

Sermon: Women in the Pastorate?

Five Spiritual Laws

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Introduction

Campus Crusade's "Four Spiritual Laws" have been life givers in our day. This may strike some as strange, for many people associate law with burdens, prohibitions, and frustration—you *must* get a city parking sticker; you *must not* drive over 55 on that stretch of road. Regulations mount, and you find yourself unable to build what you want, swim when you want, and picnic where you want. There are taxes at every turn—property, school, excise, income (state and federal), and sales. The law seems to be a strait jacket. Where's the life in that?

Of course, without law, we would have no community, safety, commerce, or public institutions. Take those away, and you lose a lot of the richness of life, not to mention a lot of lives. Good law is, in fact, a life giver.

The Ten Commandments, especially when cast in the "thou shalt not's" of the King James Version, can seem cold, and one might be tempted to think he could spark up his life by circumventing them. But as someone has put it, "You don't break the Ten Commandments; you break yourself on the Ten Commandments." Sin as you please, and you won't put a dent in these laws. The only dents will appear in you.

Imagine a senior class's choosing to test the livability of the Decalogue. Half will strain to obey the Ten; the other half will ignore and even defy them. The graduates agree to meet in 20 years to assess the results. Of course, the meeting would never occur. The lawbreakers would be long dead

or imprisoned. And even those who've not yet gotten around to murder and theft would have ruined themselves through lies and infidelities; their souls withered through covetings and blasphemies.

We may chafe when God gives us scriptural direction, but we had better cling to his instructions. We may not die from disobedience, but in disobedience, we will surely miss the abundant life.

Paul says some seemingly hard, lawlike things in this passage, but we believers in scriptural authority, in biblical inerrancy, not only accept them; we give thanks for them, even as we try to understand them. This is the way of life.

I urge, then, first of all, that requests, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for everyone—for kings and all those in authority, that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness. This is good, and pleases God our Savior, who wants all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth. For there is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all men—the testimony given in its proper time. And for this purpose I was appointed a herald and an apostle—I am telling the truth, I am not lying—and a teacher of the true faith to the Gentiles.

I want men everywhere to lift up holy hands in prayer, without anger or disputing. I also want women to dress modestly, with decency and propriety, not with braided hair or gold or pearls or expensive clothes, but with good deeds, appropriate for women who profess to worship God.

A woman should learn in quietness and full submission. I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man; she must be silent. For Adam was formed first, then Eve. And Adam was not the one deceived; it was the woman who was deceived and became a sinner. But women will be saved through childbearing—if they continue in faith, love and holiness with propriety (1 Timothy 2:1-15 NIV).

Let me suggest that we find here five spiritual laws concerning the role of women, laws the church ignores or defies to its own peril.

We Should Cherish Human Authority over Us (Verses 1-2)

Paul uses four words to speak of prayer for rulers—requests, prayers, intercession, and thanksgiving. The first three are no problem; the fourth, thanksgiving, is more of a challenge. After all, Paul wrote this in the time of Nero. You can easily imagine praying,—“God, please change his heart, please send him godly counselors, please give him time to repent.” But how do you give thanks for a murderous tyrant?

Above all, you recognize that human authority is a divinely ordained ministry. Without it, we would all collapse in desperation. Have you ever been on a committee that took two hours to do thirty minutes’ work—and fellowship was not the filler? It was all rabbit chasing, nit-picking, hand-holding, head scratching, therapeutic venting, and dead horse beating. The problem was a leader who could not or would not lead, who wouldn’t keep things on track, referee pointless disputes, interject clarifications, and cut short ramblings. He thought he was demonstrating gracious accommodation. In fact, he was wasting a dozen man hours his committee members could have spent with

their families or renewing themselves for other tasks. He was the proverbial man “who couldn’t organize a two-car funeral.”

What heart has not cried out, “God, please let someone take charge, even if they get it wrong!” Or as comedian Jerry Clower’s coon hunting friend John Eubanks cried out from the treetop, where he was gripped in a death battle with a lynx, “Just shoot up here amongst us! One of us has got to have relief.”

