

The Ordination of Women Among Texas Baptists

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Introduction

On the ordination of women, as on every subject, no one speaks for all Texas Baptists. Baptists share a heritage of saving faith in Christ, a deep love and respect for the Bible, and important distinctives such as soul competency, priesthood of the believer, and autonomy of the local church. Baptists also share a tendency to express honest differences freely, as a people who strive to know and do God's will. God has blessed the church with the insights of many gifted scholars in Scripture, theology, biblical backgrounds, and church history. This paper contributes to the ongoing discussion among Texas Baptists merely the observations and theological reflections of one ordained woman in pastoral ministry.

Baptists who look for denominational leadership concerning the ordination of women receive mixed signals. *The Baptist Faith and Message (BF&M) 2000* of the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) declares the office of pastor to be limited to men,¹ but apparently does not ban ordained women from serving as deacons and church staff. Tammie Reed Ledbetter, of *SBC Life*, wrote, "The revision to the SBC doctrinal statement does not address ordination, but it clearly affirms the leadership of women in a variety of non-pastoral roles."² To the contrary, a 1984 SBC resolution discouraged the ordination of women for any role.³

An SBC agency, the North American Mission Board (NAMB), has announced that its Chaplains Commission will continue to endorse (recommend as qualified) women for the pastoral role of chaplain in hospitals, correctional facilities, the military, etc., but will disqualify ordained women for all future endorsements.⁴ NAMB trustees acknowledged,

¹"The Church," *BF&M 2000*. n.p. [cited 25 November 2002]. Online: <http://www.bgct.org/bgctroot/bfm/faith.pdf>.

²Tammi Reed Ledbetter, "SBC and Women Pastors," *SBC Life* (October 2000). n.p. [cited 1 June 2002]. Online: <http://www.sbcLife.org/articles/2000/10/sla5.asp>.

³"Resolution on Ordination and the Role of Women in Ministry," n.p. [cited 1 June 2002]. Online: <http://www.sbc.net/resolutions/amResolution.asp?ID=1088>.

⁴Through information received in conversation with the various agencies, this author learned that, as of June 2002, the Chaplaincy Commission of NAMB/SBC endorses 236 female chaplains; the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship (CBF) endorses 50 female chaplains, 46 of them ordained and two others in process of ordination; and the Alliance of Baptists endorses 33 female chaplains, "most of them" ordained. The BGCT is just beginning a chaplaincy endorsement process, endorsing six women in September 2002. The Alliance, CBF, and the BGCT all trust decisions about ordination to the local Baptist church.

The issue of ordination is not addressed in the Baptist Faith and Message, and the Bible does not clearly set forth a detailed description of the practice of ordination as it is commonly observed today. . . . However, Southern Baptists, following Scriptural principles, have developed a rich and meaningful tradition of ordaining God-called men into the ministry.⁵

The NAMB web site accurately describes a chaplain's pastoral role and duties, declaring that, "Hospital chaplains . . . are ministers called by God and trained to serve in an environment of sickness, pain, birth, death, and continuous learning experiences. They function as pastor, prophet, teacher, administrator, counselor, and evangelist."⁶ So, the *BF&M 2000* is silent on the ordination of women but excludes women from pastoral roles, while NAMB, citing tradition not Scripture, endorses women in pastoral roles but excludes ordained women.

Baptist differences continue in the local church. A few Baptists still believe women are to be silent worshipers and learners. Most Baptist churches welcome the leadership of women but place various limits on a woman's freedom in Christ to serve. A few Texas Baptist churches ordain and search for deacons or pastoral staff without regard to gender.

Many long-time Texas Baptists such as Daniel Vestal, formerly pastor of FBC Midland and Tallowood Baptist, Houston, are learning and leading Baptists by example. Vestal, like many Texas Baptists, reportedly grew up believing that women should not be pastors, until his bias was challenged. He met faithful women who spoke of their divine call in ways that reminded him of his own. He observed the effectiveness of many women in pastoral ministry. He studied the work of scholars who loved the Bible as he did, yet voiced understandings of Scripture beyond his own dogmatic views. As he prayed and studied, Vestal began to understand that God can and does call to pastoral ministry whomever God chooses, male and female.⁷

For Baptists who are trying to determine whether their congregation is ready to ordain women, the most frequent and relevant questions seem to be the following:

1. Can a biblically sound, Christ-honoring church ordain women,
 - a. Although Jesus was male and some people teach that God is male?
 - b. Although Adam was created before Eve?
 - c. Even though Eve was the first to sin in the Garden?
 - d. Although Jesus chose twelve men for his closest followers?

⁵James Dotson, "NAMB Will No Longer Endorse Ordained Female Chaplains," *BP News* (8 February 2002). n.p. [cited 14 June 2002]. Online: <http://www.bpnews.net/printerfriendly.asp?ID=12701>.

⁶"Hospital Chaplaincy," NAMB Chaplaincy Endorsement. n.p. [cited 17 June 2002]. Online: <http://www.namb.net/evangelism/cev/healthcare.asp>.

⁷Daniel Vestal, "Vestal On-Line: Women as Pastors," n.p. [cited 1 June 2002]. Online: <http://www.cbfonline.org/forum/vestalonline.cfm?forumId=1080>.

- e. Although some teach that the Epistles restrict pastoral leadership to men?
 - f. And remain faithful to Baptist practice?
 - g. Even though Baptists have not yet reached consensus on this issue?
2. What might Baptists risk in ordaining qualified women?
 3. What do Baptists gain in ordaining qualified women as well as men?

Gender and the Nature of God

*Can a biblically sound, Christ-honoring church ordain women, although Jesus was male and some people teach that God is male? Yes. God is perfect and without limits in goodness, including limits of gender. A 1999 SBC resolution described God's perfections as infinite.⁸ The *BF&M 2000* declared that gender is "part of the goodness of God's creation."⁹ However, the leader of one Texas Baptist organization, Southern Baptists of Texas (SBT), has declared that God is male, "a gender-specific being."¹⁰ At the SBT's inaugural meeting, their executive director, Jim Richards, announced that the SBT will "recapture the true image of the person of God," whom Richards described as "eternal, all-powerful, all-knowing, holy and male."¹¹*

Texas Baptists have long celebrated the infinite nature of God's goodness, the God who announced to Moses in the burning bush, "I am who I am. . . . This is my name forever" (Exod 3:14-15 NRSV). God alone decides who God was, is, and will be. Most Baptists who pray to God as "our most gracious heavenly Father" know that not even this cherished name is adequate for all that God is. No human mind can fully conceive the depth and fullness of God's being. To be male is to be incomplete, without the goodness of all that is female, yet our God is complete, perfect, whole, and good.

