

The Big Time or the Modest Newsletter Relevant

Why Women Have the Freedom to Pursue Advanced Theological Training

by Deborah Forteza and Rachel Bauder

This is why the study of God's Word should be a primary focus for every person: because through it one can know God's heart, and if one knows God's heart, one can obey him. It is for this very reason that I (Deborah) believe that women should have the freedom to pursue advanced theological training. I'm not advocating that every woman *should* dedicate herself to formal theological studies, but I do believe that if women have the desire and opportunity to educate themselves in this area, they have the freedom to do so.

I think that this topic concerns all of us either directly or indirectly, because all of us have a tendency to be extremists in our views without being careful to be biblical. In addition, the unsaved question us about our views concerning women, and we ought to be able to reasonably defend our faith. After all, is not one of the main goals of our bashes to help us think through subjects in order to be principle-oriented rather than issue-driven? My conclusion is that this matter of women being theologically trained lies in the realm of the adiaphora.

In order to present the reasons supporting my thesis statement, I have included portions of the previous essay that stated the objections to my argument. The responses to these objections are a joint effort of Rachel Bauder and me.

Objection #1. *Women are naturally caregivers, encouragers, made to help others, and therefore, should dedicate themselves primarily to these tasks.*

Response: Regardless of whether this may be true, it is a fallacy to assume that caregivers do not need to think and discern. In addition, it does not follow that if a woman educates herself, this knowledge will impede her from encouraging others and being a caregiver. In fact, it is possible that further education will enable a woman to be a better encourager or caregiver. Furthermore, it is erroneous to consider encouragement and caregiving to be the sole feminine activities or even feminine activities at all. Scripture defines femininity in terms of ruling the house (I Tim. 5:14), of which caregiving is only a small part, alongside virtues like diligence, prudence, and wisdom (Prov. 31). Very few would argue that these latter virtues are uniquely feminine. Nor does care-giving itself belong especially to the province of women, as Paul's commendation of men like Timothy, Epaphroditus, and Onesiphorus illustrates. In the case of Timothy at least, advanced theological training aided rather than impeded his ability to "naturally care" for fellow believers.

Objection #2. *The nature of the questions that are asked in advanced theological levels can cause a woman's faith to be shaken or even destroyed. (Of course we can say that this could also be true of men; however, I don't know that in the questions this essay addresses we can always appeal to the response that men also can fall prey to these dangers. The Bible does differentiate between men and women, particularly in leadership issues, and perhaps, in being deceived).*

Response: The problem presented does not necessarily relate to women as such, but to humans in general. Liberal ideas could potentially deceive any person, but particularly those who are not

discerning. This lack of discernment could come from either not having the necessary tools for processing certain information, or from a weak faith. The solution to the problem is not to shelter every person, but rather to teach believers how to discern between biblical and unbiblical thinking, and to encourage them in their faith. Throughout Scripture, the goal for each believer is spiritual maturity, which consists in being able to discern for himself between good and evil, not being able to follow lists of do's and don'ts. The issue of "being deceived" seems to be in the context of spiritual leadership (i.e., something about the makeup of women hinders them from being able to be spiritual leaders at church or in the home because they tend to be more easily deceived spiritually). Thus, one cannot use this verse to support that women in general should not be exposed to further education because their faith is "weaker" than the man's. This latter assumption is not supported by the Scriptures.

Objection #3. *By giving this kind of education to women, we are making them too independent (from their husbands, pastors, etc.), and therefore, we subtly adopt egalitarian ideas. In addition, a woman who knows the same or more theology than her husband will have a harder time submitting to his leadership. (It would be unfair for any of us to assert that there is no truth in this argument. Since Eve, all women struggle with submission, particularly when they disagree with their husbands.)*

Response: The problem with egalitarianism does not reside so much in their view of the nature of the woman (namely, that she is equal to man), but in the faulty conclusions that they make concerning her leadership in the church. They assume that because the woman is essentially equal to man, she must also be equal in function to the man. This assumption can be refuted based on Christ's submission to the Father while being fully equal with the Father. Equality of essence does not necessitate equality in function.

