

1 Timothy 2:11-15: Paul's Prohibition of Women Elders

Intro: This passage is one of the most debated in 1 Timothy. Not because the sentences are hard to understand, but because of what they are saying. Our culture doesn't like the idea that God would refuse a position of church leadership to women.

--If you would like to do some serious study on this particular section, I would recommend:

Women In The Church by Kostenberger & Schriener. For a wider consideration of various gender issues, read: *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood* by Piper & Grudem.

--The simplicity and shortness of this section prove that Paul's point was clear and obvious to Timothy and the rest of the church. The flow is very natural. Paul speaks about his desire for the men to lead in prayer, for women in the church to dress modestly, and do good works, but not that the position of an elder or pastor is not for them. Paul then speaks about what qualifications male elders should have, and male and female deacons.

--Historically, the church has always recognized this passage, as well as others, to say what it clearly says. It has only been in the last 100 years that Protestant churches have begun to ordain women as pastors, elders, or bishops.

--Sadly, it is only a small number of modern Protestant denominations that still hold the biblical position of male eldership.

1) SBC (some 47, 000 fellowships), though they are in the battle right now.

2) Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod (some 6,000 fellowships).

--CMA would have been the second, with 25, 000 fellowships, but they just surrendered and now allow women elders/pastors.

3) Calvary Chapel; PCA; Evangelical Free Church of America; and Newfrontiers all have around 1500-2000 fellowships.

4) There are a few other smaller church networks like Acts 29, Sovereign Grace Churches, etc., and no doubt a few others I am not familiar with.

--I say that to put things in perspective. Biblical male eldership is a shrinking minority in American Protestant churches. So, this passage is very important!

--If this passage is not a clear prohibition of women elders, then what is it? The sheer volume of crazy interpretations proves there is only one reasonable interpretation!

--Here are a few of the "different" interpretations I came across in my personal studies:

-Paul didn't actually write this letter (a pseudo-Paul did), so what it says doesn't matter.

-Paul caved to the patriarchal cultural pressure.

-This is not a timeless manual for the church—only for Ephesus.

-This was only in relation to the impact false teaching had on women.

-Paul was referring to Gnostic teachings where Eve enlightened Adam with her teaching.

-Paul was referring to women propagating the mother goddess Artemis teaching, a heresy popular in Ephesus at the time.

- Distinctions between men and women had become blurred because of the false teaching that the resurrection of the saints had already occurred.
- Paul wrote it because Roman women had become too assertive in public settings.
- Women were teaching heresy, so only women false teachers were refused.
- Really refers to women ruling and teaching their husbands, not all women.
- Because women had a lack of formal education, uneducated women were not to teach.
- Paul's refusal was only intended to be for a temporary period of time.
- Since women can speak in other ways, they should be able to do this too.
- have authority** should actually be translated *engage in fertility practices* (There are a legion of similar views that make wild translations of this Greek term.)
- Paul was refusing to allow women to claim to be the originator or author of men.
- Paul was refusing women who would instigate violence through their teaching.
- Paul is just giving illustrations or examples of morals, not reasons for prohibitions.
- All of this is just allegorical.
- None of this matters because it wasn't central to Paul's real purpose in writing.
- The relevance of this passage is unclear.
- This prohibition cannot mean what it says because it goes against logic and justice.
- Redemption transcends creation, so the created norms no longer matter.
- The whole thing has "whispers of patriarchy" even in the Genesis account. (Which would mean sin in paradise!)
- Paul is using "practical logic" and not our "Western logic" while tapping into "generative core beliefs" of the culture to defend his reasoning. *That is one example of many other scholarly mumbo-jumbo responses no normal person would ever get from reading the Bible!*
- Some just tap out of the discussion by saying: *It is just hard to fathom!*
- The sheer variety and scope of argumentation make it obvious—they are protesting too much! If this passage doesn't mean what it clearly says, it doesn't mean anything at all.
- *Thomas Schriener tells this story in his book *Women in the Church*: "*I remember saying to a friend who is a New Testament scholar, 'I would like to believe the position you hold. But it seems as if you have to leap over the evidence of the text to espouse such a position.' He replied, 'Tom, you are right. Take that leap. Take that leap.' Leaping over the evidence is precisely what I am unwilling to do.*"*
- Leaping over the clear lines of the Word is clearly leaping into God's displeasure.

