

What does the Bible Really Teach about Women Leading in the Church?

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The Making of a Leader

1 Timothy 2:8-15

If you talk with secular people who are upset with Christianity and upset with the church, one of the charges that is frequently hurled against the church is that the Bible oppresses women! How can you believe in a book that denies the full equality of women and men? How can you in the 21st century believe in a book that says that women are not allowed to lead in your church or be ordained or preach to men? What a Neanderthal viewpoint! How backward can you be?

It would be a lot easier to deal with this anti-church objection except that many conservative Christians who love God and believe in the Bible also believe that the Bible forbids women from leading in the church, from being ordained as pastors or from preaching, at least in a mixed group of men and women. In this strange alliance – secular opponents of Christianity and many conservative Christians both agree that God of the Bible created a hierarchy of men and women - denying full equality to women and creating a system that only allows men to preach and to lead in church, but never women.

There is also in the church a very large group of people who have a high view of scriptural authority, who take the Bible with deadly seriousness, who say that the Bible nowhere forbids women in the 21st century from preaching in church or being ordained as pastors or senior pastors or becoming church planters or missionaries.

Something that has concerned me over the past 25 years is the incoherence of church practice as it applies to women. There are churches that permit women to “share” from the Bible for an hour, but forbid women from “teaching.” Or women can teach so long as they were “under the covering of their husbands,” (whatever that means). One of the most famous women Bible teachers in America – whose DVD’s have been viewed by millions of people – is supposed to be teaching “under the covering” of her husband whose name no one knows. Or women are allowed to preach and lead on the mission field in Africa or South America or Asia, but they can’t do those things here at home. This last practice, in essence, is saying that those people on the mission field are not fully adult or fully human.

In one particular denomination, a very prominent woman was permitted to preach from the floor of the convention hall, but she wasn’t permitted to stand on the stage. There is even one denomination that permits women to preach from the pulpit on the right side of the stage, but never from the pulpit on the left. One seminary prepares women

to teach, but never to be ordained as pastors. Another denomination permits women to be senior pastors, but never bishops.

Now, if you can keep all of these different rules straight in your mind, you are a better person than I am. The most likely conclusion to draw from such differing and incoherent rules is that some churches set the standard for permissible roles for women based upon their congregations' subjective feelings of comfort rather than a careful study of the scriptures.

A woman named Rita wrote to me and said that from the moment she came to Christ, she believed she was called to ministry. The day after she received Christ she led someone else to Jesus. She went to a seminary and was trained, but the church she joined would not permit women to be pastors. They strung her along for years allowing her to teach in youth ministry, to be an administrator, and to work with other women. They even gave her a ministry license, but they refused to give her the title of "pastor." She was a licensed minister of the gospel, but not a pastor.

Rita said that the new pastor of her church says that he might permit women to have the title of "pastor," but he is still deciding on that. She's been waiting for the past year for him to make a decision. My heart breaks for women like Rita who are rejected from church leadership not because of any character defect or want of gifting or calling, but simply on the basis of gender.

So today, as I continue in this series on leadership from the New Testament book of 1 Timothy, my message is simply titled "What Does the Bible Really Teach about Women in Leadership?"

Let's pray.

In your outlines I've provided a translation of 1 Timothy 2:8-15 that I've borrowed from a book that I have found to be the very best book I have ever read dealing with some of the tough passages regarding men and women in the Bible. It's called *Man and Woman One in Christ* by Philip Payne.

We have some copies of this book in our bookstore, but I do need to warn you that it is somewhat technical. In many parts, it would be helpful if you were able to at least read New Testament Greek. Here is Dr. Philip Payne's translation of 1 Timothy 2:

1 Timothy 2:8-15 (Phillip Payne translation)

⁸Therefore I want the men everywhere to pray, lifting up holy hands without anger or disputing. ⁹Similarly, I want the women to dress modestly, with decency and propriety, adorning themselves, not with elaborate hairstyles and gold or pearls or expensive clothes, ¹⁰but with good deeds, appropriate for women who profess to worship God.