Leaders, and not just lovers of money, are pierced through with many sorrows; otherwise, they wouldn’t need so many prayers, requests, and intercessions. It’s a strange thing that so many want to lead. Of course, there are those who jump in out of a sense of mercy and frustration over the mess the community suffers at the hands of incompetents. But many simply want positions for the sake of their own mobility, aggrandizement, perks, and income. Are they in for a surprise! Before long, they’ll be begging for requests, prayers, and intercessions.

After I’d left seven years of college teaching to attend seminary, someone asked me how I could suffer simply sitting in class, taking notes and tests. I said it was wonderful. Even after thousands of classroom teaching hours, I still felt the butterflies of pressure when I approached the rostrum. The professor is responsible for the content, the learning environment, and the suitability of tests and assignments. He needs to organize and pace himself so as to be done on time and not ten minutes early. With an eye to student evaluations and future enrollments, he’s wary of student boredom and upset. When he’s wracked by a cold, he must still be both audible and perky. When he’s worried about things outside of school, he must act as though the class at hand is the most

exciting subject of the day. And this is the pleasant part. As one Christian college colleague once told the president in a faculty discussion of professorial salaries, "Mr. President, please understand, I teach for free. But you still don't pay me enough to grade."

It is hard to describe the agony of working through malformed student papers, pen in hand. If you attend to the things a normal editor would note, you slow to a snail's pace, and the stack of papers to your side seems to grow rather than shrink. But that is not the end of it. You brace yourself for the huff and puff, for the wounded looks and comments, for the little contests over points, for belaboring the obvious. And thus battered, you join the ranks of professors who've micromanaged grade inflation over the decades.

So how did I feel as a seminary student? Liberated.

Thank you, Lord, that this professor has spent hours in preparation, that he's the one with the case of nerves, that it is no fault of mine if he's boring or ill-prepared, that he's the one who must read my hastily-done paper, that he's the one who has to play the heavy when a student wants to take the final early so that he can get back for a rehearsal dinner or his younger brother's first varsity football game. Please help him to be helpful to us students. Please give him joy in teaching us. Please help us to do well enough on our work to give him a sense of accomplishment. Please relieve him of worries about his family, health, income, and such. Thank you, Lord, for stirring church members to pay his salary so that I can learn about the Bible at very little cost.

This sermon is about what feminists call "patriarchy," but it is good to begin with a look at the blessings of "archy." For it may well be the case that the feminist upset is

more fundamentally opposed to the "archy" than to the "patri."

Paul could have simply cast civic obedience and cooperation as techniques for disarming critics, for keeping the government at bay, but his was not a message of pure strategy and manipulation. It involved genuine thankfulness for authority. If then, we resent authority, we cut ourselves off from the thankfulness that God commands.

The Great Commission Is the Thing (Verses 3-7)

If gaining authority is not the Christian program, what is our assignment? Very simply, the Great Commission. Paul insisted that they not embroil themselves in silly distractions, seditions, fulminations, and wranglings.

Of course, there is a time to vex the rulers. Peter and John did so in Acts 4:1-22. Of course, there is a time for anger. Jesus showed it when he overthrew the moneychangers' tables. Of course, there is a time for social action. William Wilberforce is honored for leading the Parliamentary charge against the British slave trade. But this and other Scripture (including Romans 13:1-7) clearly teach that the burden of proof is on the one who would intentionally introduce social conflict.

Yes, there are social wrongs. Yes, good adjustments might be made. But the worldwide preaching of the gospel must not be neglected or hindered by attention to trivial or petty things.

Abroad today in the land is the conviction that self-maximization is the highest good. By this standard society is obliged to provide every conceivable opportunity and freedom to make sure that only the criminal will find barriers to self-expression and personal fulfillment.

