

# **WHAT WE BELIEVE ABOUT MEN AND WOMEN IN THE CHURCH**

## **PART 3: WHO CAN TEACH**

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All quotations are taken from the Holy Bible, New International Version (NIV).

# Introduction

Should a local church eldership team permit women to teach men in whole-church settings? For some people, I realise the question seems absurd. ‘Why are we talking about elders “permitting” women to do anything?’ ‘Why *shouldn’t* a woman be able to do anything that a man can do?’

For others, my previous two papers will have prepared you for the fact that the question is a contentious one in the Christian community. Here’s a summary of the some of the ground I’ve covered previously:

- Some Christians believe that the ‘distinction’ part of ‘union-with-distinction’ requires that we prohibit women from teaching men. The reason for this is that it’s believed to contravene biblical teaching on male headship. Men and women are created equal but different, and God’s good design for men and women is that men should lead in the church and home and women should submit to male authority.
- In 1 Corinthians 14, Paul appears at first glance to lay down a blanket prohibition on women being vocal in public meetings. ‘Women should remain silent in the churches,’ he writes. ‘They are not allowed to speak but must be in submission’ (v. 34). In Paper 2, I pointed out that, whatever Paul means by this statement, he *can’t* mean that women are never permitted to speak, as this would directly contradict what he says just a few verses earlier (vv. 26-27) as well as a few chapters earlier, in chapter 11 (vv. 2-16). I explained why I think there’s nothing in this text that prohibits women from contributing to church meetings today.
- In 1 Corinthians 11, Paul refers to male headship, but the whole thrust of his argument has to do with enabling women to contribute to public meetings without shame rather than trying to shut them up. Paul talks about women praying or prophesying in public, but teaching isn’t mentioned.

It’s now time to turn to our third passage from Paul, which is also the most important in the debate on who can teach. This is 1 Timothy 2:11-15, and it’s the one place in Paul that directly addresses the issue of women teaching men.

## *Summary of issues:*

1 Corinthians 11:3-16	1 Corinthians 14:33-35	1 Timothy 2:11-15
Presents the idea of male headship. Suggests that male headship is rooted in the doctrine of the trinity and the order of creation of men and women.	Suggests that women shouldn’t speak in public meetings.	Specifically prohibits women from bringing authoritative teaching where men are present. Appeals to the order of creation.

In this paper, I wish to argue that, 1 Timothy 2 notwithstanding, women *should* be permitted to teach in whole-church settings. Of course, having read this paper, you may well end up taking a different view. If that’s the case, my intention isn’t to alienate you. This is why this third paper is followed by a fourth one on how we handle our disagreement in Grace Church. Ultimately, while I don’t think there’s any context in church life where women shouldn’t be allowed to teach, this is something that the elders (picking up on a major theme of Paper 1) write in ink and not in blood. We do not consider where someone lands in this debate to be an essential matter.

## What the debate isn't about

Before getting into the detail, it's necessary to say a word about what the debate on who can teach *isn't* about. No one is in any doubt that the Spirit gifts certain women to teach. When the Spiritual gift of teaching is mentioned in the New Testament, there's never any indication that the gift is restricted to men (Romans 12:7; 1 Corinthians 12:1-11, 27-29).

Priscilla is often identified as a woman who exercised a significant teaching ministry in the early Church. Along with her husband, Aquila, Priscilla makes several appearances in connection with the Paul's ministry (e.g. Acts 18:1-3, 18-19; 1 Corinthians 16:19; 2 Timothy 4:19) and is celebrated by Paul as one of his co-workers (Romans 16:3). A feature that's often remarked on is that Priscilla's name is most frequently mentioned ahead of that of her husband. This could imply that she had the more prominent ministry. Most important for our discussion is Priscilla's role in teaching Apollos, who became a significant itinerant teacher in his own right:

### Acts 18:24-26

*<sup>24</sup> Meanwhile a Jew named Apollos, a native of Alexandria, came to Ephesus. He was a learned man, with a thorough knowledge of the Scriptures. <sup>25</sup> He had been instructed in the way of the Lord, and he spoke with great fervour and taught about Jesus accurately, though he knew only the baptism of John. <sup>26</sup> He 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.*

## What the debate is about

While no one disputes that women are frequently gifted to teach, and that women who are gifted in this way should be encouraged to use their gift, there is a question about the appropriate *context* in which a woman's gift of teaching can be used.

The fact is that there's no example in the New Testament of a woman formally *holding a teaching office* and exercising her teaching gift in a *public setting* where *men are present*.<sup>1</sup> Consider the example of Priscilla:

- There isn't an indication that Priscilla received formal recognition as a teacher in the early Church. Commenting on Acts 18, John Piper and Wayne Grudem suggest that this is an example of Priscilla and Aquila offering *unofficial* guidance rather than exercising the kind of *official* teaching leadership that features so prominently in the pastoral epistles (1991, p. 106).
- In Acts 18, Priscilla teaches Apollos *in the privacy of her own home* rather than in a public setting. Similarly, in 2 Timothy 1:5 and 3:14-15, we hear of the instruction that Timothy had received from his grandmother and mother in the home.
- In Titus 2:3-5, Paul urges Titus to teach older women to teach younger *women*. Here, there's no mention of women teaching men. In fact, Paul writes that Titus himself is responsible for teaching the older and younger men (2:1-2, 6-8).

This is important context to understand. To reiterate: no one is arguing that women shouldn't be permitted to teach *per se*. The issue is over whether it's appropriate for a woman:

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<sup>1</sup> Hence, Thomas Schreiner: '[W]omen participated in ministry in the Scriptures, but their ministry was a complementary and supportive ministry that fostered and preserved male leadership in the church' (1991, p. 281).

- To receive formal recognition by a church leadership team and to be encouraged to teach in an 'official' capacity...,
- teaching in public gatherings and not just in private settings...,
- where men as well as women are present.

Of course, the fact that there's no record of women publicly teaching men in an official capacity doesn't necessarily mean that it didn't occur. Nor does it necessarily imply that it shouldn't happen today. Maintaining that women shouldn't teach in whole-church contexts today on the basis that we don't see this happening in the New Testament would be building an argument from silence. This is why the central plank of the traditional complementarian view is the one piece of biblical material that directly addresses the issue.

Time, then, to look at 1 Timothy 2.

# 1 Timothy 2:11-15

<sup>11</sup>A woman should learn in quietness and full submission. <sup>12</sup>I do not permit a woman to teach or to assume authority over a man; she must be quiet. <sup>13</sup>For Adam was formed first, then Eve. <sup>14</sup>And Adam was not the one deceived; it was the woman who was deceived and became a sinner. <sup>15</sup>But women will be saved through childbearing – if they continue in faith, love and holiness with propriety.