Hannah Whitall Smith beautifully phrased the holy paradox many Baptists experience in addressing God as heavenly Father, while realizing that God is beyond all naming.

God is not only father. He is mother as well, and we have all of us known mothers whose love and tenderness has been without bound or limit. And it is very certain that the God who created them both, and who is Himself father and mother in one, could never have created earthly fathers and mothers who were more tender and more loving than He is Himself. Therefore if we want to know what sort of a Father He is, we must heap

⁸Resolution on the Power, Knowledge, and Changelessness of God.. n. p. [cited 3 June 2002]. Online: <http://www.sbc.net/resolutions/amResolution.asp?ID=574>.

⁹"Man," *BF&M 2000*.

¹⁰Don Hinkle, "Southern Baptists of Texas is Newest State Convention," *The Conservative Record*, November 1998. n.p. [cited 1 June 2002]. Online: <http://www.ncbaptist.com/Nov98/Texas.htm>.

¹¹Marv Knox, "'Conservative' Baptists start separate Texas convention," *The Baptist Standard* (18 November 1998). n. p. [25 November 2002]. Online: <http://www.abpnews.com/abpnews/story.cfm?newsid=2263&srch=1>.

together all the best of all the fathers and mothers we have ever known or can imagine, and we must tell ourselves that this is only a faint image of God, our Father in Heaven.¹²

Jesus was fully human as well as fully God, and Jesus was male. Just as God could have chosen to come to earth as a powerful ruler, not a lowly person, God could have chosen to come already born, with Jesus' male body not needing the nurture and protection of a female's body. In coming as a male borne by a human female, God blessed both genders and painted a beautiful picture of inclusive love and respect for all people. The world's first glimpse of the incarnation was not of a male baby but of a woman, growing with child. The Bible relates this truth in the narrative of Mary visiting Elizabeth in Luke 1, as the child within Elizabeth leapt with joy at the arrival of Mary and the Holy Child within her (cf. Luke 1:39-56).

The good news came to an ordinary young woman. When she accepted God's gracious invitation, the living Word of God came to dwell in her, first hidden and unseen, but growing until one day that divine and human child blessed the world through her. The invitation that comes to each person to accept the indwelling of Christ is a spiritual re-enactment of Mary's physical reality. The incarnation honors female and male. The ordination of male and female lives out this wondrous picture for the church and the world.

The Creation Order

Can a biblically sound, Christ-honoring church ordain women, although Adam was created before Eve? Yes. Human beings must hope that the order of creation does not indicate divine preference, for fish, birds and cows were all created before Adam. God created woman, because Adam was incomplete, i.e., "not good" alone. Woman was formed from Adam's own flesh to finish God's creation of humanity as the appropriate partner for man, the one who would help him as God helps all people (cf. Gen 2:18). The words for the woman's role, "help meet," are not words for an assistant or servant. *Ezer* (help) is the Hebrew word used when speaking of God as our help (cf. Ps 70:5), and *neged* (meet) means "corresponding to" or "equal to."¹³ The ordaining of women and men is a picture of human interdependence, as men and women are made to help one another, bear one another's burdens, and be priests to one another.

The Sin of Eve

Can a biblically sound, Christ-honoring church ordain women, even though Eve

¹²Hannah Whitall Smith, *The God of All Comfort* (New Kensington, PA: Whitaker House, 1997), 69. See also Isaiah 49:15 and Isaiah 66:13. Readers who wish to consider additional biblical images of God are referred to Virginia Mollenkott, *The Divine Feminine: The Biblical Imagery of God as Female* (New York: Crossroad, 1983); Jann Aldredge-Clanton, *In Whose Image; God and Gender* (New York: Crossroad, 1991); and Arthur E. Zannoni, *Tell Me Your Name; Images of God in the Bible* (Archdiocese of Chicago: Liturgy Training Publications, 2000).

¹³Herbert Miles and Fern Harrington Miles, *Husband-Wife Equality* (Old Tappan, NJ: Fleming H. Revell, 1978), 183.

Eve was the first to sin in the Garden? Yes. The Bible says everyone is a sinner: “For all have sinned and come short of the glory of God” (Rom 3:23 KJV). Only the grace of Jesus Christ cleanses anyone to be fit for the service of God. The Scriptures teach that Christ died for the sins of all (cf. 1 Cor 15:3). In the Garden, both Eve and Adam sinned. When confronted Eve tried to blame the serpent, and Adam tried to transfer his responsibility to Eve and even to God (cf. Gen 3:12), but God held Adam and Eve individually accountable for their sin (c.f. Gen 3:17), just as each individual must answer to God (cf. Rom 14:12). Harvey Cox, Baptist theologian at Harvard, suggested Eve’s original sin was abdicating her God-given coresponsibility for the Garden. Instead of obeying God, she listened to a lower authority.¹⁴ Not all Baptists agree about individual accountability. Dr. Dorothy (Mrs. Paige) Patterson offered a different understanding in a 1998 news conference. “When it comes to submitting to my husband even when he’s wrong, I just do it, she said. He is accountable to God.”¹⁵

The 1984 SBC “Resolution on Ordination and the Role of Women in Ministry” referenced 1 Tim 2 in disqualifying women for pastoral leadership. Other biblical scholars have made informed arguments that this passage was Paul’s attempt to refute false teaching at a particular time and place, rather than to silence forever the voice of women in the church. In verse 11, Paul supported the new freedom of these women to attend instruction. In return, the new students were to learn quietly and were not to teach until they learned to discern true doctrine from false.¹⁶

In verses 13-15 Paul gave the reason these untaught women were to be quiet students. God had first taught Adam the Garden’s dietary law before Eve was formed, and the serpent had deceived the novice. Paul intended only a temporary silencing of these women, for he immediately referred to the birth of Eve’s promised offspring (cf. Gen 2:15-17; 3:3, 15). As a woman brought sin into the world, so a woman brought forth salvation’s child.¹⁷ Women are saved from sin and from any curse of the fall through that child born of a woman, if they choose the redeemed life of faith, love, holiness, and modesty. The passage is consistent with other Pauline words, “For since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead” (1 Cor 15:21 KJV). First Timothy 2:11-15 was written to help the early church disciple women, honor their new freedom in Christ, and prepare them for further ministry and leadership. God’s love is stronger than the sin of Eve and of Adam.

