Women in the Bible

**Recent Decision of the SBC**

On June 14, 2023, the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) voted overwhelmingly to uphold earlier decisions to expel two churches because they have women pastors.

The decision came during the group’s annual meeting in New Orleans. The SBC heard appeals by California megachurch Saddleback (formerly led by Rick Warren) and a smaller church, Fern Creek Baptist in Louisville, Ky.

Saddleback Church ordained a woman as a campus pastor, and Fern Creek Church has had a woman pastor, Rev. Linda Popham, for more than three decades.

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 floor debate in New Orleans, Popham argued that women should be allowed to serve as pastors and that she had been faithfully serving in churches since she was a teenager.

She said that her congregation adhered to an earlier version of the Baptist Faith and Message, adopted in 1963. That version of the theological document does not exclude women from holding the office of pastor.

“We have a faith and practice,” Popham said of her congregation, “that identifies more closely with the Baptist Faith and Message than many other Southern Baptist churches, and I am personally more conservative than the most Southern Baptist pastors I know.”

Defending the churches’ expulsions was prominent SBC theologian and seminary president Albert Mohler.

He argued that the Bible restricts the role of pastor to men only.

“The issue of women serving in the pastorate” he said, “is an issue of fundamental Biblical authority that does violate both the doctrine and the order of the Southern Baptist Convention.”

As Mohler spoke, voters interrupted him multiple times with applause in support of his position.

The women at Fern Creek and Saddleback will continue to serve as pastors there, but their congregations are no longer part of the Southern Baptist Convention.”[[1]](#footnote-1)

The SBC’s recent decision has [brought new attention](http://www.religionnews.com/2014/08/29/cracks-stained-glass-ceiling-women-reach-prominent-pulpits/) to the theological divide among religious groups concerning the ordination of women. While many Christian denomination allow women to serve as pastors, there are also many that do not.

American Baptist Church – Yes

Episcopal Church – Yes

Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) – Yes

Missouri Synod Lutheran Church – No

Orthodox Church in America – No

Presbyterian Church (USA) – Yes

Roman Catholic Church – No

Southern Baptist Convention – No

United Church of Christ – Yes

United Methodist Church – Yes

There are also a number of more conservative denominations that will ordain women in some instances (depending on the region or local church), but not in others. Additionally, just because a woman is ordained in these settings, does not necessarily mean she will be able to find a local church in which to pastor. It all depends on whether the church will accept a woman as its pastor.[[2]](#footnote-2)

**Egalitarian vs. Complementarian Theologies**

Sometimes in debates regarding the role of women in the church we will hear people use the terms “egalitarian” and “complementarian.” Generally, churches that ordain women (like The United Methodist Church) are egalitarian in their theology while those that do not are complementarian. What’s the difference?

Egalitarian and complementarian theologies represent two different perspectives on gender roles. Both views are rooted in biblical interpretation. However, each perspective arrives at different conclusions regarding the equality and distinctiveness of men and women. Here’s a comparison.

1. **View of Gender Equality:**

**Egalitarian Theology:** Egalitarians believe in the fundamental equality of men and women in all aspects of life, including church leadership and family roles. They argue that both women and men are created in the image of God and therefore are equally capable of exercising spiritual gifts and serving in leadership positions within the church.

**Complementarian Theology:** Complementarians affirm the equality of men and women but believe that men and women have distinct, complementary roles. They argue that while men and women are equal in worth, they have different God-given responsibilities, with men primarily called to leadership and women primarily called to submission.

1. **Biblical Interpretation:**

**Egalitarian Theology:** Egalitarians emphasize a broader understanding of biblical texts, considering cultural context, original language, and the overall trajectory of Scripture. They argue that passages such as Galatians 3:28, which states that there is neither male nor female in Christ, support the egalitarian view. Egalitarians also highlight women leaders in the early church, such as Phoebe, Junia, and Priscilla, as evidence of women’s involvement in ministry.

**Complementarian Theology:** Complementarians tend to interpret Scripture at face value, giving weight to passages that they believe establish male headship and female submission. They often refer to verses like Ephesians 5:22-33 and 1 Timothy 2:11-15 to support their view that God designed men to lead and women to submit. Complementarians argue that these passages reflect God’s intended order for relationships and that deviation from these roles leads to the breakdown of God’s design.

