

ΤΩ ΧΡΟΝΟΥ ΚΑΙΡΩ

IN THE NICK OF TIME

Occasional Essays and Other Stuff for Christian Students Presented by the President of
Central Baptist Theological Seminary of Minneapolis

American Christianity needs leaders. American Christianity needs *Christian* leaders. Christian leaders explain the Scriptures, bringing them to bear upon life's urgent questions. Christian leaders exemplify the life of faith, finding their ultimate satisfaction in God alone. They unite intellectual discipline with ordinate affection, turning their entire being toward the love of God. These essays are dedicated to the task of inviting Christian students to become tomorrow's Christian leaders.

—Kevin T. Bauder

"...Be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine."

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A Woman's Place

Kevin T. Bauder

The nomination of Sarah Palin as the Republican candidate for the vice presidency has placed some conservatives in a double-bind. On the one hand, they have been disappointed with the less-than-thorough conservatism of John McCain, so the more "Reaganesque" position of Governor Palin comes as a welcome balance. On the other hand, their understanding of the biblical role of women leaves scant opportunity for a female to occupy the second-highest (and, potentially, the highest) office in the land.

At the moment, I am not particularly interested in the political issues involved in the presidential campaign. Theologians have a right to political opinions, but as theologians their views about politics should carry no more weight than anyone else's. What does interest me is the moral and ethical question of whether a woman can rightly and biblically occupy high office. In fact, my interest is even broader than that. I would like to ask which roles women may occupy (rightly and biblically) in every sphere of life.

Scripture places limits upon the leadership of women in two spheres. The first is the local church. The apostle Paul commands women to "keep silence" in the churches and to learn from their husbands at home (1 Cor. 14:34-35). He further states that he does not permit women to teach or to usurp authority over the man, but to be in silence (1 Tim. 2:11). Both of these texts have to do with church activity, and neither defines the role of women in commerce, society, or politics. Even in the context of church activity, they must be understood rightly.

When Paul insists that women are to learn in silence, his command occurs within a particular universe of discourse. It is no sin if a woman greets her sisters at church, or if she warns someone of an approaching mishap. I think that Paul's instruction is best taken in view of the fact that pastor-elders exercise a unique role as teachers of the congregation. To a very large extent, their teaching is what constitutes their authority (Eph. 4:11; 1 Tim. 5:17). Only males (and not all of them) are permitted to exercise this kind of authoritative teaching ministry. Though a woman might pray or even prophesy (1 Cor. 11:5), she must not teach in a way that would either assert pastoral authority for herself or undermine the legitimate authority of her pastors.

Scripture also places limitations upon women's leadership in the home. The text of the New Testament is clear that women are to submit to their husbands (Eph. 5:22-33; Col. 3:18; 1 Pet. 3:6-7). Young women are to be taught the virtues and skills necessary to maternity and domesticity (1 Tim. 5:14; Titus 2:4-5). Yet, Paul's language implies that women do exercise a unique sphere of authority, even within the home. For example, Paul's use of *oikodespotein* in 1 Tim. 5:14 implies that a woman is to be something of a household despot. Certainly the woman who is lauded in Proverbs 31 is no stay-at-home mom, at least as that position is sometimes narrowly imagined. She is a strong person who exercises initiative, engages in commerce, and even purchases property.

Scripture leaves little room for chest-thumping, alpha-male leadership, even within the home. That kind of leadership is actually forbidden within the church (1 Pet. 5:3). Outside of the home and church, Scripture closes no sphere of human activity or leadership to women.

The world of commerce is certainly open. The virtuous woman of Proverbs 31 is commended for her commercial activity. To all appearances, Lydia continued as a prosperous businesswoman after her conversion. Given her occupation and influence, she almost certainly had males in her employ, and she may even have owned male slaves.

For a man to work in the employ of a woman is no reversal of biblical roles. A male employee owes the same loyalty and duties to a female boss that he would owe to a male one. These duties include the submission of an employee to his employer.

The professions are also open to women. The Scriptures do prevent women from being pastor-elders, but no similar restriction blocks them from becoming physicians, attorneys, or scholars. While many would disagree with me, I think that women can even pursue biblical and theological scholarship. In my opinion, no good scriptural reason exists to block females from studying—and teaching—the Word of God and the system of faith at the most advanced levels. Colleges and seminaries are not churches, and professors in those schools do not exercise pastoral authority. If we object to the notion of women teaching the biblical and theological disciplines at the seminary level, we ought to recognize that our objections come from our own sensibilities and not from the text of Scripture.

What about politics? Does Scripture permit a woman to lead a nation? The clearest biblical example of female political leadership is Deborah. Some exegetes will argue that Deborah was God's second-best choice to judge Israel and that she did so only because Barak was too cowardly to assume the responsibility. Be that as it may, it is still true that God would not ask someone to do something that was wrong. Deborah is sufficient proof that the "regiment of women" (to use Knox's phrase) is not, after all, "monstrous." Since the Bible offers no clear prohibition barring women from exercising political authority, it is difficult to make any moral argument against it.

Even if no moral objection can be raised, however, do not practical considerations militate against females taking leadership in business, education, and politics? How is a woman to submit to her husband when she is his employer or even his president? How can she possibly guide the household when her attention is absorbed with affairs of the boardroom, the classroom, or the war room? How will she fulfill her obligations as wife and mother?

These perplexities are real, but they are not exactly unique to women. Men also experience conflict between the duties imposed by their careers and those that are inherent in being husbands and fathers. Some men fulfill these responsibilities well, while other men fail. Doubtless the same is true of women who succeed in business or in the professions. It will surely be true of women who succeed in statecraft. For both men and women, however, the ability to balance public commitments with personal duties is a matter of individual conscience between themselves and the Lord.

Would I work for a female boss? As a matter of fact, I have. Would I take a theology course from a female professor? If she were teaching something I was interested in, I would. Would I vote for a female candidate? If she is qualified and holds the right positions, my answer is a definite *yes*. ✖

This essay is by [Kevin T. Bauder](#), president of Central Baptist Theological Seminary. Not every one of the professors, students, or alumni of Central Seminary necessarily agrees with every opinion that it expresses.

Casting All Your Care upon God, for He Careth for You

Thomas Washbourne (1606-1687)

Come, heavy souls, oppressed that are
With doubts, and fears, and carking care.
Lay all your burthens down, and see
Where's One that carried once a tree
Upon His back, and, which is more,
A heavier weight, your sins, He bore.
Think then how easily He can

Your sorrows bear that's God and Man;
Think too how willing He's to take
Your care on Him, Who for your sake
Sweat bloody drops, prayed, fasted, cried,
Was bound, scourged, mocked and crucified.
He that so much for you did do,
Will do yet more, and care for you. ✕

Central Baptist Theological Seminary of Minneapolis | [Contact Us](#) | www.centalseminary.edu
900 Forestview Ln N, Plymouth, MN 55441 | 1-800-827-1043