

EXPOSITORY ESSAY: **Philosophy of Pastoral Care of Women** by David M. Coddington

In the local church, it is the responsibility of the pastor to shepherd those persons who are attenders in his congregation. This responsibility applies to all who attend the church: men and women. It is the reality in many churches that women make up the majority of the congregation. The reality calls for the pastor to minister to that segment of the congregation as well as to the men. Even if women are not the majority in the church, it is still the responsibility of the pastor to look after their spiritual health and welfare. In this paper will be an examination from a biblical standpoint of how a pastor should minister to women, and the areas of discussion will include: preaching, counseling, discipling, and empowering.

Before we look at the different areas that a pastor should minister to a woman, we must look at and understand the biblical foundation for the need of pastoral leadership in the life of women. One approach that is promoted by some men in leadership is that if pastors focus on ministering to the men in their congregation, then that spiritual nourishment will trickle down to each man's family and ultimately his wife. But, this approach is not correct for several reasons, starting with the biblical evidence.

In Genesis 1:27, God created man and woman in his image. "So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them." The fact that women were created in the image of God, just as men were, has an important implication. Women have the desire to be in relationship with God just as much as men do. Because of this, they come to the church looking for teaching and guidance. They should be welcomed into the church as equal members, as written in Colossians 3:11, "Here there is no Greek or Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave or free, but Christ is all, and is in all". There is no difference in the church; no one is greater or lesser. All true believers are saved by the blood of Jesus Christ.

In light of the spiritual nature of women and their membership in the body of Christ, it is the pastor's responsibility to seek to address their needs and minister to them. Paul told all of the elders from Ephesus to "'Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. Be shepherds of the church of God, which he bought with his own blood'" (Acts 20:28). Paul's command included both men and women. The question now is: How are pastors supposed to minister to women? First, we will look at how to minister to women through preaching.

Pastors must make a conscious effort to communicate effectively to the women in the congregation. There are several factors that work against the pastor in the sermon. The first is that the natural instinct is for a man to preach in a way that appeals to other men. It may not even be intentional. A sermon comes from the experiences and the inner thoughts of the pastor. An example is that a pastor as a man might particularly enjoy watching sports. A majority of his analogies will naturally be about sports. The men in the congregation will naturally relate to the analogies, but constant male analogies may turn away the women in the audience. The pastor must make a conscious effort to think 'outside the box' (outside of normal tendencies) and fight his natural instinct.

The next problem that the pastor faces is that men and women naturally think and communicate differently. "Watching men talk to men, women talk with women, and then noting how they talked together, I realized that women and men have distinctive styles

of communication” (MacRae 93). As Dr. MacRae notes, pastors must make an effort to think about how women will receive the message and then craft their message to reach both men and women. “There are times when application can be made or the sermon’s form may be structured in a way that reaches the heart of a woman differently than a man” (MacRae 94). Women have different life experiences than men and interact with the speaker differently. An example of this can be with humor in the sermon. A certain joke may seem funny to the pastor and the men in the audience, but it could be insulting or pretentious to the women in the audience. Pastors must fight against their instincts and craft the sermon in a way that communicates well to women and men.

In addition to how a sermon is communicated, the subject matter and application should apply to women as well. Paul directed his preaching to women many times in his letters, which includes addressing marital concerns in Ephesians chapter 5 and clothing issues in 1 Timothy chapter 2. Paul made a point to teach on subjects that women care about. In the same way, it is the responsibility of the modern pastor to preach on subject matter that relates to women, and this includes applying it directly to women. Many women in the church have developed the ability to take what the pastor is preaching on and apply it to themselves no matter what it is. This is unfortunate because the pastor can apply the Bible to the concerns of men and women. Concerns of women could include: identity, self-image, relationships, and family concerns. The pastor must make an effort to apply his message to the lives of both men and women.

It is also the responsibility of the pastoral office to provide counseling for the women in their congregation. Before examining the actual counseling process, we must first look at the temptation inherent in ministering to women, and the need for caution. This is applicable for all areas of ministry but will be discussed under counseling because that is where it is most visible and vulnerable. In some churches, male pastors are not allowed to counsel women in their office if another woman is not present. Even more drastically, a former youth pastor asserted that he would not minister to girls and women outside of teaching because of the risk of sexual temptation and sin.

Unfortunately, the reality is that many pastors fall into the temptation of sexual misconduct with congregation members. This is a problem for several reasons. On the side of the pastor, it is tempting to take advantage of women that put their trust in him or he may be deceived into thinking that the relationship they develop should be taken to a deeper level. These feelings are compounded by the fact that there are some women who are either: attracted to the pastor because of his position and character; or some women that come into counseling are emotionally vulnerable and seek to connect with the man who seems to be providing help. There are many more factors that are at play and situational; however, those listed here give an overall idea of the situation.