1. **Roles in Church Leadership:**

**Egalitarian Theology:** Egalitarians advocate for the full inclusion of women in all levels of church leadership, including pastors, lay leaders, and teachers. They believe that spiritual gifting (Romans 12, 1 Corinthians 12) and calling, rather than gender, should determine a person's suitability for leadership.

**Complementarian Theology:** Complementarians generally hold that certain leadership roles, particularly those involving teaching and authority over men, should be reserved for men. They believe that male headship in the church reflects God’s order and that women can contribute meaningfully in other areas of ministry without holding positions of authority over men.

1. **Marriage and Family Roles:**

**Egalitarian Theology:** Egalitarians view marriage as a partnership of equals, with both spouses sharing leadership, decision-making, and responsibilities. They reject hierarchical marital roles and emphasize mutual submission, considering the specific gifts and talents of each partner. (For instance, if one spouse is better at cooking or yard work, let that person be the primary cook or yarder worker – don’t assume it’s somebody’s job to do something because of their gender.)

**Complementarian Theology:** Complementarians believe in the principle of male headship in marriage and the family. They see the husband as having the primary responsibility for leadership, protection, and provision, while the wife is called to respect, support, and submit to her husband’s leadership.

While there can be variations in interpretation and practice, the above represents what egalitarians and complementarians generally believe about gender roles in the church and home.

**Profiles of Courageous Women in the Bible**

As has already been noted, The United Methodist Church rejects complementarian theology and embraces the full equality of women and men in all aspects of church leadership, including ordained ministry. It’s not that we ignore or overlook biblical passages that seem to speak against women in leadership. But we do read and seek to understand these passages in their proper context (with attention to cultural setting and original language. Further, we hold them in conversation with other passages that highlight the gifts, calling, and leadership of women. We find such passages throughout the Old and New Testaments.

**The Old Testament:**

1. Shiprah and Puah defied Pharaoh’s orders and committed (what appears to be) the Bible’s first recorded act of civil disobedience.

**15Then Pharaoh, the king of Egypt, gave this order to the Hebrew midwives, Shiphrah and Puah: 16“When you help the Hebrew women as they give birth, watch as they deliver. If the baby is a boy, kill him; if it is a girl, let her live.” 17But because the midwives feared God, they refused to obey the king’s orders. They allowed the boys to live, too.  
18So the king of Egypt called for the midwives. “Why have you done this?” he demanded. “Why have you allowed the boys to live?”  
19“The Hebrew women are not like the Egyptian women,” the midwives replied. “They are more vigorous and have their babies so quickly that we cannot get there in time.”  
20So God was good to the midwives, and the Israelites continued to multiply, growing more and more powerful. 21And because the midwives feared God, he gave them families of their own.**

**Exodus 1:15-21 (NLT)**

Note the irony. The women are named while the king is unnamed. Additionally, the women are driven by fear of God (which, as Proverbs 9:10 states, is the beginning of wisdom) while the king is led by an unfounded fear of Israelite takeover.

1. Moses’ mother and big sister cleverly rescued Moses while he was a baby, paving the way for the Exodus.

**About this time, a man and woman from the tribe of Levi got married. 2The woman became pregnant and gave birth to a son. She saw that he was a special baby and kept him hidden for three months. 3But when she could no longer hide him, she got a basket made of papyrus reeds and waterproofed it with tar and pitch. She put the baby in the basket and laid it among the reeds along the bank of the Nile River. 4The baby’s sister then stood at a distance, watching to see what would happen to him.**

**5Soon Pharaoh’s daughter came down to bathe in the river, and her attendants walked along the riverbank. When the princess saw the basket among the reeds, she sent her maid to get it for her. 6When the princess opened it, she saw the baby. The little boy was crying, and she felt sorry for him. “This must be one of the Hebrew children,” she said.**

**7Then the baby’s sister approached the princess. “Should I go and find one of the Hebrew women to nurse the baby for you?” she asked.**

**8“Yes, do!” the princess replied. So the girl went and called the baby’s mother.**

**9“Take this baby and nurse him for me,” the princess told the baby’s mother. “I will pay you for your help.” So the woman took her baby home and nursed him.**

**10Later, when the boy was older, his mother brought him back to Pharaoh’s daughter, who adopted him as her own son. The princess named him Moses, for she explained, “I lifted him out of the water.”**

**Exodus 2:1-10 (NLT)**

The above plan was well thought out and brilliantly executed.