## Overview of concerns

	1 Timothy 2:11-15
What's being prohibited?	Women teaching men in church meetings in a way that's authoritative
What does the text say about male authority and female submission?	Reference to female submission and male authority
What are the grounds for saying that there's a timeless principle here?	Reference to the order of creation

Let's begin by reminding ourselves that, whatever else we may say about this passage, 1 Timothy 2 cannot be taken as an absolute prohibition on women teaching. We've already seen that the New Testament shows how women were involved in teaching ministry in the early Church. The issue concerns Paul's apparent prohibition on women delivering teaching that represents the exercising of *authority*. In *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*, Douglas Moo supports a straightforward reading of the text when he says:

We think 1 Timothy 2:8-15 imposes two restrictions on the ministry of women: they are not to teach Christian doctrine to men and they are not to exercise authority directly over men in the church. These restrictions are permanent, authoritative for the church in all times and places and circumstances as long as men and women are descended from Adam and Eve (1991, p. 180).

That said, 1 Timothy 2 presents a number of challenging issues. In his summary of the various positions taken by its interpreters, Andrew Wilson (2012a) outlines twelve different perspectives (yes, twelve!) on the passage that fall into three broad categories.<sup>2</sup> Once again, given the complexity of the interpretive challenge, I can only hope to give a brief survey of the issues as I see them, before setting out the considerations which inform my personal take on the text. As with the two previous papers, the section marked with a coloured line in the margin can be skipped without losing the argument as a whole.

## The world behind the text

Paul's letter is addressed to his protégé, Timothy, in Ephesus. What do we know about Ephesus in the first century?

We know that, as the centre of the worship of the goddess, Artemis, women were especially prominent in the religious life of the city. We know that Ephesus was essentially a feminist society. Women converted from a pagan culture felt a sense of entitlement. Their religious background made them accustomed to the idea of women teaching and leading men. Consequently, many of these women were

<sup>2</sup> Unfortunately, Wilson focuses only on verse 12 rather than considering the passage as a whole, an approach that leads him (in my view) to neglecting several important considerations for understanding the text.

demanding leadership roles in the church, even to the point of pushing men aside. Meanwhile, women who had been converted from a more conservative background found themselves in the brave new world of a community where a traditional, hierarchical understanding of men and women was rejected. These newly emancipated women were eager to exercise their new-found freedom in Christ, neglecting their domestic responsibilities in their desire for recognition in the church. The problem was that women in first-century society were poorly educated. Unlike men, they lacked the basic skills to be able to correctly interpret and expound the meaning of the scriptures. The result was that, when false teachers came to Ephesus, many of the women lacked the ability to distinguish truth from falsehood. It's little wonder, then, that in this setting, Paul requires women to remain quiet and submit. We know that, had Paul not put these safeguards in place, the effect on the Ephesian church would have been disastrous.

All this may sound plausible, but we don't, as a matter of fact, 'know' any of these things. Almost everything that I've said in the previous paragraph is based on conjecture.<sup>3</sup>

What we do 'know' is that interpreters have long disagreed on the extent to which the world behind the text should be determinative for understanding the text. A key question is whether we should consider Paul's teaching in 1 Timothy to be primarily corrective or normative. Is he mainly concerned with addressing issues that are specific to the situation in Ephesus or is he (in Douglas Moo's words) laying down teaching that's 'permanent, authoritative for the church in all times and places and circumstances' (Ibid, p. 143)?

Emma Ineson believes that 'the whole flavour of the letter is corrective' (2009, p. 1). Timothy is charged with remaining in Ephesus to deal with false teaching which has already resulted in the 'shipwrecking' of the faith of some (1:19-20; cf. 4:1; 6:21). This lends credence to the idea that, in 1 Timothy 2, Paul is addressing a *specific instance* of malpractice in Ephesus.

Andreas Köstenberger takes the opposite view. His argument is based, in part, on an appreciation of the letter's genre:

[S]ince 1 Timothy 2 is part of a *Pastoral Epistle*, whose very nature is that of apostolic instruction regarding the organization of the apostolic and postapostolic churches, the injunctions of 1 Timothy 2 should be considered *paramount*, exceeding in their finality even texts in earlier Pauline epistles or the Gospels in their authority for the church of all time. In other words ... the injunctions of 1 Timothy 2 are part of an epistle whose entire purpose for writing is wrapped up in the purpose of providing ... normative instruction (2001, p. 242, emphasis original).

I think Köstenberger overstates his case. Certainly, there are instances of 'normative instruction' in the letter<sup>4</sup>, but his remark about this being the letter's 'entire purpose' seems to me to be unjustified. Much of 1 Timothy *is* corrective and at least some of that correction is directed at women (2:9-15; 3:11; 5:3-16). Whilst in general it's straightforward to identify which material in the letter is corrective and which is normative, unfortunately that isn't so easy in the case of 1 Timothy 2:11-15. The debate continues: is this a context-specific instruction designed to correct a local problem in the Ephesian church or does it represent Paul's 'customary position' that he taught everywhere (Moo, 1991, p. 184)?

<sup>3</sup> The exception is the point about Ephesus being the site of the temple dedicated to Artemis. It's true that Ephesus prided itself on having this temple, which was one of the seven wonders of the ancient world.

<sup>4</sup> For example, the pastoral epistles include the following examples of instruction that's normative for the Church: [i] 'the duties and qualifications of officeholders (1 Tim 3:1-13; 5:1-2; 2 Tim 2:1-26; 4:1-5; Titus 1:5-9; 2:1-15; 3:1-11); [ii] instructions regarding the enrolling of qualified widows for diaconal assistance (1 Tim 5:3-16); [iii] instructions regarding public prayer (1 Tim 2:1-15); [iv] instructions regarding remuneration of the ministers of the Word (1 Tim 5:17-19); [v] instructions regarding the suppression of heresy (1 Tim 1:3-7; 2 Tim 4:3-4; Tit 1:10-11)' (Köstenberger, 2001, p. 242, drawing on the work of David Gordon).

## The world of the text

It should be admitted that, when looked at from the perspective of church history, most people looking at 1 Timothy 2 have concluded that women shouldn't be permitted to teach in whole-church settings. For centuries, this was regarded as the 'plain meaning' of the text. The burden of proof rests, therefore, on anyone who think the text *doesn't* mean what it appears to say.

When we begin to dig deeper into the text, however, a number of problems come to the fore. Here are three of the most significant ones.