The tension comes from the fact that the Bible is very clear on two points: pastors must minister to women, and pastors must remain above reproach. We have already seen that the Bible charges pastors with ministering to women. In a recent study on domestic abuse and the response of clergy, the author noted, “In addition to turning to health care providers and community organizations, women experiencing partner abuse may view faith-based groups as another potential resource” (Copel 119). Christian women need, and seek out, the advice and counseling from their pastor.

At the same time, pastors are biblically mandated to be spiritually pure. “Here is a trustworthy saying: If anyone sets his heart on being an overseer, he desires a noble task. Now the overseer must be above reproach,…” (1 Timothy 3:1-2a). This is no small order. According to the *Life Application Commentary*, “above reproach” means that the

overseer, or pastor, must “have no flaw in his conduct that would be grounds for any kind of accusation” (Barton 941). Not only does a pastor need to be righteous in his conduct, but also have conduct that leaves no room for even an accusation. This is significant in situations where pastors are accused of sexual misconduct no matter if the accusations are true or false.

These two ideas, ministry and righteous conduct, are held in tension in the life of a pastor. He must somehow minister to women and do it in a way that leaves no room for even an accusation. How can this be accomplished? There are two ends of the spectrum: one end is the practice of not ministering to women at all, and at the other end is ministering to women without regard to the danger. The solution is somewhere in the middle. Pastors must minister to, and counsel, women in the church while staying vigilant to stay out of situations that would put them, and the woman, under increased temptation or open to accusations. The practical applications from this will be discussed in more detail later, but two brief ways to stay blameless would be to have a glass office with a secretary for meetings, and to be accountable to any senses that his wife may pick up.

Now that temptation has been discussed, we can look at how to go about counseling a woman. In the Bible, pastors can look to Jesus as the prime example for counseling women. Jesus went out of his way on numerous occasions to minister to women and counsel them. One of the most famous times was with the woman at the well, recorded in John 4:4-42. This passage has much substance, so several key points will be highlighted here.

First, Jesus engaged in conversation with the Samaritan woman. "...Jesus, tired as he was from the journey, sat down by the well... When a Samaritan woman came to draw water, Jesus said to her, "Will you give me a drink?" (from John 4:6-7). This may seem a little harsh or demanding in cultures today; however, in that culture it was amazing that a Jew would talk to a Samaritan, let alone a Samaritan woman. Pastors can learn an important point from Jesus' actions. Pastors need to engage with women in an active manner. Throughout his conversation, Jesus responds to her comments and arguments but eventually drives home to the core issue - her lifestyle and her need to believe in Him. As counselors, pastors need to engage in an active manner the women that come to them. This means asking questions and trying to get to the core issues.

Active listening is crucial to counseling women. Beverly Hislop covers this extensively in her book *Shepherding a Woman*. "The listening is not focused on how the listener will respond or even on policing the speaker's thought process. Rather, the focus is to truly understand what the speaker is feeling and thinking" (Hislop, *Shepherding A Woman*, 116). In meeting with a pastor in his office, it is common that he either: talks the whole time and does not let you speak; or his replies have nothing to do with your comments or topic that you are trying to discuss with him. The whole idea behind active listening is to figure out what the speaker is actually thinking and feeling, and then "reflect what the speaker has communicated" (Hislop, *Shepherding A Woman*, 116). Non-active listening can ruin the counseling session and actually hurt the woman who came for help. She may feel rejected and that the pastor does not listen or understand her.

All of this should be done in a loving manner. In all of their conversation, Jesus answered her questions strongly but in a loving manner. It is also interesting that He never condemned her for her lifestyle and situation. That is very important when

counseling a woman. Immediate blame should not be placed on her. There may be complex dynamics that are at work that need to be brought out and understood.

In counseling, the pastor must keep in mind how a woman communicates. As already noted, there is an innate difference between how men and women communicate. Stressful and vulnerable situations in counseling can lead to miscommunication and the woman being hurt. "Clearly there is a different expectation and predictable delivery. Women want to talk, and they want to be listened to. Men, given a choice, may pick actions over words. They would rather do something than talk about it. Perhaps this is the reason so many women feel marginalized by men in leadership" (Hislop, *Shepherding A Woman*, 52). Pastors must realize that counseling a woman has some innate differences than counseling a man or a male friend. Affirmation, feelings, and concern are important to a woman who is in distress or needs help. There is a time for problem-solving, but that might come later in the counseling process.

