

Can Women Be Teachers in the Christian Congregation?

(Part 2)

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Resolving the Apparent Contradiction between 1 Corinthians 11:5 and 1 Timothy 2:8-15

In restating Paul’s clear understanding that there would be wives or other women in the congregation who would be “**praying or prophesying**” (1Cor. 11:5), we must ask how we reconcile this with the apparent meaning of statements in 1 Timothy 2, where it says that women are not allowed to teach a man?

MUST WOMEN REALLY NEVER TEACH A MAN ANYTHING?

1 Timothy 2:8-15 *ESV*:

❖ “I desire then that in every place *the men* should pray, lifting holy hands without **anger or quarrelling**, *likewise also* that the women should adorn themselves with respectable apparel, with modesty and self control, not with braided hair and gold or pearls or costly attire, but with what is proper for women who profess godliness—with good works. Let a **woman learn quietly** with all **submissiveness**. I do not permit a woman to **teach or to exercise authority over a man** [Gk *Andros* = a male]; rather she is to remain quiet. **For Adam was formed first**, then Eve; and Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and became a transgressor. Yet she will be *saved* (“preserved” NASB) through child-bearing—if they continue in faith and love and holiness, with self control.”

Timothy served in **Ephesus**. So what is said in this letter applies to that local situation although the principles drawn from Paul’s admonitions are also of benefit to all.

MEN IN EPHESUS—DON’T QUARREL AT THE MEETING!

Just as the men should pray in the congregation at Ephesus without quarrelling “**likewise also**” the women should be adorned with good works in the congregation.

WOMEN IN EPHESUS—BE SUBMISSIVE TO GOD AND HIS ARRANGEMENT OF THE CONGREGATION!

The women’s ‘good works’ included praying and prophesying (1Cor. 11:5), yet without their giving of excessive attention to their appearance as was the practice of the priestesses of Artemis.

Furthermore, the statement, “*Let a wife learn quietly with all submissiveness*” means that **the learning should be, not in silence**, but “undisturbed” or “in quietness” or with “a quiet demeanour” just as men should “do their work quietly” (2Thess. 3:12). This, for the men, does not mean that work is done in total silence, as with the silent orders of the Roman Catholic Church. Rather, it means, for the women, that their learning is done either **undisturbed or without causing a disturbance in the** congregation and was the attitude of rabbinic students. So, in theologian NT Wright’s *Kingdom New Testament* we find the rendering “undisturbed” for verses 11 and 12, and Greek scholar William Mounce, renders these verses as:

❖ “You should allow a woman to learn **with a quiet demeanour** in all submissiveness; but I don’t allow a woman to teach or to **domineer over** a man; rather, she is to have a quiet demeanour” (1Tim. 2:11-12).

These renderings more harmoniously match the context of the letter to Timothy where some women had naively accepted false doctrine from the knowledgeable male false teachers so that they had been deceived and were trying to persuade the male overseers in a very domineering manner.

According to the *Word Biblical Commentary* the “submissiveness” mentioned is in the context of learning and so “limits the women’s submission to the teaching overseers” and is restricted to “the public times when the overseers teach” as well as “**submissiveness to God**” rather than particularly to husbands who are not even mentioned. So as with their modesty in dress the women needed to be modest in their demeanour. Here Paul’s mention of Eve may have been to show that she wouldn’t have been deceived if either Adam had informed her more fully of factors about God’s creation of the garden, its vegetation, and its animals; or if she had patiently learned from Adam. Clearly Christian women need to learn the Scriptures just as much as men do.

WOMEN IN EPHESUS—STOP BEING DECEIVED INTO TEACHING WHAT IS FALSE!

The phrase in 1Timothy 2:12: “*I do not permit a woman to **teach** or to exercise authority over a man*” fits within the *context* of teaching of the Gnostic kind, and so Paul’s statement of “*I do not permit...*” is in the local setting of Ephesus and is therefore an exhortation so that Timothy:

- ❖ “...may charge *certain persons* not to teach **different doctrine**, nor to devote themselves to myths and endless genealogies” (1Tim. 1:3, 4).

