

On Women in Elder Ministry

It is the practice and stance of Enon General Baptist Church to affirm and support God's calling of women in any office or position in the Body of Christ based upon giftedness, character, and competence. The ministries to which God may call a female to serve include, but are not limited to Pastor, Elder, Teacher, and Ministry Leader. The stance is taken based upon the reasoning and leading as it follows in this document.

Thy Kingdom Come

We pray, as we have been taught, that God's kingdom come to earth and be established. With this prayer comes a realization that we are constantly seeking a transition out of a worldview that is marred by fallen sinfulness and brokenness. We pray that this world is progressively being renewed and restored by God's rule coming to be a transformative experience in the hearts and minds of believers, and that very same transformation would be influential in the world around us. As God reveals His character to the people of earth, He is faithful in showing us that He comes to bring freedom. He does not desire oppression. He values all people to know and be used for His glory, and He repeatedly uses what the world considers "weak" or "unworthy" to bring about godly results. This requires that we ask the question, "Does God not want women preaching, teaching, or holding authority in the church?"

Through faithful prayer, study, interpretation of scripture, and the leading of the Holy Spirit, we must conclude that the kingdom of God that is progressively being ushered in, is a kingdom where God chooses to use women in all roles of ministry in the church.

(Gal. 3:28, Isa. 1:17, Psalm 72:4, 1 Cor. 1:27, Rom.8:1-39)

Gift Based Ministry

Throughout the New Testament, the church is referred to as a Body of Christ that has many parts functioning in many different ways. We read further that every Christian is granted spiritual gifts that equip the believer to fulfill a God-given ministry in the Body of Christ. Each given gift is often recognized and confirmed by others in the Body of Christ. Upon the revelation that God has given such gifts as prophecy, teaching, and leadership to females, it is of substantial importance that the church does not stifle these gifts. Instead, in keeping with the evidence of God's leading, we should look to encourage, build-up, and sharpen these skills that the Body of Christ be edified through all gifts given.

(1 Cor. 12, Rom. 12:6-8, Eph. 4:11, 1 Pet. 4:10,11)

Whoever is not against us is for us

In Mark 9, we encounter an interaction between Jesus and His disciple, John. John wanted Jesus to stop another person who was driving out demons because he was "not one of us." Whoever this person was, they did not meet the qualifications that John had in mind for someone to perform ministry duties in the name of Jesus. Jesus corrects John by telling him, "Whoever is not against us is for us. Truly I tell you, anyone who gives you a cup of water in my name because you belong to the Messiah will certainly not lose their reward." In light of compelling arguments and experiences of women performing ministry in the power of the Holy Spirit, we do not wish to be like John in trying to stifle the work of God's kingdom because someone doesn't match traditional expectations.

How do we justify this stance in light of some Bible passages that seem to go against it?

We understand that this topic in the church continues to be divisive in many church settings. Some scriptures, and their traditional interpretation, cause many to think that a stance permitting women to preach, teach, and hold authority is a stance that is contrary to the word of God. These scriptures include, but are not limited to: Titus 2:3-5, 1 Cor. 14:34, 1 Tim. 2:11-14, Eph. 5:22-33.

The study of women's roles in ministry is expansive. The validation of a stance that permits full participation in ministry for women is only fully realized through extensive study, prayer and engagement with the scriptures. This document will offer a short answer in an attempt to summarize, but it comes with an encouragement to dive into the journey of searching through this for yourself.

We believe in the authority of God's Word. The scriptures are the only guide to holy living that is needed for any believer to live a God-honoring life. We affirm that the scriptures are inspired, inerrant, and infallible. We hold up the Bible as the faithful, living, life-changing Word of God. It is our desire to seek faithfulness to the Word of God and to the God of the Word. That is why in considering the topic at hand, we must be faithful to not lean too heavily on the traditional interpretations passed onto us. Instead, we must be faithful in searching the entire Bible for ourselves and let the Holy Spirit speak and guide us into truth. In examining these scriptures, their context, and the purpose for which they were written to the original audience, we must reject that the restriction of women from pastoral, preaching, teaching, and leadership roles was meant to be upheld for all churches at all times in all places. Instead, it is believed to be a more faithful interpretation that there are times and places when it was necessary to restrict, and there are also times and places when it is necessary to cast off those restrictions.

