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Topics: 1 Timothy 2, Women in Ministry

Women Preachers? A Response to Perry Noble

November 6, 2015

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Perry Noble's Advocacy of Women Preachers

Perry Noble, pastor of New Spring church in South Carolina, has recently defended the idea that women should preach. You can read his defense [here](https://perrynoble.com/blog/should-a-woman-be-allowed-to-preach) (<https://perrynoble.com/blog/should-a-woman-be-allowed-to-preach>)

He writes in a friendly spirit and says that he wants to clarify the situation rather than argue about the matter. Such friendly discussions are important, and I hope it should prove helpful to clarify why I think Noble's reasons fail to persuade.

Let me begin by summarizing Pastor Noble's reasons for thinking that women can preach. First, women were commissioned by Jesus to preach that he was raised from the dead. Second, women were among those who preached on the Day of Pentecost ([Acts 2:1-4](http://biblegateway.com/bible?version=NASB&passage=Acts+2%3A1-4) (<http://biblegateway.com/bible?version=NASB&passage=Acts+2%3A1-4>)). Third, some passages in the Bible (like [Deut. 25:11-12](http://biblegateway.com/bible?version=NASB&passage=Deut.+25%3A11-12) (<http://biblegateway.com/bible?version=NASB&passage=Deut.+25%3A11-12>)) no longer apply today. Fourth, many women had leadership positions: Deborah was a judge and spoke God's word; Esther was a queen; Philip's four daughters prophesied; Phoebe was a deacon; Priscilla was also clearly a leader. Fifth, it is inconsistent to allow a woman to teach Sunday School and then forbid them to preach. Sixth, we should be focusing on more important things when there are more than 3 billion people out there who don't know Jesus.

Reasons to Dissent from Pastor Noble's View

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Let me take up the last reason first. Yes and yes to the priority of proclaiming the gospel. And yes to his statement about unity in the essentials. But Pastor Noble should be more careful in what he says. Pastors have a responsibility before God to proclaim the whole counsel of God ([Acts 20:27](http://biblegateway.com/bible?version=NASB&passage=Acts+20%3A27)). Surely, some doctrines are more important than others, but it doesn't follow from this that other doctrines don't matter at all. Historically, there would be no Baptist churches at all if all one wanted to say is that there should be unity in essentials. I can imagine someone saying to Baptists in the 16th century: "let's not dispute the matter of baptism. After all, there are many people to be reached with the gospel. Let's not waste our time on this issue." Unity on the essentials of the gospel does not and should not lead to the conclusion that other biblical teachings are inconsequential. The call to reach the world must not be used as a trump card to nullify what the scriptures say.

It is also noticeable that Pastor Noble gives no explanation for the texts that prohibit women from teaching or exercising authority over men (e.g., [1 Cor. 11:2-16](http://biblegateway.com/bible?version=NASB&passage=1+Cor.+11%3A2-16); [1 Tim. 2:11-15](http://biblegateway.com/bible?version=NASB&passage=1+Tim.+2%3A11-15)). It isn't helpful to say that there are only five passages on this issue. There are only two texts in the NT that say believers shouldn't marry an unbeliever. Is this an indifferent matter then? There are a handful of texts that prohibit same-sex relationships. Can we then ignore them? The texts where Paul gives instructions about women teaching must be explained, especially since Paul grounds his view in the created order, in the good and beautiful world God made ([1 Cor. 11:8-9](http://biblegateway.com/bible?version=NASB&passage=1+Cor.+11%3A8-9); [1 Tim. 2:13](http://biblegateway.com/bible?version=NASB&passage=1+Tim.+2%3A13)). They can't be waved off without even giving an explanation.