1. Moses’ sister, Miriam (presumably the same sister from above), is identified as a prophet.

**20Then Miriam the prophet, Aaron’s sister, took a tambourine and led all the women as they played their tambourines and danced. 21And Miriam sang this song:  
“Sing to the Lord,  
    for he has triumphed gloriously;  
he has hurled both horse and rider  
    into the sea.”**

**Exodus 15:20-21 (NLT)**

1. Rahab hid the Israelite spies who came to check out the Promised Land prior to the conquest.

**Then Joshua secretly sent out two spies from the Israelite camp at Acacia Grove. He instructed them, “Scout out the land on the other side of the Jordan River, especially around Jericho.” So the two men set out and came to the house of a prostitute named Rahab and stayed there that night.  
2But someone told the king of Jericho, “Some Israelites have come here tonight to spy out the land.” 3So the king of Jericho sent orders to Rahab: “Bring out the men who have come into your house, for they have come here to spy out the whole land.”  
4Rahab had hidden the two men, but she replied, “Yes, the men were here earlier, but I didn’t know where they were from. 5They left the town at dusk, as the gates were about to close. I don’t know where they went. If you hurry, you can probably catch up with them.” 6(Actually, she had taken them up to the roof and hidden them beneath bundles of flax she had laid out.)**

**Joshua 2:1-6 (NLT)**

1. Deborah is a prophet and judge (judges were military leaders) who successfully led God’s people into battle against their enemies.

**4Deborah, the wife of Lappidoth, was a prophet who was judging Israel at that time. 5She would sit under the Palm of Deborah, between Ramah and Bethel in the hill country of Ephraim, and the Israelites would go to her for judgment. 6One day she sent for Barak son of Abinoam, who lived in Kedesh in the land of Naphtali. She said to him, “This is what the Lord, the God of Israel, commands you: Call out 10,000 warriors from the tribes of Naphtali and Zebulun at Mount Tabor. 7And I will call out Sisera, commander of Jabin’s army, along with his chariots and warriors, to the Kishon River. There I will give you victory over him.”  
8Barak told her, “I will go, but only if you go with me.”**

**14Then Deborah said to Barak, “Get ready! This is the day the Lord will give you victory over Sisera, for the Lord is marching ahead of you.” So Barak led his 10,000 warriors down the slopes of Mount Tabor into battle. 15When Barak attacked, the Lord threw Sisera and all his chariots and warriors into a panic. Sisera leaped down from his chariot and escaped on foot. 16Then Barak chased the chariots and the enemy army all the way to Harosheth-haggoyim, killing all of Sisera’s warriors. Not a single one was left alive.**

**Judges 4:4-8, 14-16 (NLT)**

1. Following Sisera’s defeat at the hands of Deborah and Barak, Jael promptly executed Sisera.

**17Meanwhile, Sisera ran to the tent of Jael, the wife of Heber the Kenite, because Heber’s family was on friendly terms with King Jabin of Hazor. 18Jael went out to meet Sisera and said to him, “Come into my tent, sir. Come in. Don’t be afraid.” So he went into her tent, and she covered him with a blanket.**

**19“Please give me some water,” he said. “I’m thirsty.” So she gave him some milk from a leather bag and covered him again.**

**20“Stand at the door of the tent,” he told her. “If anybody comes and asks you if there is anyone here, say no.”**

**21But when Sisera fell asleep from exhaustion, Jael quietly crept up to him with a hammer and tent peg in her hand. Then she drove the tent peg through his temple and into the ground, and so he died.**