¹⁴Harvey Gallagher Cox, *On Not Leaving It to the Snake* (New York: Macmillan, 1967), xvii.

¹⁵In Mark Wingfield, “New Statement Calls Wives to Submit,” *The Baptist Standard*. n.p. [cited 1 June 2002]. Online: http://www.baptiststandard.com/1998/6_17/pages/wives.html.

¹⁶Richard and Catherine Clark Kroeger, *I Suffer Not a Woman; Rethinking 1 Timothy 2:11-15 in Light of Ancient Evidence* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1992), 12-13.

¹⁷Don Williams, *The Apostle Paul and Women in the Church* (Van Nuys, CA: BIM Publishing, 1977), 211-214.

The Twelve Apostles

Can a biblically sound, Christ-honoring church ordain women, although Jesus chose twelve men for his closest followers? Yes. Jesus did have twelve close male followers, but they were not his only disciples, not the only witnesses to the miracles, the crucifixion, and the resurrection, and not the only ones who led the early church or penned the New Testament. Perhaps none understood his mission like the woman who anointed him for burial (cf. Mark 14:1-10). By God's design, these men first heard the Gospel, "He is risen," from the lips of faithful women commissioned directly by Jesus.¹⁸

Within the Christian faith, denominational differences concerning the interpretation of Scripture affect views on the ordination of women. The Roman Catholic Church calls itself apostolic, believing that when Jesus announced, "Upon this rock I will build my church" (Matt 16:16-18 KJV), *rock* referred to Peter. In Catholic belief, because the teaching of Jesus is infallible, the teaching of Jesus' apostles and their successors is also infallible on matters of faith and morals. Catholic bishops are considered the true successors to the apostles, salvation is possible only through the church, only the church authentically interprets Scripture, and the pope as Peter's successor speaks with final authority on faith and morals. Bishops are governing authorities as well as servants of the church. Jesus and the twelve apostles were male, so by Catholic tradition all priests must be male. That is Catholic, not Baptist doctrine.¹⁹

The historic Baptist position is that the *rock* on which Jesus said he would build his church was not Peter but the profession of faith in Jesus that Peter voiced. Baptists believe that each soul is competent to stand before God and make a decision to accept Jesus as personal Savior and to follow the call of God. Neither the church nor its pastor must mediate on behalf of a soul who is seeking God.²⁰ Each believer has the right and obligation to study Scripture, using Jesus Christ as the criterion for interpretation, and to live according to the truth of Scripture. The priesthood of the believer obligates Christians to pray for, encourage, correct, and support one another, lifting one another up to God for blessing. This priesthood is offered with great respect and humility, for fellow believers are equally of the priesthood. Because of their congregational polity and this distinctive view of ministry, Baptists have tended to view the ordained ministry as leadership in service, but not as ruling authority.²¹

¹⁸See Luke 24 and John 20.

¹⁹*Catechism of the Catholic Church*. n.p. [cited 10 June 2002]. Online <http://www.vatican.va/archive/catechism/p123a9p4.htm#I>. See also "Resolution on Southern Baptists and Roman Catholics," n.p. [cited 1 June 2002]. Online: <http://www.sbc.net/resolutions/amResolution.asp?ID=964>.

²⁰Baptist theologian, Dr. Molly Marshall, reminded Baptists that "the competency of the soul in religion affirms the right and capacity of the individual to deal directly with God. . . . No one should presume to dissuade another from responding to the Spirit's stirring. See her article, "Toward Encompassing Theological Vision for Women in Light of Baptist Tradition," *Folio* 4:2 (Autumn 1986). n.p. [cited 10 June 2002]. Online: <http://www.bwim.org/Library/Toward%20Encompassing%20Theological%20Vision.pdf>.

²¹Messengers to the 1998 Baptist General Convention of Texas (BGCT) affirmed "the freedom of each local Baptist church to commission for service all persons regardless of race, socio-

When the pastor is seen as God's servant in the congregation, the issue of an ordination candidate's gender melts away, for every believer is called to be God's servant. Ordination is simply one means for extending the reach of the church and accomplishing greater effectiveness in ministry. In ordination to the diaconate or to the gospel ministry, the church confirms the call of one of its own for service, to represent the church in a ministry for which the church as a whole continues to acknowledge responsibility.

Baptists have never viewed clergy as infallible in matters of faith, but the SBC has begun to present the pastor as a governing authority to be obeyed by the congregation. The 1998 "Resolution on the Priesthood of the Believer" stated in part,

The doctrine of the priesthood of the believer in no way contradicts the biblical understanding of the role, responsibility, and authority of the pastor which is seen in the command to the local church in Hebrews 13:17, "Obey your leaders, and submit to them; for they keep watch over your souls, as those who will give an account;" . . . we affirm the truth that elders, or pastors, are called of God to lead the local church.²²

The SBC view of ordination as setting apart a pastor who is to be obeyed by the church has been accompanied by emphasis on the pastoral role being reserved exclusively to men. The 2000 revision to the *BF&M* introduced a statement banning women from pastoral roles.²³

Parallel differences exist in the way Baptists view deacons. Following the example of the early church, many Baptists entrust mature, wise, and compassionate members to serve Christ and the church as deacons in caring for the vulnerable, serving at the Lord's table, and advising the congregation on the church's overall ministry. In other Baptist congregations the deacon body is a governing board. Dr. Thomas Schreiner, a conservative New Testament professor at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, holds that although "the pastorate is absolutely limited to men" and women should not even be allowed to teach men in Sunday School, churches may allow women to serve as deacons if the church views the diaconate as "a ministry office of service," not a position of governing or ruling authority.²⁴ The intent is to ban women from the authority to teach and govern, not from ordained ministry.

economic standing, age or gender who are called of God to *servant leadership*" (*emphasis mine*)." (Mark Wingfield, "Sexes Marked by 'Biblical Equality,' Texas Baptists Resolve," *The Baptist Standard* [18 November 1998]. n.p. [cited 2 June 2002]. Online: http://www.baptiststandard.com/1998/11_18/pages/equality.html.

²²"Resolution on the Priesthood of the Believer," n.p. [cited 25 November 2002]. Online: <http://www.sbc.net/resolutions/amResolution.asp?ID=872>.