When interpreting the Bible, we are seeking to let God lead us to know the timeless, universal, and eternal truths of God. In the scriptures stated, there was a need for women to be restricted and not permitted to teach or speak. Those restrictions should not be seen as timeless, universal and eternal. If we conclude that those restrictions were meant to be permanent prescriptions, then it is very hard to line up that conclusion with the many instances in scripture where women were faithful leaders who prophesied, taught, led ministries and even ruled nations. The fact remains that there are many more places, times, and occurrences in the Bible where women were encouraged and used by God for great purposes that blatantly do not adhere to the restrictions placed in these few contexts where restrictions were needing to be enforced.

Biblical examples of God using women in leadership roles:

- Deborah:

In the Book of Judges, Deborah is described as a judge and prophetess who led the Israelites against their oppressors. She is remembered for her wisdom and courage in mobilizing a military force and achieving victory. (Judges 4, Judges 5)

- Miriam:

Miriam is depicted as a prophetess who led the Israelites in singing and celebrating their liberation from Egypt. She is also mentioned as a leader alongside Moses and Aaron, showing her influence in the nation's affairs. (Exodus 15:20-21, Micah 6:4, Numbers 12)

- Huldah:

The prophetess Huldah, mentioned in 2 Kings 22, was consulted by King Josiah regarding a scroll found in the temple. Her wisdom and prophetic insights played a crucial role in shaping the nation's faithful return to the way of God's leading. (2 Kings 22:11-20)

- Esther:

Esther is a queen who courageously risked her life to save her people (all the people of God) from genocide. Her political maneuvering and strategic actions exemplify leadership in a challenging context. (The Book of Esther, Esther 4)

- Priscilla:

Priscilla is mentioned in the New Testament as a leader and teacher within the early church, co-working with Paul and other missionaries. The scriptures highlight her and her husbands (Aquila) role in the early church as missionaries, teachers, and co-workers with Paul, demonstrating their significant contribution to the spread of the Gospel. (Acts 18, Romans 16:3, 1 Corinthians 16:19)

- Junia:

Junia is mentioned explicitly in Romans 16 and given the same title as the male apostles. Faithful scholarship has revealed that this female name was reinterpreted in some translations to argue that the title of “Apostle” was only applied to males, but this was an unfortunate mistake that led to misinformation regarding her role as “prominent among the apostles.” (Romans 16:7)

- Phoebe:

Phoebe is mentioned in Romans 16 as Paul introduces her to the church in Rome. She is commended as a “sister”, a “servant of the church” (or deaconess), and a “helper of many,” including himself. Paul encourages the Roman Christians to receive her and assist her in any way they can, recognizing her significant role in the church at Cenchrea. (Romans 16:1-2)

This list is not exhaustive, but it does serve the purpose of highlighting how God has used women in various leadership roles throughout history. It is woeful that many in the Body of Christ have never heard of or studied these women and their work for God. In considering such work, we are better equipped to conclude that the restrictions on women in ministry found in the Bible were not meant to be timeless, universal, and eternal prescriptions for all churches throughout time.

It is also necessary to assert that although the restriction of women from roles and positions is not a satisfactory interpretation, there are still good teachings found in all the listed scriptures when we consider our aim to seek out the timeless, universal, and eternal truths found in them. When this is our guiding lens of interpretation, we are then open to the possibility that in these scriptures, God is really wanting us to look at the giftedness, character, and competence of each person being considered for such positions rather than their gender. It is easily seen by each qualification listed that the principle behind the teaching is that people being selected to lead in the Body of Christ should be people of sincere faith, godly character, and have a considerable amount of competence in using their gifts for the edification of the Body of Christ.

Resources for further study:

Belleville, Linda L, and James R Beck. 2005. *Two Views on Women in Ministry*. Grand Rapids, Mich Zondervan.

Grenz, Stanley J, and Denise Muir Kjesbo. 2010. *Women in the Church*. InterVarsity Press.

Mcknight, Scot. 2018. *The Blue Parakeet : Rethinking How You Read the Bible*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan.

Seiffert, Amy. 2025. *Your Name Is Daughter*. Baker Books.