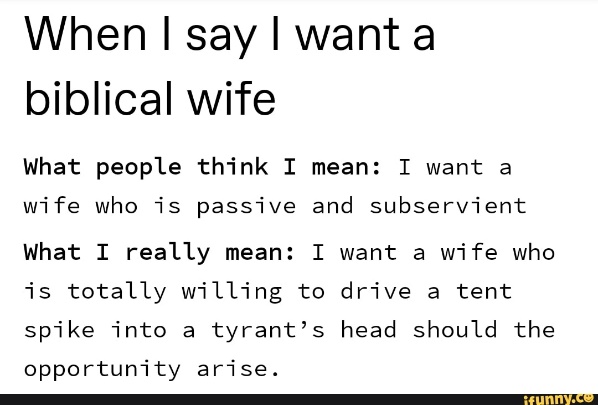
**22When Barak came looking for Sisera, Jael went out to meet him. She said, “Come, and I will show you the man you are looking for.” So he followed her into the tent and found Sisera lying there dead, with the tent peg through his temple.**

**23So on that day Israel saw God defeat Jabin, the Canaanite king. 24And from that time on Israel became stronger and stronger against King Jabin until they finally destroyed him.**

**Judges 4:17-24 (NLT)**

Judges 4 highlights the leadership of women during a chaotic period of Israel’s history.

The story about Jael has inspired this internet meme:



1. Huldah is remembered as a prophet who interpreted Scripture and delivered an authoritative, prophetic message to King Josiah of Judah.

**14So Hilkiah the priest, Ahikam, Acbor, Shaphan, and Asaiah went to the New Quarter of Jerusalem to consult with the prophet Huldah. She was the wife of Shallum son of Tikvah, son of Harhas, the keeper of the Temple wardrobe.  
15She said to them, “The Lord, the God of Israel, has spoken! Go back and tell the man who sent you, 16‘This is what the Lord says: I am going to bring disaster on this city and its people. All the words written in the scroll that the king of Judah has read will come true. 17For my people have abandoned me and offered sacrifices to pagan gods, and I am very angry with them for everything they have done. My anger will burn against this place, and it will not be quenched.’  
18“But go to the king of Judah who sent you to seek the Lord and tell him: ‘This is what the Lord, the God of Israel, says concerning the message you have just heard: 19You were sorry and humbled yourself before the Lord when you heard what I said against this city and its people—that this land would be cursed and become desolate. You tore your clothing in despair and wept before me in repentance. And I have indeed heard you, says the Lord. 20So I will not send the promised disaster until after you have died and been buried in peace. You will not see the disaster I am going to bring on this city.’”  
So they took her message back to the king.**

**2 Kings 22:14-20 (NLT)**

1. After becoming queen, Esther appealed to King Xerses to stop the annihilation of Jewish people.

**15 Then Esther sent this reply to Mordecai: 16 “Go and gather together all the Jews of Susa and fast for me. Do not eat or drink for three days, night or day. My maids and I will do the same. And then, though it is against the law, I will go in to see the king. If I must die, I must die.” 17 So Mordecai went away and did everything as Esther had ordered him.**

**Esther 4:15-17 (NLT)**

**The New Testament:**

1. The first person to learn the specifics of the incarnation (i.e., God becoming a human being in Jesus) was a young teenage girl named Mary.

**26In the sixth month of Elizabeth’s pregnancy, God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a village in Galilee, 27to a virgin named Mary. She was engaged to be married to a man named Joseph, a descendant of King David. 28Gabriel appeared to her and said, “Greetings, favored woman! The Lord is with you!”**

**29Confused and disturbed, Mary tried to think what the angel could mean. 30“Don’t be afraid, Mary,” the angel told her, “for you have found favor with God! 31You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you will name him Jesus. 32He will be very great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his ancestor David. 33And he will reign over Israel forever; his Kingdom will never end!”**

**Luke 1:26-33 (NLT)**

1. The first person to identity Jesus as “Lord” was Mary’s relative Elizabeth, who at the time was pregnant with John the Baptist.

**42Elizabeth gave a glad cry and exclaimed to Mary, “God has blessed you above all women, and your child is blessed. 43 Why am I so honored, that the mother of my Lord should visit me?**

**Luke 1:42-43 (NLT)**

1. The woman at the well told other Samaritans about Jesus. Consequently, she became one of the first evangelists of the New Testament.

