are our choices to be according to emotional whims, obvious giftedness, or even a calling that stands in contradiction to any clear mandate in Scripture. Zoba contends that "if a woman seeks, she will find the opportunities to serve in a world of desperate need."²⁷

Scripture alone must be the final authority in all matters of faith and conduct (2 Tim 3:16-17; Heb 4:12; 2 Pet 1:20-21). Scripture makes frequent connections between the life of the family and the life of the church in every arena of kingdom service (1 Tim 3:5; 5:1-2). Leadership patterns in the family are consistently reflected in the church as well (1 Tim 2:9-14; 3:1-7; Titus 1:5-9). A Christ-centered marriage has the potential to give a "word about God" to a world indifferent to spiritual truths. Those within the family circle have a unique opportunity to study the Bible and to learn theology through object lessons built into the family's structure. The family is effective in evangelism in whatever the cultural setting.

²⁷Zoba, "Women Reaching Women," 46.