I've seen this at play in the Army. One once thought of this institution as a deterrent force, ever ready to assume a war-fighting and war-winning posture. Entrance standards were utterly insensitive, keyed only to one's ability to take up arms effectively. Color blindness, flat feet, and migraines took you out of the enlistment line, even if your desire to serve was passionate. And for those who might be indignant at exclusion, the obvious answer was that the point of the Army was not their gratification but combat readiness.

That has now changed, at least with regard to women. Social engineering and political correctness loom large in the leaders' consciousness. So that women might have the "opportunities" men have found in the military, physical fitness standards have been slackened and millions of dollars, otherwise available for military materiel, training, and pay, have been diverted to build separate bath and sleeping facilities. What does this have to do with combat prowess? Nothing. What does it have to do with placating the feminist agenda? Everything.

It is a pity when public policy and public institutions are hobbled by the extraneous. It is a sin when the church is so hobbled, yet it happens again and again. Some want to use the church to gain personal standing in the community, to exercise power denied them in society at large, to "launder" their image for the sake of courtship, to facilitate a two-income standard of living, to make business contacts, to gain a platform for their talent, or to advance a political agenda. The Great Commission can easily get lost in the shuffle. Paul was no stranger to these distractions, and he put his foot down against them here.

From his words, it is obvious that women were attempting to use the church

to "liberate" themselves from conventional, and even biblical, womanhood. Paul may have even been sympathetic to one upset or another. It's reasonable to suppose that some of the husbands were less than loving toward their wives, for he addressed that problem in Ephesians 5:22-33. But he was determined that the church not be hijacked for lesser purposes. To put it simply, a church should ask itself, regarding a planned program or activity, "Will anyone get saved?" or "Are the eternal destinies of souls in the balance?" The congregants may love their daycare center, but can they name one parent or child who has recently accepted Christ as a result of those tens of thousands of dollars invested in the activity? What if those same dollars had been invested in the Lottie Moon Christmas Offering for International Missions?

Drop the daycare from the budget, and you'll have a community explosion. Withhold the same money from the missionaries, and you won't hear a peep of protest from the foreign field. So often, the squeaky wheel gets the grease, even though the squeak is sub-Christian.

There is an ungodly squeak coming from secular feminists in our day, and that squeak has worked its way into the church. Some women are indignant that they are still barred from the pastorate in conservative churches. They reason that they are just as capable of delivering a sermon, presiding at a funeral, and counseling an engaged couple. They confidently report their pastoral calling from God, and they bemoan the world's and church's loss in the face of traditionalists' scruples. But we may reasonably ask, "Are the eternal destinies of souls in the balance?"

If women become pastors, will that open the evangelistic floodgates? If they do not, will it keep those gates shut? What of Great

Commission importance is really at stake? Are there hosts of women on the brink of salvation who would repent of their coldness toward the church and come gladly into the Kingdom once women took charge? The evidence from the United Church of Christ (where the majority of pastors/co-pastors are women), the Presbyterian Church, U.S.A. (where 42% of associate pastors are women), and the United Methodist Church (where about a fourth of clergy are women) does not encourage that conviction. And even in the few growing denominations open to women pastors, the men are taking the lead. For instance, in the Assemblies of God, only about four hundred of eleven thousand churches are pastored by women. And such traditionalist denominations as the Southern Baptist Convention, the Presbyterian Church in America, and the Evangelical Free Church, all who stand for a male clergy, have seen significant growth in the last decade. It is simply impossible to correlate healthy expansion with female leadership and stagnation with its absence.

Paul, of course, was not making pragmatic calculations. He was not saying that he opposed women pastors because they just wouldn't work out. He was saying that the notion was a bad one because it conflicted with God's best. But it's not surprising that departure from God's best way would result in less than God's best fruitfulness.