Finally in counseling women, it is important to understand issues that are unique to women. In her book, *Shepherding Women in Pain*, Beverly Hislop touches on several topics that are more likely to women: "eating disorders, domestic abuse, abortion recovery" (Hislop, *Shepherding A Woman in Pain*). These are some of the issues that are either unique to women, or manifest themselves different than in men. Pastors need to keep these issues in mind when counseling women. Males would not naturally think of some of these issues as root problems, but they may be there.

There are also biological issues that are unique to women: hormones, Premenstrual Syndrome, post-birth hormones, and menopause. All of these must be taken into account when counseling a woman. These are hard for men to recognize or see because men do not have anything that is similar. It may be wise for the pastor to consult with a woman and then refer her if it is a serious issue. A female counselor would be better suited to address this kind of problem and understand what the counselee is going through.

The next area that pastors should minister to women in is discipling. To begin with, it is not wise, or necessary, for a pastor to one-on-one disciple multiple women in the congregation. In a similar way to counseling, one-on-one discipleship between a man and a woman could definitely lead to compromising situations. A discipleship relationship brings a closeness that goes both ways. This could lead to inappropriate behavior. Instead, pastors can encourage women to disciple other women and train the ones who are leading.

In Titus chapter 2, Paul instructs Titus on how the female members of the church should teach one another. "Likewise, teach the older women to be reverent in the way they live, not to be slanderers or addicted to much wine, but to teach what is good. Then they can train the younger women to love their husbands and children, to be self-controlled and pure, to be busy at home, to be kind, and to be subject to their husbands, so that no one will malign the word of God" (Titus 2:3-5). Paul very clearly states here that older women should disciple younger women in how to live the Christian life. It is interesting that the values, that the older women are to teach, cover almost everything in life. Paul includes actions in the church and actions in the home. Women can have a huge impact on other women.

It will be discussed later in detail, but briefly this can be made to happen in the church in different ways but primarily would go through the women's ministry. The pastor can empower and encourage the women's ministry to disciple. Many times the

women's ministry in the church is a bunch of social events and conferences. The impact would be amazing if life-on-life discipleship was a part of the women's ministry program. This must come from the vision (the ministry plan) of the pastor. He must convince and lead the head of the women's ministry in this area. It is also important that he give them the power (the means) to accomplish this. It is not easy to set up a program in which 10's to 100's of women are being disciplined. Time, money, and pulpit encouragement are necessary to accomplish this task.

Although mass one-on-one discipleship is not a good idea, the pastor must disciple, mentor, or train the select female leaders of the church. Paul sets the precedence for this in 1 Timothy chapter 5. "Do not rebuke an older man harshly, but exhort him as if he were your father. Treat younger men as brothers, older women as mothers, and younger women as sisters, with absolute purity" (1 Timothy 5:1-2). Paul commands Timothy to encourage the older women and younger women as if they were members of his family. The main idea is that the pastor should minister in some capacity to the women in the church. In regard to discipleship, the pastor should mentor, or train, the head woman or women in the church. This will be beneficial because it will: transfer the pastor's vision (his ministry plan); create a checks-and-balance for the women's ministry; and make the ministry more theologically sound and effective. The head women in the church should not be left alone to do whatever they want because they are women. There is much they can learn from the pastor, and vice-versa, which will benefit the entire church.

The final area that pastors can minister to women is through empowerment. 'Empowerment' refers to putting women in positions of authority, power, and prominence. This topic is fairly controversial, so it will be addressed here in three sections: biblical text, opportunities, and benefits. There are a couple of biblical texts that give evidence for female leadership in the church and a few that seem to prohibit female participation. This examination herein will not be a comprehensive exegesis, but it will address the texts. To begin, let us look at the negative texts, and then the positive texts.

In 1 Timothy chapter 3, Paul gives the qualifications for a man to be qualified for the office of elder. Right before that in chapter two, Paul makes a very strong statement, "A woman should learn in quietness and full submission. I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man; she must be silent. For Adam was formed first, then Eve. And Adam was not the one deceived; it was the woman who was deceived and became a sinner" (1 Timothy 2:11-14). Three observations must be made. First, Paul's statement, that he lets a woman learn, was extremely countercultural for that day and age. "In first-century Jewish culture, women were not allowed to study. Jews and Gentiles regarded it disgraceful for women to discuss issues with men in public" (Barton 938). Therefore, positively Paul is affirming women learning theology.

