

# May Women Teach the Bible?

Many years ago, I remember sitting in a leadership meeting with other men and the pastor of our adult class. The church was a very large church and our adult class often had an attendance of between 300-350 adults. I forget now what the meeting was about. Most likely we were discussing future plans for our class. I remember the meeting because at the end of it, several men wanted to know what they had to do to become an elder in the church. So, the pastor of the class answered their questions. Immediately one man began to complain that he had not yet been asked to be an elder. He felt that he would never be able to become an elder. He complained that the requirements were too high. The pastor tried to comfort and encourage him. But gradually, he became increasingly more upset and very confrontational.

As I listened to him, I realized that he was displaying one reason why he was not qualified to be an elder. 1 Timothy 3:1-7 and Titus 1:5-9 give us the qualifications for an elder. His behavior revealed that he was not temperate. He was pugnacious, that is a fighter, and not peaceable. Titus 1 revealed he was quick-tempered. Worse yet, he failed to realize that it was God who had established the qualifications for being an elder and a deacon.

For leadership positions, God has given the church a list of qualifications to help us know who the Holy Spirit has selected to serve as elders and deacons. Acts 20:28 reveals that the Holy Spirit prepares men to become elders. Men become qualified

because the Holy Spirit spiritually shapes and molds them. If the man understood the standards, then he had a low view of those standards. Sadly, men are often asked to serve as elders or deacons who are not qualified. Some churches choose elders and deacons by just calling every man in the church who is a member to find willing volunteers.

Often, God's qualifications for leadership positions are ignored. Sometimes, the qualifications are minimized in order to have leaders. Leaders are often viewed as men who

make decisions, but not as spiritual leaders who shepherd and tend the flock (John 21:15-17). Our God established the qualifications to help us know who He wants to lead the church. God's standards are intentionally high so that it is obvious who

should lead the church. If a church lowers the qualifications of leaders so that everyone qualifies, then the church will never know whom God has chosen. God has intentionally given us divine principles for choosing church leaders so that we will know whom He wants to lead the church.

God has also given us high standards to help us know whom He wants to teach His Word. 2 Timothy 2:15 urges teachers to diligently labor in the Word of God. Sadly, 2 Peter 3:16 reveals that some churches allow the untaught to teach. Revelation 2:20-23 reveals that some churches allow false teaching. Some churches use the excuse that people have so many different viewpoints about Scripture. Some churches allow immature Christians to teach Scripture. Consequently,



some teachers have never had any formal education or training from their church, and some have never opened a systematic theology. They have never been taught anything but the elementary truths of Scripture. The spiritual life of some is not what it should be. The point that I am trying to make is that teachers of the Word of God must be faithful students of the Word. They must diligently study. They must be examples of godliness. They must know the Bible. As a result, if they buy a book written by a well-known Bible teacher, and then use it as a guide in a Bible study, then they will know if there are false statements in the book. God has given us high standards for teachers of Scripture for a reason.

Now, why did I start this message with these two examples? The answer is that I wanted to prepare you for our study by reminding you that God has established principles by which the church is to function. He has established principles for selecting church elders, selecting deacons, selecting deaconesses, how elders are to function, for the teaching of the Word of God, the use of spiritual gifts, how to give financially, how believers are to worship together, and even how to discipline sinning church members. God has communicated His will to the church by establishing principles. Some believers do not like them.

Our study is in 1 Timothy 2:11-15. It is about the role of women and the teaching of God's Word. We are going to learn that God has established principles for who can teach Scripture in different situations in the church, and who can be leaders of the church. We are not interested in the culture's view. Instead, we are interested in God's view. We want to please God - not the culture. The passage can be outlined in three sections. The first section is "Women's Role in Public Worship" (v. 11-12). The second section is "Women's Role Established by God" (v. 13-14), and the last section is "God's Blessing for Women" (v. 15).

**WOMEN'S ROLE IN PUBLIC WORSHIP (v 11-12).** We have already discovered in verses 9-10 that God the Father has established divine principles for how women are to dress in the public worship services. The verses say,

[Likewise, I want women to adorn themselves with proper clothing, modestly and discreetly, not with braided hair and gold or](#)

[pearls or costly garments, but rather by means of good works, as is proper for women making a claim to godliness. 1 Timothy 2:9-10 \(NASB\)](#)

That is, women are to be concerned about their beauty, but they are to be more concerned about their inner beauty before God. That is the first divine principle that God has communicated for women in verses 9-15.

