

Women and Teaching

"In Christian circles there are many different opinions as to whether women should be allowed to teach others. They vary from not allowing women to speak at all, allowing them to teach children or a group of other women, to allowing them to teach and speak to a full congregation of men and women.

Should women remain silent at all times?

1 Corinthians 14: 33-36 appears to teach that women should never speak in any meetings of the church: *For God is not a God of disorder but of peace. As in all the congregations of the saints, women should remain silent in the churches. They are not allowed to speak, but must be in submission, as the Law says. If they want to inquire about something, they should ask their own husbands at home; for it is disgraceful for a woman to speak in the church. Did the word of God originate with you? Or are you the only people it has reached?*

However, an interpretation which insists that women remain silent at all times would be in direct contradiction to 1 Corinthians 11: 5 where Paul referred to women both praying and prophesying in public meetings. Therefore, there must be another explanation of the above passage.

Some suggest that these verses are not Paul's own opinion, but that he is quoting the Corinthians' own views. He then follows it up with a sharp rebuke, saying, *'Did the word of God originate with you? Or are you the only people it has reached?'* In other words, Paul strongly disagrees with them, as he has already shown in 11: 5.

In *Woman in the Bible*, Mary Evans confirms that 'The transposition of verses 34-35 in the Western texts shows that they were linked together and makes feasible the possibility that they are a separate quote.' Paul does on other occasions quote from the Corinthians' own views and then follows it up by condemning them; see 1 Corinthians 6: 12-13; 10: 23.

However, if 1 Corinthians 14:34-35 is a quotation, it is certainly the longest one Paul uses. Also, if this explanation is correct, it seems strange that the passage has been consistently misunderstood from very early Christian times.

Women should remain silent sometimes

A more popular view is that this is Paul's own advice, but that the exhortation to remain silent and not speak was limited in its scope.

In order not to contradict 1 Corinthians 11:5, it must at least allow for praying and prophesying by women. It appears quite possible that what was meant in chapter 14 was that wives should not call out questions to their husbands in a public meeting. Rather they should wait until they were at home and ask them in private.

Verse 35 is then taken as a further explanation of the sort of silence Paul refers to in verse 34. A wife should submit to her husband and it would be disgraceful for her to question her husband in public. J. Keir Howard has the following to say on this passage:

The implication is that during the formal teaching session of the church, probably conducted in the form of orderly discussion and argument, the women were interrupting noisily. Consequently they are told to be silent (*sigao*). The whole statement itself is unusual. There is no mention of unmarried women or widows, indicating that only one group of women is in view, namely certain wives who were apparently publicly arguing with their husbands over matters of teaching and interpretation. If there were points that were unclear or matters of disagreement then the proper course of action was for them to ask their husbands at home rather than disrupt the proceedings of the congregation. The fact that such a course of action was unavailable to single women or widows indicates the limited applicability of this statement.

The Student's Commentary states that 'Women in the East at that time, as still today disturbed the congregation by conversing among themselves or by asking questions.'

Women should not chatter through services

The word used for 'speak' in these verses is *laleo* which the Companion Bible (Appendix 121.7) defines as meaning 'to talk or to use the voice, without reference to the words spoken.' It is therefore possible that Paul was condemning the women for chattering to each other through the services, as well as calling out questions. This would have been against the Lord's wishes, as He is '*not a God of disorder but of peace*'.

Whichever explanation of 1 Corinthians 14:33-36 is accepted, it is clear that these verses cannot support the view that women should never take an active part in a meeting of believers, nor that they should be condemned unconditionally to keeping completely silent.

Women should learn in quietness

The only other passage in the New Testament which refers to a woman keeping silent is 1 Timothy 2:11-14:

A woman should learn in quietness and full submission. I do not permit a woman to teach or have authority over a man; she must be silent. For Adam was formed first, then Eve. And Adam was not the one deceived; it was the woman who was deceived and became a sinner.

The Companion Bible notes on the word 'woman' that 'the whole context shows that wives are in the apostle's mind'. This is clear from references to submission, to Adam and Eve, and, in verse 15, to the bearing of children. Mary Evans, on verse 11, says:

There is certainly no indication here that there is a particular submission required from all women to all men, other than that which is generally required from every Christian to every other.