Second, Paul's prohibition is for a woman not to teach or have authority over a man. This is crucial because it means that Paul did not let women teach or have authority in certain situations. This was not a blanket rule that affected all times and situations. Third, Paul's reasoning for this prohibition is based on the original fall of humans into sin rather than on a cultural rule or tradition.

How then should Paul's statement be understood? In some cases, people want to say that Paul is only prohibiting the women that were being disruptive in the church. Another view is that Paul was only giving into cultural traditions and ways at that time. The first interpretation has some basis, but there is a better explanation. If this passage

is tied in with the context of the passage that immediately follows, another meaning appears. The prohibition is limited to the office of elder and overseer. That is the topic that Paul has in mind and is addressing. A woman should not be allowed authority or teaching in the office of elder or overseer. In light of that, women should be allowed to be women's ministry leader, children administrator, worship leader, or even speak in church on Sunday, under the condition that they do not authoritatively teach the Word to men.

The other passage that seems to limit the participation and leadership opportunities for women in the church is 1 Corinthians 14:33b-35, "As in all the congregations of the saints, women should remain silent in the churches. They are not allowed to speak, but must be in submission, as the Law says. If they want to inquire about something, they should ask their own husbands at home; for it is disgraceful for a woman to speak in the church." No matter what your view on this verse is, there is one thing that everyone agrees on: this prohibition is not absolute. In other areas of Scripture, it is clear that women are allowed to speak in church (1 Corinthians 11:5).

This passage is hard to understand and there is two main ways to interpret it. Some people interpret it that it was cultural and that it does not apply today. Other people interpret it as referring to the official office of teaching or prophesying. In either case, there is a main idea that hits on what Paul is getting at. "In either case, what is clear is the principle that women are to display their submission to male headship and learn quietly from those (qualified males only) who are responsible for the teaching ministry of the church" (Ware). This principle is difficult to accept, but it allows for women to serve and lead in many other areas in the church that are prominent.

There are several passages that show that women can and should be in leadership. Deborah led the nation of Israel in Judges chapters 4-5. Women prophesied in the early church (1 Corinthians 11:5). Priscilla, a woman, and Aquila took Apollos aside and explained the gospel to him in Acts 18:26. In Romans chapter 16, Paul lists Phoebe and women who served alongside him for the gospel that presumably included leadership roles. These passages should not be ignored or explained away.

It is the responsibility of the pastor to open up positions for women in leadership. There are many ways for this to be accomplished. First, pastors can spotlight women during the Sunday morning worship service. While being careful not to exert any kind of authority over any men, women can lead worship, pray, give a devotional, or give announcements. All of these give the women a place of prominence and an opportunity to engage in ministry. Second, pastors can appoint women in offices of leadership, including: children's coordinator, women's pastor, women's life group leader, or women's worship leader. A small warning is necessary. In every case, a person should be appointed to a position based on their spiritual giftedness, ability, effectiveness, and character. A person should not be appointed to a leadership position merely based on gender, race, or age in order to fulfill a quota or to give the church a better image. The inner characteristics of the person are more important. Third, giving women a voice in the church is necessary. If there are no qualified or available women for leadership positions, it is still necessary to engage the women of the church in conversation and include them in leadership meetings and decisions.

All of these ideas are important because they are beneficial to the church. Women will feel edified and want to come to church if they see other women in leadership positions. It may drive them to serve God in a greater way. It will also set an example for the young girls and young women in the church. They will have role models and see

women in the church who are serving powerfully. Finally, women in leadership positions will bring insights and fresh ideas that would not come from a man. In some ways, women are better in positions of leadership than men.

In this paper has been addressed important ways that pastors can minister to women: preaching, counseling, discipling, and empowering. We have looked at it mostly from a biblical standpoint, with psychological and experiential knowledge supplementing the biblical mandates and information. Now let us look at how each area applies to ministry context.

First, let us look at preaching, to youths, as an example. Preaching should be conducted in a way that includes the female point-of-view in mind. Applications and illustrations should apply to girls and guys. Subject matter is also important to reaching boys and girls in the teenage years. The gap in girl and guy problems is quite large in this age group. They both think, act, and live differently. 'Girl and Guy Talks' are common in youth groups but more depth should be given to this practice. Many times this amounts to "Girls, do not give your bodies away to boys who want to have sex!". There is much more that can be spoken into the lives of teenage girls on many different subjects. It would be beneficial for the (male) youth pastor to personally speak to the girls. It is good to have godly women speak to them, but it would be beneficial for them to hear from a male perspective and their pastor. Typically, male youth pastors go to an extreme in youth ministry, to avoid sexual sin. Sexual sin should be avoided at all costs but that does not mean that youth pastors can or should avoid teaching, talking to, or getting to know all of the girls in the ministry. That is being a poor excuse of a pastor.