²³"While both men and women are gifted for service in the church, the office of pastor is limited to men as qualified by Scripture" ("The Church," *BF&M 2000*).

²⁴The quotes are from a review of Dr. Schreiner's book, *Two Views of Women in Ministry*, published in an article by Marv Knox, "Southern Prof says Women May Be Deacons," *The Baptist Standard* (5 November 2001). n.p. [cited 2 June 2002]. Online: http://baptiststandard.com/2001/11_5/pages/women_deacons.html.

The SBC interpretation of Hebrews 13:17, naming the pastor as the leader who is to be obeyed, differs significantly from the Baptist practice of shared leadership with mutual submission.²⁵ In congregational polity, each member may be an accountable leader in one situation and a respectful follower in another. Freedom in Christ is to be exercised in a responsible manner. Hebrews 13:17 must be considered in the context of verse 1, which calls believers to mutual love, and verses 6-9, which urge believers to reject all teaching that is inconsistent with the unchanging Gospel of Jesus Christ, to be strengthened by grace rather than ritual laws that offer no benefit, to live unafraid in Christ, and to imitate the faith of effective, productive Christians. Far from mandating unilateral submission to the pastor and elders, this Hebrews passage requires each believer to exercise great discernment. Within that context, Christians are to follow their various leaders, so everyone's ministry may be joyful.

A pastor has a very important leadership role in the congregation, but so do many others. A Baptist church is not a monarchy, an oligarchy, or a hierarchy, but a fellowship of believers where all are one in Christ Jesus. A pastor, deacon, or lay person earns influence, not by demanding obedience, but by living a life of such loving, self-sacrificing, and exemplary service that members are drawn to follow the Christ they see shining forth in that leader.

The Epistles and the Role of Women

Can a biblically sound, Christ-honoring church ordain women even though some teach that the Epistles restrict pastoral leadership to men? Yes. Baptists believe the whole Bible and try to avoid building a theology or an ecclesiology on a few isolated verses that may at first appear to conflict with the whole message of the Gospel.²⁶ The Gospels consistently revealed the respectful acceptance Jesus offered to women. The grace-filled behavior of Jesus contrasted with the rabbinic tradition in which he was taught. According to Helmut Thielicke, some within that tradition discouraged a man from speaking with a woman, even his own wife, and considered women to be shallow, petty, envious, lazy, eavesdropping creatures.²⁷ The Torah was to be burned rather than given to women, and women were to sit behind screens if they attended worship at all, yet Jesus carried on a discussion of theology with Mary in her home and with a Samaritan woman at a public well. Women were participants in the ministry of Jesus. As Georgia Harkness wrote, "To Jesus, women were persons, as precious to God as were men—persons to be talked with, regarded as friends, healed in body and spirit, treated as important in spite of the prevailing

²⁵"This church is an autonomous body, operating through democratic processes under the Lordship of Jesus Christ. In such a congregation, members are equally responsible. Its Scriptural officers are pastors and deacons. In "The Church," *The Baptist Faith and Message 1963*. n.p. [cited 16 June 2002]. Online: <http://www.bgct.org/bgctroot/bfm/faith.pdf>.

²⁶Those laypersons who want to learn how to read and interpret the Bible with respect for the history, times, language, and people who first heard the words, will find help in a book by Gordon D. Fee and Douglas Stuart, *How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth; a Guide to Understanding the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1982).

²⁷Helmut Thielicke, *The Ethics of Sex* (trans. John W. Doberstein; New York: Harper, 1964), 8-9.

prevailing Jewish subordination.”²⁸

A few epistolary passages have sometimes been interpreted in ways that seem to exclude women from church leadership. Baptists must carefully consider the grammar, historical and theological settings, and context of Scripture.²⁹ Verses that have been translated contrary to the saving and restoring grace of God in Christ must be examined thoughtfully and prayerfully, not used lightly as prooftexts. Those few verses must be interpreted in light of the many that offer equal opportunities for service and leadership to all believers called by God.³⁰

Serious Bible study requires effort. The probable meaning of each of the following passages is greatly debated in Christian thought. The following brief comments serve merely to call Baptists to search out the truth under Christ’s leadership.

Rom 16:1-2

Don Williams noted important points in these two verses. First, Phoebe’s title was masculine in gender, eliminating any linguistic reason to call her a “servant” while addressing her male counterparts as “minister” or “deacon.” Second, Paul assumed the Roman church would welcome her leadership; he did not explain her as an isolated female phenomenon in ministry. Third, Phoebe had a recognized ministry in her congregation and beyond. Last, Phoebe was likely carrying the letter to Rome for Paul. She had a ministry similar to Paul’s.³¹

1 Cor 11:2-16; 14:33b-36³²

In 11:3 debate often centers on whether “authority” or “source” is the appropriate understanding of *head*. The question may be moot, for in Christ the one who

²⁸Georgia Harkness, *Women in Church and Society* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1972), 212.

²⁹English teachers often emphasize the relationship between structural context and meaning by asking students to punctuate and capitalize the word grouping, “woman without her man is nothing. Two solutions with different meanings are: “Woman without her man is nothing” and “Woman! Without her, man is nothing.”

³⁰Looking in detail at all the relevant passages is beyond the scope of this paper. Whole books have been written on single passages related to women in Pauline epistles. The reader is especially encouraged to consult first a passage on “Putting Problem Passages in Perspective,” in *Equal to Serve; Women and Men Working Together Revealing the Gospel* (ed. Gretchen Gaebelein Hull; Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1991), 187-189.

³¹Williams, *The Apostle Paul*, 42-43. Similar Pauline commendations of female ministers named Prisca, Mary, Junia, Tryphaena, Tryphosa, Persis, the mother of Rufus, Julia, and the sister of Nereus are found in his letter to Romans alone.

³²For fuller discussions of these texts, the reader is referred to Patricia Gundry’s *Woman, Be Free!* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1977). Two helpful articles, and the comments of their responders are found in *Women, Authority & The Bible* (ed. Alvera Mickelsen; Downers Grove: IVP, 1986). The first article is “What Does Kephale Mean in the New Testament?” by Berkeley & Alvera Mickelsen, with responses by Ruth A. Tucker and Philip Barton Payne. The second article is “Women, Submission & Ministry in 1 Corinthians,” by Walter L. Liefeld, with response by Alan F. Johnson. Gilbert Bilezikian’s *Beyond Sex Roles* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1985) is also an excellent resource.

would be the greatest authority must be the greatest servant (cf. Mark 9:35). “Ruler” or “boss” does not seem to be a translation consistent with Christian thought; in Christ is the authority to serve sacrificially, but not the authority to dominate. The passage instructed the church that men and women who preach and pray in public must be sensitive to societal vulnerabilities and customs regarding modest and appropriate dress and demeanor, so that even their physical appearance will bring honor and glory to their *head*.