### i) The meaning of *authentein*

Much debate about the meaning of the text concerns Paul's use of the term *authentein*. The NIV renders this term 'assume authority'<sup>5</sup>, but it's illuminating to place the NIV's translation of verse 12 alongside other versions:

I do not allow a woman to teach or to have authority over a man... (CSB)

I do not permit a woman to teach or to exercise authority over a man... (ESV)

I permit no woman to teach or to have authority over men... (RSV)

I do not permit a woman to teach or to assume authority over a man... (NIV)

But I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man... (KJV)

I do not let women teach or take authority over a man... (NIRV)

Notice how translations fall into two broad categories of meaning. The translations of *authentein* in the left-hand box understand authority in a neutral sense. These translators take the traditional view that Paul prohibits women in the church from having authority over men. The translations on the right, however, give a negative spin to the women's use of authority (authority is spoken of as 'assumed', 'usurped' or 'taken'). The implication is that there's no problem with a woman having authority in the church per se: Paul is addressing a situation in which women are *grasping* for power in a way that pushes men aside.

Which rendering of *authentein* is the correct one? The problem is that this is the only time this word appears in the New Testament and, outside of the New Testament, there are very few occurrences from a similar period. There's another, more common, word (*exousiazō*) that Paul could have used to designate the ordinary exercise of authority, leading to the frequently made suggestion that, had Paul any of the meanings in the left-hand box in mind, he would have chosen a different word. The fact that he didn't do this suggests that there was a particular problem with the women in Ephesus.

This line of argument is disputed by complementarian scholars. Wilson (2023) cites articles by Wolters (2011) and Köstenberger (2001) that present evidence that *authentein* doesn't necessarily connote the negative exercise of authority. Elsewhere, Wilson (2012a) asserts that Köstenberger's position 'has largely won the day.' He may be right, although that doesn't stop egalitarian scholars from drawing attention to the peculiarity of this word to support their argument (e.g. Bartlett & Paul, 2022). The fact is that the original, intended meaning of *authentein* is still an active area of dispute. Given the paucity of data, the issue is unlikely to be settled any time soon.

<sup>5</sup> Interestingly, the NIV has changed its translation of this phrase during the time that I've been involved with pastoral ministry. In the 1979 edition, the NIV has 'I do not permit a woman to ... have authority'; in the 2011 edition, the NIV changes it to '... assume authority'.



## ii) 'I do not permit...'

At the beginning of verse 12, Paul writes 'I do not permit' (or 'I am not permitting'). Some point out that Paul's use of *epitrepō* would seem strange if his intent is to establish a universal prohibition. Bartlett and Paul state that 'there is no example anywhere in the Bible of this expression being used to lay down a general rule' (2022). Drawing on Andrew Perriman's research, Marg Mowczko remarks that 'the word *epitrepō* is commonly used in contexts of localised situations, exceptions, and concessions, rather than contexts of universal norms and regulations' (2015).

The unusual construction of 1 Timothy 2:12 is further underlined when we compare it with Paul's instructions in the rest of the letter. Paul frequently uses the verb *paraggellō* or noun *paraggelia* to lay down commands, make charges or issue directives (1 Tim. 1:3, 5; 4:11; 5:7; 6:13, 17, 18) (Ibid, 2015). However, the instruction of 2:12 is in a category all on its own.

What are we to make of this? It's hard to say. Douglas Moo asserts that 'nothing definite can be concluded from this word' (1991, p. 180). The term *epitrepō* on its own can't be used to determine whether Paul means for his instruction to apply only to a temporary, local situation. To discern Paul's meaning, we need to consider other factors.

## iii) The order of creation of man and woman

For complementarian thinkers, the fact that Paul references the priority of the man in creation in verse 13 is a primary reason why 1 Timothy 2 should still be regarded as binding today. Andrew Wilson explains:

Exegetically, Paul's argument is not grounded in the culture of the day, the quirks of Ephesus or the lack of educated women, but in creation (2:13-14), and it therefore seems that whatever Paul is restricting, he is restricting on the basis of the way men and women were created (which would correspond to the way he invokes Genesis 1-3 throughout his letters). It ... seems best ... to assume that (as with almost every verse in the NT epistles!) we are dealing with an instruction that believers today are intended to follow (2012a).

Complementarians often understand Paul's argument in 1 Timothy 2:12-13 to parallel his flow of thought in 1 Corinthians 11:8-9 (e.g., Moo, 1991, pp. 185-6; Hosier, 2005, pp. 178-9; Hendricksen, 1964, pp. 109, 113). In both places, Paul apparently appeals to the order of creation to justify the priority of the man in some way.

What does this priority consist in? Let's take a closer look at verses 12 and 13:

### 1 Timothy 2:12-13

<sup>12</sup>*I do not permit a woman to teach or to exercise authority over a man; rather, she is to remain quiet.* <sup>13</sup>*For Adam was formed first, then Eve.*

Taken together, these verses seem to be connecting the order of formation with the ideas of authority and subordination. Moo sets out a common complementarian reading of these verses when he writes:

Both the logic of this passage and the parallel in 1 Corinthians 11:3-10 make this clear: for Paul, the man's priority in the order of creation is indicative of the headship that man is to have over woman. The woman's being created after man, as his helper, shows the position of submission that God intended as inherent in the woman's relation to the man, a submission that is violated if a woman teaches doctrine or exercises authority over a man (Ibid, p. 185).<sup>6</sup>

<sup>6</sup> Similarly, John Hosier represents a classic Newfrontiers perspective when he writes on 1 Timothy 2: 'It is vital to appreciate the whole thrust of scripture as well as the immediate context. Whatever the exegetical difficulties

Straight off the bat, I think we need to take 1 Corinthians 11 out of the equation. Even a cursory reading of these two texts shows that Paul is addressing very different problems in Corinth and Ephesus. This makes using 1 Corinthians 11 to interpret Paul's meaning in 1 Timothy 2 highly questionable exegetically. Moreover, as we've seen, when Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 11 that woman came from man and was created for man, his purpose isn't to say that 'men have authority over women'; he makes the different point 'woman is the glory of man' (v. 7). So, Paul's argument in 1 Corinthians 11 isn't parallel to the argument that he makes here. 1 Timothy 2 needs to be understood on its own terms.

What is Paul's purpose in referring to the order of creation here? When verses 12 and 13 are read together it's natural to carry the idea of authority from v. 12 into our reading of v. 13. Then the man's priority in creation seems to have something to do with authority. But see what happens to the argument when we read on to the next verse:

### 1 Timothy 2:14

*And Adam was not the one deceived; it was the woman who was deceived and became a sinner.*

If Paul's intention in these verses is to establish the ideas of male authority and female submission, then we might expect verse 13 to be followed with a statement about Eve's submission to Adam or Eve having (or taking) an authority that properly belonged to her husband. But Paul doesn't say either of these things. Instead, he introduces the theme of deception, an idea that links naturally with the thought with which Paul begins: 'A woman should *learn*...'

