

Repentance Led Rick Warren to Support Women's Authority in Church

Three years ago, former Saddleback Church pastor and founder Rick Warren found himself in the unenviable position of repenting for a stance concerning the church he had held for many, many years.

Since founding Saddleback Church in California in 1980, Warren held the widespread belief that women should not be allowed to have authority within the body of Christ and to preach the gospel. It's something he simply took for granted.

But in 2020, when the COVID pandemic hit, Warren, who retired from his position at Saddleback last year, began "reading every book I could find on the Great Commission and on church history."

On a recent podcast interview with former Southern Baptist Church Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission President Russell Moore, Warren said he read over 200 books on the subject and that of church missions, and he began to question his own steadfast beliefs on whether or not women belonged in the pulpit or in places of authority within the church.

The issue became especially volatile last month when the Southern Baptist Convention expelled Saddleback from the SBC over its decision to hire a female pastor. When Warren retired, Andy Wood and his wife, Stacie, took over the duties as lead pastors.

Because Stacie Wood's role was that of a "teaching pastor," the church was found to not be in friendly cooperation with the necessary credentials under the Southern Baptist Convention, as reported by Baptist Press.

Warren told Moore that his study of the Great Commission “caused me to change my view about women. I came upon three different Scriptures. We like to call ourselves Great Commission Baptists, and we claim that we believe the Great Commission is for everybody, both men and women are to fulfill the Great Commission. But not really.”

Warren cited Matthew 28:19-20, when Jesus told his disciples, “Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

“There are four verbs in the Great Commission: ‘go,’ ‘make disciples,’ ‘baptize’ and ‘teach,” Warren said. “Women are to go. Women are to make disciples. Women are to baptize and woman are to teach, not just men. This is one of the reasons why Saddleback Church has baptized more people than any church in American history—57,000 baptisms in 43 years. Anybody can baptize anybody that they led to Christ.”

Warren said it was Jesus who authorized women to teach. “Jesus said ‘all authority is given to Me, therefore baptize.’ If you have a problem with the Great Commission, you have a problem with Jesus. I had to repent when I took a hard look at the Great Commission. I had to say it’s not just for ordained me, it’s for everybody.

A passage in Acts 2 also helped Warren change his thinking:

“The second thing that changed my mind was the day of Pentecost,” Warren said. “A few things happened that day. We know women were in the Upper Room. We know women were filled with the Holy Spirit. We know that women were preaching in languages other people couldn’t understand.”

A third verse of evidence for women in church authority came in John 20:17, when Jesus told Mary Magdalene to tell the disciples about His resurrection, and that Jesus “chose her to be the first preacher of the gospel.”

 Warren said that during his studies, he looked at more than 300 commentaries on those verses and came to the conclusion that “everyone gets to preach and everyone gets to prophesy.”

“The people who don’t like that ignore those verses,” Warren said. “John MacArthur doesn’t’ even cover that verse, he just skips over it. Jesus told a woman to deliver the message to men.”

Indeed, Warren now supports women becoming pastors.

“I have to say with humility, it doesn’t bother me if you disagree with me,” Warren says. “For 2,000 years, the church has debated the role of women in culture. “If I’m wrong, I’ll say I’m wrong. But it’s just everyone’s interpretation of Scripture.”

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