

1 Timothy 2:12

I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man, but to be in silence

1. This verse, in its context, is the crux of the doctrine concerning the role of women in the church
 - a. Three words that must be defined (see outline point 4):
 - 1) Teach
 - 2) Authority
 - 3) Silence
 - b. Proposed applications must be defined (see outline point 5):
 - 1) Under what circumstances? If “in the assembly,” define assembly
 - 2) Which women?
 - a) Married to a believer
 - b) Married to an unbeliever
 - c) Unmarried from a believing household
 - d) Unmarried from an unbelieving household
 - e) Other?
 - 3) Red flags of proposed applications
 - a) Inconsistently applied
 - b) Our generation is the first to figure it out
 - c) Would not work in other cultures or centuries
2. Distractions from passages typically taken out of context:
 - a. (1 Corinthians 14:34 – 35) Generally, verses 34 and 35 are quoted, but not verse 36, which would seem to be on a completely different subject. Considering the context that begins in 14:1, the women under consideration were female prophets, who are told to “keep silent in the churches” in the same way as tongue speakers without interpreters (verse 28) and an excessive number of prophets (verse 30). Verse 36 makes sense in this way. Paul was answering the unspoken challenge to his instructions, “I cannot control the Spirit in me,” or “But others need to know this message that God has given through me.” Paul replies, “Do you think God is so shortsighted that He would give a message to you only?” Female prophets were not to speak in the general assembly,
 - b. (1 Corinthians 11:3 – 16) Female prophets could speak in a group of women if they wore head coverings to illustrate that they recognized the position in which faith put them.
 - 1) In the first century, Greek culture dominated, but many other cultures existed inside of it. In Greek culture, women were entirely equal. In many of the subcultures, the Jewish culture (not Scripture) being one, women were “oppressed.” This presented a problem for commerce. Some women, married or not, were free to negotiate enforceable contracts. Less liberated women, due their subcultures, could not. Alexander’s mother came up with a clever way to enable commerce to navigate the cultural reefs. If a woman wore her scarf over her head, she was not free to negotiate a contract, but rather only deliver an offer from the head of the house (husband, father, brother, *etc.*). Hellenistic women wore their shawls over their shoulders to indicate that they could negotiate their own valid contracts.

- 2) Christian women may have come from either type of society. As Christians, they were equal with men in the Kingdom (Galatians 3:28).
 - 3) Female prophets (11:4 – 5) were to wear the symbol of being non-negotiators. They were not independent agents. As the context (chapters 11 through 14) unfolds, it becomes apparent that female prophets did not prophesy to men (14:34), therefore among women. This symbolized (11:7) the high honor that accrued to men that women permitted men to lead. In contrast, men did not cover their heads (11:4, 7) to symbolize the high honor that accrued to God because men were volunteering to be living sacrifices (*e.g.*, Romans 12:2, Ephesians 5:25).
 - 4) If this passage dictates a specific clothing or hair style for all time, it is the only such reference in the New Testament. All other fashion descriptions are couched in qualitative terms that can be interpreted in light of the present culture (*e.g.*, modest).
3. Passages that contribute to the larger picture
 - a. Directed to Christian couples: Ephesians 5:22 – 33. Marriages between Christians are to model the relationship of Jesus and the church. This is another example of a visual symbol for an invisible (spiritual) concept. Note that neither single people nor those married to non-Christians fit into the illustration. So, this is not a universal command concerning marriage, but directions on how to teach a difficult concept through an earthly relationship. See also Colossians 3:18.
 - b. Directed to wives with unbelieving husbands: 1 Peter 3:1 – 2. The paragraph goes on to address Christian couples as well. Certainly, questions would arise concerning how to view civil unions when just one of the partners became a Christian. Paul expands on that theme in 1 Corinthians 7:10 - 16.
 - c. Directed to Christian husbands: 1 Peter 3:7. Women are equal heirs in the Kingdom, but are generally weaker physically, not spiritually. See also Colossians 3:19.
 - d. Why were men picked to lead? 1 Timothy 2:13-15 Male leadership is a reminder of one of the negative consequences of the first sins (Genesis 3:9 – 19). Also, a promise is made that painful childbirth, another negative consequence, will not destroy faith. This needs to fit into the central theme from Ephesians 5:22 – 33, that the structure of Christian marriage was designed in advance as a visual aid to unbelievers for understanding the relationship between Jesus and the church.
 4. Definitions
 - a. Silence
 - 1) Word studies should be initiated when the common meaning of the word leads to inconsistencies. In this case, a woman is told to be silent, but yet singing is generally accepted as appropriate. Being educated in silence is not considered good educational practice, yet God is the master educator. Common courtesy suggests speaking to those you meet.
 - 2) In the KJV, ‘silent’ is used twice (2:11 – 12) with reference to women. The same word is used in Acts 22:2, 1 Thessalonians 4:11, 2 Thessalonians 3:12, 1 Timothy 2:2, and 1 Peter 3:4. In Acts 22:2, the reference is to a crowd becoming still. They had already quit yelling (21:40). 1 Thessalonians recommends that we lead a ‘quiet’ life. 2 Thessalonians recommends that we work in ‘quietness.’ 1 Timothy 2:2 uses the same word, but it is translated