This raises an intriguing question: what if Paul's primary purpose in bringing the creation story into this passage is to explain why women should learn, not why they shouldn't teach?

The fact is that it isn't 'clear' from this passage (despite Moo's claim to the contrary) that Paul's reference to creation is intended to establish the principles of male authority and female submission. There are (at least) two different interpretations, both of which find support in the text:

What is the main argument in 1 Timothy 2:11-15?	
The man's <i>authority</i> over the woman.	A woman's susceptibility to being <i>deceived</i> .
The need for a woman to <i>submit</i> to male authority.	The need for a woman to <i>learn</i> in submission to God's Word.
Why does Paul appeal to creation?	
He wishes to establish what is true for men and women for all time. Paul's teaching here is <i>prescriptive</i> .	Paul's reference to Genesis is <i>illustrative</i> . He wants to highlight how the situation in Ephesus is analogous to what occurred in Eden.

Which of these approaches will be deemed most appropriate will depend in large part on how we understand Paul's argument in these verses. Unfortunately, Paul's argument is difficult to discern. In Appendix 1 and 2, I summarise the arguments of two prominent scholars who take very different views on what Paul's argument in 1 Timothy 2 is all about. It's worth comparing their arguments in detail. Appendix 1 provides an overview of Douglas Moo's argument in *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*. As a complementarian scholar, Moo sits firmly in the left-hand column of the above table. Appendix 2 sets out the ideas of Andrew Perriman (1998) who sits in the right-hand column of the table. Which of the two approaches is right?

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of these verses, do we not have to bear in mind the matters of headship referred to in 1 Corinthians 11 and the whole teaching on male/female relationships in Ephesians 5?' (Ibid, pp. 178-79).

## The world in front of the text

I don't have a definitive answer to that question. However, I do still think that 1 Timothy 2 shouldn't be used to prohibit women from teaching today. In what follows, I'll build my case in three stages:

- Stage 1 consists of some personal reflections on 1 Timothy 2.
- Stage 2 establishes the principle of proportionality: why any conclusions we draw from 1 Timothy 2 need to be 'proportionate' and not used as a lens through which we view the rest of Scripture.
- Stage 3 sets out five positive reasons why we should permit women to teach in whole-church settings today.

### Personal reflections on 1 Timothy 2

As we've seen, a complementarian reading of 1 Timothy 2 tends to see this passage as normative – applicable to the Church for all time – rather than having limited application to the local situation in Ephesus. I can understand why a plain reading of Scripture leads many to that conclusion. However, I do think the following considerations are relevant to our question, 'who can teach?'

- i) A complementarian reading of 1 Timothy 2 depends on two assumptions: the Genesis creation narrative includes the ideas of male authority and female submission; and verse 12 – 'I do not permit a woman to teach or to [exercise] authority over a man' – constitutes the main idea in the passage. Both assumptions are open to question.
- ii) There's no explicit indication in the Genesis text that Eve sinned by failing to submit to Adam's authority or to take an authority that properly belonged to Adam. Paul may have held this view, but he doesn't argue that case anywhere else in the New Testament, nor is it *clear* that he's making that point here.
- iii) Paul's point about Eve's deception in verse 14 raises the possibility that Paul's primary concern is not to prohibit women from teaching but to encourage them to learn. This, in turn, suggests there's a significant contextual element to what he says in this passage: it's absurd to suggest that Paul thinks women are intrinsically more susceptible to being deceived than men. I think it's entirely possible that Paul was motivated to write these verses because he saw in the Ephesian situation a parallel with the way in which the serpent deliberately targeted Eve and not Adam. I can't prove that point, but it does seem to me likely.
- iv) This brings us back to the earlier discussion about whether we see this passage as being primarily corrective or normative. A reasonable case can be made for both.
- v) In verse 11, Paul doesn't tell us to whom or what a woman should submit. It's possible to understand this as a reference to submission to male authority, either to a husband's authority or the authority of church leaders who are male. But there is another possibility: the submission enjoined by Paul is to what he's already identified as 'the pattern of sound teaching' (2 Timothy 1:13). This interpretation is consistent with the mention of deception in verse 14. It also fits with one way of understanding the message of the letter as a whole (cf. 1:3).

There's nothing here that I would write in blood. My purpose here is to make the simple point that it's far from clear that the traditionalist interpretation of the passage is the correct one. The idea that Paul's

argument is based, ‘not on temporary conditions or circumstances’ but on facts of creation that ‘have meaning for all time’ (Hendricksen, 1964) isn’t certain.

I’ll conclude my thoughts in this section with a reflection on the arguments of Douglas Moo and Andrew Perriman from the Appendices. To my mind, these scholars place emphasis on different elements of the Paul’s argument, but in so doing, they neglect or fail to do justice to features of the text that aren’t of primary interest. Here’s how I would sum up their approaches:

ISSUES	DOUGLAS MOO (1991)	ANDREW PERRIMAN (1998)
Emphasis	Learning/deception	Submission to male authority/insubordination
Key verses	<i>A woman should LEARN in quietness and full submission. (v. 11)</i>  <i>And Adam was not DECEIVED; it was the woman who was DECEIVED and became a sinner. (v. 14)</i>	<i>I do not permit a woman to TEACH or HAVE AUTHORITY over a man (v. 12)</i>  <i>For Adam was FORMED FIRST, then Eve. (v. 13)</i>
Weakness of position	Inadequate treatment of the theme of women being prohibited from having authority over a man from v. 12.	Inadequate treatment of the theme of deception from v. 14.

To my mind, both approaches have their weaknesses. Moo’s argument that Eve’s deception in the garden amounts to a kind of declaration of independence doesn’t persuade me in the least. In fact, there’s nowhere in Scripture where the deception of Eve is explicitly presented as an example of a woman taking authority over a man. On the other hand, Andrew Perriman’s suggestion that 1 Timothy 2:12 ‘intrudes into the passage as something of a parenthesis’ (Ibid, p. 157; cf. Oden, 1989, p. 97) seems too convenient by far, the exegetical equivalent of dismissing or relegating a piece of data because it doesn’t fit your preconceived theory.<sup>7</sup>

I’m not sure where that leaves me concerning the correct way to interpret 1 Timothy 2. But as I go on to develop my argument, I wish to show that that’s exactly the point. The fact that the meaning of 1 Timothy 2 is so hard to grasp is precisely the point that we need to grasp.

Which brings me to David Hume and the principle of proportionality.

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<sup>7</sup> This is one of the criticisms made by Sharon James in her short review of Andrew Perriman’s book for The Gospel Coalition (undated)

## The principle of proportionality

The eighteenth-century philosopher, David Hume, once wrote: ‘A wise man ... proportions his belief to the evidence’.<sup>8</sup> Hume made this principle of proportionality a foundation of his philosophical methodology. It also enshrines a piece of everyday common sense.