The 'quietness' required here refers to when a woman is learning, and is a sensible piece of advice so that maximum benefit can be obtained from the teaching being given. It does not restrict the woman to silence at all times, but indicates the manner in which it is best for her to learn. The fact that Paul emphasizes she should learn at all was fairly radical at that time. In the Jewish community it was not considered worthwhile to teach women anything regarding the Law or the Scriptures.

Should women teach others?

1 Timothy 2:12 then says, '*I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man; she must be silent.*' Some people take this to be the absolute prohibition of any woman ever teaching any man for all time. However, it must be borne in mind that this is the only verse in the whole of Scripture which seems to suggest this. As such, care should be taken to ensure that this view is in harmony with other scriptural principles.

Acts 18:26 refers to Priscilla and Aquila who together instructed Apollos in their own home:

He (Apollos) began to speak boldly in the synagogue. When Priscilla and Aquila heard him, they invited him to their home and explained to him the way of God more adequately.

Here is an example of a woman, together with her husband, teaching a man who was a capable speaker in his own right. Paul obviously thinks highly of both her and her husband and greets them at the end of his letter to the Romans (16:3-4). There is no condemnation of this woman who he calls in Romans 16:3 'my fellow-worker in Christ Jesus'. She played her role in teaching a man 'the way of God more adequately' (Acts 18:26). Therefore, it seems that 1 Timothy 2:12 cannot be taken as a complete prohibition of women ever teaching men.

Don Williams, in *The Apostle Paul and Women in the Church*, refers to this verse and says:

In the Greek it is a present active indicative verb which can be translated 'I am not presently permitting a woman to teach or to have authority over men ...' This in contrast to the extremists

demanding full women's liberation in Ephesus. Paul prohibits the teaching of those not properly instructed.

The suggestion made here is that because of the tense of the verb used in the Greek, Paul was only prohibiting the women of that particular time and place and he did not intend it to be taken as a timeless prohibition.

1 Timothy 1:7 refers to a group of people who were teaching others erroneously: '*They want to be teachers of the law, but they do not know what they are talking about or what they so confidently affirm.*' It is possible that some of the women at Ephesus formed part of the group referred to here and, because of this, Paul included his exhortation in 1 Timothy 2:12.

A wife should not teach her own husband

However, returning to the note in *The Companion Bible* which suggests that the whole context of this passage shows that wives and husbands are in mind: it is possible that this verse merely prohibits a wife from teaching her own husband. The singular form of both 'woman' and 'man' is used which suggests that this may be so, for the words can equally well be translated 'wife' and 'husband'. This appears quite likely when the context is taken into consideration. The previous verse refers to submission which is due by a wife to her husband. The following verse refers to Adam and Eve, the first example of a husband and wife in Scripture.

The analogy which Paul uses here may imply that wives should not presume to teach their husbands in public, especially if they, like Eve, had misunderstood or misinterpreted God's word as a result of being deceived.

This Interpretation of 1 Timothy 2:12 is in accordance with Peter's advice in 1 Peter 3:1-2: Wives, in the same way be submissive to your husbands so that, if any of them do not believe the word, they may be won over without words by the behaviour of their wives, when they see the purity and reverence of your lives.

Here Peter suggests that the practical outworking of a believing wife's Christianity would be more effective in converting her husband than any amount of teaching. In both passages the attitude of submission is important, whereas talking and teaching is advised against.

A wife should not domineer her husband, or teach others to do so

A last suggestion as to the meaning of 1 Timothy 2:12 is given in *The Students Commentary*: 'What God says here is that a wife is not to govern her husband nor to teach other women to govern their husbands.' This, again, agrees with the view that husbands and wives are being referred to, and that the teaching merely refers to women attempting to domineer their husbands and telling others to do likewise. Don Williams states that 'The meaning of the infinitive *'to have authority'* is literally 'to domineer', so 1 Timothy 2:12 could be paraphrased. 'I do not permit a wife to domineer over her husband, or to teach others to do so.' This explanation fits in very well with the context, which is nothing to do with teaching, but deals with the attitude which a woman should adopt towards her own husband.