‘peaceable.’ 1 Peter recommends that we have a ‘quiet’ spirit. Paul is recommending that a woman learn “peaceably” or “uncontentiously,” not silently. The idea of women being silent while being taught is a poor translation that reflects the beliefs of the translators of the 17th century. Their understanding has carried over and influenced teachings to this day. A Greek-speaking person, as were both Timothy and Paul, would have understood this as “peaceable.”

- 3) Secondly, in verse 11, the word ‘submission’ is in the active voice, not the middle voice, suggesting that this submission is to God, not to other humans.

b. Authority

- 1) In the church, leadership is not described in terms of authority. Rather, leaders lead because followers follow. All subjection passages that describe a relationship between church people are in the middle voice, meaning that the follower does so voluntarily, not by coercion or force. No passage suggests that church leaders subjugate followers. So, this phrase, “have authority over a man,” bears investigation as to what Paul meant.
- 2) This is the only place in the New Testament in which this word appears. All other translation of “authority” are from a completely different Greek word.
- 3) Based on how the word was used in the literature of the time, it means to “act independently.” Literally, it means to execute with one’s own hand, to act of oneself. So, Paul’s caution is that women should not act independently of the men.

c. Teach

- 1) This is the common word for teach.
- 2) What boundaries must any student observe in order to maintain a valid student-teacher relationship?

d. Reassembling 2:11 – 12: Let a woman learn peaceably, submitting to God. I do not permit a woman to teach or act independently of men, but to be peaceable.

e. Why would “peaceable” be stressed? The New Testament does not say. I suspect that problems had already arisen in that area, both from women with new-found freedom, and from those for the first time being submissive.

5. Applications

a. What is the setting for this reminder for women to be uncontentious students?

- 1) Most of the activities enjoined in this chapter should occur all the time, not at any specific time (prayer and modest apparel). But “teach” implies the presence of at least two people, probably more.
- 2) The line in verse 8, “I desire therefore that the men pray everywhere, lifting up holy hands...,” suggests that men should lead public prayer. Although 1 Corinthians 11:3 – 16 and 14:34 – 35 concerns appropriate conduct of people exercising a miraculous power, consistency indicates that men teach and men lead public prayers.
- 3) Ephesians 5:22 – 33 contributes to this consistency.
- 4) What qualifies as “leading public prayer”?
- 5) What qualifies as “teaching”?

b. Is this understanding different according to marital status?

- 1) No.

- 2) In an attempt to justify “silence,” some turn to 1 Corinthians 14:35, “If they want to learn anything, let them ask their husbands at home.” First, that is about female prophets. Second, it leaves no source of answers for the unmarried or those married to unbelievers, and Paul recommended remaining unmarried due to the “present distress.”
- c. When can women speak?
- 1) Since it is impractical to prohibit women from speaking at any time in the presence of a male, strange definitions have been generated.
 - a) To allow Christians to greet one another, arbitrary start and end times have been established for the “assembly.” This defines a specific hour (more or less) as the assembly. All other times when Christians are gathered are called something else.
 - b) Some allow women to speak in class but not the assembly, others neither.
 - c) Two generations ago, men and women did not sit together. The children sat with the women. Imagine the discipline of children with no noise.
 - d) European culture from which we descend historically has been oppressive to women. Christian women definitely were not equal in the Kingdom of the 6th through the 19th centuries. Hellenistic culture of the 1st through 4th centuries enjoined equality. Culture affects how we view the Scriptures.
 - 2) But, if the admonition is to be peaceable students of the Word, the same behavior applies consistently.