

Voices: A female seminary professor's response to John Piper: 'Is There a Place for Female Professors at Seminary?'

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Earlier this week, John Piper posted an article/interview in which he answers the question, "[Is There a Place for Female Professors at Seminary?](#)"

When I first saw the article pop up in my newsfeed, I had a feeling I knew what it would say even before I clicked. But as a female professor of ministry and scripture at a Baptist university and seminary, I could not stop my curiosity.

I would like to address some of the points that Piper makes in that article.

But before I do, I will say that Piper's article is grounded in his interpretation of the Bible to limit the pastoral office to men. I have a different interpretation. In this brief article, I will not rehearse the detailed reasons why I, and many others, including some Baptists, interpret certain passages differently than he does.

However, I feel that I owe it to my students to respond.

We need a diversity of voices

First, I agree with Piper that seminary professors should model pastoral vision and should seek to shape the hearts, as well as the minds, of students. Most professors would tell you that they see their work as a calling and as a service to the church. Forming, rather than informing, the next generation of leaders in Christ's church is our goal.

However, I greatly disagree with Piper that people who are "excluded" from a certain role cannot train, model and inspire people to execute the mission of that role.

Throughout history, certain people have been "excluded" from various occupations and leadership roles. If those people had not spoken out, inspired, modeled and even sometimes covertly trained the people who hold power, there would be no leaders anywhere in the United States except white men.

We need a diversity of voices informing the next generation of pastoral leaders so that pastoral vision might expand. For example, how can white men teach other white men about the needs of black women?

If we maintain a view that whosoever believes Christ may be saved, then we must listen to the voices of those different than us so that we can share Christ much farther than our own backyards.

And, most importantly, we must acknowledge that no person is perfectly qualified to be a pastor or church leader ... which means no person, NO PERSON, is perfectly qualified to teach pastors.

We are all sinners in need of grace. The moment we decide that something about us makes us worthier than a large percentage of the population is the moment when we need to be reminded how Moses felt about his calling,

and that Christ alone is perfect.

Is sharing Christ's love a 'man's field'?

The second point Piper makes that I will address is that he says, "The issue ... is not the competence of women teachers or intelligence or knowledge or pedagogical skill. ... The issue here at the seminary level is largely the nature of the seminary teaching office."

In many arguments against women in church leadership, a similar kind of statement is made. For example, "It's not about how well you preach, but it's the fact that you are a woman."

In my opinion, this is illogical. Why in the world would God not want all people to use all their gifts so that Christ's message increases? If a woman is a skilled teacher, why would God not want pastors to learn from someone who has the ability to teach them to think more deeply?

The [Hardin-Simmons University Student Handbook](#) defines university policies for students, and it also indicates that its parameters apply to faculty, staff and administrators.

In the section about sexual harassment, it states that beyond conduct of a sexual nature, "Sexual harassment also includes gender-based harassment, which may include acts of verbal, nonverbal, or physical aggression, intimidation, or hostility based on gender or gender-stereotyping, even if those acts do not involve conduct of a sexual nature."

An example is provided to help students understand what is meant. "A male staff assistant in a biology lab repeatedly makes disparaging comments about women such as 'science is a man's field' and 'women don't have the capacity to understand.'"

While I recognize this is not a perfect analogy and there are some nuances

here, if it is sexual harassment to tell a woman she does not have the capacity to understand God's good creation through science, is it different to tell a woman that she does not have the capacity to understand a "man's field" of sharing Christ's love to God's good creation of humanity through ministry?

So to my students and potential students I say this.

I am not perfect. I make mistakes. But I am doing my best to be faithful to my calling and to use my gifts accordingly. May God bless our efforts to expand our pastoral visions together so that, humbly, we might have the opportunity to participate in the divine task of furthering God's community on earth.

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