

Does This One Word Dispel the Notion That Women Cannot Teach Men?

1 Timothy 2:11-12 is considered by many to be the Bible's clearest statement against women functioning in authoritative roles of leadership in the church. It reads, "Let a woman learn in silence with all obedience. I do not permit a woman to teach or to usurp authority over a man, but to be silent."

For many, this passage has become a canon within the canon and is used as the standard by which every other passage about women is measured. Passages that obviously recognize women functioning in authoritative roles of leadership are not given equal consideration but are subordinated to this one passage and forced to fit within the narrow parameters of the interpreter's take on this verse.

This, however, is not good hermeneutics. Passages showing women functioning in leadership roles must be given equal consideration and conclusions drawn after each passage has been carefully examined and compared. Even the non-academic leaders of the Azusa Street Revival understood this interpretive principle, and in the 1908 edition of the *Apostolic Faith*, they exhorted their readers, "We must rightly divide the Scriptures and compare Scripture with Scripture so that there is no confusion, and no deceptive spirit or wrong teaching may creep in."

Numerous Examples of Women Teaching Men

In my book, *Paul, Women and Church*, I show the numerous women whom Paul recognizes as coworkers and fellow-ministers. He specifically refers to one woman as an apostle and another woman as his spiritual mother. He refers to another woman as

having “stood before” many including himself.

There is no reason to believe that these women were confined to teaching only women. In the case of Priscilla, it is specifically stated that she was equally involved with her husband in instructing the learned Apollos, “the way of God more accurately” (Acts 18:24-26).

In *Paul, Women and Church*, I also show how in 2 Timothy 2:2 (NIV), Paul exhorts Timothy to commit the things he has learned from Paul to “many witnesses entrust to reliable people who will also be qualified to teach others.” Although the King James and New King James versions translate the word *anthropoi* in the passage as “men,” the 2011 edition of the NIV got it right for the word *anthropoi* is gender-inclusive, like the English word “people” or “person.”

If Paul had wanted to confine the teaching ministry of the church to males only, he could have easily done so by using a form of the Greek word *aner*, which is gender-specific and refers to males. Instead, he uses *anthropoi* and makes it clear that Timothy is to prepare women as well as men to teach others in the church in Ephesus.

The same is true of Ephesians 4:8 (MEV) where Paul introduces the ascension of gifts of apostle, prophet, evangelist, pastor and teacher. He says that Christ “ascended on high” and “gave gifts to people.” The King James and New King James versions got it wrong when they translated *anthropoi* in this passage as “men.” The 2011 New International Version, New Revised Standard Version and New Living Translation got it right by translating the word as “people,” for that is its literal meaning.

These passages that show women functioning in leadership roles and teaching men should cause us to step back from using 1 Timothy 2:11-12 to marginalize women and confine them to subservient roles in the church. And when we consider the

actual Greek word that Paul used for “authority” in 1 Timothy 2:12, we can be confident that Paul did not bar all women from teaching and leading men.

The Word that Settles the Matter

The word “authority” in 1 Timothy 2:11-12 is a translation of the Greek word *authentein*, which is found only here in the entire New Testament. The very fact that it is used only here should cause us to pause and question why that would be the case. It certainly indicates that Paul is not addressing the normal exercise of authority in the church.

If Paul were addressing the normal exercise of authority in the church, he would have used the Greek word *exousia*, which he and other New Testament writers use over 100 times. That Paul uses this strange Greek word that neither he nor any other New Testament writer ever uses is a clear sign that he is addressing a unique and local situation in Ephesus and is not giving instructions for all churches everywhere.

Since the word *authentein* is used only here in the New Testament, it has been necessary to examine ancient Greek literature to see how it was used. Its use from around 600 B.C. up to the time of Paul carried the meaning of “gaining the upper hand” with connotations of control, dominance and even violence. In one case, it was used regarding a murder. The murderer was said to have committed *authentein* against the victim.

From around the time of Paul and onward, *authentein* begins to take on a new meaning. Although the original meaning persists, it is now also used to refer to someone who claims to be the author or originator of someone or something. In fact, our words “author” and “authentic” are derived from *authentein*.

But why would Paul use such a word in this passage?

A Text Without a Context Is a Pretext

The short answer is that it is the appropriate word for addressing the unique situation Paul and Timothy are confronting in Ephesus. It is clear from 1 Timothy 1:3 that the purpose of this letter is to encourage and instruct Timothy in his unpleasant task of confronting false teaching that is being spread in the church at Ephesus. In this passage, Paul reminds Timothy how he, Paul, had urged him to remain in Ephesus to continue confronting this false teaching.

It is also clear from this passage, and others such as 1 Timothy 5:13-15, that the false teaching is having a particular effect on the women of Ephesus and causing them to act in ways unbecoming of a Christian. Paul's use of *authentēin* is obviously the appropriate word for addressing what is happening in Ephesus at the time.

In other words, Paul did not write 1 Timothy to lay out a church order for all churches of all times. He wrote 1 Timothy to encourage Timothy in his difficult assignment of confronting false teaching that had infiltrated the church in Ephesus. By not putting this text in its proper context, much of the church is today preaching a pretext.

The Admonition Is Specific, Not Universal

The fact that Paul addresses the women, plural, in 1 Timothy 2:8-9 and then changes to "a woman," singular, in verses 11-12 may indicate that he has a particular woman in mind who is responsible for propagating this false teaching.

The specificity of the admonition is borne out also by the phrase in 2:12, "I do not permit," which, in the Greek, is in the present, ongoing sense and literally reads, "I am not permitting." This seems to point to a restriction specific to the current situation in Ephesus, with the meaning, "I am not permitting at this time."

Concluding Thought

In summary, this one strange Greek word makes clear that Paul is not writing a manual of church order for all churches everywhere. He is addressing the unique situation that exists in Ephesus at the time. First Timothy is a personal letter written to encourage and instruct Timothy in his unpleasant task of confronting false teaching in Ephesus.

Yes, one word in its proper context dispels the notion that women cannot teach men. {eoa}

*This article is derived from **Dr. Eddie Hyatt's** latest book, **Paul, Women and Church**, available from Amazon and his website at . He and his wife, **Dr. Susan Hyatt**, are establishing the **Int'l Christian Women's Hall of Fame and Ministry Center** in downtown Grapevine, TX. To read more about this vision to "write God's women back into history," check out the new website under construction at*