Here’s an example. From time to time, fresh claims are made about the existence of big cat that lives on Bodmin Moor here in Cornwall. If I were presented with a single, grainy photo of the beast of Bodmin Moor, I might be inclined to be sceptical, but a dozen or more high-definition images, taken by different photographers at different times, and supported by additional, corroborating evidence (the cast of footprint, for example) would be difficult to refute. My belief in the Bodmin beast would change in proportion to the abundance and quality of the evidence.

The principle of proportionality also applies to biblical interpretation. It means exercising caution where Scripture makes assertions that are less than clear. It urges us to be conservative with respect to our conclusions, ensuring that our level of conviction is proportionate to the degree of clarity found in the text.

What would it mean to be conservative with respect to the conclusions drawn from 1 Timothy 2? Given the unusual features of this particular text, plus the uniqueness of its message in the context of the canon of Scripture (nowhere else in the Bible are we told that women can’t teach men), I think we should be suspicious of those interpreters who claim to have 1 Timothy 2 all sewn up. The fact is that God-fearing, Word of God-honouring, theologically-literate scholars take different views on what the text is saying. The meaning of the text isn’t perfectly clear. It’s a cloudy passage, and this should moderate the language we use when talking about it. Andrew Wilson does a good job, I think, of modelling the kind of language that’s appropriate: ‘*I tend to think...*’ (2012a).

I hope it’s clear that my embrace of the ‘cloudiness’ of the passage isn’t down to a lack of engagement with the text. The opposite is the case. I think a proper engagement with the text leads to a proper respect for the limitations of our understanding. We really can’t justify the practice of using 1 Timothy 2 as a proof text for why fifty percent of the global Christian population can never aspire to teach in whole-church settings. Terran Williams lands in the same place, saying:

Instead of being dogmatic or building substantial doctrines or practices on ... cloudier passages, churches should hold their interpretations of them more humbly and lightly, even while holding to the authority of Scripture confidently and tightly. Cloudy Scriptures are *not* a valid basis for a defining doctrine. Clear teachings should take precedence. Thankfully, most of the Bible’s texts are clear; only some are cloudy.

He goes on to ask:

What defines certain texts as cloudy? They tend to have an unusual number of obscure terms; or seem to say the opposite of what other passages say; or they are particularly difficult to apply in concrete situations; or there does not appear to be any other biblical passages that say the same thing; or the ancient situation the passage addresses is puzzling. They therefore give rise to many diverse interpretations and are thus heavily debated by leading scholars.

Before concluding:

Well, I do not know of a more debated passage in the last hundred years of church history, nor a cloudier text than this one (2022, p. 149, emphasis original).

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<sup>8</sup> *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, 1748, 10.1.

John Piper and Wayne Grudem (1991) take issue with the stance taken here by Williams, pointing out that ‘almost every text about precious and important things is disputed in some way and by some Christians.’ They argue for the importance of taking a clear and uncompromising stance on disputed matters, and *especially* on male headship and female submission, because of what’s at stake for the ‘health and mission of the church’ (pp. 112-14).

I find the degree of confidence they place in their interpretation of 1 Timothy 2 surprising. Even if they’re right in their assertion that the meaning of most biblical passages has been disputed at some stage, anyone can see that some texts are more disputed than others. There’s a spectrum that exists from texts that are ‘clear’ to texts that are ‘cloudy’, and by any measure 1 Timothy is just about as far towards the ‘cloudy’ end of the spectrum as it’s possible to get.

To illustrate the point, *no one* knows exactly what Paul is driving at when he concludes the 1 Timothy 2 passage with the statement that ‘women will be saved through childbearing’ (v. 15). In the Appendices, I offer a possibility, but any student of Scripture worth their salt acknowledges that this verse supports a range of possible interpretations.<sup>9</sup> The same is also true with the preceding verses, as the above discussion shows.

In Appendix 1 of Paper 1, I refer to Andrew Wilson’s (2023) insistence that we’re not at liberty to dismiss 1 Timothy 2 simply because it’s hard to understand. The same point is made by Don Carson and Tim Keller in a video conversation for *The Gospel Coalition* (2020). I agree that it’s important that we honour the inspired character of *every* part of God’s Word. My position is not that we give up on 1 Timothy 2 on the basis that it’s difficult to understand, but that we allow the difficulty of the text to motivate us to work harder at trying to understand it while holding any conclusions we come to lightly.

However, while it’s important that we don’t dismiss 1 Timothy 2, we also need to beware of the opposite error of affording it too much weight. We get into all kinds of problems if we elevate 1 Timothy 2 to the status of being a kind of hermeneutical key that can be used for unlocking the meanings of 1 Corinthians 11 and 14, as well as Genesis 2 and 3. It really is astonishing how many interpreters ‘read in’ the idea of authority to some of these texts on the basis that authority is mentioned in 1 Timothy 2.

Back when I started writing in this area in 2014, I remarked that we shouldn’t permit a single text ‘to trump the fundamental New Testament insistence on the equality of the sexes and the clear evidence that women led, taught and contributed to public worship in the early church.’ I went on to say, ‘1 Timothy 2 must take its place among the other arguments rather than have pride of place over them.’ That’s still the position I hold today.

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<sup>9</sup> Andrew Wilson’s response to 1 Timothy 2:15 is to say, ‘[I]t is a difficult text. And it’s probably good at times just to hold your hand up and say, “Yeah, I could very easily be wrong about this”’ (Anderson *et al*, 2024).

# Why Women Should Teach

It's time to pull the strands of our discussion together and explain why, in Grace Church, we hold that women should be able to teach in contexts where the whole church is gathered. There are five reasons.

## i) There's no clear biblical prohibition against women teaching men

In Paper 2, I considered what Paul says about men and women in 1 Corinthians 11 and 14. In this paper, I've looked at 1 Timothy 2. I've done my best to be even-handed in the way I've discussed the various positions. No doubt my discussion has been imperfect at points. But, after countless hours analysing the passages and struggling to understand what both complementarian and egalitarian scholars have written about them, I struggle to find any clear, biblical rationale for prohibiting women from teaching in whole-church settings.

Let's briefly survey the ground we've covered:

1 Corinthians 11:3-16	1 Corinthians 14:33-35	1 Timothy 2:11-15
Presents the idea of male headship. Suggests that male headship is rooted in the doctrine of the trinity and the order of creation of men and women.	Suggests that women shouldn't speak in public meetings.	Specifically prohibits women from bringing authoritative teaching where men are present. Appeals to the order of creation.

