

aSouthern Baptists made the news at their annual convention in June 2023 by voting overwhelmingly to uphold earlier decisions to expel two churches because they have women pastors –Saddleback Church formally pastored by Rick Warren and a lesser known church, Fern Creek Baptist in Louisville, KY.

The SBC's 2000 statement of faith, called Baptist Faith and Message, asserts that only qualified men can serve as pastors, and the nearly 13,000 voters, who are called "messengers," voted to uphold the churches' removals.

During the debate, Albert Mohler, the President of The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, properly summed up the issue:

"The issue of women serving in the pastorate," he said, "is an issue of fundamental Biblical authority ..."

Before we look at what the Bible teaches on the subject, we need to define the word "pastor."

Webster's 1828 Dictionary gives the following definition:

P'ASTOR, *noun* [Latin from pasco, pastum, to feed.]

1. A shepherd; one that has the care of flocks and herds.
2. A minister of the gospel who has the charge of a church and congregation, whose duty is to watch over the people of his charge, and instruct them in the sacred doctrines of the Christian religion

The second definition is obviously the one that we are concerned with here.

When we look at the New Testament, we find three words used to describe the office of pastor:

1. **"Pastor"** from the Greek word *poimēn* which means "shepherd." We see that word being used in Ephesians 4: 11, and elsewhere as the pastor-teacher or shepherd-teacher.
2. **"Elder"** from the Greek word *presbyteros* from which we get the word presbyter and Presbyterian. It refers to those who serve by leading the church.
3. **"Bishop"** from the Greek word *episkopos* which means "overseer."

That these three words or titles are used to describe the same office – the office of pastor – is seen in how they are used interchangeably in the New Testament:

For example, the Apostle Paul called "the elders of the church" together in Acts 20:17 and said:

"Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers [episkopos], to feed [poimaino -verb form of poimēn] the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood." -- Acts 20:28

The same thing is seen in Titus 1, where Paul reminds Titus that he is to ordain "elders" [*presbyteros*], list the qualifications, and then states:

"For a bishop [episkopos] must be blameless, as the steward of God.." - Titus 1:7a

The Apostle Peter also uses the terms interchangeably:

"The elders [presbyteros] which are among you I exhort...Feed [poimaino] the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight [episkoepo] thereof..." - I Peter 5:1-2

In another text, Peter applies the terms *pastor* and *overseer* to Jesus himself: *"For ye were as sheep going astray, but are now returned unto the Shepherd (poimēn) and Bishop (episkopos) of your souls."*(I Peter 2:25).

Notice that even Peter uses "*shepherd*" and "*overseer*" interchangeably. Peter is reflecting what is true in all of the New Testament -- **The use of these three terms – pastor, elder, and bishop – all refer to the same office.**

Now we can deal with the question – **Can Women serve as pastors of a church?**

I believe there are three reasons why the answer is "no."

1. The Biblical Requirements for Being a Pastor

The qualifications for being a pastor are given to us in 1 Timothy 3.

The passage begins by reminding us that "*if any man desire the office of a bishop, he desireth a good work.*" (1 Timothy 3:1) The use of the words "man" and "he" are clear and exclude women.

Then we are told that "a bishop must be blameless, the husband of one wife" (1 Timothy 3:2) The Greek language here is very clear. It says that the overseer must be the andros (individual male – masculine singular) of one gunaikos (woman, specifically a wife – feminine singular). There is no possibility of interpreting the language any other way.

Those who advocate for women being pastors must disregard this very clear teaching of the Word of God.

2. The Biblical Responsibilities of Being a Pastor

If we look at the three terms for the office pastor in the New Testament, we also see the responsibilities of a pastor:

As a bishop, he is to take the oversight of the church (1 Peter 5:2), in other words, the pastor is the manager of the church.

As an elder, he is to lead the church, not as “lords over God’s heritage, but ensamples to the flock” (1 Peter 5:30).

As a pastor, he is to shepherd the members of the church by “feed[ing] the flock of God” (1 Peter 5:2). This involves preaching and teaching the Word of God with authority to all the church:

“Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine.” -2 Timothy 4:2

But this is something women cannot do without violating the Word of God.

“Let the woman learn in silence with all subjection. But I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man, but to be in silence.” --1 Timothy 2:11-12

The word “silence” means being possessed by a calmness of spirit and peaceful disposition. It is set as the opposite to “teaching” and “having authority over a man.”

This does not mean that women cannot teach other women (Titus 2:3-5) or children (2 Timothy 3:14-15), but they cannot teach or have authority over men.

Thus, they cannot have a pastoral position, or perform the pastoral function, for that puts them in authority over men.

3. The Biblical Role of Being a Pastor

The New Testament uses several metaphors to describe the church -the Body of Christ, the Temple of God, the Bride of Christ, etc. The metaphor that is relevant here is the one found in 1 Timothy 3:15 is “*the house of God*” in other words, church is like a family.

The Bible is very clear on many of the roles that men and women play in the home:

(1) Husbands are to love their wives “as Christ loved the church” – Ephesians 5:25).

(2) Wives are to reverence their husbands (Ephesian 5:33) by willingly submitting to their husbands in the Lord (Ephesian 5:22)

(3) Both “*submitting to one another in the fear of God*” (Ephesians 5:21).

The husband is “the head” of the family (Ephesians 5:23); and the wife is the helper (Genesis 2:28 –“*helpmeet*”).

Just as a family household is supposed to be under male headship under Christ (Eph 5:23), God's household is meant to reflect the same leadership pattern -men are to be the leaders of a local church.

None of this means that women are somehow inferior to men, they simply have been given different roles in the home and church.

CONCLUSION:

The Bible is clear on the issue – women cannot Biblically be pastors of a local church. They simply cannot qualify.

If you are in a church that has women pastors, you are in the wrong church. After all if they can't get this issue right, how can you trust them to get other things right?

THE TRUTH ABOUT WOMEN PASTORS



“This is a true saying, If a man desire the office of a bishop, he desireth a good work.”
--1 Timothy 3:1

By Tom Stiles