¹¹ A woman should learn in quietness and all submission. ¹² I am not permitting a woman to teach with self-assumed authority over a man; she must be quiet. ¹³ For Adam was formed first, then Eve. ¹⁴ And Adam was not deceived; it was the woman who was deceived and became a transgressor. ¹⁵ But she will be saved through the Childbirth—if she continues in faith, love and holiness with propriety.

Many people who have read 1 Timothy 2 have concluded that Paul is not just speaking to a local situation in Ephesus and giving particular temporary counsel to a church in crisis, rather Paul is forbidding every church for all time whatever their culture from allowing women to preach or lead in the church. We'll get into the details of 1 Timothy 2 in just a moment – what I believe it actually teaches. But as a preliminary matter, let me offer just two reasons why 1 Timothy 2 should not and cannot be read as prohibiting women for all time from leading or teaching in the church.

First

If 1 Timothy 2 forbids women from teaching or leading men then it contradicts Old Testament examples

In other words, if God who inspired Holy Scripture is offended by women leading and teaching men then we should find no example in the Old Testament of God giving leadership to a woman. After all, God doesn't contradict himself. But here's what we read:

Micah 6:4

⁴ I brought you up out of Egypt
and redeemed you from the land of slavery.
I sent Moses to lead you,
also Aaron and Miriam.

Miriam was sent by God to lead Israel! And then there's Deborah. She was one of the judges who God raised up to lead all of Israel. Here's what we read:

Judges 4:4-5

⁴ Now Deborah, a prophet, the wife of Lappidoth, was leading Israel at that time. ⁵ She held court under the Palm of Deborah between Ramah and Bethel in the hill country of Ephraim, and the Israelites went up to her to have their disputes decided.

I could list many other women who were prophetesses who led and instructed Israel through their prophetic gifting. Here's the second thing:

If 1 Timothy 2 forbids women from teaching or leading men then it contradicts Paul's apostolic practice

The Apostle Paul was the author of 1 Timothy 2. If Paul thought that for all time in all situations women couldn't preach or lead men in the church then he contradicted his own teaching by his practice. In other words, the Apostle Paul would be saying to the church, "don't do what I do, do what I teach." Like the parent who has a cigarette in their mouth, telling their kids smoking is bad, don't smoke. Where does Paul approve of women teaching men or leading in the church?

In Romans 16:1 Paul commends:

Our sister Phoebe, who is a deacon of the church in Cenchreae.

Some translations call Phoebe a servant of the church, but every other use of the Greek term *diákonos* in the book of Romans refers to a leader in the church, a deacon. This is further confirmed by verse 2 in Romans 16 which reads:

Romans 16:2 Philip Payne translation (PPV)

Receive her in the Lord in a way worthy of the saints, and give her support in whatever matters she may have need from you, for she has been a leader [prostatis, which means "leader, chief, president or presiding officer"] of many and myself as well

Many translations of the Bible obscure the leadership role that Phoebe had in the church. But this Greek word *prostatis* which literally means "to stand before," is always used in the New Testament of a person who stands before a group to lead them.

And then there is Junia, a woman apostle in the New Testament. Romans 16:7 reads:

Romans 16:7 Philip Payne translation (PPV)

Greet Andronicus and Junia, my relatives who have been in prison with me. They are outstanding among the apostles, and became Christians before I did.

John Chrysostom who is looked to by the Eastern Orthodox part of the church as the greatest of the early church fathers said this back in the 4th century:

"Even to be an apostle is great, but also to be prominent among them – consider how wonderful a song of honor that is. For they were prominent because of their works, because of their successes. Glory be! How great the wisdom of this woman that she was even deemed worthy of the apostle's title."

But in the 13th century a man who was translating the Bible changed Junia's name to Junias, a male name.

Junia ⇨ Junias

This male name, Junias, became popular through the Protestant Reformers and even today there are some in the church that argue that “No, Junia was not a woman. She was a man. And even if she was a woman, she wasn’t an apostle. She was just known by the apostles.” For the first 1,000 years of the church there is not a single reference to Junia being anything other than a woman. And the greatest leaders in the church regarded Junia as a woman apostle.