This means that Timothy should also:

- ❖ “Avoid the irreverent babble and contradictions of what is **falsely called ‘knowledge’**” (1Tim. 6:20)

So Paul was forbidding women to promote Gnosticism as well as the Judaising that the male false teachers were teaching, and that Paul was trying to counteract. However, the phrase “I don’t allow a woman to teach or to domineer over a man” “cannot be a blanket prohibition of women teaching anyone” because:

- Older women are told to teach ... (Titus 2:3).
- Timothy was taught by his mother and grandmother (2 Tim 3:15).
- Priscilla taught Apollos (Acts 18:26).
- Women are “to prophesy” (1Cor. 11: 5).
- The prophetess daughters of Philip (Acts 21:8-9).

So in *Hard Sayings of Paul* Manfred Brauch noted that this sentence in 1Timothy 2:

“carries primarily the negative sense of ‘grasping for’ or ‘usurping authority’...” So it is “directed against women involved in false teaching who have abused proper exercise of authority in the church (not denied by Paul elsewhere to women) by usurpation and domination of the male leaders and teachers in the church at Ephesus” p. 256

Furthermore Professor of NT Craig S. Keener explains the background to 1Timothy 2:8-15:

The proper way for any novice to learn was submissively and “quietly.” Women were less likely to be literate than men, were trained in philosophy far less often than men, were trained in rhetoric almost never, and in Judaism were far less likely to be educated in the law. Given the bias against instructing women in the law, it is Paul’s advocacy of their learning the law, not his recognition that they started as novices and so had to learn quietly, that was radical and countercultural.

Given women’s lack of training in the Scriptures, the heresy spreading in the Ephesian churches through ignorant teachers (1:4-7), and the false teachers’ exploitation of these women’s lack of knowledge to spread their errors (5:13; 2Tim. 3:6), Paul’s prohibition here makes good sense. His short-range solution is that these women should not teach; his long range solution is “let them learn” (2:11). The situation might be different after the women had been instructed (2:11; cf. Rom.16:1-4, 7; Phil.4:2-3).

The IVP Bible Background Commentary, p. 610-612.

So 1Timothy 2:8-15 is also not saying that faithful, biblically educated, capable women must never teach in the congregation.

HOW DOES “ADAM WAS FORMED FIRST” AFFECT WOMENS’ STATUS IN THE CONGREGATION?

- ❖ “**For Adam was formed first**, then Eve; and Adam was not deceived, but **the woman was deceived** and became a transgressor” (1 Tim. 2:13, 14).

Why was only Eve deceived by the Serpent? In examining the Genesis Two account it becomes evident that because God made Adam before the garden was made Adam saw the final touches to the creation, namely the creation of the garden with all its trees and flowers and shrubs, after which God then began to create the various animals that would be in the garden once Adam was placed in it. Eve saw none of these things. So Paul’s comment that “*Adam was formed first*” is not a comment about man as being of higher rank than his wife or any woman, but simply shows that, because **Adam** was formed first he **had more knowledge than Eve** had and so he was not deceived. Also, at the time of the temptation Adam was part of the situation because he “was with her, and he ate” (Gen. 3:6). So for these reasons, Eve, as the one deceived through a lack of knowledge, is not held responsible for sin entering into the world (Rom. 5:12). So the phrase “**the woman was deceived**” contributes to the context of 1 Timothy 2:8-15 in understanding that the women who were not to teach were deceived women. However, although some had been deceived this does not imply that all women in the Ephesus congregation were deceived or that all women in all periods of time get deceived anymore than men do.

NOTE: According to *The Biblical Hebrew and Discourse Linguistics* edited by Robert D. Bergen the NIV is grammatically incorrect when it renders Genesis 2:8 as “had planted” as if the garden already existed before Adam’s creation.

HARMONY BETWEEN 1 CORINTHIANS 11:5 AND 1 TIMOTHY 2:8-15

The phrase in 1 Timothy 2:13, written in AD 63-65 concerning the situation in Ephesus, parallels Paul's statement to the Corinthians in AD 55 that:

- ❖ "For man was not made from woman, but woman from man. Neither was man created for woman, but woman for man. That is why a wife ought to have a symbol of authority on her head, because of the angels" (1 Cor. 11:8-10).

However, Paul goes on to say:

- ❖ "Nevertheless, in the Lord woman is not independent of man **nor man of woman**; for as woman was made from man, so man is now born of woman. And all things are from God" (1 Cor. 11:11-12).