Our study starts with verse 11. We are going to discover God's second principle for women. It explains how women are to conduct themselves when the Word of God is publicly taught in the church. Verse 11 says,

[A woman must quietly receive instruction with entire submissiveness. 1 Timothy 2:11 \(NASB\)](#)

This is a command because the phrase "must . . . receive instruction" is an imperative in the Greek. That is, this is not an option or something for women to consider if they would like to do this. It is a command. Women are commanded to do this. A better translation of the phrase "receive instruction" is "to learn." That is, the Spirit is commanding women *how they must learn the Scriptures* when they are in the church. He is not commanding them to learn, but *how they must learn*.

Now some men and women do not like this verse and the next three verses. They object because Paul is limiting what women can do in the church. They believe women can be preachers in the public worship service and teach men. Some think that Paul is favoring men. Some even claim that Paul was a male chauvinist. That is the influence of the culture creeping into the church. These people miss two important biblical facts. The first fact is that 2 Peter 1:20-21 and 2 Timothy 3:16 teach us that God the Holy Spirit has written all of Scripture. That means the Holy Spirit moved Paul to write this passage. God, Himself, is the author of these verses. So, it is wrong to accuse Paul of being against women and preferring men. What they are really doing is falsely accusing God.

The second fact is that God is actually showing favor toward women in these verses. In order to understand this, it is important to understand that the ancient Jewish rabbis had a low view of women's intelligence. Alfred Eedersheim in

his book, *Sketches of Jewish Social Life*, explains this when he says,

... the Rabbis did not approve of the same amount of instruction being given to girls as to boys. More particularly they disapproved of their engaging in legal studies-partly because they considered woman's mission and duties as lying in other directions partly because the subjects were necessarily not always suitable for the other sex ... because the Rabbis regarded woman's mind as not adapted for such investigations. The unkindest thing, perhaps, which they said on this score was, "Women are of a light mind."<sup>1</sup>

His point is that the rabbis did not encourage women to learn because they thought women were not very intelligent. Consequently, women were not usually taught the Scripture by the rabbis. So, it is significant that neither God nor Paul prohibits women from learning. Rather, women are encouraged to learn the Word of God.

John MacArthur makes this important statement in his commentary on 1 Timothy,

The prevalent Jewish tradition about women did not come from the Old Testament. The Old Testament affirmed that women have a spiritual status equal to that of men. The Mosaic law was given to all Israel, women as well as men (Deut. 1: 1). Both were to teach it to their children (Deut. 6:4-7; Prov. 6:20). The protection of the law applied equally to women (cf. Ex. 21 :28-32). Women had inheritance rights (Num. 36:1-12). Men and women alike participated in the Jewish religious feasts (cf. Ex. 12:3; Deut. 16:9-15). The single greatest spiritual vow, the Nazarite vow, was open to both men and women (Num. 6:2). Women were involved in spiritual service (Ex. 38:8; Neh. 7:67). Nor did God hesitate to deal directly with women (Gen. 3:13; 16:7-13; Judg. 13:3).

Spiritual equality between the sexes did not, however, do away with the difference in their roles. There were no queens in either Israel or Judah (Athaliah was a usurper). It is true that Deborah served as a judge (Judg. 4:4-5:31). Her case, however, was unique.

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It is significant that Deborah declined to lead the military campaign against the Canaanites, deferring instead to a man, Barak. No women served as priests. None of the authors of the Old Testament were women. No woman had an on-going prophetic (speaking before people) ministry like that of Elijah, Elisha, or the other prophets. While Miriam (Ex. 15:20), Deborah (Judg. 4:4), Huldah (2 Kings 22:14), and Isaiah's wife (Isa. 8:3) are called prophetesses, none had a permanent calling to that office. Miriam, Deborah, and Huldah gave only one recorded prophecy, and Isaiah's wife none. She is called a prophetess because she gave birth to a child whose name had prophetic meaning. A fifth woman mentioned as a prophetess, Noadiah, was a false prophetess (Neh. 6: 14). While God spoke through women on a few limited occasions, no woman had an on-going role of preaching and teaching.