I could mention the early church leader Priscilla who taught or instructed Apollos. We could go through Romans 16, 7 of the 10 people who Paul commends as leaders in the church are women. The short of it is, if Paul meant to teach that women could not lead or preach to men in the church in every situation for all time he contradicted it by his own apostolic practice.

My own reading of church history suggests that whenever the Spirit of God is poured out in the church, women are liberated to be and do everything that God has called them to do. Whenever the activity of the Holy Spirit recedes and the church becomes more institutionalized, women are pushed into the background. The bottom line is this, nothing in the spiritual gifts passages that we read about in the New Testament – in 1 Corinthians 12, in Romans 12, in Ephesians 4, in 1 Peter 4 – ever restrict any spiritual gift, including gifts of teaching or leadership or apostleship or evangelism or prophet or pastor or teacher simply to men. The gifts of God and the call of God are not gender-based any more than they are race-based or age-based.

So, let’s look at the 1 Timothy 2 text. And the reason that I give you this translation is because many translations have a male bias that is simply not present in the Greek. So, Junia’s name is Junias. The female apostle Junia went through a sex change operation in the 13th century and became Junias, a male apostle.

What I’d like to do is quickly ask and answer seven questions regarding 1 Timothy 2. Remember that 7 is the perfect number

What is the context?

What is the cultural context for Paul writing 1 Timothy 2? A dear friend of mine, Steve Robbins, who led our leadership school called VLI for years, always said that a text without a context is a pretext. What is the context of 1 Timothy 2? 1 Timothy 1 tells us that the central concern of 1 and 2 Timothy is the spread of false teaching in the church at Ephesus. This false teaching is of such concern to Paul that virtually every single paragraph in 1 Timothy is about the false teaching. If you read through 1 Timothy, women seem to have been deceived by false teachers, just as Eve was deceived by the serpent in the garden of Eden. And women were passing on this false teaching from house to house or perhaps from house church to house church.

So Paul writes 1 & 2 Timothy to combat false teaching that is being spread by women. This false teaching is leading many, many people to leave the Christian faith. That's the context.

Why are women commanded to learn?

Here's what we read in verse 11:

1 Timothy 2:11 (NIV)

¹¹A woman should learn in quietness and full submission.

There is only one actual command in 1 Timothy 2:8-15. There is a command to women to learn.

1 Timothy 2:11 PPV

¹¹A woman should learn in quietness and all submission.

This command for women to learn contrasts with the absence of women on any list of students in Ephesian schools at the time. And it contrasts from the first century Jewish practice in which women are not allowed to study the Torah, rather only boys and men are to study the Law. But Paul gives one command in this text and he says "women learn". Not in total silence, but in quietness, in peace. 1 Timothy 2 is all about creating peace in the church.

Paul wants men not to quarrel. He wants women to learn in peace and in submission. Paul doesn't say in submission to men, but in submission to the truth they are learning. In other words, women don't go around spreading false teaching. Instead, learn and submit yourself to the truth of God's Word. Which leads to the third thing, the most difficult verse in this whole text, which we'll get to in a moment,

Is the prohibition regarding women teaching or leading universal or temporary?

The only verse in the Bible that allegedly prohibits women teaching or leading in the entire Bible – my study Bible at home has over 2,000 pages – there's just this one verse in 2,000 pages that allegedly prohibits women from teaching or leading men and that is 1 Timothy 2:12. Is it universal so that women in the 21st century in America or in China cannot teach or lead men? Or is Paul speaking to a particular situation in Ephesus in the first century where women are going from house church to house church spreading false teaching?

Philip Payne, in my opinion, convincingly argues that Paul is speaking to a temporary situation in Ephesus. Verse 12 ought to be translated this way:

1 Timothy 2:12 PPV

¹² I am not permitting a woman to teach with self-assumed authority over a man; she must be quiet.

