

# The Central Issue for Churches That Ban Women From the Pastorate

For those churches that ban women from the pastorate, “authority” is the central issue. They insist that women are forbidden by Scripture from exercising authority over men and being a pastor would put her in this forbidden position.

This “authority myth” is pervasive. The popular “Spirit Filled Life Bible,” without a shred of evidence, explains the prohibition toward women in 1Timothy 2:12 as referring to “the authoritative office of apostolic teacher in the church.”

The Southern Baptist Convention uses the same argument with different terminology for excluding women from being pastors in their denomination. In a document called “Southern Baptists and Women Pastors,” the executive staff of the SBC quote Paul’s words in Timothy 2:12, that, “I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man,” and then say of Paul:

He 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 is, however, dispelled when we look at the Greek word for “authority” and when we look at what Jesus said about authority in the church.

## The Greek Word for Authority

The Greek word for “authority” is *exousia*, and it is found 102 times in the Greek New Testament, and numerous other times in its verb and other cognate forms. For example, Mark 7:29 (NKJV) says the people were astonished at the teaching of

Jesus, "For He taught them as one having authority [*exousia*] and not as the scribes." 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 one 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.

If he were addressing the normal exercise of authority in the church, we would expect him to use the word that he and every other New Testament writer uses. It is obvious that in this personal letter to his young protege, Timothy, Paul is addressing the unique situation that Timothy is confronting in Ephesus to which he alludes in 1:3.

## **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:

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“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. 10:25-26).

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 a *diakonos* as “one who executes the commands of another” and “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, “*Who Says Women Can't Pastor?*” 41).

The modern churches who make authority the central issue, are at odds with Jesus and the New Testament on two fronts: They are wrong to maintain that institutional authority is a chief characteristic of pastoral ministry, and they are wrong to insist that women are excluded from exercising institutional authority. {eoa}

*For a thorough discussion of the controversial issue of women*

*pastors, see **Dr. Eddie Hyatt's** latest book, "Who Says Women Can't Pastor?" available from Amazon and his website at .*

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