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In no way does the New Testament treat women as spiritual inferiors. The first person Jesus revealed His messiahship to was a woman (John 4:25-26). Jesus healed women (Mark 5:25-34; Luke 13:11-13). In contrast to the prevailing practice of the rabbis, He taught women (Luke 10:38-42). Women ministered to Jesus and the disciples (Luke 8:2-3). Following His resurrection, Jesus appeared first to a woman (Mark 16:9; John 20:11-18). Women and men were involved in the prayer services of the early church (Acts 1: 13-14). Peter reminds men that women are to be "[granted] honor as fellow [heirs] of the grace of life" (1 Peter 3:7). The fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:21-22) are for both men and women. In short, all the promises, commands, and blessings of the New Testament apply equally to women and men.

As in the Old Testament, spiritual equality does not preclude differing roles. There are no women pastor-teachers, evangelists, or elders in the New Testament. None of the authors of the New Testament were women. The New Testament nowhere records a sermon or teaching of a woman. While the daughters of Philip are said to have prophesied (Acts 21 :9), neither the occasion nor the message is defined. There is no reason to assume they had an ongoing preaching ministry, or that they taught during the public

1. Alfred Eedersheim. *Sketches of Jewish Social Life*. Eerdmans Publishing. 1972. pp. 132-133.

worship. They, like Mary the mother of Jesus (Luke 1 :46ff.), or Anna (Luke 2:36-39), delivered some message of truth elsewhere. As noted in chapter 6 of this volume, a comparison of 1 Corinthians 11:5 and 14:34 indicates women are permitted to pray and speak the Word, but Paul here makes clear that such allowance is not in the assembly of the church.<sup>2</sup>

So, Christ and the apostles elevated women as equals with men, but there is still a difference in roles. There is a difference in roles in the church just as there are different roles in marriage. It would be inconsistent to have differences between the roles in the church and in marriage. So, women are not being treated as inferiors in this passage. The passage is about roles.

Then in verse 11, women are encouraged to learn in two ways. The first way women are to learn is quietly. The Greek word for “quietly” is *hesychia*. The word means to be “silent, “quiet,” or “quietness.” Secondly, women are to learn “with entire submissiveness.” That is from the heart, women are to willingly learn in silence when Scripture is taught in the church. Just as women are to be more concerned about their inner heart beauty, women are also to respond from the heart in how they learn Scripture. That is, women are to be silent when the Word of God is taught in the public worship service. But what does that mean?

In verse 12, Paul explains the meaning of verse 11. He says,

**But I do not allow a woman to teach or exercise authority over a man, but to remain quiet. 1 Timothy 2:12 (NASB)**

In order to avoid some confusion, I need to explain the meaning of the Greek words that are translated as “allow” and “exercise authority.” The Greek word that is translated as “allow” is *epitrepo*. It just means “to permit.” The Greek word for “exercise authority” is *authenteo*. Sadly, the meaning of this word has been influenced by a bad translation in several Bibles and in modern culture. George Knight states this about *authenteo* in his Greek commentary on 1 Timothy 2:12,

... the word shows no inherent negative sense of grasp or usurp-

ing authority or of exercising it in a harsh or authoritative way, but simply means “to have or exercise authority.”<sup>3</sup>

That is, this is not a prohibition against domineering or abusive leadership, as some claim. It is a prohibition against any authoritative position over men. That starts with the authoritative teaching of Scripture in the church, especially from the pulpit. Whenever someone declares “Thus says the Lord,” they are acting in an authoritative position for our God.

That means the Holy Spirit is declaring that it is improper for a woman to teach men in a public meeting of the church. Now notice that Paul says in verse 12 that she is “to remain quiet.” The Greek word for “quiet” is the same Greek for “quietly” in verse 11. This helps us understand that verse 12 is explaining verse 11. *The message is that woman are to willingly, from the heart, submissively and quietly learn rather than assume the role of authority and teach the Word of God in the public meeting of the church.* Since the primary functions of elders in the congregation are teaching and shepherding, she cannot have a leadership position in the church such as an elder. This is the divine principle God is teaching us! Consequently, she should willingly never insert herself as an authority of Scripture in the public worship.

