

# Voices: MacArthur on Moore and women in ministry

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The Apostle Paul commends Phoebe of Cenchreae, the female deacon (Greek: *diakonos*), as the courier and first interpreter of his magisterial Epistle to the Romans. He said she had done much for many.

In the same way, John F. MacArthur Jr., pastor-teacher of Grace Community Church in Sun Valley, Calif. as well as a well-known radio preacher, has done much for many, including me. I still recall reading and learning from MacArthur's *The Gospel According to Jesus* while a seminary student some 30 years ago.

MacArthur turned 80 years old this past summer. This year—2019—marks his 50th year of pulpit ministry at Grace Community Church. This ministerial milestone is being celebrated throughout the year by his syndicated radio broadcast *Grace to You*, most recently last week at Grace Community Church at a Truth Matters Conference on the sufficiency of Scripture.

## MacArthur's admonition to Moore and more

During [a panel discussion](#) at this conference on Oct. 17, emcee Todd Friel asked MacArthur to describe in a word the well-known Bible teacher and preacher Beth Moore. After having associated her with the term “heretic,” MacArthur opted to forego a reductionistic description to offer the uncharitable admonition, “Go home.”

Applause erupted from his erstwhile supporters in the audience. Once the

clapping ceased, not unlike other things in MacArthur's theology, the pastor-teacher went on to say: "There is no case that can be made biblically for a woman preacher. Period. Paragraph. End of discussion."

Unfortunately, the discussion did continue, with fellow panelist Phil Johnson describing Moore as "narcissistic" and panelist Mike Riccardi affirming MacArthur's contention regarding Moore's preaching.

Unable to bridle his tongue (James 3:1-12), MacArthur went on to compare Moore to a well-spoken, persuasive jeweler hawking wares on television and to lambaste the Southern Baptist Convention for capitulating to broader ambient culture, not least the #MeToo movement.

## **A more helpful question and response**

Even if MacArthur were to be correct in his assertions and assessments, in his disparaging remarks and condescending comments regarding Moore he fails to follow the very Scripture he proclaims.

A less personal, more insightful question Friel could have put to MacArthur would have been: "What roles did women play in the respective ministries of Jesus and Paul?" In order to answer biblically, MacArthur would have had to respond, "Any number."

Instead of going home, appreciable numbers of women followed Jesus, supported Jesus and were taught by Jesus in their homes, even as they helped to bury Jesus and to offer winsome witness to his resurrection, despite the doubts of 11 male disciples (see, for example, Luke 8:1-3; 10:38-41; 23:55-56; 24:1-12).

Turning to Paul, one might note there also were a number of women actively involved in his mission including Phoebe, a deacon; Prisca, a coworker; and Junia, prominent among the apostles and perhaps as an

apostle. (see Romans 16:1-3, 7; compare 1 Corinthians 15:6).

In addition to these three women, one also might note the names of these eight female coworkers of the Paul: Lydia, Tryphena, Tryphosa, Persis, Euodia, Syntyche, Nympha and Apphia (see Acts 16:14-15; Romans 16:12, Philippians 4:2; Colossians 4:15; and Philemon 2).

## **Part of MacArthur's theology of women in ministry**

To be sure, there are Pauline passages that preclude women from speaking in a gathered assembly of Christ-followers (see especially 1 Corinthians 14:34-35; 1 Timothy 2:11-15). These are undoubtedly the texts MacArthur had in mind when he declared, "There is no case that can be made biblically for a woman preacher."

That being said, there are, in fact, contextual factors shaping these particular prohibitions that careful, faithful interpreters must consider. I have written more extensively [elsewhere](#) on the subject of women in the church's ministry.

## **Biblical support for women preaching & leading in ministry**

We do well to note that in the very Bible to which MacArthur appeals, there also are texts that presuppose women will pray and prophesy or preach (see 1 Corinthians 11:2-16; compare also, for example, Numbers 11:27; Judges 4:4; 2 Kings 22:14; Nehemiah 6:14; Isaiah 8:3).

Additionally, Acts clearly indicates early women Christ-followers did prophesy, including the daughters of Philip the evangelist (Acts 21:8-9;

2:18).

Furthermore, Paul exclaims that in the Lord woman is not independent of man nor is man independent of woman, for in Christ there is neither “male and female” (1 Corinthians 11:11; Galatians 3:28).

For Paul, spiritual gifts were not determined by gender (see especially 1 Corinthians 12:7-11; compare Romans 12:6). In particular, it must be noted and acknowledged that Paul did not limit the gift of prophecy, or “forthtelling,” to men.

## **Places women have preached**

A fair and further question to ask MacArthur would be precisely what he means by the phrase “woman preacher.” Although he seemingly would preclude any and all females from anything approximating pulpit ministry, there are any number of Christ-loving, Bible-believing people who, while not supporting women as lead pastors, would warmly welcome a word of exhortation (Hebrews 13:22) from the likes of Lottie Moon and Annie Armstrong, Anne Graham Lotz and Joni Eareckson Tada, Priscilla Shirer and yes, Beth Moore.

As it happens, women have been preaching on mission fields, during Sunday gatherings and in various other Christian contexts ever since Mary Magdalene first declared to the disciples, “I have seen the Lord” (John 20:18). What would Jesus and Paul say to this? Amen, I gather. Can I get a witness?

## **A place women will preach**

Following the annual meeting of Texas Baptists in Waco next month, Baylor University’s [George W. Truett Theological Seminary](#) will host a [National](#)

[Preaching Conference](#) at the historic First Baptist Church of Waco. In addition to the likes of Alistair Begg, Tony Evans, Joel Gregory, Jimmy Mellado and Ralph West, Mary Hulst and yes, Beth Moore will be preaching.

Then and there, we will welcome Beth into our home and hearts as we listen to her expound God's holy, authoritative word. As she and her fellow ministers preach, we will pray that the Lord will give us ears to hear what the Spirit is saying to the churches (Revelation 2:7, 11, 17, 29; 3:6, 13, 22).

All are most welcome to join us as we do so, including John MacArthur.

*Todd Still is the dean and the William M. Hinson Chair of Christian Scriptures of Baylor University's Truett Theological Seminary.*