The very words of this text provide a contemporary example of pointless distraction from the main thing. The NIV reads, "our Savior, who wants all *men* to be saved." (v. 4) and "the *man* Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all *men*" (v. 5). The TNIV reads "who wants all *people* to be saved" and "Christ Jesus, himself

human, who gave himself as a ransom for all *people*." Well, of course, Jesus gave himself as a ransom for all people and wants all people to be saved, and, of course, Jesus' humanity, and not just his maleness, was central to the incarnation. But who thought otherwise? Where are the women who thought the atonement had passed them by because Jesus, a man, had put his saving focus exclusively on males? Where are the women who missed heaven because of this misunderstanding?

Of course, there are none. There is no real epistemological problem here. Indeed, there is no evangelistic problem. The meaning is clear, and any woman who would balk at faith because the wording was not to her modern tastes is a doubtful candidate for salvation.

When visiting the offices of the International Bible Society in Colorado Springs with some seminary professors, one administrator told us that the Bible had a hard time getting a hearing among the young people of England because of its maleness. So it seemed only gracious and even evangelistic to adjust the translation to their tastes. But if ever there was a slippery slope, this is it—sensitivity-driven translation. And if ever there was a thoughtless provocation in Evangelicalism, this is it—clearing up confusions nobody has to palliate irritations few have and to introduce irritations many will have. It would simply be one more instance of the distracting contentiousness Paul condemned, one more instance of worldly concerns diverting the church from its central task.

The TNIV's representatives say they are simply interested in accuracy and not political correctness. A quick visit to the Council of Biblical Manhood and Womanhood web site will show that more and

other than accuracy is afoot. And the coincidence between the hegemony of secular feminism in the culture and the appearance of this feminist-sensitive translation is stunning. One is reminded of the timing of the Mormon revelations that polygamy was defunct and that blacks could be priests. The first happened to come when Utah was seeking statehood, the latter in the wake of the civil rights movement. Very convenient, as is our current fascination with “accuracy” in translation.

The Fall Is Still in Effect, Even in Church (Verses 8-10)

There are those who discount male headship as being the result of the Fall. And just as we should not deny anesthesia to women in childbirth, we should not force Eve to endure the tyranny of the curse of male dominance. After all, we are redeemed people, with new hearts. We can all work in glad consensus, now that we’re regenerate.

Actually, as Paul notes, male leadership precedes the Fall. But there is more. Paul is no Romanticist when it comes to the fellowship of the redeemed. We continue to carry a lot of baggage, and that baggage must be handled in ways not necessary in heaven to come. One who is intoxicated with visions of the new creation’s virtue is likely to miss the fact that God’s people need a great deal of “teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness” (2 Tim 3:16). And God has designated men as the chief teachers, rebukers, correctors, and trainers.

Consider Paul’s directive that women dress modestly. A liberated church member might argue that it is nobody’s business what women wear, and that if the men of the church catch themselves peering at cleavage, it is their problem. They have no

business blaming the woman for their failings, failings which they, as mature Christians, should be able to overcome. They have no right to blame the victim of their overheated imaginations.

The same thing could be said of Paul’s word of disapproval for expensive clothes. If someone else’s designer labels intimidate you or make you jealous, it is your problem. You should grow up and realize that another’s self expression is not your concern; you should harness your envy and get over it.

Paul would have none of this. He knows our weaknesses, and he teaches that, this side of heaven, we’re going to have to police ourselves mightily. The Fall is still in the church, including the part that would tempt women to be callously indifferent to the chaos that would result from their unbridled quest for self-expression and self-fulfillment.

The Creation Mandate Is Still in Effect, Even in the Church (Verse 15)

Those of us in the liberal arts tradition are particularly appreciative of Genesis 1:28, part of what many call the “Cultural Mandate.” God’s people are not to become hermits, waiting in holiness for the Lord’s return. Rather, they are to “seize ground” in and through academia, government, the arts, commerce, the military. All truth is God’s truth, all of earth his domain.