Let me give you some practical applications of this. First, she cannot become a pastor or an elder in a church, since their primary function is teaching in the church. Second, a woman must never correct a man in public when the church is gathered together. On one occasion, I was preaching in the minor prophets. The passage was about God’s judgment and a woman in the back of the church objected. So, she interrupted my sermon and declared that I was wrong. Now most of us would agree that her behavior was wrong, but she did not.

On another occasion, I was teaching a Bible study with about forty to fifty men and women in the audience. On this occasion, a woman objected to something that I had said. She revealed her objection by asking a question, and in the question hinted at a point of disagreement. So, I answered her question. Then she began to argue with me. It was clear that she considered herself the authority on Scripture. She had not

2. John MacArthur. 1 Timothy. The MacArthur New Testament Commentary. Moody Press. 1995., p. 83-85.

3. George Knight. Commentary On The Pastoral Epistles. New International Greek Testament Commentary. Eerdmans Publishing. 1992. p. 141.



asked a question as a learner. Instead in a public meeting, she was trying to change my viewpoint on the meaning of the passage. She did not realize that she had revealed her own lack of understanding of the passage. Both women violated the divine principle. They assumed the role as a teacher in the public meeting of the congregation. They should have been quiet, and addressed the issue in private after the meeting.

On another occasion, a woman visited our church. During our evening Bible study, we had a time of corporate prayer when both men and women voluntarily could pray for the needs of our congregation from their seat. She objected to these women praying because she believed verses 11-12 prohibited women from saying anything. But this passage does not prohibit women from praying in a Bible study. But it would be improper for a woman to lead the congregation in prayer. However, a woman is free to lead the prayer time if the audience is composed of women or children. A woman is free to teach or pray one-on-one with a man, in a small group, a family gathering, or any other situation that is not in the context of the public meeting of the church. Women can sing in the choir and sing solos before the congregation. Women can be deaconesses (Romans 16:1; 1 Timothy 3:11). Women can teach men in private (Acts 18:26). Women have spiritual gifts!

Every time I read Matthew 23:8-12, I am reminded that roles of spiritual leadership are actually positions of responsibility before our God. Here is Jesus' message to the twelve disciples,

**But do not be called Rabbi; for One is your Teacher, and you are all brothers. Do not call anyone on earth your father; for One is your Father, He who is in heaven. Do not be called leaders; for One is your Leader, that is, Christ. But the greatest among you shall be your servant. Whoever exalts himself shall be humbled; and whoever humbles himself shall be exalted. Matthew 23:8-12 (NASB)**

Repeatedly, Jesus had to confront the pride of the disciples. They had discussions about who would be the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. On the night Jesus was betrayed, Jesus washed the feet of the disciples as an example of humility in the Upper Room. Jesus' message in Matthew 23:8-12 is that

the true leader humbly serves others, and not the reverse. We often hear the term "servant-leadership." I really do not like the phrase because of the word "leadership." I would prefer a different phrase, maybe "servant-responsibility." The truth is that elders in a church have roles of responsibility. The true leader uses his position to influence others and not to control them. God's leaders are sensitive to not exalt themselves.

**WOMEN'S ROLE ESTABLISHED BY GOD (v 13-14).** Verses 13 and 14 now reveal why this divine principle exists. The passage says,

**For it was Adam who was first created, and then Eve. And it was not Adam who was deceived, but the woman being deceived, fell into transgression. 1 Timothy 2:13-14 (NASB)**

Notice that the verse starts with the word "for." The "for" points us back to verses 11-12. Verses 13-14 explain why God established the principle described in verses 11-12. The Holy Spirit gives us two reasons for the principle. It is important to notice that both reasons are not rooted in Roman, Greek, or Jewish cultures. Paul is not prohibiting untaught women from teaching here, as some claim. Notice that both reasons are rooted in events that occurred between Adam and Eve. Both reasons are rooted in events that happened at the creation, and not in Paul's time. The reasons transcend cultures.

The first reason for the principle given in verses 11-12 is that Adam was created first, before Eve. This reason appeals to the order of creation. That is, the reason is not based in any subsequent culture, or conditions in our culture. Because Adam was created first and Eve was created second due to not fault of her own, God established the divine order—the divine principle.