Verse 11:

--***Let a woman learn in silence with all submission.***

--First, take note, Paul says women are to **learn**. The language gives the idea of *let them go on learning*. Christianity's emphasis on women learning was a blessing. *Jesus' blessing on Mary of Bethany.*

--Through history, too many places withheld learning from women. Today, our issue is dumbing things down for women. Too many “women’s ministries” are filled with shallow appeals, and curated emotional tugs on heartstrings. Not the pure word of God.

--Still, Paul’s point is the manner and mode of their learning. What does he tell Timothy?

--***in silence*** can mean *total silence*, or *quietly*, or *peaceable* as used in **1 Thess. 3:12: *that they work in quietness and eat their own bread.***

--***with all submission*** means with entire submission to God (not man) and His truth. The submission spoken of here is referenced in other places as well. It is the correct response to authority. Such as submission to government, parents, masters, husbands, etc.

--It is the opposite of responding to God-ordained authority with rebellious or combative attitudes.

--Notice, these first two exhortations relate to the following two points Paul will make. Learning in silence + Not teaching; With all submission + To have authority.

Verse 12:

--***And I do not permit.*** . . not because Paul was a tyrant but because God does not permit.

--Again, it is important to remember the context here is the sphere of the church. Paul is writing so that believers ***may know how you ought to conduct yourself in the house of God (3:15).***

--This does not relate to a woman’s job in a school, hospital, or HR department.

--What does Paul (God) not permit?

--***a woman to teach.*** . . Now, people get into all types of arguments about what type of teaching Paul was talking about. Some of this is understandable. The Scriptures make it clear that women are supposed to pray, evangelize, worship, prophesy, speak in tongues, teach other women (**Titus 2:3-4**), etc.

--Still, the Bible also speaks clearly about a type of teaching that is not for women.

1 Corinthians 14:33-35: *For God is not the author of confusion but of peace, as in all the churches of the saints. Let your women keep silent in the churches, for they are not permitted to speak; but they are to be submissive, as the law also says. And if they want to learn something, let them ask their own husbands at home; for it is shameful for women to speak in church.*

--The context in Corinth was the ordering of an out-of-control service and the judgment of various tongues and prophecies. Paul makes it clear, women were not to speak into those things which were clearly for the elders of the church to deal with.

--Elders were to judge things like tongues, visions, dreams, and prophecy by the Word of God. Inspired and infallible truth is what Paul is referring to when he speaks about teaching—**Acts 2:42: *and they continued steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine.*** . .

--The rest of the pastoral epistles also give clarity on the teaching Paul is referencing: the apostles’ doctrine Vs. different doctrine (**1:3**); sound doctrine; the faith; the deposit; that which refutes false teachers; the teaching that has authority in the church; the teaching of elders; etc.

4:11: *These things command and teach.*

6:2: *Teach and exhort these things.*

2 Timothy 4:2: *Preach the word! Be ready in season and out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching.*

--Paul then tells Timothy the second thing God does not permit for women in the church.

--***or to have authority over a man but to be in silence.*** . . The Greek word for ***have authority*** (*authenteo*) is a verb used only here in the NT and is rarely found in Greek literature. We only have eight occurrences before 312, and even some of those are debatable!

--The term is not negative—as some try to say women couldn’t exercise *negative* authority, but they could exercise *positive* authority. In fact, the language makes both things mentioned the same. The teaching and the authority prohibited are either both positive or both negative. Paul’s reference to teaching is clearly positive, therefore, so is the authority he speaks of.