In 1 Corinthians Paul sometimes quoted a Corinthian slogan, then refuted it. Some believe 14:34-35 was such a Corinthian saying.³³ These verses do not seem consistent with basic Christian thought nor with what Paul said in 11:5, indicating that women can and may prophesy in public. In 14:36, Paul seemed to refute the slogan.

Gal 3:28

Some scholars believe Galatians 3:28 is from a baptismal liturgy in Pauline churches.³⁴ Each time a new believer is baptized into the Christian fellowship, these ancient words picture the unity of all believers as the body of Christ. Baptists who exclude women from leadership interpret this verse as referring solely to oneness in salvation. Gilbert Bilezikian of Wheaton College made the case that this passage refers to oneness within the church as a community.

The passage addresses the question of what happens to persons who by faith identify themselves with Christ. The apostle’s emphatic answer is that they receive a new identity which they hold in common with other believers. In this passage Paul does not address the issue of who may become a believer. . . . All who have faith, Gentiles included, qualify for the blessing (3:8-9, 13, 22). Here Paul is concerned with the result of their entrance into the life of faith. He shows that they receive a common identity that heals their segregations and their antagonisms as they are fused together into the unity of the body of Christ. The passage emphasizes their commonality as believers.³⁵

1 Tim 3:11

Paul was addressing women deacons in this passage. According to Williams, “In the original language there is no article ‘the’ before women, as there is in English. Thus ‘women’ is used adjectivally, ‘women who are deacons.’ New Testament Greek does not assign a female gender to the word used for deacon.”³⁶

1 Tim 3:1-2; Titus 1:5-6

As Texas Baptist theologian, William Hendricks, observed,

³³Linda McKinnish Bridges, “Silencing the Corinthian Men, Not the Women,” in *The New Has Come; Emerging Roles Among Southern Baptist Women*, (eds. Anne Thomas Neil and Virginia Garrett Neely; Washington, DC: Southern Baptist Alliance, 1989), 40-49.

³⁴Bilezikian, *Beyond Sex Roles*, 126.

³⁵Bilezikian, *Beyond Sex Roles*, 126.

³⁶Williams, *The Apostle Paul*, 115.

Titus and 1 Timothy have been used to obfuscate the issue of women's ordination. The author said that men seeking the office of bishop should be blameless. Biblical literalists cannot have it both ways. I have been assured that Paul did not mean blameless or perfect. How, then, do we know that he meant men? . . . The issue should not be resolved by prooftexts. The larger context of Scripture and the Christological principle of interpreting Scripture must be brought to bear.³⁷

In refusing to ordain women, does the church call "unclean" those whom God has washed clean in Christ (cf. Acts 10:15)? Do Christians trivialize Scripture in claiming that "husband of one wife" is emphasizing gender rather than faithfulness? Texas Baptists must grapple with such issues by praying for one another, listening to one another, and "speaking the truth in love" (Eph 4:15 KJV).

Faithful to Baptist Practice

Can a biblically sound, Christ-honoring church ordain women and remain faithful to Baptist practice? Yes. Baptists have always had a variety of ordination practices.³⁸ As a Baptist historian, Leon McBeth of Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary wrote, "For Baptist women to serve as deacons is no new thing."³⁹ Male and female deacons served even in the earliest Baptist churches in England. Numerous nineteenth- and twentieth-century Southern Baptist congregations had deaconesses. The First Baptist Church of Waco in 1877 set aside six deaconesses, possibly the first Texas Baptist congregation to do so. Their pastor at the time was B. H. Carroll, founder of Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary.⁴⁰ According to Baptist sociologist, Dr. Sarah Frances Anders, "Southern Baptists lag behind in the ordination of women deacons primarily due to tradition and prejudice more than theological support."⁴¹ McBeth noted, "Almost without exception, Southern Baptist churches that have ordained women as deacons report that the experience has been beneficial beyond all expectations."⁴²

Even those Baptists who cherish Calvinist roots may ordain women. In Calvin's writings on church order, he considered the role of women in the church to be among what he called "different things." These are matters about

³⁷Bill Hendricks, "The Baptist Faith and Practice," *The Baptist Standard* (31 July 2000). n.p. [cited 2 June 2002]. Online:

http://www.baptiststandard.com/2000/8_7/pages/hendricks_text.html.

³⁸Dr. Leon McBeth is a respected source on the history of women in the Baptist tradition. His important work, *Women in Baptist Life* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1979), is out of print but should still be available at many seminary and church libraries.

³⁹McBeth, *Women*, 139-140.

⁴⁰Leon McBeth, *Texas Baptists* (Dallas: Baptistway Press, 1998), 79.

⁴¹Sarah Frances Anders, "Changing Responsibilities of Women in the Church," in *Christian Freedom for Women and Other Human Beings* (eds. Harry N. Hollis, Jr., Vera Mace, David Mace, and Sarah Frances Anders; Nashville: Broadman, 1975).

⁴²McBeth, *Women*, 143-149.

which good Christians have the freedom in Christ to differ, decisions that God has neither forbidden nor commanded.⁴³

In 1964, Addie Davis of North Carolina became the first woman ordained to the Gospel ministry by a Southern Baptist church. Warren Carr, pastor of the ordaining church, said that the congregation took seriously Ms. Davis's call to the ordained ministry and her passion to answer that call of God. The first Texas woman ordained to the ministry, approximately the ninth Southern Baptist woman to be ordained, was Jeanette Zachry of Broadway Baptist Church in Fort Worth, in 1977. The first chaplain to be ordained to the Gospel ministry by a Southern Baptist congregation had been serving at a correctional facility for six years without the blessing of ordination. As reported by McBeth, a male minister apologized in that worship service, "Forgive us for so long delaying this act which recognizes you in the fullest sense as a minister of the Gospel."⁴⁴

