

Despite SBC Vote, Authority Myth Still Keeping Women From Ministry

Sixty-one percent of the delegates at the Southern Baptist Convention in Indianapolis voted for a constitutional ban on all churches that have a woman on staff with the title of pastor. The vote, however, fell short of the required two-thirds majority necessary for a constitutional amendment.

The amendment would not have changed the SBC's position on female pastors but would have added teeth for enforcing its stance. The denomination's position is still that put forth last year by the executive staff, which quoted Paul's words in 1 Timothy 2:12a (NKJV), "I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man."

Based on a superficial reading of this passage, the executive staff then declared that Paul "Concludes women cannot have a pastoral position, or perform the pastoral function, for that puts them in authority over men in the life of the church."

The 'Authority Myth'

Based on this "authority myth," this year's annual meeting expelled the First Baptist Church of Alexandria, Virginia, from the SBC because of its embrace of female pastors. Messengers also voted not to accept the requests for reinstatement from Saddleback Church in Southern California and Fern Creek Baptist Church in Louisville, Kentucky, both of which were excommunicated for having women pastors.

For the SBC and all churches that ban women from leadership roles, "authority" is the central issue. The titles may change, but authority is still the issue. For example, one megachurch allows women to be pastors but does not allow them

to be on its board of elders because the elders govern their church and “women cannot function in governing authority.”

This authority myth is, however, dispelled when we take a closer look at Paul’s words in 1 Timothy 2:12 and when we look at what Jesus said about authority in the church.

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The Greek Word for ‘Authority’

The Greek word for “authority” in the New Testament is *exousia*. It is found 102 times in the Greek New Testament, and numerous other times in its verb and other cognate forms. For example, Matthew 7:28 says the people were astonished at the teaching of Jesus, “For He taught them as one having authority (*exousia*) and not as the scribes” (Matt. 7:29). Not once in the entire New Testament is a woman told she cannot exercise *exousia*.

Those who would ban women from the pastorate immediately point to 1 Timothy 2:12, which says, “I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man.” However, the word translated “authority” in this verse is not *exousia*. It is the word *authentein* and is found only here in the entire New Testament.

The fact that it is used only here should cause us to pause and question why that would be the case. Why would Paul use this strange Greek word that neither he nor any New Testament writer ever uses? It certainly indicates that Paul is not addressing the normal exercise of authority in the church. Paul is obviously using this strange word to address the unique situation Timothy is confronting in Ephesus (Hyatt, “Who Says Women Can’t Pastor,” 16-31).

Jesus and Authority

Jesus made it clear that leadership in His kingdom is not about authority. He made this clear when James and John asked for the two most prominent seats in His kingdom—one on His right hand and the other on His left.

When the 10 heard about it they were angry, for they wanted those positions of authority. As strife erupted among them over the issue of “authority,” Jesus rebuked them and told them they were thinking like the heathen. He said,

“You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them and those who are great exercise authority (*exousia*) over them and their great ones lord it over them. Yet *it shall not be so among you*; but whoever desires to become great among you, let him be your servant (*diakonos*)” (Matt. 20:25b-26).

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The word that Jesus said must characterize leaders in His movement is the Greek noun *diakonos*. In first century Israel, a *diakonos* was a household servant who did the bidding of his/her master. Thayer's Greek-English Lexicon defines *diakonos* as “those who advance other's interests even at the sacrifice of their own.”

In other words, *diakonos* designates one who is a servant and is the very antithesis of “office,” “authority” and “power.” Jesus thus steers the Twelve away from thinking of their ministry in terms of hierarchy and authority to thinking of it in terms of humble service. The late Catholic reformer, Dr. Hans Kung, wrote,

In the New Testament, not only is the word ‘hierarchy’ consistently and deliberately avoided, but so too are all secular words for ‘office’ in connection with church

functions, as they express a relationship of power. Instead of this, an all-encompassing term, diakonia, service (really 'serving at table'), is used, which can nowhere evoke associations with any authority, control or position of dignity and power (Hyatt, 41).

The Conclusion of the Matter

Modern churches such as the SBC who make authority the central issue are at odds with both Jesus and Paul. Neither made "authority" the central issue for functioning in church leadership, including pastoral ministry.

The idea that women cannot function in authoritative roles is doctrinally unsound and harmful to the mission of the church. While much of the church languishes in defeat, spiritual gifts are being quenched, and voices are being muzzled. This is tragic! The world will never see a fully functioning body of Christ until it embraces the gifts and callings in all its members, including the women.

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Dr. Eddie Hyatt has over 50 years of ministry experience as a revivalist, pastor and professor of theology. He is on a mission, along with many others, to "save America" by pointing the nation back to her founding principles and praying for another Great Awakening to sweep across the land. His numerous books are available from Amazon and his website.

For a thorough discussion of the controversial issue of female pastors, see Hyatt's book, "Who Says Women Can't Pastor," available from Amazon and his website at .