On a side note, youth events and projects need to be equal opportunity for both genders in order to have a healthy youth group. To give an example, one summer I interned in the Junior High group (ages 12-14) of my home church. I loved hanging out (spending time) with the boys and planned lots of events. We had lock-ins, pool parties, and hang-out times. Halfway through the summer, the girls started to get frustrated and became jealous of the boys. I had neglected the girls in my zeal for ministering to the boys. In the future, I made it a point to plan as many events for the girls as the boys. In addition, co-ed events had games and such that were geared equally for boys and girls. The youth pastor should not neglect either gender.

Counseling girls as a youth pastor is a sensitive subject and a delicate challenging endeavor. Let us first look at the dangers. It is common and natural that a good portion of girls in the youth program are attracted to the single youth pastor, especially if he is young and funny. This creates a strong danger of sexual misconduct. It is also more likely for teenage girls to make an accusation out of spite or pain. Hopefully this is not the case, but even a false accusation can ruin a ministry and/or severely tarnish a ministry career. Therefore, it is important for the youth pastor to be extremely careful about his presence, actions, and conversations. Hugging can easily become inappropriate. Some games are also outside of propriety, wrestling being an extreme example. Conversations must also be carefully crafted and communicated. When a youth pastor is only 3 years older than a female high school senior, it would be very easy to slip into a flirtatious conversation. Caution must be used, but it should not prohibit all ministering to girls.

Teenage girls need counseling from their youth pastor. Some of them may not have a father figure in their lives and need that source of encouragement and help. There are situations where only a pastor can help, for examples: partying, pregnancy, or relationship issues. Most teenagers would rather go to their pastors first than their

parents. Several steps should be set in motion for this aspect of the ministry. First, a strong, spiritual, and mature female leader is needed in the youth ministry, with whom there should be an open line of communication for advice and an ongoing willingness for referrals. There are just some areas that should not be touched as a male pastor. In those situations, the male youth pastor should be able to hand them over to a mature female leader, who would be able to minister to the girl in a way that the male youth pastor could not.

Discipleship is crucial for the spiritual development of all believers. Discipleship should have a key part in the ministry program. The key idea for this will be getting older women or college-age girls to get involved in the lives of teenage girls. In many cases, girls at that age are higher functioning than boys, in terms of spiritual matters. Girls want to talk about feelings, beliefs, and hard issues. This will be a critical time and age for discipleship to happen.

Female leadership is important and vital in youth ministry. There are several ways that women can be empowered in youth ministry. First, the opinion of experienced women should be sought out. Every youth pastor should have an older woman who he can sit down with and inquire for ideas about girl topics, issues, and opinions. There are too many young youth pastors who merely give sports analogies and think up youth games that only boys would enjoy. Girls sit on the side and do not get involved. A woman, who is behind the scenes in a somewhat leadership position under the youth pastor, would be extremely helpful to his ministry.

Second, women should be allowed to teach in the youth Sunday School meeting and the weekly main meeting, whatever day of the week that is. There are many women who would bring a fresh perspective and power that the youth pastor lacks. All that these women need is the opportunity and empowerment.

In conclusion, women were created in the image of God just as men were. Pastors have the responsibility to minister to them through preaching, counseling, discipling, and empowering. This is biblically mandated and exemplified. The whole ministry of the church will benefit from utilizing women in ministry. Women are a large part of the church that should not be ignored or forgotten.

Outline:

- I. Women's Right for Pastoral Care
 - a. Biblical Text: Eve/Paul
- II. Preaching to Women
 - a. Direction Towards Women
 - i. Biblical Text: Lydia
 - b. Subjects Women Care About
 - i. Family Matter
 - ii. Nurturing
- III. Counseling Women
 - a. Techniques to Learn
 - i. Biblical Text: Woman at the Well
 - ii. Active Listening
 - iii. Being Sensitive to Women's Problems
 - b. Understanding Female Specific Issues
 - i. Life Cycle

- ii. Child Bearing
 - iii. Friendships
 - c. Safety Against Temptation
 - i. Biblical Text: 1 Timothy (Above Reproach)
 - ii. Open Door Policy
 - IV. Discipling Women
 - a. Women Discipling Other Women
 - i. Biblical Text: Titus 2/1 Timothy (Women Speaking)
 - ii. Women's Ministry
 - iii. Discipleship
 - V. Putting Women in Leadership Positions
 - a. Empowering Women
 - i. Biblical Text
 - 1. Deborah
 - 2. Junia
 - VI. Applications:
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