In addition, submission does not come from ignorance, but rather, it is a choice. We know this from the example of Christ's earthly life: though he knew more than any other human being, he chose to submit himself to other human beings, such as his parents and other authorities.

Moreover, if one were to apply the reasoning given above to child rearing (i.e., hinder them from learning so that they will be submissive), most of us would disagree with this methodology.

In addition, that our flesh tempts us to sin is no reason to keep us from doing something good. For example, all of us struggle with pride, yet this does not keep us from acquiring further training or serving the Lord publicly--things that could potentially increase our temptation to become proud.

Also, since the Scriptures do not forbid women to educate themselves, the matter becomes part of the adiaphora. If this is true, no one individual can impose on any other individual a regulation that is not scriptural.

Objection #4. *Because women become more independent through theological education, they also tend to become masculine in their deportment. This masculinity may include: being too assertive, provoking debates, taking leadership, etc. Although a meek and quiet spirit does not necessitate timidity and continual silence, it surely does exclude an attitude of masculinity in women. (Again, those of us who have a struggle with cultivating a meek and quiet spirit realize that seminary training does sometimes make it more difficult for a woman to develop this virtue.)*

Response: As stated above, character qualities do not derive from intrinsic characteristics, but from a heart that loves God. While it is true that education helps one become more discerning, it does not necessitate lack of submission and masculinity. In fact, the definition of meek is "showing patience

and humility;” “gentle; easily imposed on; submissive.” Patience, humility, gentleness, and submission are possible even for the most brilliant and perfect person—e.g. Christ, Paul, Moses, etc., as long as this person loves God above everything else. Brilliance, perfection, skill, and knowledge are entirely compatible with the nature of meekness, because meekness is only possible insofar as one has something to submit. The more one has to submit, the greater the meekness that one can exercise. To restrict one’s abilities merely because one fears losing one’s meekness is to abort the virtue itself: meekness in a racehorse is valuable; meekness in a flea is not.

Objection #5. *Only spiritual leaders should go to seminary. Because spiritual leaders are only men with a certain call, women are precluded, and therefore should not go to seminary. In other words, since women should not be competing with the pastor in the theological teaching of other women, there is no reason for them to go to seminary. It is the pastor and husband’s job to teach theology, not the woman’s. In addition, by encouraging women to be in seminary, we are giving them leadership skills that they will never be able to fulfill in a Fundamentalist church. Thus, on one hand we make them leaders, and on the other we don’t allow them to lead because we believe that this task is exclusively for men. (In this argument, the Titus 2 passage is not taken into account because it refers to a different subject. Titus 2 is considered to be referring to women teaching other women about practical home issues rather than advanced theological material.)*

Response: This argument does not relate only to women. It also applies to laymen whom God has not and will not call to the pastorate (for instance, Christian men who were formerly immoral), and to men whose calling would be very unlikely on account of physical disabilities. Before one becomes too selective about who should go to seminary, one should notice that teaching in the church is not the only reason someone attends seminary. The skills that one learns in seminary (and beyond) are not exclusive to pastors. One does not exclusively learn how to baptize people or serve the Lord’s Supper (in fact, these are almost non-existent in seminary education), but rather, how to study God’s Word and to be able to defend it. Seminary education is good for teaching in the home, sharpening one another, personal or group Bible study, and personal godliness, among other things. In addition, seminary does not *make* anyone a leader, just as it does not *make* anyone a pastor. Seminary only provides the tools that one needs in order to be able to think for oneself. Granted, an educated person cannot be easily manipulated by a leader with faulty arguments, but the decision of whether one resists or follows resides solely upon oneself. Education makes a person a better communicator, and potentially, it can give him a better understanding of the world in which he lives. Education is good for any person, whether or not one studies for a specific reason. All education can be beneficial and enjoyable, and nothing in Scripture forbids women to learn. This objection assumes that God only calls men to study the Bible in depth. Perhaps this is the case, but Scripture does not make that clear. I do believe that men are better equipped for this task and ought to be the leaders in this area, but this does not preclude women from studying this issues for personal, apologetic, writing, or teaching reasons. Just because one can’t be a mechanic does not mean that he cannot have an interest in mechanics, or that he can’t study mechanics to advise others how to fix cars. By the same token, just because a woman can’t be a pastor doesn’t mean that she cannot be interested in theology or that she cannot give constructive criticism to the pastor. If one adopts the view that women can only learn certain things and that other subjects are exclusive to men, who decides where the line is drawn? Should women have no education at all? Should they have only some kinds of education? Which ones? Even if one concedes the first point, there is no

way of telling how far must one go. The reasoning of those who oppose women studying theology seems to come from a narrow view of education and to reflect pragmatist tendencies.