Every time the Greek verb that Paul uses here that's translated "I am not permitting" is used in the Bible it refers to a particular situation, it is never universally applicable. In fact, even very conservative commentators concede that the particular verb that Paul uses when he says "I am not permitting" a woman to teach is not ever used of a universal situation. It's always used to address a particular situation in a particular place at a particular time. Paul is addressing women who are spreading false teaching from house church to house church and he's telling these women to stop it! "I'm not letting these women teach!"

Now, if you say that 1 Timothy 2:12

1 Timothy 2:12 PPV

¹² I am not permitting a woman to teach with self-assumed authority over a man; she must be quiet.

Is universal, there's nothing in this text that restricts this verse to women teaching in church vs. teaching at a conference or teaching in a seminary or teaching by writing a book. There's nothing in this verse that restricts its application to women teaching doctrine vs. teaching about marriage. There's nothing in this verse that restricts this application to women teaching vs. sharing or preaching in a church vs. teaching through DVDs or on the radio that millions of people listen to.

Paul's own practice was such that he did not have a problem with women teaching men. He does not restrict leadership or teaching gifts to men. Indeed, Paul encourages all believers to teach each other.

Here's what we read in Colossians

Colossians 3:16

¹⁶ Let the message of Christ dwell among you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom through psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit, singing to God with gratitude in your hearts.

Teaching one another in the church is not gender-based. In 1 Corinthians 14, we read:

1 Corinthians 14:26

²⁶ What then shall we say, brothers and sisters? When you come together, each of you has a hymn, or a word of instruction, a revelation, a tongue or an interpretation. Everything must be done so that the church may be built up.

Teaching in the church is based on gifting. It's based on calling, which leads to the fourth question:

What kind of authority is forbidden for women?

Paul says in 1 Timothy 2:12:

1 Timothy 2:12 PPV

¹² I am not permitting a woman to teach with self-assumed authority over a man; she must be quiet.

Paul is not prohibiting all leading by women. And I say this again, forgive me for the repetition, but so many churches take this one verse and build a mountain of doctrine from it and bury women under this one verse. Gifts of leading in Romans 12 and Ephesians 4 – gifts like apostle and prophet and evangelist and pastor and teacher – are not gender-based. They are given by the sovereign Holy Spirit as he wills, not as the culture wills or as our comfort level wills. The Spirit gives gifts of leadership to women and men as he wills.

Paul says, "I am not permitting a woman to teach with self-assumed authority." The Greek word for self-assumed authority is *authentain*. Philip Payne painstakingly shows in his book, *Men and Women, One in Christ*, in a 36-page detailed chapter this Greek word *authentain* which is used only here in the New Testament, that everywhere outside the Bible it refers to self-assumed authority. In other words, Paul is prohibiting women who are not authorized by the church from assuming authority for themselves to teach.

Tish Warren who is a woman Anglican priest recently wrote a fascinating article in *Christianity Today* in which she says that in the cyber-age that we live in, authority no longer comes from the church, but from popularity. If your post goes viral, you get book deals, you get to speak on conference stages. If you're clever, if you word things in a relatable way, if you have a compelling life experience, it no longer matters what your doctrine is or if you have any theological training. You are listened to by hundreds of thousands of people even though you are not in any way accountable to any church structures or any Christian community or any board or denomination. In many ways, 1 Timothy 2:12 about self-assumed authority, has a very contemporary application to both women and men in the Twitterverse and the blogosphere spouting their opinions without any check or any accountability to anyone else.

Brothers and sisters, it might be good to not follow the lead of some popular blogger who is not deeply rooted in and accountable to any local church community for what they say or what they teach. Let's continue.

1 Timothy 2:13

¹³ For Adam was formed first, then Eve.

Here's the fifth question:

Does the fact that Adam was created before Eve mean that men always have authority over women?