The second reason for the principle is that Eve was deceived and fell into transgression. Genesis 3:1-7 tells us that Eve believed Satan's lie and ate of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. (By the way, the Bible never says they ate an apple!) Then after she ate of the fruit, she knew the difference between good and evil. Genesis 3:6 says that Adam then ate also.

Now notice 1 Timothy 2:14 says Adam intentionally ate from the tree. The Greek word that describes Eve's deception implies she was not just deceived, but that she was completely deceived. She not only violated God's command to not eat of

the tree, but she also usurped Adam's leadership role. John Stott includes this point in his commentary on 1 Timothy when he says,

The priority of Adam's creation established his leadership (13), as we have seen, while Eve's folly in challenging [his leadership] led to disaster.<sup>4</sup>

John MacArthur adds,

... when Adam, violated his leadership role and followed Eve (though it was not he who was deceived) the perversion of God's order was complete.<sup>5</sup>

That is, Eve also sinned when she urged Adam to violate God's command to eat of the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. When Adam ate, he sinned. He knew what he was doing. So, both Adam and Eve violated the order that God had already established in the creation between the sexes. When Eve took the leadership role, Adam yielded to her and disobeyed. That is the great message from this verse.

Therefore, for both reasons, women are to willingly, from the heart, submissively, and quietly learn rather than assume the role of authority and teach the Word of God in the public meeting of the church.

**GOD'S BLESSING FOR WOMEN (v 15).** Verse 15 is the most difficult verse in this passage. It is an encouragement to any woman who may feel that this divine principle is not fair. The verse says,

**But women will be preserved through the bearing of children if they continue in faith and love and sanctity with self-restraint. 1 Timothy 2:15 (NASB)**

The most important word for understanding this verse is "preserved." It is translated from the Greek word *sozo*. It is usually translated as "to save." It is the word that is usually used to refer to someone being saved. Most Bibles, including the new

LSB, translate this verse with "saved," but not the NASB.

So, how are we to understand that women are saved through the bearing of children? Several explanations have been suggested. First, some suggest the meaning of "will be preserved through the bearing of children" is that a woman can be saved by having children. This is an incredibly bad explanation for several reasons. First, that would mean those women who cannot have children could never be saved! Second, Ephesians 2:8-9 teaches us that we are not saved by works, but by faith in Christ. If salvation is not works, then a woman cannot be saved by giving birth to a child.

The second meaning that has been given to the phrase "will be preserved through the bearing of children" is that the stigma of Eve's sin is removed from women by the fact that only women can have children. The important point is that the stigma is removed. Then the rest of the verse refers to how women are truly saved. While this is a very common explanation of this verse, I wonder how is this an encouragement to women who cannot have children? How is the stigma removed for a childless woman? There is a second problem with this view. The first part of the verse refers to a woman, but the second part refers to women. This suggests the women, at the end of the verse, are not related to the woman, in the first part of the verse. That is a problem for this view.

This leads us to the third most common explanation. The phrase "will be preserved through the bearing of children" refers to the birth of Christ. I personally favor this view. Why? Because the Greek word that is translated as "bearing of children" has a definite article before it. That is, this is not just any childbirth, but "The Childbearing." It seems to refer to the birth promised to Eve in Genesis 3:16. It seems to simply refer to the promised Savior. Through Christ, born of a woman, is how women are saved. The proof anyone, including women are saved, is that they will continue in faith, love, holiness, and self-control. This seems to be the best explanation.

**CONCLUSION.** So verses 11-15 teach us that woman are to willingly, from the heart, submissively, and quietly learn rather than assume the role of authority and teach the Word of God in the public meeting of the church. That is the meaning of "be quiet" or "be silent." They are not to teach when men are present. They cannot be elders or function in some other posi-

4. John Stott. *The Message of 1 Timothy & Titus*. The New Testament Series Editor. Inter-Varsity Press. 1996. p. 86-87.

5. Ibid. John MacArthur. p. 88-89.

tion of authority in the church. However, they may be deaconesses and leaders among women.

As an encouragement, the Holy Spirit reminds women that they have the great honor of being the physical means by which people are saved. It is through a woman that our Savior was born. That was the promise given to Eve (Genesis 3:16). Eve's name means "life." It is because of a woman that our Savior was born. It is because of a woman that women are saved. The proof they are saved is that they will continue in faith, love, holiness, and self-control. That is also true of men.