In 1 Corinthians 11, Paul's purpose in invoking the trinity doesn't seem to me to have anything to do with establishing a permanent, authority-and-submission-based relationship between men and women. Nor is his reference to creation intended to provide a justification for male authority and female submission. Working with the idea of gender complementarity, Paul appeals for believers in Corinth to uphold gender distinctives while also embracing male-female mutuality. The only mention of authority in the passage is in relation to a woman's authority over her own head. Maintaining gender distinctives in that culture requires women in the church to wear head coverings so as not to bring shame on their husbands. Paul's burden in the passage isn't to impose restrictions on women sharing in public (by praying and prophesying) but to help them understand how to do so without attracting criticism.

In 1 Corinthians 14, Paul's primary concern is that women's conduct in the church doesn't bring the gospel or the church into disrepute. In this respect, the argument is inspired by a similar concern to 1 Corinthians 11. Some complementarian interpreters have suggested that Paul has Genesis 2 in mind when he appeals to 'the law' (v. 34) but I don't find any substance to this view. The instruction that women should 'remain silent in the churches' has a specific application to the first-century church in Corinth and 'all the congregations' with which Paul is associated. It's not binding for the church today.

Only 1 Timothy 2 includes an explicit prohibition against women teaching in public gatherings of the church. Here, Paul specifies that what he has in mind is the kind of teaching that would entail women having (or assuming) authority over men. The idea that Paul in this passage is setting out normative instruction for the Church isn't clear. The reference to creation can be understood as saying something about male authority and female submission but Paul doesn't make this connection explicit. It's possible that Paul is saying something specific about the local situation in Ephesus in which women are being deceived by false teaching. We can't know for sure. The principle of proportionality requires us to hold any conclusions about the meaning of this text tentatively.



Where does this leave us? In a paper written for the eldership team of a Newfrontiers-partner church in Chertsey, Andrew Ryland (2011) follows David Devenish<sup>10</sup> in suggesting that *function should match status unless Scripture specifically restricts function*. By this he means that the equality of the sexes is expressed most naturally through women being permitted to have the same roles in church life as men *unless* the Bible specifically says otherwise. Ryland spells out the implication:

*We must have a clear mandate to restrict people from serving God. The principle that 'function should match status unless Scripture specifically restricts function' is therefore important because it presumes permission rather than restriction (p. 9, italics original).*

I think Ryland is right. In the absence of any clear biblical prohibition against women teaching on Sundays, women should be permitted to teach. We must not impose law where there is no law.

## ii) Holding a complementarian position doesn't preclude women from teaching men

It's perfectly possible to be a consistent complementarian and hold that there are occasions where a women can teach a mixed-gender congregation. Newfrontiers has long recognised this. The founder of Newfrontiers, Terry Virgo, leaves the issue open in his list of values that shape the practice of Newfrontiers-partner churches (Virgo, 2009-10; Hosier, 2009-10). Having explained his personal conviction that 'women do not teach mixed congregations in our churches', John Hosier concedes that 'some take the view that it is possible for a woman to teach a mixed congregation as long as she does so under the oversight of the elders who therefore carry the final authority' (2005, p. 179).

This is the position held by Andrew Wilson. He endorses women teaching by pointing to an analogy with marriage:

[I]t's not inconsistent for a husband to be head of his family, but to defer to his wife on all sorts of issues where she knows more than he does. In fact, when Paul talks about the role of women at home, he uses the strong verb *oikodespotein* (to rule the household), which he does not see as incompatible with submitting to their husbands. By analogy, we might suggest, elders/overseers can define doctrine for and exercise authority over the church, but still release women to instruct the church on pretty much any topic where they are more qualified or gifted to speak. I find that argument fairly compelling (2012a).

The same position has been defended by Alan Frow, the Global Team leader for our own movement (2015). In its official position document, Advance chooses to remain open on the question of whether women should teach in whole-church contexts, saying:

While we partner around similar doctrine and values (such as complementarity), eldership teams are encouraged to work out the detail of how these values are expressed in their local churches. For example, across all partner churches, elders are responsible for directional, authoritative preaching, but occasionally, on pertinent themes, some Advance churches will have women speak to the gathered church (2019, p. 25).

The idea that a complementarian stance on eldership precludes women from teaching men is illogical. It's perfectly possible for women to teach the congregation at the invitation of (and under the authority of male elders) and in submission to the authority of God's Word.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>10</sup> Paper written for Woodside Church, Bedford (1990) but not circulated widely in Newfrontiers.

<sup>11</sup> The idea that having women teach a mixed-gender congregation is consistent with complementarian values is quite common in the UK evangelical scene. A famous advocate of this view is John Stott. He takes a broadly traditionalist stance on 1 Timothy 2 but suggests that the requirement that women remain silent is 'a first-century cultural symbol of masculine headship, which is not necessarily appropriate today' (1996, p. 80). He concludes by saying: 'The New Testament is now complete, and all Christian teachers are called to teach humbly



## An important aside: 'Big T' and 'little t' teaching

The reference to 'directional, authoritative preaching' in the Advance booklet is significant. Within Advance, there's the assumption that not all teaching is equal. There are different categories or levels of teaching in the church.

This idea is developed by Andrew Wilson. His starting point is that, in 1 Timothy 2, Paul doesn't intend to prohibit women from teaching *per se*, but from teaching *and* having authority. This raises a question: is there a category of teaching that *would* be appropriate for women to bring because it doesn't contravene the 'authority' bit?

Wilson (2012a & b, 2015) thinks there is. He distinguishes between what he calls 'Big T' and 'little t' teaching. Little t teaching is what all believers are urged to bring whenever we have opportunity. It includes exhortation and evangelistic preaching as well as the kind of everyday teaching that happens across the church as its members instruct one another (e.g. Colossians 3:16, Hebrews 5:12).

Big T teaching, on the other hand, is teaching that's restricted to certain members of the church and is authoritative in a special sense (e.g. James 3:1, Titus 2:1). Wilson thinks that what distinguishes this category of teaching is that it involves 'defining doctrine' for the church. In 1 Timothy 2, Paul is prohibiting women from doing something very specific. Women aren't being prohibited from teaching, or even from teaching men, but from teaching men in a way that represents having authority over them, i.e. from bringing Big T teaching. This means that women can be involved in 'quoting, explaining and applying Scripture under the guidance and oversight of the elders.' What's prohibited is defining doctrine for the church by explaining 'this is what must be believed, and this is what must be done' (Wilson, 2012b). This kind of teaching should only be brought by men who are elders.