Paul makes the same point to Timothy in Ephesus in AD 63-65 as he earlier did to the Corinthians in AD 55, and indicating that just because woman came into existence after man in Eve's case, this does not preclude women from having the gifts, including those of "**prophecy... teaching... exhortation**" (Rom. 12:6-8). Hence, women today should not be precluded from "praying or prophesying" i.e. teaching (1 Cor. 11:5) in the congregation.

THE DIFFICULTY OF UNDERSTANDING 1 TIMOTHY 2:15

The standard translations render this verse as: "*Yet she will be saved ("preserved" NASB) through **child-bearing...***" However, because the definite article is immediately before the Greek word *teknogonias* a number of scholars see the likelihood that the correct rendering should be "the child-birth" and with reference to the Messiah's birth. This is especially likely because a woman's salvation is not dependent upon her bearing of children. Rather it is dependent on one's faith in the Messiah as the remainder of the verse advocates when it says "*if they (the husband and wife) continue in faith and love and holiness, with self control.*" This view is further strengthened because Paul has just referenced the Genesis account of the Fall and so bringing to mind the promise of the seed—the Messiah in Genesis 3:15. So the GOD'S WORD translation gives the following rendering:

- ❖ "However, she and all women will be saved through the birth of **the child**, if they lead respectable lives in faith, love, and holiness." *The footnote states: "Taken to refer to Yeshua."*

But Aren't Only the Elders to Be the Teachers?

In the *Word Biblical Commentary* on the Pastoral Epistles, which includes the first letter to Timothy, William Mounce makes the point that all **the qualities** noted in 1 Timothy 3:1-7 for "an overseer" are **common to all Christians** albeit that some may be still developing these qualities. So although one of the abilities for an elder is that of **teaching** this does not preclude others who display a reasonable ability in this area and, of course, this includes women.

FAITHFUL PEOPLE WHO ARE COMPETENT TO TEACH SHOULD TEACH

- ❖ "You've heard my message, and it's been confirmed by many witnesses. Entrust this message to **faithful individuals** who will be competent to teach others" (2 Tim. 2:2 God's Word Translation).
- ❖ "And entrust what you heard me say in the presence of many others as witnesses to **faithful people** who will be competent to teach others as well" (NET). Also in NRSV, ISV, NLT, and CEB and others.

Except for the NAB and the NJB, older translations have generally translated this as "faithful **men**" and so to preclude women as teachers. However, the Greek word *anthropos* has a basic reference to 'humans' i.e. 'mankind' and so includes women. So modern translations generally render this as "faithful people" and thereby include women as teachers in harmony with other texts which show women to be teachers of the Scriptures.

Only Some Women Are to Be Teachers

- ❖ "Now you are Christ's body and each of you is a member of it. And God has appointed in the church first apostles, second prophets, **third teachers** ... Not all are apostles, are they? Not all are prophets, are they? **Not all are teachers, are they?**" (1 Cor. 12:27-30).

Therefore, just as some men in the congregation would not be teachers so some women in the congregation also would not be teachers. Clearly it would only be those women who are competent, well-motivated, and biblically knowledgeable that should become teachers in the Christian congregation (especially for encouraging others).

As a Teacher a Woman Should Display Modesty

However, as with a male novice to teaching, the female novice to teaching should work under the guidance of an elder so that humility is maintained and so she never falls into the trap of usurping an elder's authority or teaching what is false (even unknowingly). The more skilled and knowledgeable she becomes the less guidance would be needed. So this would be the teaching of Bible subjects of substance (as with Priscilla) and not just aspects on the periphery i.e. only background information. So in 1 Timothy 2 Paul repeats the point that he made earlier in 1 Corinthians 11:5 (AD 55) for women to act modestly and yet he made no change to their privilege of "praying or prophesying."

The High Value of Women in the Congregation

- ❖ "There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer **male and female**; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus" (*Gal. 3:28 NRSV*).

The statement about "*male and female*" is not one that is to the effect that differences in sex no longer exist. The translation issue is that Paul here does not say 'no longer male *or* female' he says "there is no longer male **and** female" as he quotes from Genesis:

- ❖ "So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male **and** female he created them" (*Gen. 1:27*).

This made man and woman partners in authority over the creation, but with **different roles**. So Galatians 3:28 is a comment about a person's worth, that is, that men and women are valued as equals in the Christian congregation. This was in contrast to the prevailing low view of women in the society of the time.

