

Are Women Really Not Allowed to Teach in Church?

Is 1 Timothy 2:12 an absolute prohibition on women teaching men? People sometimes go to ludicrous lengths to accommodate this verse.

Renowned Chinese teacher, Watchman Nee, benefited greatly from the teaching of two Chinese missionaries/leaders. So when they visited him one day, he wanted his church to hear them. But there was a problem. They were women, and therefore could not teach the men. In order to “fulfill the letter of the law,” he strung a curtain along the middle of the meeting room. The two Chinese missionaries taught the ladies on one side of the curtain while the men sat and listened on the other side!

Consider the following:

- 1 Timothy 2:12 is the only verse in the Bible that apparently explicitly states that women cannot teach men.
- Paul and Timothy had traveled together for some time, and Timothy would have known if Paul forbade women to teach (1 Cor. 4:17). It would have therefore been surprising if Timothy and Paul hadn't made that clear right from the start in Ephesus, and even more surprising that Timothy was allowing women to teach and the practice needed to stop.
- Paul acknowledged the very real role that women had in teaching Timothy (his mother and grandmother).
- Priscilla (named first) and her husband, Aquila, taught Apollos a “more accurately” (Acts 18:26).
- 1 Corinthians 14:26 gives a list of things that everyone is expected to participate in. “When you come together, every one of you has...” The Greek word for every one, *hekastos*, is a word that encompasses both genders.

This list includes teaching. Several times in chapter 14, the word “all” is used. Verses 24 and 31 both say that all may prophesy, and we know from Paul’s teaching in chapter 11 that this includes women. If Paul really forbade women to teach, why didn’t he mention it ?

- A number of gifts to the church, including teachers, are listed in 1 Corinthians 12 and Ephesians 4. For some of these gifts there are female examples in the Scriptures (Junia was an apostle, Philip’s daughters prophesied), but there’s no qualification here that women aren’t allowed to teach. Paul asks, “Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers?” While the obvious answer to this question is “no” there is no implication that some of these gifts are gender specific.
- Colossians 3:16 exhorts us to teach and admonish one another.
- In Revelation 2, the church in Thyatira is chastised for allowing “Jezebel” to lead people astray. It’s what she teaches that is the problem, not the fact that she’s a woman teaching.
- 2 Timothy 2:2 is the classic passage on discipleship. It is often rendered “Share the things you have heard from me ... with faithful men who will be able to teach others also.” The word “men” in the Greek is *anthropos*, a generic term for humans rather than gender specific.

This verse, then, appears to contradict what Paul says in other places. So is there another explanation for what Paul says in this verse?

*Adapted from **Felicity Dale’s** blog, Kingdom Women. Felicity is the author of The Black Swan Effect.*