**29“Come and see a man who told me everything I ever did! Could he possibly be the Messiah?” 30So the people came streaming from the village to see him.**

**39Many Samaritans from the village believed in Jesus because the woman had said, “He told me everything I ever did!”**

**John 4:29-30, 39 (NLT)**

1. Women financially supported Jesus’ ministry.

**3Joanna, the wife of Chuza, Herod’s business manager; Susanna; and many others who were contributing from their own resources to support Jesus and his disciples.**

**Luke 8:3 (NLT)**

Note that Joanna’s husband, Chuza, worked for Herod! This is the same Herod who arrested John the Baptist (Luke 3:18-20) and later had him executed (Luke 9:7-9). There is no question that Joanna was a person of initiative and courage.

1. Women were at the tomb on Easter morning and told the eleven disciples about the resurrection. (Unfortunately, the disciples did not initially believe them.)

**But very early on Sunday morning the women went to the tomb, taking the spices they had prepared.**

**9So they rushed back from the tomb to tell his eleven disciples—and everyone else—what had happened. 10It was Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and several other women who told the apostles what had happened. 11But the story sounded like nonsense to the men, so they didn’t believe it.**

**Luke 24:1, 9-11 (NLT)**

1. Mary Magdalene was the first person to speak to the resurrected Jesus. She also told the disciples about the resurrection.

**14[Mary] turned to leave and saw someone standing there. It was Jesus, but she didn’t recognize him. 15“Dear woman, why are you crying?” Jesus asked her. “Who are you looking for?”  
She thought he was the gardener. “Sir,” she said, “if you have taken him away, tell me where you have put him, and I will go and get him.”  
16“Mary!” Jesus said.  
She turned to him and cried out, “Rabboni!” (which is Hebrew for “Teacher”).  
17“Don’t cling to me,” Jesus said, “for I haven’t yet ascended to the Father. But go find my brothers and tell them, ‘I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.’”  
18Mary Magdalene found the disciples and told them, “I have seen the Lord!” Then she gave them his message.**

**John 20:14-18 (NLT)**

1. Lydia was a wealthy laywoman who helped founded the Philippian congregation (the same congregation to which Paul later wrote his well-known “joy letter”).

**11We boarded a boat at Troas and sailed straight across to the island of Samothrace, and the next day we landed at Neapolis. 12From there we reached Philippi, a major city of that district of Macedonia and a Roman colony. And we stayed there several days.**

**13On the Sabbath we went a little way outside the city to a riverbank, where we thought people would be meeting for prayer, and we sat down to speak with some women who had gathered there. 14One of them was Lydia from Thyatira, a merchant of expensive purple cloth, who worshiped God. As she listened to us, the Lord opened her heart, and she accepted what Paul was saying. 15She and her household were baptized, and she asked us to be her guests. “If you agree that I am a true believer in the Lord,” she said, “come and stay at my home.” And she urged us until we agreed.**

**Acts 16:11-15 (NLT)**

1. Euodia and Syntyche’s feud threatened to tear apart the Philippian church, showing the tremendous influence these women had on the congregation. Note that Paul also counted these women among his “co-workers.”

**2 Now I appeal to Euodia and Syntyche. Please, because you belong to the Lord, settle your disagreement. 3 And I ask you, my true partner, to help these two women, for they worked hard with me in telling others the Good News. They worked along with Clement and the rest of my co-workers, whose names are written in the Book of Life.**

**Philippians 4:2-3 (NLT)**

1. Phoebe was a leader in the first-century church and among those whom Paul names at the end of Romans.

**I commend to you our sister Phoebe, who is a deacon in the church in Cenchrea.**

**Romans 16:9 (NLT)**

1. Priscilla and her husband Aquila were close friends of Paul. They hosted the apostle in their home for approximately 18 months, accompanied Paul on one of his missionary journeys, and assisted him in establishing the Corinthian congregation. Paul mentions at the end of Romans that the couple not only “risked their necks” for his life but also continued to host a church out of their home.