In a paper presented to the Newfrontiers Theology Forum, Matt Hosier agrees with Wilson's categorisation, suggesting that there's a category of elder-led teaching that's 'authoritative', 'doctrinal' and serves the purpose of guarding, guiding and governing the church (2013, p. 6). Given that eldership in Newfrontiers is understood to be a male function, this means that only men can bring Big T teaching to the church.<sup>12</sup>

The distinction between Big T and little t teaching isn't without its problems. Consider, for example, the comment made by Stephen Harris in a response to Andrew Wilson's (2012a) article:

I appreciate the logic of the argument to allow women to get away with some 'teaching' (small \*t\*) and yet prohibit them from the Teaching (big \*T\*), yet I really find this a hard distinction to identify in scripture and [it] seems forced at best. In my mind, all teaching is essentially doctrinal in its basis, and it should be taking place throughout every context of church life.<sup>13</sup>

Putting aside Harris's use of the phrase 'get away with' (a loaded phrase if ever I saw one!), I think he's right to point out that all teaching from the Bible includes a substantial doctrinal element. However, I

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under its authority. If then a woman teaches others, including men, under the authority of Scripture (not claiming any authority of her own), in a meek and quiet spirit (not throwing her weight about) and as a member of a pastoral team whose leader is a man (as a contemporary cultural symbol of masculine headship), would it not be legitimate for her to exercise such a ministry...?' (Ibid, p. 81). Not all complementarians agree with this stance (see Andrew Wilson's 2015 response to John Piper's harder stance on women teaching). This is a good illustration of a point that I made in Paper 1: rather than 'complementarian' and 'egalitarian' representing two, closed systems of thought, they actually represent broad schools of thought that sit on a spectrum.

<sup>12</sup> Drawing a distinction between two types of teaching is nothing new. It's long been a significance plank of complementarian thinking. See Piper & Grudem, 1991, pp. 85-86 (Q's 21-22)

<sup>13</sup> Stephen Harris's remark appeared in the comments section beneath Wilson's article. The comments feature of the Think Theology blog has now been removed, but not before I was able to grab Harris's remark.

also think that Andrew Wilson and his fellow complementarian interpreters are on to something. There is a distinctive kind of teaching that only elders should bring to the church.

What distinguishes this category of teaching is not just ‘defining doctrine’. It’s more nuanced than that. Here are four examples from my own experience of church leadership:

- When something happens that impacts on the whole church, such as the stepping down of an elder, or some tragedy that results in collective bereavement, it’s the elders who should bring biblical truth to bear on that moment. This is a function of the elders’ remit to ‘oversee’ the church. It would be inappropriate for any non-elder – female *or* male – to take primary responsibility for bringing teaching that speaks into what the whole church family is experiencing in that moment.
- When a leadership team is aware of particular pastoral sensitivities around an issue so that it requires handling with extreme care, it’s the elders who would be expected to teach into that issue. Examples from the history of Grace Church would be teaching on the topics of homosexuality, gender roles and transgender. Again, it would be inappropriate for any non-elder – female *or* male – to carry primary responsibility for setting out the church position on these kinds of issues.
- When there are areas that are theologically contentious within the evangelical Christian community, so that any teaching could inflame divisions in the church, it’s necessary for the elders to bring teaching that explains, clarifies and unifies. A recent example from Grace Church would be teaching on the end times from Matthew 24 or on assisted dying. Again, it would be inappropriate for any non-elder – female *or* male – to carry primary responsibility for teaching into these areas.
- When teaching is needed that speaks to the strategic direction of the church, and there’s a need for a leadership team to say, ‘This is where we think God is taking us, and here’s why’, then the elders would have a significant role in bringing teaching that helps the church make its response to God. A recent example from Grace Church would be talks delivered by two members of the eldership team when we were exploring the possibility of purchasing some land. Once more, it seems to me that it would be inappropriate for any non-elder – female *or* male – to carry primary responsibility for teaching into these things.

What these cases do is point to the fact that there’s a category of teaching that’s properly restricted to the governmental office of eldership.<sup>14</sup> This is because authority in church life isn’t just a function of the *What* (the content of what’s being taught), but also of the *Who* (the identity of the person delivering the teaching).

I think the distinction between Big T and little t teaching is enormously helpful when thinking about how Paul’s instructions in 1 Timothy 2 should apply. If you’re one of those readers who is dissatisfied with the fuzziness of my conclusions concerning 1 Timothy 2 (I understand your frustration, I really do), then consider this. What if a complementarian perspective on 1 Timothy 2 is the correct one? What if Douglas Moo is on the mark? What if Paul really *does* prohibit women from in a way that could be construed as women exercising authority over men? Does this mean that women can’t teach in any circumstances today?

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<sup>14</sup> I explored this issue in more detail in an earlier incarnation of this paper (and the other two papers in this series) in 2014. For this paper, I decided not to get bogged down in the issue of what constitutes eldership authority, but here’s a sample of what I wrote back then: ‘When a non-elder stands in the pulpit, I do believe that there are certain “no go” areas in terms of what is taught, or at least certain areas where a non-elder should proceed with caution. These areas of teaching belong so closely with the governmental office that it would nearly always be inappropriate for anyone other than an elder in that local setting to bring them.’

Not at all. It's perfectly possible to embrace a complementarian understanding of 1 Timothy 2 and still hold that women can teach on certain themes and subjects at the invitation of the elders.

At this point, a question comes into view: Given that I *do* think that there are certain areas of teaching that should be the exclusive preserve of an eldership team, then why would we settle for anything less than elder-led teaching on the occasions when the whole church is gathered? In our Newfrontiers setting, this would mean that all teaching on Sunday mornings would be delivered by men.

It's a question that's commonly asked, and I feel the force of the premise, but, ultimately, I don't think that it stands.<sup>15</sup> There are several reasons why a church leadership team might wish to diversify the voices that are being received by the congregation in its Sunday gatherings. Let's consider the issue now.

### iii) There are good reasons why a church eldership team might invite people who aren't part of that team (or on the track to eldership) to teach the local congregation

Here are some reasons:

- *Using all the gifts that God gives*

All elders must be able to teach (1 Timothy 3:2; Titus 1:9) but not all teachers are elders. We may even find that some of our *best* teachers aren't elders or on the path to eldership. To restrict these believers by keeping the pulpit closed to them leads needlessly to their discouragement and the impoverishment of the body.

- *Recognising and celebrating partnership*

In Grace Church we regularly receive teachers from other churches in our partnership. These are moments when the whole church gets to feel the benefit of being part of a larger movement. Yet, these visiting teachers have no leadership authority in Grace Church, even if they happen to serve as elders in

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<sup>15</sup> An advocate for this argument is Matt Hosier, who serves on the global team for Advance and leads the Advance UK sphere (Hosier, 2013, p. 7). Hosier's argument is based on the following points: (i) The pastoral epistles (1 and 2 Timothy and Titus) seem to indicate that, when the first-century Christians began gathering regularly on the 'Lord's Day', it was the elders who had a crucial role to play in teaching authoritative doctrine in these settings (this ties in with biblical theology, as the story of God's people tells us that it was always the head of the household who was responsible for teaching when the people of God gathered); (ii) Times when the whole church gathers are precious and few, and these provide the main opportunities for the elders to care for the flock by bringing teaching that guides, guards and governs the church; (iii) We live in an age where there is just as much false doctrine around as there was in the first century, and the need in the church for 'authoritative' teaching is as important now as it's ever been.

