

Voices: My position on Law's list of SBC churches

April 3, 2023

Mike Law Jr., senior pastor of Arlington Baptist Church in Virginia, with wide support among some members of the Southern Baptist Convention, recently posted a list of churches affiliated with the denomination who have women on staff with “pastor” in their titles.

This move by Law and others in the SBC is a continuous part of their movement to control—and alienate—women who feel the call to serve in Christ's church. As a male member of a Baptist church with female ministers, I feel the need to respond.

The list against women in ministry

Law notes his list includes churches “listed on the churches.sbc.net website” and “the SBC Workspace database.” He also explains: “Local and State Associations often relate to the SBC on a national level, so there is an open question of whether they are considered to be in friendly cooperation with the Southern Baptist Convention for the purposes of seating messengers.”

Law admits he has “not examined all of the churches in the Southern Baptist Convention. These are either churches I personally discovered along the way of writing to the SBC Executive Committee, churches who disclosed their female pastors to me through correspondence, or churches who were brought to my attention through colleagues.”

In [a previous letter](#), Law called for unity in the SBC on the issue of women as pastors. To that end, he [made a motion](#) at the 2022 SBC annual meeting

to amend the SBC's constitution to define a church in "friendly cooperation" as one that "does not affirm, appoint, or employ a woman as pastor of any kind." More than 2,000 people have signed their support of this letter.

Law and those in the SBC who agree with him seem to want to relegate women out of pastoral roles. While I believe they base their positions in Scripture, there are many examples in the Bible of women leading God's people and men affirming that leadership.

Paul on women in ministry

Paul's first letter to Timothy is used as one argument against women leading in ministry—specifically teaching and having authority over men in the church. Reading Paul's letter so as to exclude women in authoritative/teaching roles is inconsistent with the Pauline corpus in general.

The SBC has, for a majority of its history, had no quarrel with women teaching children and being missionaries. Law's list—which contains many children and family pastors—only proves his issue is semantic, which does not constitute a faithful reading of Paul.

The word Paul uses in the 1 Timothy passage concerning women not being permitted to teach is *didasko*—"to teach" (1 Timothy 2:12 NRSV). The issue here for many who advocate for women in ministry is that Paul consistently refers to women who are in church leadership in his other letters.

Paul uses many words to describe women who were serving the churches he wrote to throughout his ministry. For examples, I'll use his letter to the Romans.

Paul refers to the woman Phoebe with the title

diakonon—“servant/deacon/minister”—during the concluding chapter of Romans (Romans 16:1). In the same chapter, Paul describes a woman named Junia as an apostle, using the phrase *episemoi en tois apostolois*—“notable/well-known among the apostles” (Romans 16:7).

In this usage of *apostolois*—“apostles”—Paul has ranked Junia as a prominent leader in the church, as seen in his first letter to the Corinthians. In 1 Corinthians 12:28, Paul ranks church leadership in such a manner: *proton apostolous, deutron prophetas, triton didaskalous*—“first apostles, second prophets, third teachers.” Thus, Paul ranks this woman named Junia over the prophets and teachers of the church.

Paul also mentions in 1 Corinthians 11:5 that women are able to prophesy. The word *propheteuoussa*—“to prophesy”—exists in the space of the church, not just for men, but for women, as well. This means Paul affirms women to the second line of church leadership, as well, using his ranking from 1 Corinthians 12.

Old and New Testament women

Throughout the Old Testament, women are viewed in leadership positions in ancient Israel. While there are occasions in which female leadership in the Old Testament is not portrayed positively, these examples should not be used to undermine the positive influence female leaders embody in the Old Testament.

Miriam (Exodus 15:20) and Huldah (2 Kings 22:14) are called *neviah*—“prophetess.” Deborah is the female judge who led Israel—she “was judging Israel” (Judges 4:4)—and is called *neviah*—“prophetess.”

Furthermore, one must consider the prophet Joel’s words from God: “I will pour out my spirit on all flesh; your sons *and your daughters* shall prophesy” (Joel 2:28 NRSV, emphasis mine).

Jesus allowed women to serve during his ministry. Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of James are said to have “followed him and *kai diekonoun auto*—“provided/served him” (Mark 15:40-41). They were among the followers at the death scene of Jesus (v. 40).

Women followed Jesus along with the Twelve who *diekonoun autois*—“provided/served”—“them from their resources/goods” (Luke 8:1-3).

Jesus spoke to the Samaritan woman at the well (John 4:27-30, 39-42). Upon giving her townsfolk her *martyrouses*—“testimony/declaration/solemn appeal” (John 4:39)—people were saved by him.

The Bible mentions women in ministry of all types in many instances. Paul, whose texts have played a significant role in the argument against women in ministry, affirms women to church leadership. Ancient Israel had prominent women leaders. Jesus our Lord allowed women to be a part of his ministry.

Messengers to the 2023 SBC annual meeting in June will vote on whether to “oust” the churches on Law’s list. If Law and his supporters are successful, these churches will continue to be faithful to the message of Scripture.

Let the ministry of women be a light in the darkness, and let these women called by God be a city on a hill that cannot be shaken. May the Lord bless women in ministry and church leadership—in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

EDITOR’S NOTE (June 20, 2023): A link to Mike Law’s list was removed after the list was used to harass women and churches named in it.

REVISED (April 13, 2023): The original article published April 3, 2023, was revised by the author to provide additional references and clarifications.

Additionally, Editor Eric Black transposed the Greek terms diakonon (referring to Phoebe) and apostolois (referring to Junia) in the original published article. That error has been corrected.

EDITOR'S NOTE: The two documents linked in this article were downloaded, respectively, from a [Google Docs](#) file shared by Mike Law and the "[What is a Pastor](#)" [website](#). Baptist Standard does not vouch for the accuracy of either document, both of which may be updated or taken down by their author at any time.

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