--The Scriptures prohibit women from the authoritative teaching of the Word of God as is the express job of biblical elders/bishops/pastors. ***3:2; 3:15; Acts 20:27-28; Titus 1:9; 1 Peter 5:2***

--The Scriptures clearly teach authority in the church lies with the elders, who are the overseers and shepherds of the church. ***1 Thess. 5:12; Heb. 13:17; 1 Tim. 3:5; 5:17***

--A pastor’s job isn’t just to teach. It is to live, teach, serve, lead, oversee, and discipline with authority—the authority of the Word of God.

--In the Scriptures, this task is always and only given to men. **Even though not all men!**

2 Tim. 2:2: *And the things that you have heard from me among many witnesses, commit these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also.*

--This type of teaching is also clearly a spiritual gift: **Romans 12:7; 1 Cor. 12:27-29; Eph. 4:11.**

--James, the apostle and elder, warns the teaching gift should be used soberly.

James 3:1: *My brethren, let not many of you become teachers, knowing that we shall receive a stricter judgment.*

--God takes the teaching and shepherding of His children very seriously.

Verse 13:

--***For Adam was formed first, then Eve.***

--***For.*** . . clearly gives us this sentence as the *reason* for Paul’s prohibition.

--God’s intention in male and female roles is evident in creation *before sin* enters the picture.

Paul bases the prohibition of women elders on the clear intention of God in creation. God created men and women with distinct roles. We must acknowledge and submit to God’s design.

--All attempts at Christian feminism fall apart just at this point. If God’s intention in male and female roles is seen before sin, all redefining of womanhood and a woman’s role becomes a redefining of God. What we ultimately call idolatry.

Verse 14:

--And Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived, fell into transgression.

--Many commentators act like they cannot understand how this sentence connects with what Paul says earlier. The inspired illustration fits the situation perfectly.

--Adam and Eve are together in the garden (**Gen. 3:6**), but Satan approaches Eve, subtly challenging God's order of headship. Eve is deceived and takes the lead in disobeying God's clear command.

--Adam, in open transgression, follows her lead against the command of God! The Scriptures clearly hold Adam responsible for the failure of headship in the entrance of sin. ***Rom. 5:12-19***

--Paul is not saying women should not be teaching pastors because they are more easily deceived. Paul is saying, look at what happened right in the beginning when Satan tempted Eve to step out of her role and take the lead, and Adam willingly allowed that to happen!

--Satan's deception in Eden is still confounding every single church embracing women pastors or elders.

--It is a sin for a woman to play a role God has not called her to (so too any man!). It is a sin for men to refuse to step up and play the role God has called them to.

--It is telling, even in the Genesis account, what happens after this takes place. After their sin, God still recognizes His own order in creation. God approaches Adam first, keeping His own instituted order, and deals with their sin.

--The outcome of their sin continues to reflect created order, despite the curse's disorder. Different consequences are given to Adam (the head) and Eve (the helpmeet). The curse affects both uniquely. If they were equal, they would also have equal consequences.

--Paul's command to Timothy, reference to pre-sin created order, and illustration of what happens when we ignore that order, are all very clear. Paul does not permit a woman to take the place of teaching-pastor in the church.

Applications:

--Now, what does this mean for us practically if we meet or interact with women pastors or elders? What if you go to a church with a woman pastor?

--First, it does not mean they are all unsaved. Eve played the wrong role but still had faith in God. We should treat all professing Christian women as true sisters in Jesus Christ, even though they are our sisters in sin, a sin which tragically harms them and others.

--If I am interacting with a woman pastor, they should have my prayers and pity, not a combative attitude. How will I want them to remember our interaction when looking back from eternity?

--Second, it does mean God will not give them the grace to play the role they think they should play. If they are playing a role God has not created them for, and the Holy Spirit has not gifted them for, there will only be spoiled or bad fruit.

--What will happen? Think, what if a man who wasn't gifted to play the role of pastor did so?

--When it comes to saved women serving God in various denominations like, Assembly of God, and some other movements, their *pastoral ministry* will never produce the fruit God would desire from the position.

--God will still bless other roles of service women are called to and gifted for, such as: worship; evangelism, prophecy; teaching women, children, visiting the sick, giving, hospitality, etc.

--Third, it is important to understand anyone doing religious things where God doesn't have them can be very dangerous.