As of 1997, at least 1,225 Southern Baptist women were ordained. Of those, at least eighty-five were church senior pastors, most in churches outside the SBC. Many ordained Baptist women were serving as deacons or on a church staff as ministers of music, education, etc. Ten Baptist state conventions each had at least one congregation with a female senior pastor.⁴⁵ As of 2002, three Texas Baptist churches in Waco have women as senior pastors. Southern Baptists experience a drain of pastoral gifts as churches turn away other talented women. Those women, nurtured in Southern Baptist congregations and certain of their call to ministry, accept pastorates in American Baptist, United Methodist, Disciples of Christ, and other denominations.⁴⁶

The Lack of Consensus among Baptists

Can a biblically sound, Christ-honoring church ordain women even if Baptists have not yet reached a consensus on this issue? Yes. Baptists must act with urgency to help women and men respond to the call of God. Lost and hurting souls are waiting now. In a free people, the possibility exists that consensus will always be illusive. Any believer can be guilty of reading Scripture and making choices to support personal hatreds, bigotries, desires, and pet heresies. The church must be careful to ordain or decline to ordain each candidate in the hope of furthering the gospel message, not to advance a particular political agenda. As Dr. Ray Vickrey, pastor of Royal Lane Baptist in Dallas, reminds Baptists so often: "If one must err, let it be on the side of grace."

⁴³E. Jane Dempsey Douglass, *Women, Freedom and Calvin; the 1983 Annie Kinkead Warfield Lectures* (Philadelphia: Westminster John Knox Press, 1985), 9.

⁴⁴McBeth, *Women*, 154-157.

⁴⁵Sarah Frances Anders, "Historical Record-Keeping Essential for WIM," *Folio* 15:2 (Fall 1997). n.p. [cited 10 June 2002]. Online: <http://www.bwim.org/Library/Historical%20Recordkeeping.pdf>.

⁴⁶American Baptists, like the United Methodists and the Disciples of Christ, ordain without regard to gender.

What Might Baptists Risk in Ordaining Qualified Women?

The church might practice ordination in an unscriptural way. Acts and the Epistles describe the early church setting aside deacons and elders, etc., but Gretchen Gaebelein Hull wrote that even New Testament scholars “do not know what ordination meant in New Testament times.”⁴⁷ William Hendricks also addressed this issue:

The Old Testament speaks of patriarchal blessing and of prophetic anointing; but there is nothing in Hebrew Scriptures analogous to contemporary practices of ordination. Jesus refers to himself as pastor. He only is our true pastor, shepherd and bishop of our souls. . . . Ordination and offices of ministry as practiced among us today have arisen from our history and traditions. There is no such thing as a senior pastor, a minister of education or specialized ministries of music and childhood education in Scripture. . . . These . . . are matters of history, tradition and culture.⁴⁸

The ministry of ordained women, whether as pastors or deacons, might not be accepted by everyone in the church. John once told Jesus that the disciples had encountered a man healing people of demons in the name of Jesus. They had ordered him to stop, “because he wasn’t one of us.” Jesus admonished them not to oppose that ministry. “Anyone who isn’t against us is for us” (Mark 9:40 NRSV). Perhaps Jesus would say the same to those who exclude women simply because they’ve never included them. A concern about a particular woman’s theological maturity or preparation for service should be considered on an individual basis but is not a reason to exclude all women. Theologian Georgia Harkness counseled,

An old Wesleyan criterion in regard to ordination asks, “Has he gifts? Has he grace? Does he bear fruit?” These queries may well be applied to women also. It is only the woman who is qualified by talent, by training, and by personal Christian vitality and dedication that is under consideration in the entire matter.⁴⁹

Some say the ordaining of women might lead to the affirming of homosexual behavior. The church’s stand on the status of women and its stand on homosexual behavior are separate issues, although some have preyed on Baptist fears by implying that the ordination of women would push the church down a slippery slope toward affirming homosexual activity. A closer parallel with the status of women was the status of black slaves. The white hierarchy judged these persons unfit for freedom and leadership, not because of their behavior, but just because they were created black. Too many whites in powerful church positions justified their bigotry and exclusivity with interpretations of Scripture inconsistent with the gospel, and they labeled strict discrimination as God’s will. People

⁴⁷Hull, *Equal to Serve*, 214.

⁴⁸Hendricks, “*The Baptist Faith and Practice*.”

⁴⁹Harkness, *Women in Church*, 206.

will. People of color were encouraged to be content in their place, for God had decreed that place. White pastors preached that God had forever consigned persons of color to lower leadership status due to the sin of Ham's son, Canaan (cf. Gen 9:18-25).

The status of women and slaves has been correlated repeatedly. Philo of Alexandria taught that women were more easily deceived; hence, the proper relation of a wife to her husband was to serve him as a slave.⁵⁰ The status of women and of slaves was also linked in Old Testament language; the word *Baal* could be translated husband, master, or owner.⁵¹ A Jewish man's traditional morning prayer included gratitude that he was not a Gentile, a woman, or a slave but a man free to worship and serve God. Galatians 3:28 may have been a direct allusion to this prayer, as the writer celebrated that these three distinctions of freedom do not exist in Christ.⁵² Homosexuality was not mentioned. In denying ordination based solely on gender, a Baptist church establishes two distinct classes of membership, with half the members unable to respond as the Holy Spirit leads.

Currently, most Baptist groups are on record as judging homosexual behavior to be inconsistent with the Christian life. No Baptist group is now on record as declaring that being female is a sin, although the SBT seems to come close with its statement that God is exclusively male. Baptists have strong, even heated interpretations of Scripture concerning homosexual identity and behavior, but they are clearly distinct from arguments about the ordination of women.

The culture of the congregation might be altered unacceptably. Each congregation has a deeply imbedded culture. Those who doubt this can try changing the color of the aisle carpet. Change, even good change, can be troubling. A fear of upsetting the culture of the congregation has kept many churches from responding to the gifts of women for ordained ministry. In its mildest form, this fear may be expressed as an anxiety that the congregation is "just not ready." In more severe forms, fear of change can lead to ill-considered statements that having a woman in the pulpit might lead to lust from male worshippers, leadership tainted by cycles of insanity, women taking over, or men leaving the church in droves.⁵³ None of these fears is rooted in fact or in Scripture.