As many scholars have pointed out, the specific content of the false gnostic teaching being spread was that Eve was created before Adam and therefore women are superior to men! But if we say that Paul's correction that Adam was formed before Eve gives men a created mandate to always have authority over women then we ought not restrict this as some Christian teachers do to the church or the home. If this is a matter of creation, and if you say that this text is universal (it's not simply designed to address the local Ephesian situation in the first century) then you ought to logically say that women should not lead men anywhere at any time. Women should not be CEOs of companies or run their own businesses and hire men. Women ought not to be elected officials in government or school principals or be officers in the military over men. And, logically, if being created first gives someone authority then animals should have authority over people because in the creation account animals were created before human beings.

There are two more questions. This is really tough text and we're asking and trying to quickly answer all the hard questions the text presents today.

Are women more deceivable than men?

Here's what Paul writes in verse 14:

1 Timothy 2:14

¹⁴ And Adam was not deceived; it was the woman who was deceived and became a transgressor.

In other words, is Paul saying that the way women are created just renders them more open to false teaching. Is Paul saying "Women, don't teach only because you have an inborn tendency to believe all kinds of lies? You are just really gullible." That's how many people have read this text. One of the main current proponents of restricting women's roles in the church explained 1 Timothy 2:14 this way:

"Paul was saying something about the nature of men and women as God created them... Men have some strengths that are generally lacking in women... God gave men, in general, a disposition that is better suited to teaching and governing in the church, a disposition that inclines more to rational, logical analysis of doctrine and a desire to

protect the doctrinal purity of the church... Paul understands the kinder, gentler, more relational nature of women as something that made Eve less inclined to oppose the deceptive serpent.”

This is a universal. If women are really by nature more deceivable than men, then women shouldn't be barred simply from teaching men. Women should be barred from teaching women. Women should be barred from teaching children. But Paul doesn't argue this. He's not saying something about the nature of women. He's restricting women who are spreading false doctrine in this situation. Indeed, the Apostle Paul says that both men and women are subject to being deceivers and to self-deception. In 2 Timothy 3:13 he writes:

2 Timothy 3:13

¹³ while evildoers and impostors will go from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived.

He says the same thing in Titus 3:3. There's nothing about a woman's constitution that makes her more deceivable. What does this verse mean? Here's what Philip Payne writes in explaining 1 Timothy 2:14

“The text of 1 Timothy 2:14 emphasizes the deception of Eve, providing a warning to Eves in Ephesus not to be similarly deceived by the false teachers or to spread the deception. As Satan deceived the woman leading to the Fall, so Satan had already deceived some women in the Ephesian church (1 Timothy 5:15). The example of Eve provides an excellent explanation and appropriate support for the command in verse 11 that women learn lest their deception lead to their fall from the faith. It directly supports the prohibition in verse 12, warning lest women teach their deception to the assembled church and threaten its fall.”

Finally,

Are women saved through childbearing?

Some translations of 1 Timothy 2:15 translate the verse this way:

1 Timothy 2:15 NIV

¹⁵ But women will be saved through childbearing—if they continue in faith, love and holiness with propriety.

Is Paul saying, “Women, unless you have a child you can't be eternally saved”? That would contradict everything Paul teaches elsewhere. A person is saved by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone. Is Paul saying, “A woman is preserved during this very dangerous moment of childbirth so long as she has faith”?

The best translation of 1 Timothy 2:15 is this:

1 Timothy 2:15 PPV

¹⁵ But she will be saved through the Childbirth—if she continues in faith, love and holiness with propriety.

Paul is saying that a woman is eternally saved through the Child birth. That's what the text reads in the original. She will be eternally saved through the Child birth (the defined article is there in the original). Whose childbirth do you think a woman's salvation hinges on? Of course, Paul is referring to the birth of Christ. Through faith in Christ women and men will be saved.

Brothers and sisters, nothing in 1 Timothy 2 should ever be used to deny women who are gifted and called and accountable to a local church from any role of leadership which God has anointed her to do. Nothing in these verses should slam the door in the face of 51% of the human race from using their gifts as the sovereign Holy Spirit desires in the church or in the world.

I want you to watch this video.

Paige and Adrienne video