

6 Gender Myths in the Church

This past weekend I had the honor of sharing the pulpit with my oldest daughter, Margaret, who serves as an associate pastor at a Christian college in Georgia. No buttons burst off of my shirt while she was preaching, but I can't begin to tell how proud I was of her.

This was the same girl who used to insist on taking the lead role when she played *Wilderness Family* or *Star Wars* with her homeschooled sisters. My wife and I have known Margaret was a leader since she was a preschooler. Now she is a pastor.

Yet I still see puzzled looks when I tell people about Margaret's vocation. That's because in many sectors of the American church, people are locked into old, religious mindsets about gender. They have the idea that God wants men to lead and women to follow—even though Scripture gives us numerous examples of women leaders.

I run into what I call “gender myths” in the church all the time, even in progressive churches that claim to be trendy and “cutting edge.” Many women are still sidelined by these antiquated myths, even when the pastor is young and the music is hip.

1. Women are more suited for children's ministry. Just because women often give primary care to babies and children at home does not mean they all want to spend their Sunday mornings in the church nursery, week after week with no break. All of us are called to serve. Jesus rebuked His disciples for minimizing the importance of children—and He took kids into his arms. We need both men and women in children's ministry today!

2. Women are best equipped to be intercessors. Many churches promote the idea that “women pray better” because they do not allow women to do anything else. Yet the Bible does not

segregate the prayer meeting by gender. Yes, there are powerful examples of women prayer warriors in the Bible (Hannah and Anna, for example) but we also need Daniels and Jeremiahs to storm heaven.

3. A woman's most valuable ministry is motherhood. No one should ever minimize the importance of a mother's love. But when churches tell women that their "primary role" is to be home with the kids, we are not only devaluing these women's other spiritual gifts but also demeaning women who don't have kids. (I know single women who have been told they can have no official ministry roles in their church until they are married.)

4. Women were made to be followers, not leaders. Traditional churches hire women to be secretaries, receptionists and administrative assistants, but females need not apply for ministerial positions. Yet the New Testament tells us that the Holy Spirit does not distribute spiritual gifts according to gender (see 1 Cor. 12:7-31). Many conservative Christians claim that the apostle Paul limited women in their service (because they take some of his comments out of context) yet they ignore the fact that Paul had numerous women on his apostolic team including Priscilla, Phoebe, Junia, Euodia, Syntyche, Persis, Chloe and Nympha.

5. Women cannot lead worship. Australian worship leader Darlene Zschech (who now pastors alongside her husband) has composed dozens of praise choruses that are sung in churches around the world, yet many conservative churches that use these songs would not allow Darlene to lead them from the podium. I know a talented young woman who was told she had to lead worship from the floor of the church instead of the pulpit because she would be "in authority" over the men if she sang from the stage. Please don't forget that one of the first worship leaders mentioned in the Bible is Miriam! (see Ex. 15:20-21.)

6. Women can't teach the Bible if men are in the room. Once when I was attending a conference in Colorado, a popular female speaker took the platform and began to teach. At that moment two pastors in front of me leaned toward one another and began to "bind the spirit of Jezebel" because they did not believe a woman should preach to a mixed crowd. Hello? Would they have prayed this way if Deborah, Esther, Mary Magdalene or Priscilla had been preaching?

What part of Galatians 3:28 don't we understand? Paul wrote: "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus."

I taught all four of my daughters that God created them uniquely, and that their spiritual gifts had nothing to do with gender but everything to do with His sovereign plan. Let's teach the same in our churches. Let's create opportunities for women instead of putting roadblocks in their way.

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