**19 The churches here in the province of Asia send greetings in the Lord, as do Aquila and Priscilla and all the others who gather in their home for church meetings.**

**1 Corinthians 16:19 (NLT)**

**3Give my greetings to Priscilla and Aquila, my co-workers in the ministry of Christ Jesus. 4In fact, they once risked their lives for me. I am thankful to them, and so are all the Gentile churches. 5Also give my greetings to the church that meets in their home.**

**Romans 16:3-5 (NLT)**

1. Junia was a “highly respected” female apostle who was imprisoned with Paul, the significance of which should not be overlooked. Roman culture promoted the ideal of a submissive woman, but Paul praises Junia for her work to advance the gospel.

**7Greet Andronicus and Junia, my fellow Jews, who were in prison with me. They are highly respected among the apostles and became followers of Christ before I did.**

**Romans 16:7 (NLT)**

**Responsibly Interpreting Biblical Passages that Seem to Speak Against the Authority and Leadership of Women**

As we’ve seen, there is ample biblical support, in both the Old and New Testaments, for the leadership of women. However, some individuals remain unconvinced, as recent stories involving the SBC have shown. Instead of dismissing these concerns, it is essential to carefully examine the passages that seem to speak against women’s roles. Let’s explore these passages one by one, shedding light on some overlooked aspects:

1. Eve as Adam’s “helper” or “helpmate”

**18Then the Lord God said, “It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper who is just right for him.  
21So the Lord God caused the man to fall into a deep sleep. While the man slept, the Lord God took out one of the man’s ribs and closed up the opening. 22Then the Lord God made a woman from the rib, and he brought her to the man.**

**23“At last!” the man exclaimed.**

**“This one is bone from my bone,  
    and flesh from my flesh!  
She will be called ‘woman,’  
    because she was taken from ‘man.’”**

**Genesis 2:18, 21-23 (NLT)**

Some argue that since Eve is described as Adam’s “helper,” women are meant to be subservient to men. However, it’s important to note that the Hebrew word used for “helper” (*ezer*) is also used to describe God’s relationship with Israel in the Old Testament. This term doesn’t imply inferiority but rather denotes a supportive role.

**I look up to the mountains—  
    does my help come from there?  
2 My help comes from the Lord,  
    who made heaven and earth!**

**Psalm 121:1-2 (NLT)**

1. Paul’s command in 1 Corinthians 14 that women be silent in church meetings.

In the midst of a lengthy discussion about orderly worship, Paul states the following:

**34Women should be silent during the church meetings. It is not proper for them to speak. They should be submissive, just as the law says. 35If they have any questions, they should ask their husbands at home, for it is improper for women to speak in church meetings.**

**1 Corinthians 14:34-35 (NLT)**

Ben Witherington is Professor of New Testament at Asbury Theological Seminary in Wilmore, Ky. He has said, ***“A text without a context is just a pretext for whatever you want it to mean.”***

It’s crucial to consider the context behind these statements. In the Corinthian congregation, there were several issues threatening to disrupt the unity of the church. After discussing the significance of love in chapter 13, Paul delves into a detailed discourse about speaking in tongues. Some members of the church were speaking in tongues, but their manner of doing so wasn’t beneficial to the community; instead, it caused distractions. Paul then addresses the issue of women remaining silent. It’s likely that Paul wasn’t making a sweeping statement about all women, but rather addressing a specific situation involving women who were not properly exercising this spiritual gift with control. If we interpret these verses as a universal prohibition against all women preaching, it would contradict earlier passages in 1 Corinthians where Paul acknowledges women’s ability to prophesy and pray in public (11:5, 13).[[3]](#footnote-3)

1. Wives submitting to their husband

**22For wives, this means submit to your husbands as to the Lord. 23For a husband is the head of his wife as Christ is the head of the church. He is the Savior of his body, the church. 24As the church submits to Christ, so you wives should submit to your husbands in everything.**

**Ephesians 5:22-24 (NLT)**

Some people interpret these words to suggest that husbands should be the primary leaders in their households, and wives are required to submit to their husbands in every aspect of their marriage. Nevertheless, it is essential to consider the context by looking at the preceding verses. In the same chapter, Paul makes the following statements:

**21And further, submit to one another out of reverence for Christ.**

**Ephesians 5:21 (NLT)**

The statement above emphasizes the concept of mutual submission in marriage, which forms the foundation for the subsequent discussion.