Objection #7. *While to know God intimately and to be a wise person one does need to know theology, this theology does not include the skills of the “science of theology” (Higher criticism, textual criticism, apologetics, etc.). The “science of theology” makes a person a critical thinker, but does not help him to know God better. While it is true that all women need to have an intimate relationship with God, they can have this by obeying what they know is true and learning from their pastors and husbands. The “science of theology” only hinders one’s simple and loving devotion for God.*

Response: The idea is that once a person begins to think critically, it is harder to read the Scriptures and meditate upon it because he is focusing on whether the tense is such and such and the textual variant is this or that. Though this may be a potential problem, we should not keep ourselves willfully ignorant to have a more existential experience when reading the Scriptures. Our faith is based upon the text, not misinterpretations of the text; therefore, if we have the ability and opportunity to enhance our understanding of the text, there is no excuse for not doing so. It is precisely because we are devoted to God that we wish to know exactly what He is saying—not just experience the warm fuzzies when we crack our Bibles. Devotion must be built on the solid rock of truth; sand simply will not suffice. Scripturally, the only thing that can hinder our devotion to God is sin. Furthermore, if “technical knowledge” really did hinder our devotion to God, no Christian should ever dedicate himself to this “technical knowledge,” whether male or female.

Other Considerations:

1. *Do the Scriptures encourage women to become theologically astute (i.e., become a critical thinker in deeper theological issues)?*

If the ability to think is part of being human, and the Scriptures do not condemn this practice either directly or in principle, why should we forbid women from learning to think? It is worth noting that when Apollos’ theological knowledge was inadequate, Aquila and Priscilla explained “the way of God more accurately” (Acts 18:26; NKJV). Such an explanation to the astute Apollos would have demanded some acumen in the explanation; and Priscilla quite possibly helped her husband supply it.

2. *What would be compelling biblical reasons for a woman to get advanced seminary education?*

Some reasons could include: to be a better helper to her husband by providing him sharpening ideas, intelligent insights, and meaningful conversation; to be a good teacher of children and other women; and to be able to think for herself and give reason for the hope within her to unsaved people around her. Probably the most compelling reason for any education, however, is for her own enjoyment and amazement.

3. *Is it reconcilable with the Scriptures that women write books for men to read? How?*

The weight of authority is not the same for a book author as for a pastor.

This is the same question as whether a woman may talk to a man or advise him in regular conversation. A book is a one-sided conversation with an important disclaimer: the hearer is free to disregard and discard the book at any time. It would therefore seem that a book weighs less than a conversation.

4. *Is it possible that our western culture has negatively shaped the way we think about this subject?*

Our culture has undoubtedly shaped our thinking. The question then becomes, to what extent have we departed from a biblical ideal? In order to determine this, it seems that one needs to examine culture and the Bible in order to weed out needless cultural impositions on believers today. These cultural impositions do not merely include egalitarianism. It is not feministic to observe that most of Christianity's attitude toward women has been shaped by Greco-Roman influences rather than biblical ones. The Greeks spoke of a woman's submission to her husband in all matters; Lemuel's mother speaks of a woman acting independently of her husband (Prov. 31), and Paul speaks of the οἰκοδεσποτεῖν ruling her house (I Tim. 5:14). It is too obvious that the former rather than the latter has had the larger influence on Christian womanhood. The Greeks likewise spoke of intellectual astuteness in a female as being a monstrosity (as do some Fundamentalists), for the female intellect was by nature inferior to man's; whereas Gen. 2 defines woman as a "helper suitable" for man. The point of these observations is that every age errs in some way. We need to admit that our own age is erring on the side of egalitarianism, but I think we must also admit that it has corrected some of the ways in which nominal Christianity has erred long on the opposite side. In such a mix, traditional conventions alone are not enough for defense against egalitarianism. The text itself must be the final word.