--Unsaved women pastors (though the same with unsaved men) are a Satanic influence in the body of Christ. *PCUSA; Evangelical Lutheran Church; Mennonite; United Methodist Church; Episcopal/Anglican Church*

*The Philadelphia Eleven were the first women ordained as priests in the Episcopal church on July 29th, 1974. Two years *before* the church permitted ordaining women to the role. Now, just some fifty years later, 40% of Episcopal priests are women and 30% of bishops. And it would be very hard to find an Episcopal church in the US that actually holds to biblical Christianity. All this in just fifty years! (Fault is the double sin of men vacating their lead and women accepting it.)*

--We must not join women in ministry *as pastors*. Which would include the foolish practice of giving women the title of *pastor* but then claiming they are not pastors, or the opposite, not calling them elders but allowing them to play the role given to an elder—especially teaching.

--We have had women share their testimonies, such as Corrie Ten Boom; Joni Eareckson Tada; Alisa Childers, various missionaries, etc., but they are not teaching apostolic doctrine or playing an authoritative pastoral role in the church.

--Church practice should always be the logical outcome of church profession.

5:22: Do not lay hands on anyone hastily, nor share in other people's sins; keep yourself pure.

Final Point:

--Jesus Christ has already solved this discussion. He chose 12 male disciples. Not six males and six females. He knew He was choosing those who would lay the foundation of the Church and all Church practice. There are twelve men written in the foundation stones of the New Jerusalem. The importance of Jesus' choices cannot be overstated.

--When the apostles were filling Judas' place, only two men were chosen as candidates (not Mary, the mother of Jesus, Mary of Bethany, Martha, or any other woman present!).

--There is not a single NT record of a woman apostle, or elders laying hands on a woman elder.

--There is not a single NT record of a woman teaching the congregation apostolic doctrine.

--There is not a single NT book, inspired by the Holy Spirit, written by a woman.

--Jesus Christ, the apostles, and the Holy Spirit couldn't have made the issue clearer. God has not gifted or called women to play the role of head in the home or in the church.

--Women fill the Scriptures otherwise, playing incredible roles as helpers in the work of God!
There is nothing stopping any woman from being the woman God would have them to be.
*We have women in our fellowship playing needed roles: deaconesses; worship; prayer;
teachers; children's ministry, youth ministry, our school, giving, administration, missions, etc.*

Verse 15:

--What is Paul talking about here? Obviously, he is not speaking about eternal salvation.

--There are numerous interpretations, but I think only one makes sense.

--***Nevertheless, she will be saved in childbearing.*** . . means a woman's freedom, or salvation, will be found in doing what God made her to do and then remaining on that path in Christian virtue. Paul is saying these are the circumstances where women will best experience their salvation in Christ Jesus.

--If a woman rejects the place God made her to occupy, she will only be frustrated and enslaved. In humbly submitting, women influence the world from the home outward.

--One commentator explained it as "bottom-up" influence with children, instead of "top-down" influence with men.

--***if they continue in faith, love, and holiness, with self-control.*** This makes it obvious that Paul is speaking about more than having kids. Women without children will find true freedom in life by staying in their God-appointed roles with godly character.

--There was obviously a problem with some women leaving and rejecting their God-appointed roles. ***5:15: For some have already turned aside after Satan.***

--Paul was commanding Timothy to teach the prohibition of women as teaching-pastors/elders, and all who are faithful to the Word of God should charge others that they teach no other doctrine. God knows that the prohibition of women elders is best for men and women. He is the Potter. We are the clay. He will resist the proud and exalt the humble.

--In general, the woman finds her proper sphere of pleasing God in the home circle and as a godly helper to God-appointed leadership in the church.

--If this idea is counter-cultural, I don't care. It is what the Word of God says! I will say it because I believe it is what's best for my sisters in Christ, and God's church.

--God's commands lived are beautiful to behold!

Psalms 119:45-47: And I will walk at liberty; for I seek Your precepts. I will speak of Your testimonies also before kings, and will not be ashamed. And I will delight myself in Your commandments, which I love.