In 1 Tim 2:11-15, midst all the cultural specifics one would expect in any letter, a timeless word of grace was spoken to the church: "Let the woman learn." The women in this church had been previously excluded by cultural and religious restrictions from participating in formal learning. How wonderfully

⁵⁰Richard N. Longenecker, "Authority, Hierarchy & Leadership Patterns in the Bible," in *Women, Authority & the Bible* (ed. Alvera Mickelsen; Downers Grove: IVP, 1986), 70.

⁵¹Bilezikian, *Beyond Sex Roles*, 63.

⁵²Barbara J. MacHaffie, *Her Story; Women in Christian Tradition* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986), 18-19.

⁵³An Anglican bishop argued against the ordination of women, claiming that women "radiate sex" and that their temperament is "inappropriate" for church leadership. "Their ordination would introduce distractions and earthiness into worship." In Rosie Nixon, *Liberalizing Women for the Gospel* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1997), 27-28.

free and filled with unbridled enthusiasm they must have been at the thought of learning the mysteries of God previously taught only to men.⁵⁴

One can only imagine how many cultural taboos these women may have trounced in their excitement, how they would have soaked up any new teaching whether true or false, how quickly they would have responded to every opportunity to share what they were hearing and to add their own untutored thoughts. Their passion to learn and to contribute was understandable, but such passion needed discipline for effectiveness.

When Paul said, “I permit no woman to teach or to have authority over men,” the Greek verb for *permit* was in the present active indicative tense, as in “I am not presently permitting.” The infinitive for *to have authority* means “to domineer.”⁵⁵ These new students were not to begin by sharing their ignorance nor acting in an overbearing fashion toward their male counterparts. They were to be quiet for a time and learn the basics.

These pupils first needed to learn how to learn. Like so many teachers of beginners, Paul told them to be quiet and receptive. If they had questions, they could ask their husbands when they got home, for men studied the Torah as boys. Paul never intended for women to be silent forever; he gave too many instructions on how women were to prophesy in public. In each case, he was responding to the level of his students and teaching them the next step toward being effective disciples and church leaders.

In the spirit of Paul, Baptists can start where their congregations are. If a church has never invited women to lead Scripture reading in worship, that church can train women how to read publicly with effectiveness. A church not yet ready to consider a woman as pastor might further its own growth and that of a woman by considering her for occasional pulpit supply.⁵⁶ If a church is not yet ready to label a woman’s prophecy as “sermon,” the worship committee can consider changing the language in the order of service to call such offerings a “message,” “testimony,” or “word of grace.” Like Paul, Baptists can support the responsible exercise of freedom in Christ and the equipping of the saints for more effective ministry.

What Do Baptists Gain in Ordaining Qualified Women as well as Men?

The church sends more laborers to work in God’s fields. “Lift up your eyes and look on the fields; for they are white already to harvest” (John 4:35 KJV). Baptists may never know how many men, women, and children are living and dying without hearing that God loves them and Christ died for them, while churches argue over who is qualified to teach them, baptize them, serve them the Lord’s Supper, plant a church for them, bless their marriages, and comfort their loved ones when they die.

⁵⁴“If any man gives his daughter a knowledge of the Law it is as though he taught her lasciviousness.. Sotah 3.4, as found in Mickelsen, *Women*, 169.

⁵⁵Williams, *The Apostle Paul*, 211-214.

⁵⁶Edwin K. Broadhead, “Sharing the Keys,” *Folio* 5:4 (Spring 1988). n.p. [cited 10 June 2002]. Online: <http://www.bwim.org/Library/Sharing%20the%20Keys.pdf>.

The church enriches its understanding of God and the gospel with diverse perspectives and invests more fully the talents God has given to the church. Each person reads the Bible through the lens of personal experience, learning, prejudices, desires, hopes, fears, time, and place. One of the reasons Christians treasure the Bible so very much is that a new insight can still surprise a believer after decades of reading and studying biblical truth. Every member of the Christian community has much to offer every other member, as each one prayerfully searches the Scriptures for revealed truth. Because men and women often see the world differently, the possibility of learning from male and female teachers, deacons, and pastors helps all worshipers to know God more fully.

The parable of the talents illustrates that God's servants are responsible for the stewardship of God's gifts. How do the people of a church answer God when they bury a woman's talent? A church truly praises God from whom all blessings flow, when it joyfully acknowledges, blesses, and uses all the gifts and talents God has given its members.⁵⁷

The church celebrates the Holy Spirit that blows at will. A study of Scripture teaches that God has frequently chosen unlikely persons for service. God violated the culturally assumed primacy of the first-born in choosing David. Ananias found Saul an unlikely choice for ministry. Samuel was just a small boy when God called him. Hulda, Deborah, Priscilla, Mary of Nazareth, and many others were surprising choices of God. God's Spirit continues to blow at will today.

At Cook Children's Medical Center in Fort Worth, 125 congregations support pastoral care by praying for the young patients and offering encouragement to families and the medical team. One of the ways churches participate is by bringing PrayerBears®, new teddy bears that have been lovingly placed at the church's altar with prayers for hospitalized children. One afternoon I was in the chapel greeting a delegation of young donors. A ten-year-old girl raised her hand and asked, "Do you have church (worship services) in here?" I told her that we did and began to describe Kids' Chapel, Teen Chapel, and Sunday worship. She asked, "Who preaches in here?" I explained that our chaplains rotated the responsibility for worship leadership; the next week would be my turn to preach. She then asked, "Would you stand up there (in the pulpit), so I can see how you look?"

I stepped to the pulpit and kept speaking, telling stories about the bears we receive and the young patients who are blessed by this prayerful love. This persistent little girl raised her hand one last time and asked in a small, serious voice, "May I come stand up there by you, so we can see how *I* would look?" While we were discussing teddy bears and broken arms, the Holy Spirit was blowing at will, and this child heard the breath of God call her name.

The local church exercises its autonomy. Baptists believe the local church has the right and responsibility to ordain whomever the church deems to be called and qualified. No national convention has ruling authority on this matter over any Baptist congregation. In the local church, the ordination of women

⁵⁷Gretchen G. Hull, "In This Together," *Leadership Journal* 22:2 (Spring 2001), 62. See Matt 25:14-30.

can be less an “issue” and more a prayerful concern to help a fellow church member discern more clearly a perceived call from God. In the local church the candidate can be known not as some controversial problem but as a respected and beloved part of the body.