NO LONGER PARTNERS IN THE OLD CREATION

In Galatians, Paul is focused on the New Creation. This demonstrates that Christians have all transferred from the family of Adam to that of Messiah. However, no one becomes genderless; indeed the ministry of the Christian woman would have **different emphasis** to that of the Christian man; yet **both are equally important** as is shown by the fact that the NT letters were written to "the brothers and sisters."

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The Veil/Shawl as a Head-Covering

This section of Paul's writings gives theologians and scholars considerable difficulty in understanding; and so we, too, struggle to fully understand Paul's meaning here.

WIVES—PRAYING AND PROPHECYING

- ❖ "Every man praying or prophesying with his head covered shames his "head", ⁵but every wife praying or prophesying with her head uncovered shames her "head." It is the same as having a shaved head" (*1Cor. 11:4, 5 KGV*).

There is nothing in the Scriptures to indicate that such praying is only under special circumstances, such as when no baptised male is present. The setting here is that of the congregation where wives acted as teachers, in that they were to engage in prophesying.

JEWISH MEN'S COVERING OF THEIR HEAD WITH A SHAWL

The Commentary on the New Testament from the Talmud and Hebraica by John Lightfoot explains the background to the idea of a head-covering:

"...it was the custom of the Jews that they prayed not, unless first their heads were veiled, and that for this reason; that by this rite that they might show themselves reverent, and ashamed before God, and unworthy with open face to behold him. ... Men therefore veiled themselves when they prayed, partly for a sign of reverence towards God, partly, to show themselves ashamed before God, and unworthy to look upon Him.

In contradiction of the Jewish tradition, Paul shows that Christian men should not veil their heads because they are no longer in shame before God. This is because of the sacrifice of Christ which paid for and acted as the covering for sins. In fact to veil their heads would bring dishonour to Christ. This is also true for Christian women.

VEILING – NOT REQUIRED FOR ANY CHRISTIANS

- ❖ “Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. And we **all, with unveiled face**, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another” (2Cor. 3:17, 18).

This freedom in Christ is demonstrated by the fact that no Christian, male or female, is required to be veiled – all behold “*the glory of the Lord*” “**with unveiled face**.” So why does Paul speak of the veiling of the faces of wives in 1Corinthians 11:4, 5?

JUDAISM’S WRONG VIEW OF WOMEN

Lightfoot’s Commentary explains the misguided view of Judaism regarding women and its mistreatment of them:

And they fetch the shame of the woman thence, that **she first brought sin into the world**. ...Should a woman walk bare headed in the street, her husband could divorce her without payment of her dowry.

So the reason for the wife having to veil herself at her wedding and whenever she was in public was that this acted a sign of shame according to Jewish authorities. To them womankind had led man into sin. The effect of veiling was similar to when one was mourning a death.

TWO REASONS FOR SHORT HAIR

(1). Adultery or prostitution in the Greek world. (2). At the completion of a Nazarite vow in the Jewish world.

A BAD REASON AND TWO GOOD REASONS FOR A WIFE TO BE VEILED

1. If a Christian wife covered herself with a veil because of shame at being a woman in accordance with the tradition of Judaism she would shame Christ as her head who had paid for her sins. This is just as would be for the case of a man.
2. However, if she covered herself with a veil in public because she had a non-Christian Jewish husband then she would be honouring him as her head. This is a very significant dilemma for her because by being veiled it would appear as though she was dishonouring Christ, but if she went unveiled her husband would have a basis to divorce her.
3. If any Christian woman had just completed a Nazarite vow and had her very long hair shorn:
 - ❖ “When either a man or **a woman** makes a special vow, the vow of a **Nazirite**, to separate himself to the LORD...⁴All the days of his vow of separation, **no razor shall touch his head**. Until the time is completed for which he separates himself to the LORD, he shall be holy. He shall **let the locks of hair of his head grow long**. ...¹⁸And the Nazirite shall **shave** his consecrated head at the entrance of the tent of meeting and shall take the hair from his consecrated head and put it on the fire that is under the sacrifice of the peace offering” (Num. 29:2, 4-5, 18).