Nor does it wash hermeneutically to say that we don't practice texts like [Deut. 25:11-12](http://biblegateway.com/bible?version=NASB&passage=Deut.+25%3A11-12) today and hence what Paul says no longer applies. A pastor has a responsibility to articulate how the scriptures fit together, showing how the new covenant fulfills the old covenant. The redemptive historical differences between the covenants must be unpacked. The matter isn't simplistic and must be explained, for all Christians throughout history have believed that some of the commands in the OT remain normative for believers today (such as, "Don't commit adultery" and "don't murder"). So, it doesn't work to cite a passage and say, "See, we don't do that anymore" as if that solves the issue. Almost any command in the Bible could be jettisoned in arguing this way. We need reasons and explanations, which is why God gave pastors the responsibility to be careful teachers of the word of God who rightly correlate and explain how the new relates to the old ([Matt. 13:52](http://biblegateway.com/bible?version=NASB&passage=Matt.+13%3A52)).

When it comes right down to it, Pastor Noble's arguments are remarkably unconvincing. When Paul says that women can't teach or exercise authority over a man ([1 Tim. 2:12](http://biblegateway.com/bible?version=NASB&passage=1+Tim.+2%3A12)), he is thinking of gathered church settings where one is designated as a teacher or preacher of God's word. Women telling the apostles that Jesus is risen from the dead isn't such a formal setting. Nor does Priscilla's private instruction of Apollos qualify as such a setting ([Acts 18:26](http://biblegateway.com/bible?version=NASB&passage=Acts+18%3A26)). Private teaching and public preaching aren't the same thing. Despite the claim of Pastor Noble, there is no evidence at all that women preached on the Day of Pentecost ([Acts 2](http://biblegateway.com/bible?version=NASB&passage=Acts+2)). They all spoke in tongues, but that isn't the same thing as preaching. In fact, Peter preached that day as the passage clearly tells us.

There are contexts in which women can speak in the gathered assembly. Women did function as prophets in both the OT and the NT. But prophecy is a different gift from teaching and should not be equated with it. In the OT some women were prophets but they were never priests. In the NT there were also female prophets, but no female apostles or female pastors, elders, or overseers. The gift of prophecy is occasional and spontaneous and is not the same thing as preaching and teaching. Paul is consistent on this matter. Women may prophesy, but they shouldn't preach or teach. Hence, I don't think it is right for a woman to teach a Sunday School class of both men and women. I take that to be a violation of [1 Tim. 2:12](http://biblegateway.com/bible?version=NASB&passage=1+Tim.+2%3A12) (<http://biblegateway.com/bible?version=NASB&passage=1+Tim.+2%3A12>). Some churches may have a tradition of doing such, but traditions must be decided by the word of God.

Women have many valuable ministries that are to be exercised in the church today. And there are contexts in which a woman may address both men and women. But preaching and teaching the word of God isn't one of those contexts. I am glad that Pastor Noble wanted to clarify matters, but I hope he understands why others think that his answers warrant further clarification.

For more resources on women in ministry, see: [Why Not to Have a Woman Preach](http://www.desiringgod.org/articles/why-not-to-have-a-woman-preach) (<http://www.desiringgod.org/articles/why-not-to-have-a-woman-preach>), [Women in the Church: An Interpretation and Application of 1 Timothy 2:9-15](http://www.amazon.com/Women-Church-Third-Interpretation-Application/dp/1433549611/ref=sr_1_3?ie=UTF8&qid=1446825035&sr=1-3&keywords=women+in+the+church+schreiner) (http://www.amazon.com/Women-Church-Third-Interpretation-Application/dp/1433549611/ref=sr_1_3?ie=UTF8&qid=1446825035&sr=1-3&keywords=women+in+the+church+schreiner), [50 Crucial Questions](http://cbmw.org/topics/complementarianism/50-crucial-questions/) (<http://cbmw.org/topics/complementarianism/50-crucial-questions/>), [Recovering Biblical Manhood & Womanhood](http://cbmw.org/topics/complementarianism/recovering-biblical-manhood-womanhood/) (<http://cbmw.org/topics/complementarianism/recovering-biblical-manhood-womanhood/>)

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