While it is acknowledged that wives are called to submit to their husbands, it is equally true that husbands are also called to submit to their wives. Paul supports this idea elsewhere when he writes, **“The wife gives authority over her body to her husband, and the husband gives authority over his body to his wife” (1 Corinthians 7:4).** These words must have been quite revolutionary in the Greco-Roman culture, where patriarchal beliefs were deeply ingrained. In 1 Corinthians 7, Paul addresses the topic of sexual practices – an area of utmost vulnerability and intimacy – and affirms that both husbands and wives share equal authority in this aspect. Consequently, it logically follows that they also share equal authority in every other aspect of their relationship.

1. Women teachers and authority figures

**11Women should learn quietly and submissively. 12I do not let women teach men or have authority over them. Let them listen quietly.**

**1 Timothy 2:11-12 (NLT)**

These words are challenging to understand. Just like with 1 Corinthians 14:34-36, it’s possible that Paul was addressing a specific situation with disruptive women rather than giving a rule for all women. Viewing it as a universal command would contradict instances in the Old Testament where women taught or had authority over men (Deborah, Huldah, etc.). It would also conflict with other parts of Paul’s writings where he supports female prophets and church leaders.

1. Can only married men serve as pastors?

**This is a trustworthy saying: “If someone aspires to be a church leader, he desires an honorable position.” 2So a church leader must be a man whose life is above reproach. He must be faithful to his wife [Greek reads *must be husband of one wife*].**

**1 Timothy 3:1-2 (NLT)**

As before, context is everything. During Paul’s time, polygamy was common, and he wanted to stress that polygamy is out of the question for anyone aspiring to be a pastor. However, if we were to apply Paul’s words universally, it would mean every pastor must be married, which would disqualify Paul himself since he mentioned he was unmarried in 1 Corinthians 7:7 (his desire was for everyone to be single like himself). Additionally, it would require all pastors to have children because Paul later says the following: “**4 He must manage his own family well, having children who respect and obey him. 5 For if a man cannot manage his own** household, how can he take care of God’s church?” (1 Timothy 3:4-5). This would create impractical expectations, disqualifying many (not just women) from becoming pastors.

It’s important to clarify that Paul is not insisting that pastors must exclusively be married men with children. Rather, he gives an example of pastors in a specific life situation (married men with children) and outlines the expectations for them in that context. Using this text to oppose women preachers disregards the broader context and misses the primary message.

1. Jason Derose, “Southern Baptists say no to women pastors, uphold expulsion of Saddleback megachurch,” NPR, June 14, 2023, https://www.npr.org/2023/06/14/1182141691/southern-baptist-convention-sbc-women-pastors-saddleback-megachurch/. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. This is part of the appeal of The United Methodist Church. Not only will The United Methodist Church ordain women (which we have been doing since 1956), but because of our polity (i.e., the way our church is governed), all pastors in good in standing, including clergywomen, are “guaranteed” an appointment. In other words, they are guaranteed a local church in which to serve and exercise their gifts. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. There are some who argue that 1 Corinthians 14:34-35 might have been added later by an editor and not actually written by Paul (scholars called this an interpolation). According to this perspective, removing these verses improves the coherence of Paul’s overall argument in chapter 14 (v. 33 flows right into verse 36). Additionally, they refer to Paul’s statements in chapter 11, where he mentions women prophesying and praying in public, which appear to contradict the content of 1 Corinthians 14:34-35. Thus, they conclude that Paul could not have authored these specific verses. They also point to other instances in the New Testament where passages have been added later, like the longer ending of Mark or the story of adultery in John 7:53-8:11.

   The interpolation argument may have textual merit because some Greek manuscripts place verses 34-35 after verse 40 instead of after verse33 (check your Bible for a footnote with this information). Divergent positioning of verses is a hallmark of interpolation. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)