The church extends its reach by giving its blessing and its authority for service. Consider just one of many pastoral ministries, pediatric chaplaincy. In the name of Christ and the church, a chaplain walks with ill and injured children. She hears their prayers, their fears, their questions about life and death, about what is fair and whether God is good. She walks with parents who beg God to let them trade places with their hurting child and with other families where a parent inflicted the child’s injury. She counsels a physician who must make a difficult ethical decision and a nurse whose husband has just left her. She conducts far more funerals than weddings, and most of those funerals feature tiny caskets. She celebrates miracles of restored health and miracles where people find grace to continue despite tragedy.

A pediatric chaplain preaches in worship services where one family is celebrating good news and another is crumbling in pain. She conducts weddings where the flower girl is on oxygen. She sees the lame walk again. She helps an eight-year-old list the pros and cons of choosing a risky bone marrow transplant versus a certain but perhaps more peaceful passing. She helps a dad lead his terminally ill daughter to saving faith in Christ. She helps estranged parents hammer out a schedule, so each can spend some final moments with the child they both love. She offers a benediction at going-home parties where physicians are sprayed with silly string. Such a pastorate is meaningful beyond words, but no one would label it easy.

No one could offer this ministry relying solely on personal strength or as a “Lone Ranger” Christian. Success as a pastor in such an intense setting depends on the partnership, prayers, authority, and encouragement of the church. That’s what ordination is. The church, that wonderful body of believers, tells a qualified candidate they know the job to which she is called is too hard all alone, but she will not be alone. The ministry is not solely her ministry but the ministry of the church. She does not need to be afraid, for they will be with her, praying that God will supply words when she has none, claiming God’s sufficiency in the midst of her inadequacy, holding her up with their prayers as surely as Aaron and Hur held up the arms of a weary Moses (cf. Exod 17:12). That is what ordination is.

The church proclaims its solidarity in Christ with the least of God’s children. The wounded people a chaplain serves need the authority of the ordained ministry. They need to know that not just one person stands with them but the whole community of God’s people. Even if these hurting souls are too young or too vulnerable to speak, they find ways to articulate their need.

Early one evening, I was called to the Emergency Department to help care for a three-year-old girl and her five-year-old brother who were being brought in by ambulance from a motor vehicle collision. Their mother was carried to a nearby adult hospital. Thankfully, both children were alert and oriented. The boy was quite verbal, telling the nurses he definitely did not want a shot. The little girl was still strapped in her car seat, refusing to be released from its

from its security, avoiding eye contact with adults, and remaining completely mute.

I was with the children for an extended period of time, offering what comfort I could and assuring them they were not alone. I inquired if I might call another relative, a father or grandparent—or perhaps a family friend? “Our grandparents live far away,” the boy explained, “and our daddy’s in jail. There is no one, only Mommy.”

As the evening wore on, the little girl warmed a bit to my presence; she giggled and played “peek-a-boo” with me. Then she said, “I read a book to you. I read the pictures.” I gave her a PrayerBear® and told her she could take it home with her. “We don’t have a home,” was her heart-touching reply. Indeed, they did not. A social worker later confirmed the mother and children had been in route to a safe house.

The children’s sad story would have been unremarkable, for motor vehicle collisions and domestic abuse are both common, but Texas Baptists had provided for these children’s spiritual needs. “Home is wherever someone really loves you,” I was able to assure her. “This PrayerBear® is yours to take with you wherever you go. It comes from a whole church that is praying for you. Bunches and bunches of people are praying for you, hoping good things for you and your family, asking God to keep you safe. They sent me here to tell you.”

“Bunches and bunches of people sent you,” she repeated and smiled. She held out her arms for me to take her out of the car seat.

“Would you like us to be like PrayerBear® and say a prayer for Mommy?” I inquired.

“Mommy got dead,” was the solemn reply. “Mommy got blood here and here, her face, her cheek, her nose, lots of blood; Mommy got dead.”

What courage it took for that little girl to confess her fear, and what a joy for me to tell the children when we received word moments later that Mommy would be treated and released very soon. I rolled Sister’s gurney next to her brother so they could touch hands, and we prayed with thanks to the God who watched over them and Mommy and for the “bunches and bunches” of people who were adding their blessing to our need.

This little girl could only share her fear of her mother’s death after she learned of the “bunches and bunches” who had sent me. As long as I seemed to her just a kind mommy-figure, I was not strong enough to meet her need for spiritual and physical safety, for mommies can “get dead.” This child, who had probably never heard the word *ordained*, needed the power of the ordained ministry. Thanks to a loving congregation with “bunches and bunches” of prayerful Texas Baptists, her need was addressed. The church had an obligation in Christ to be with those hurting children, and the church fulfilled its obligation by ordaining one of its own to be there, with the church’s blessing and authority for service.

Conclusion

The church of Jesus Christ is established to bring about the realm of God. On that mission, each member is a servant minister, not a ruling authority. The only

way to greatness in Christ is to be the greatest servant. The issue is not whether women are equally qualified with men to hold positions of power, but whether any of us should be seeking such power. Ordained and laypersons are equally ministers of the church of Jesus Christ. The church ordains to facilitate its ministry. When a congregation ordains a pastor for Gospel ministry in the local church or the chaplaincy, the people are making a public statement that the body of Christ will be present as that minister teaches, preaches, officiates at weddings and funerals, counsels, walks beside and prays with vulnerable souls. The total weight of the responsibility does not rest on that minister's inadequate shoulders, and certainly no glory is due that pastor. The resources for ministry are the unlimited resources of Christ whose body is the Church.

The question of whom we shall ordain must be preceded by the question of what it means to ordain anyone. Baptists who view ordination as the appropriate equipping of one of the church's own as a servant on mission for the body tend to be less concerned with gender than with a candidate's evidence of call, talent, and fitness for service, as given in Scripture. Baptists who view ordination as the setting apart of a candidate to exercise governing authority over the church, as pastor or as deacon board, as well as those who view ordination as conveying some sort of elevated social status in the church, tend to exclude women from those positions of power.

We have important choices to make as Texas Baptists. We can view ordination as one tool to help the church accomplish its ministry more effectively, or we can view ordination as naming a few members to an elite and powerful fraternity in the church. We can set ourselves up as a mediator between God and the women who respond to God's call, or we can acknowledge Jesus Christ as the only true mediator between God and any person. We can look for Bible verses that seem to allow exclusion of women from ordained ministry, or we can act on biblical truth and equip the saints, female and male, for any ministry to which God calls them. While we argue, a hurting world waits.