5. *Could we picture NT women studying in a seminary? Would Paul encourage this practice?*

It would be difficult to picture anyone in the NT studying at a seminary, for such an institution was never authorized by God and would have seemed superfluous to a body of believers under the teaching ministry of thorough elders. Ideally, women ought to learn these things in her home and at her church; however, we are far from the scriptural ideal, and the lack of teaching that drives men to seminary is the same as that which drives some women there also. Those who feed on meat in other intellectual matters will not long be satisfied with milk in theological matters, especially if they are in surroundings where theological matters surface frequently. The seminary comes along to aid the church and the family so that theological conversations in those realms would be of a higher degree.

Advertisement

"And a Little Child Shall Lead Them"

Friday, December 12, 2003 - 4:30PM

Friday, December 12, 2003 - 8:00PM

Saturday, December 13, 2003 - 8:00PM

- Basilica of Saint Mary

16th and Hennepin Avenue

Minneapolis, MN

\$12 admission, group rate: please see Andrea Brown or Katrina Zartman and pay them by November 26th. Literature will include familiar and well-loved anthems and carols of Advent and Christmas, as well as newly composed and lesser-known works. Repertoire will include Franz Biebl's "Ave Maria", the Quempas Carol, and the Moravian anthem "Morning Star", along with works by Jeffrey Jarrett and others. These performances will also include the premiere performance of "Blessed Are the Peace

Makers” by Anne Kilstofte, commissioned by the National Lutheran Choir for the 2003 Christmas Festivals.

Doctrinal Fidelity

Introduction needed . . . still.

Concerning the Scriptures,

We believe that the Holy Scriptures are God’s Word, true, God-breathed; infallible and inerrant in whatever topics they address. They are man’s sufficient and necessary authority for faith and practice. [They are complete, consisting in the sixty-six books of the Old and New Testaments.]*

Concerning God the Father,

We believe that God is a Spirit, revealed to us as He reveals Himself, existing perfect, unchangeable, incomprehensible, infinite, and sovereign. God is the self-existing Designer, Creator, and Sustainer of all things. His name is the LORD, inexpressibly glorious in holiness and worthy of all possible honor, confidence, and love. God is holy, true, righteous, good, loving, just, gracious, and merciful. God is omniscient, and His omniscience extends to all things past, present, and future. God is a Trinity, one God in essence, yet three distinct and unique Persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. God alone, being one, is worthy of man’s worship.

Concerning God the Son,

We believe that the Lord Jesus Christ is very God and very man, eternally begotten of the Father, one Person existing indissolubly in two natures. We believe He was born of the virgin Mary and lived a sinless life. We believe in His substitutionary death upon the cross, His burial, and His bodily resurrection. He is now seated at the right hand of God the Father and will return bodily to the earth to judge the living and the dead. His kingdom shall have no end.

Concerning God the Holy Spirit,

We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life. He is coequal with God the Father and God the Son. He is a distinct Person proceeding from the Father and the Son, who with the Father and the Son together is worshiped and glorified; who spake by the prophets. The Holy Spirit imparts ordinate affections, resulting in the fruits of holiness.

Note: Jill would like include something about creation taking place in six literal days. Discuss this at the bash.

Concerning Mankind,

We believe that man was created as a distinct person in God’s image, in a state of sinlessness, for the purpose of bringing glory to God. Adam’s rebellion plunged all of mankind into sin. He [Man?] therefore not only lost that original righteousness, but is naturally inclined to all manner of evil, being conceived in sin, and brought forth in iniquity. Therefore, every man justly deserves God’s wrath and damnation.

Concerning Salvation,

We believe that man’s salvation from the just wrath of God is according to God’s causal foreordination, predestination, and effectual calling. Man is saved through faith alone by which the righteousness of Christ is imputed to him. God does this for his own glory and according to his sovereign pleasure.

Concerning the Church,

We believe in the church invisible, holy, and universal, the bride and body of Christ, consisting of those saved through faith in the gospel of Jesus Christ, for the purpose of worshipping God.