ALLOWING A WIFE TO COVER HER HAIR - IN CORINTH

“...but every wife praying or prophesying with her **head uncovered** shames her “head” (*Jewish non-believing husband*). It is the same as having a shaved head (*like an adulteress or Nazarite*. Moreover, if a wife will not cover her head, she might as well cut her hair short (*like an adulteress*); but if it is shameful (*because of looking like an adulteress*) for a wife to cut her hair short or shave her head, then you must allow her to cover it” (1Cor. 11:5. 6 KGV).

Here Paul is making a concession for practical reasons so that:

1. Any Woman who had just completed a Nazarite vow and had recently had her hair cut short would not be mistaken for an adulteress or a prostitute.
2. Any Wife, who had a Jewish non-believing husband who required her to wear a head covering at all times in public, would not run the risk of incurring the husband’s disfavour and end up being divorced.

A WIFE’S AUTHORITY TO DECIDE WHETHER OR NOT TO COVER HER HEAD

- ❖ “Indeed a man shouldn’t have his head covered, since he is the image and reflected glory of God, but the wife is the reflected glory of a man. Indeed, man wasn’t made from woman, but woman from man. Neither was man created for the sake of woman, but woman for the sake of man. For this reason a wife ought to be wearing her authority on her head—and out of regard for the angels. However, in union with the Lord, a wife isn’t independent of man, nor is man independent of a wife; because, just as the woman was made from the man, so now man comes through woman. But everything comes from God (*the ultimate*

source). Judge for yourselves: is it proper for a wife to pray to God with her head uncovered? Doesn't [human] nature teach you that if a man wears long hair, it's a disgrace to him, but if a wife wears long hair it's a glory to her! This is because long hair has been given instead of a covering. But if anyone still wants to argue about this, we have no other practice—nor do the congregations of God" (1Cor. 11:7-16 KJV).

NOT APPLICABLE TO TODAY

Neither Christian men nor women needed any longer to wear a head covering because the sacrificial work of Jesus had removed the shame that Jews customarily attributed to themselves. So because of the customs and viewpoints current **in the 1st century culture** Paul here is simply making a concession to allow any Christian woman who was married to a Jewish non-believer, and therefore running the risk of divorce, to wear the covering; and similarly any woman who had just completed a Nazarite vow and so cut her hair short could avoid being viewed as either an adulteress or as a prostitute if not wearing the covering.

With this background in mind it is clear that there should be no requirement of wearing a hat or veil or having long hair for Christian women in our very different modern-day western culture. *The NIV Theological Dictionary of New Testament Words* shows that:

In a culture where the significance of veiling is no longer understood in the same way, the argument no longer has the same force ... The passage has been used in support of requiring women to wear hats in worship today. If the application were valid the argument would support not the wearing of hats but full veils. *ibid* p.680

THE EFFECT ON ANGELS

The phrase "and out of regard for the angels" is very difficult for most theologians. However, it appears that angels were thought to be at Christian gatherings to transmit prayers to God as if God were actually there and that something involving head-coverings might be offensive to them. Yet this may not be the reason at all and we have to say that, at the moment, this view is very uncertain.

Summary

From the above examination of the Scriptures, their language, and their background the best view of the status of women shows that men and women are equal in God's eyes but have different yet complementary roles in all aspects of life including that of the Christian Congregation.

However, if one treats 'ministry' and 'teaching' as concerning only the role of male elders/pastors, then women would be seen as having no ministry. This is also true of other men who are not in leadership. Surely this is an incorrect approach because women are shown to be teachers of biblical truth, both outside and inside of the Christian congregation as well as Phoebe being an example of a female deacon.

THE RENDERING OF 1 TIMOTHY 2:11-15 IN THE KINGDOM OF GOD VERSION

❖ "You should allow a woman to learn undisturbed, in all willing submissiveness. ¹² However, I don't allow a woman to be an official teacher, that is, in a position of authority over a man; rather, that she is to be left [to learn] undisturbed. ¹³ Certainly, God formed Adam first and then Eve, ¹⁴ yet Adam wasn't deceived, but the woman, having been deceived, came to be in transgression. ¹⁵ Nevertheless, she will be kept safe through the child-birth, if they continue in faith, self-sacrificing love, and holiness accompanied by good judgment."

With this rendering, along with others, there is complete harmony with Paul's statement that Christian women can be "**praying or prophesying**" i.e. teaching (1Cor. 11:5) in the Christian Congregation.

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