

together for worship. The word “teach” means the public teaching of the Christian faith, as Paul seems to use the word consistently throughout I Timothy (1:3, 7, 3:2, 4:13). It is certainly clear from other scriptures that women did teach in certain circumstances, for example, as II Timothy 1:5 and 3:14-15 suggest that Timothy was taught by his mother and grandmother, and that Titus 2:3-5 tells older women to teach younger ones. This teaching is not an office, but an example of the priesthood of all believers.

The theological foundation for Paul’s teaching on women and the pastoral office is the Order of Creation, based on Genesis 2-3 and further developed in I Timothy 2:13-14. These words should be seen as binding on the Church for all time, and not to be ignored or set aside. The pastoral office is to be filled by qualified men only.

**8** Christian men and women are to serve the Lord according to the gifts and abilities with which He has blessed them, in the station of life where He has placed them. “Further, everyone must benefit and serve every other by means of his own work or office so that in this way many kinds of work may be done for the bodily and spiritual welfare of the community, just as all the members of the body serve one another” (Martin Luther, LW 44:127). “A free congregation esteems and cherishes all the spiritual gifts which the Lord gives for its edification, and seeks to stimulate and encourage their use” (AFLC Fundamental Principle 6). Proverbs 31:10ff, Romans 12:1-8, I Corinthians 3:5-9, 7:17, 12:1ff, I Peter 4:8-11.

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# A BIBLICAL RESPONSE TO THE QUESTION OF THE ORDINATION OF WOMEN

A Scriptural &  
Confessional Study



# A Biblical Response to the Question of the Ordination of Women

**1** The Word of God is our authority for faith and life. We cannot look to culture, opinions, personal experience, or custom as sources of authority. “My neighbor and I – in short, all men – may err and deceive, but God’s Word cannot err” (Luther’s Large Catechism). See Psalm 119:105, Matthew 28:20, John 8:31, 17:17, Galatians 1:8, Ephesians 2:20, II Timothy 3:14-17.

**2** God has established an order for human relationships, assigning at creation certain distinct identities and functions to men and women. This is called the Order of Creation. “The Gospel does not overthrow civil authority, the state, and marriage, but requires that all these be kept as true orders of God, and that everyone, each according to his own calling, manifest Christian love and genuine good works in his station of life” (Augsburg Confession, Article XVI). Genesis 1:27-28, 2:18-25, I Corinthians 7, 11:3-16, 14:26-40, Ephesians 5:21-33, Colossians 3:18-19, I Peter 3:1-7.

The woman is man’s counterpart, his partner, a special gift from the Creator. In the Old Testament these roles are highlighted through the analogy of God as “husband” and His people Israel as “wife.” In the New Testament this teaching continues with Christ as the “Bridegroom” and the Church His “Bride.” Isaiah 54:5, Jeremiah 31:32, Revelation 21:2, 9.

**3** All Christians, whether men or women, have the same standing before God. This is called the Order of Redemption. “For in Christ Jesus all social stations, even those that were divinely ordered, are nothing. Male, female, slave, free, Jew, Gentile, king, subject – these are, of course good creatures of God. But in Christ, that is, in the matter of salvation, they amount to nothing” (Martin Luther, LW 26:354). Romans 3:22-24, 8:16-17, Galatians 3:26-29, Ephesians 2:19-22.

**4** All Christians, whether men or women, are included in the priesthood of all believers. “Not only are we the freest of kings, we are also priests forever, which is far more excellent than being kings, for as priests we are worthy to appear before God to pray for others and to teach one another divine things. These are the functions

of priests, and cannot be granted to any unbeliever. Thus Christ has made it possible for us, provided we believe in Him, to be not only His brothers, co-heirs, and fellow kings, but also His fellow-priests” (Martin Luther, LW 31:355). Romans 12:1-8, I Corinthians 12, I Peter 2:5, 9.

**5** The New Testament provides many instances of ministry that women offer to the Lord as members of the universal priesthood of believers. Mark 15:40-41, Luke 8:1-3, 24:1-11, Acts 9:36, 18:24-26, 21:9, Romans 16:1-13, Philippians 4:2-3, Colossians 4:15, I Timothy 3:11, 5:3-16. These activities include prophesying, charitable works, and missionary service.

**6** The office of pastoral ministry is distinct from the priesthood of all believers. Christ has instituted this office for the preaching and teaching of God’s Word and the administration of the sacraments. “To obtain such faith God instituted the office of the ministry, that is, provided the Gospel and the sacraments. Through these, as through means, He gives the Holy Spirit, Who works faith, when and where He pleases, in those who hear the Gospel” (Augsburg Confession, Article V 1-3). Acts 20:28, I Corinthians 4:1, Ephesians 4:11-13, I Timothy 3:1-7, Titus 1:5-9, I Peter 5:1-4.

A study of several New Testament words helps us understand this point. The first are *apostle* (ambassador, representative), *prophet* (proclaimer), *evangelist* (proclaimer of good news), and *teacher* (expositor). There is a close connection between these offices, and the Bible suggests that the same person could hold them at the same time. Barnabas, Silas, and Timothy are called apostles (Acts 14:14, I Thessalonians 1:1, 2:6, Acts 15:32); Barnabas, Saul/Paul, and others in Antioch are called prophets and teachers (Acts 13:1). Paul calls himself an apostle and teacher (Acts 13:1), while Silas refers to himself as an apostle and prophet (I Thessalonians 1:1, 2:6, Acts 15:32). Timothy is told to do the work of an evangelist (II Timothy 4:5). The main task of those who hold these offices seems to be the proclamation of the Gospel.

In Ephesians 4 the word “teacher” is joined with a new word, *pastor* (shepherd). Peter is charged by the Lord

to “pastor” or shepherd His sheep (John 21:17). In his first epistle Peter addresses the *elders* as a fellow elder, and charges them to “pastor” the flock of God, serving as *bishops* or overseers (I Peter 5:1-2). Paul uses the same words when he addresses the Ephesian elders (Acts 20:28).

The only New Testament office distinct from the above is the *deacon*, which seems to have its origin in a situation at the church in Jerusalem (Acts 6:1-7), though this word is not used as a title in this instance, but it is clear from later references that such an office did emerge (Philippians 1:1, I Timothy 3:8-13). There is one scriptural reference (Romans 16:1) where a woman is given this title; some would point to the meaning of the word, which could simply be translated “servant,” and suggest that it refers to general service in the congregation, but there is a strong tradition of such an office for women in the early church, which leads commentators like R.C.H. Lenski, for example, to translate the word as “deaconess.”

**7** The Order of Creation, together with the example of Christ and His apostles, as well as 1900 years of church history, teaches that women should not hold the pastoral office. I Corinthians 14:34-40, I Timothy 2:11-12. Concerning the first passage, what do “silence” and “not speaking” imply? The context suggests that the word “church” refers to the congregation gathered for worship, and Paul is seeking to avoid disorder. It is clear from the use of the word “silence” that total silence is not implied, as we see from Acts 11:18 (“... they were silenced, and they glorified God, saying ...”) where the same word is used. Also, Paul encourages all members of the congregation in Ephesus, not only the men, to “speak to one another with psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs” (Ephesians 5:19).

The word for “speak” frequently means to “preach” in the New Testament (Mark 2:2, Luke 9:11, Acts 4:1, 8:25). We need to remember that Paul’s command for women to not speak is given in the context of worship services in the congregation.

In the second passage noted above, it is important to note again that the context is the congregation coming