The example of Adam and Eve

The understanding of the example of Adam and Eve given in 1 Timothy 2:13,14 depends upon which interpretation of verse 12 is favored.

(1) Those who prefer the explanation that women should never teach men under any circumstances, feel that the example of Adam and Eve is given to show that, as it was a woman who was deceived and not a man, it is sensible that women should never be allowed to teach men. They say that this verse is used by Paul to illustrate that women, by nature, are more easily deceived than men. However this is questionable as Paul uses the same analogy in 2 Corinthians 11:3 where both male and female believers are likened to Eve in their liability to deception:

But I am afraid that just as Eve was deceived by the serpent's cunning, your minds may somehow be led astray from your sincere and pure devotion to Christ.

Paul was well aware that both men and women are capable of being deceived and was not averse to likening either sex to Eve where necessary. However, generally Adam and Eve are examples of the husband and wife situation, not of men and women (Matthew 19:3-9). Also, if it were true that women are more easily deceived than men and so more likely to teach error, then not only should the prohibition have applied to women teaching men, it should have included teaching other women and children, which it did not. Children are far less likely to be able to detect error in the teaching of a woman than a man would be. If this was what Paul had in mind, he would have been more concerned about preventing women from teaching children, rather than from teaching men who, are capable of thinking and questioning for themselves.

2) If 1 Timothy 2:12 was intended to prohibit only certain groups of women at Ephesus at that time, then the analogy used by Paul may be between the deception of Eve and the deception of these particular women. Neither should presume to teach when in such a condition. Just as Eve had been deceived by Satan, these women may have been deceived by 'certain men' (1 Timothy 1:3-4).

(3) If 1 Timothy 2:12 refers to husband and wife, then the meaning of the next two verses has already been considered above.

(4) Lastly, if it refers to women domineering their husbands, then Paul uses the example of Adam and Eve to show that she has no grounds to claim any superiority over her husband.

Conclusions

Based on the discussion above, it seems there is no good scriptural basis for excluding women from teaching others about the Scriptures. Priscilla is a good example of a woman who successfully helped to teach a man, and women clearly prayed and prophesied in meetings.

However, women were told not to chatter during meetings, and certain wives in the Corinthian church were also told that if they had any questions, they were to ask their husbands privately at home. As a general rule, it also seems that women were not to teach their own husbands. If their husbands did not believe, they were to be won over by their wives' pure and reverent behaviour, and not by their teaching or talking (1 Peter 3:1,2)."

- Sylvia Penny "*I Do not Permit a Woman to Teach*" from *Woman to Woman*;
The Open Bible Trust UK <https://www.obt.org.uk/>

Food for Thought: Helper "When I was in college when I first did a word study of *EZER*, the word translated as Helper in Genesis 2 describing the woman and her creation purpose. It was a word that had always implied to me that the woman was subservient and secondary to the man.

I honestly was shocked to discover that this word *EZER* was only used to describe 3 separate groups in the Old TestamentThe woman in Genesis 2, David's mightiest and most courageous and daring warriors, and of The Lord Himself, Yahweh. This was incredible to me.

EZER was not a backup word or a description of a weaker person ! *EZER* describes the character of God Himself who helps those who are unable to help themselves....When Adam looked and interacted with Eve he discovered more and more what God was like."

Continued study of the Bible confirmed that after the fall it was a man's world...But, despite the dominance of men, women periodically crop up to show great leadership and great wisdom. I found myself inspired by Rebekah's initiative, Tamar's daring, Miriam preserving Moses' life as an infant, Ruth's loyalty to Naomi and to God, Esther's putting her life on the line, and Deborah's leadership that saved Israel.

And then there was Mary, courage, available to God no matter the cost, Martha who is unafraid of speaking directly to Jesus, and Mary Magdalene who is first to see the Risen Jesus. Dr. Bartlett Hess was my mentor in early years and I never forgot him saying...' Women, first at the cross, first at the tomb, first at the Resurrection.' It is women who preach the first Resurrection sermons, despite the dullness of the apostles to hear at first!"

- Steve Andrews "Kensington's View of Women in Leadership"