Some call it the “Creation Mandate,” and I think this highlights an important point some miss. They slight the instruction to “be fruitful and increase in number.” Perhaps they think that “zero population growth” is necessary in an overcrowded world, that we’ve already fulfilled the fruitfulness clause (Actually, all six-billion-plus of the world’s popula-

tion could be comfortably seated in Delaware). Be that as it may, it is not at all clear that Christians have provided the optimum number of children to this earth. Indeed, their “market share” of world population is shrinking. One could quite easily apply this mandate to say, “Children born to Christian parents are a divine priority.” This does not mean that each Christian couple is to have as many children as possible any more than it means they are required to kill as many mosquitoes as possible. But they should hold procreation in high esteem and do their fair share.

It is obvious from this text that certain women in the church were set against this directive. They considered their newfound faith a ticket out of the rigors of childbearing and child raising. They counted cheap what God had declared grand and pressing.

When Paul said, “But women will be saved through childbearing—if they continue in faith, love and holiness with propriety,” he did not introduce a new plan of salvation, any more than Jesus introduced a new one in his conversation with the rich young ruler. The fellow had asked, “Good teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?” After reviewing his fealty to the Ten Commandments, Jesus then said, “You still lack one thing. Sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me.” This directive does not teach salvation by charity and nullify the *sola fide* of the Reformation. No, it was Jesus’ way of putting his finger on the individual’s nerve, the point of greatest resistance to repentance and to his Lordship. By this same standard, a man who professes faith but eschews baptism is a specious convert. And the minister who presses the point of baptism is not an advocate of baptismal regen-

eration but a concerned “physician,” who sees the flush of disobedience in the cheeks of a false professor.

The Difference between Men and Women Is Momentous (Verses 11-14)

The difference between men and women is fundamental to Creation. Genesis 1:27 says, “male and female created he them.” It does not say, “short and tall,” “bright and dull,” “sanguine and melancholy,” or “hardy and feeble.” All of these, and countless other distinctions, are found among humans. But this was the one highlighted in Genesis.

Our society is obsessed with erasing or trivializing this distinction. We’re supposed to cheer when a girl is selected for the varsity football team or the smoke-jumpers. We’re supposed to roll our eyes when a female sports reporter is denied access to the men’s locker room. But Paul’s words are counter-culture both to our contemporary fascination with erasing gender distinctions and to those feminist fore-runners he found in the church of his day.

“Birth order” and “sin order” were significant features of the difference between men and women. One might reasonably ask what that had to do with Paul’s and other men’s authority in the church. After all, Paul was physically born and spiritually born again years after some of the women to whom he wrote. And he surely preceded and surpassed other women in his audience in sin. He even called himself “the worst of sinners” (1 Tim 1:15). So why would these women need to defer to him?

Well, the issue is not the relative merits of individual men and women, but the very framing, launching, and navigation of the genders through their first representatives, Adam and Eve. God has written a play, if

you will, and the appearance, roles, and character of the characters are set. This is not improvisational theater, where all the actors are thrown on the stage at once, given a concept, and turned loose for his fascination and entertainment.

But where is the freedom if our lines are set? Simply this: That unlike the play you see at your local theater, the characters of God's drama are perfectly at home in their parts. Recently, there was an ugly incident at Comiskey Park. A drunken father/son duo vaulted onto the field and pummeled the Kansas City Royals' first base coach. They weren't playing thugs; they were thugs. They felt no horror as they watched themselves leap over the fence. There was no sense of bemused distance as they observed their own behavior. These were hooligans playing hooligans, and doing it well. Indeed, all of us at one time are hooligans playing hooligans more or less discretely. And then some, by God's grace, become regenerates playing regenerates.

Our circumstances are also God's doing. Shakespeare's Henry V would not have delivered the stirring St. Crispin's Day speech were he not facing near certain death on the eve of the Battle of Agincourt. Indeed, he would not have been Henry V at all had not Henry IV and Mary Bohun met and mated. This and a million other things came to pass to put him on that French plain on that fifteenth century evening. And none of these millions of things escaped God's notice and superintendence. God is sovereign, and when history happens, whether in Eden or France, it is not willy nilly or meaningless. It is fraught with significance. And Paul duly notes this. Why does Henry play the lead and Salisbury or Warwick a supporting part? Were they lesser men? Not at all. It is because the playwright made it so.

Did Eve sin first because she was made weaker in certain ways or because God arbitrarily scripted her to do so? It really doesn't matter. He's the playwright, and all that follows in his play is according to his good and perfect pleasure.

Given this difference, Paul then applies it to the work of the church. He says that women must not teach or have authority over a man. In our day, that limits God-called and gifted women to a student pool of only three billion people, the number of women on earth. Actually, it's more than that, for women are perfectly free to teach boys. In America alone, that adds twenty million to their classroom.

Many find fulfillment in ministry to seniors, youth, military personnel, truckers, Arabs, or sports figures, yet none of these groups represents as much as a quarter of the population. Yet these ministers are perfectly happy with their "niche." How much more content one should be if the "niche" is over half the world. She will never run out of potential pupils and team members if the Great Commission is her passion. She will, however, face frustration if her own Great Ambition is her passion.

From the Women's Christian Temperance Union (WCTU) to Mothers Against Drunk Driving (MADD), women have organized to do great things. In Southern Baptist circles, Lottie Moon, Annie Armstrong, Dixie Jackson, Mary Hill Davis, and a host of other women have had great impact on Great Commission causes, all without supervising men. And the woman who frets about strictures on her freedom to teach and exercise authority is like a woman who could live in Eden itself and yet fret that she couldn't eat from the fruit of a certain tree.

Do we think God cruel when he calls a missionary to give his life to reaching the

people of Java and not the people of Sweden? Do we simmer with resentment when that same missionary suffers spiritual dryness as he flees from Surabaya or Bandung to Upsulla or Stockholm? Do we count God arbitrary when he forces Jonah to concentrate on the Ninevites and not the Cypriots or Egyptians? Not at all. It is a wonderful thing to be given direction by the Lord and to sense his feedback when we stray from that particular direction.

As an interesting sidelight, we might note the impact of this passage on the current “openness of God” debate. There are those who say that God can only make an educated guess about the future, that man is utterly free to chart his own course, and that God must work with eventualities as we hand them to him. On this model, God is not unlike the anxious lottery player who tunes in at 10:00 p.m. to see which of the numbered balls, dancing on air in the plexiglass box, will spring out to be counted. “Oh! So it’s Eve who sins first. Well, that changes everything.”

On the other hand, when we understand that God is Lord of history, that he shapes genders, individuals, and circumstances—clay in the potter’s hands—as he pleases, then we, with Paul, know that Genesis is not only true but normative. It was no accident that Eve was either more deceivable than Adam or that Eve’s circumstances were more seductive than Adam’s or both. There are no accidents.

Conclusion

I have been and am subject to a great many laws. The Selective Service and Training Act pressed on me during the Vietnam War years. The Sixteenth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution catches my attention every year around April 15. The Illinois Vehicle Code forbids me to drive 80

mph down Chicago’s six-lane Lakeshore Drive. Evanston City Code penalizes me if I park on the west side of the street on Monday night. There are times when all these are irritants.

But each of these laws has been a great source of life for me. Because of the draft, I chose R.O.T.C. in college and spent 28 years I wouldn’t trade in the Reserves. When driving up I-94 toward Wisconsin, I spy the Navy’s Blue Angels practicing for the Chicago Air and Water Show, and I’m grateful my income tax dollars have helped sustain a strong highway system and military force. When I give visitors directions to the Art Institute, I’m pleased they won’t have to negotiate a host of breakneck speeders on Lake Shore Drive. And I’m thankful for the way that city parking regulations insure we’ll have clean streets and snow removal when the blizzards hit.

Christians can spend their lives chafing at restrictions, whether from the Ten Commandments, the Sermon on the Mount, or the Epistles. Or they can give thanks for biblical distinctions and directives, confident that the God who revealed them is the loving God who will make them “all they’re meant to be.”