There isn't space here for a comprehensive response to these issues. Briefly: (i) Scripture gives us few details about corporate gatherings in the early church. While the pastoral epistles link the task of teaching closely with the pastoral office of elder, there are indications from Paul's earlier epistles that any believer could bring 'a word of instruction' (1 Corinthians 14:26; cf. Colossians 3:16); (ii) This is an argument for elders bringing the majority of teaching, not necessarily all of it. Sunday gatherings provide the main opportunities for the elders to do lots of things, including culture-setting in the church. Sometimes, the decision of an eldership team to encourage others to bring the teaching is a helpful way to encourage a congregation's growth in maturity; (iii) I've already dealt with the issue that the defining mark of Big T teaching is not its doctrinal content. John Dickson (2012) makes the further, somewhat provocative point that teaching in today's Church is not equivalent to teaching in the first century because the New Testament is now complete. We're no longer dependent on a particular category of (male) teachers to 'lay down doctrine' because this function is fulfilled by the New Testament. I don't go all the way with Dickson in the argument he espouses (see criticism by Windsor, 2013 & DeYoung, 2019) but I do think he's on to something. Now that we have the New Testament canon, anyone who's submitted to the authority of God's Word written can teach in a way that refutes false teaching.

the churches from which they come. Like any other non-elder, they teach under the authority of God's Word and at the invitation of the Grace Church elders.

My observation is that those who argue that a church shouldn't settle for teaching that's 'less' than elder-led preaching tend to be inconsistent in practice. Most leadership teams are happy to receive guest teachers from other churches. Yet, these visiting teachers have no governmental authority where the receiving congregation is concerned.<sup>16</sup> It would be inappropriate for them to bring the kind of 'Big T' teaching that only the local elders can bring.<sup>17</sup>

It's true that most of the guest teachers I'm talking about are men who have been formally 'set in' by their home church. They may be recognised by an apostolic team. They have a track record of teaching sound doctrine in their home congregation and have the trust of the eldership team that has issued them with an invitation to address their church. This doesn't alter the fact that the authority with which they address the receiving congregation is not their own. They come at the invitation of the elders of the church who have responsibility for the spiritual oversight of that congregation. But this raises a question: why couldn't a *non-elder* also receive the recognition of a local church (or an apostolic team) as a gifted teacher in their own right?

And why couldn't a woman receive this recognition? Couldn't a woman receive the trust of a local eldership team to bring teaching that's timely, edifying and doctrinally sound? Do we believe that women are less qualified than men to teach? Less gifted? Less doctrinally sound? Or is there something else going on?

- *Building a culture of diversity and inclusivity*

Something that's frequently under-recognised is the role played by Sunday teaching in the kind of culture that's instilled in a church. That 'culture forming' element is due, in large part, to what gets taught. But it's also a function of who gets to do the teaching.

My view is that inviting women to teach on occasion on a Sunday is a helpful step towards building a culture of diversity and inclusivity. This isn't an example of the church losing its distinctiveness from the world. It's not about opening the door to liberal views or 'woke' ideology. I'm advocating for publicly embracing and celebrating something that's central to the biblical perspective on the world.

This brings us to our fourth reason for having women teach.

#### **iv) Having women teach demonstrates a clear commitment to male-female complementarity**

The content of the message that's brought on a Sunday represents a proportion of what's being taught. At the same time, there's also a message being communicated by the identity of the person who's bringing the teaching.

Consider the example of a church whose entire leadership team is white inviting a black member of the congregation to take the Sunday teaching slot. Before that person says a single word, a message has been communicated to the congregation about 'the kind of people we are and the values we hold.' A teacher

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<sup>16</sup> What about apostolic authority? I think this is a big area, possibly one that could do with a paper in its own right. For anyone who is interested in digging into this, I think *Fathering Leaders, Motivating Mission* by David Devenish (2011) is a good place to start, especially pp. 178-82.

<sup>17</sup> I'm regularly invited to preach in other churches but, when I'm preparing, I recognise there are several 'no go' areas for me as a visiting preacher. I won't seek to bring strategic direction to the church, for example. Nor will I stray into pronouncing on issues that are written in ink or pencil (at least, not without checking with the local church elders first). As a visiting elder, it's not my place to do those things. These areas are for the local elders.

colleague of mine used to call this ‘teaching when you’re not teaching.’ It’s the kind of thing that’s often remembered long after the content of the message has been forgotten. It’s the stuff of culture-formation.

What’s the message being communicated when a congregation only ever receives teaching from men? At the end of my first paper, I quoted Andrew Ryland’s remark that complementarian churches often have ‘a practice that falls short of their theology. That is, women feel more restricted than the official policy allows’ (2011, p. 32). In the same paper, Ryland laments the fact that, ‘A proportion of young women in complementarian churches do not aspire to learn theology, to be strong in faith, to grow in leadership skills, etc. simply because they have “picked up” that these things are NOT for them. This is an issue of church culture that needs urgent attention’ (Ibid, p. 4).

My observation is that, so long as young women don’t see female teachers in the pulpit, it’s very difficult for them to pick up any message *other* than the idea that ‘these things are NOT for them’. Whether we admit it or not, who we invite to speak from the pulpit often communicates a stronger message about who we are and what we value than who people see hosting our meetings, leading the band, sharing a testimony or greeting people at the door.

For me, the issue boils down to this: I struggle to see how prohibiting women from teaching in whole-church settings expresses the biblical vision for complementarity. Surely belief in complementarity, of distinction with union, *compels us* to embrace in full all the gifts that the Spirit gives to women, including the gift of teaching? Belief in distinction means recognising that women have something distinctive to bring, something unique to contribute that’s intrinsic to their identity as women. Belief in union convinces me that as a man I *need* that contribution.

## v) Legitimate concern for the church’s reputation encourages us to have women teach

Back in Paper 2, I suggested that the issue of reputational concern is in the foreground to what Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 14. We also saw that it’s fundamental to his argument in 1 Corinthians 11 and may sit in the background to 1 Timothy 2 (although this is debatable).<sup>18</sup> Paul is concerned about two things, not just one: fidelity to God’s Word *in* the Church, and how the Church is perceived by people *outside* the Church. He’s committed to biblical faithfulness *and* missional relevance.

Biblical faithfulness and missional relevance can be understood as being two poles. There’s a tension between them but the tension is a creative one. The Church finds its identity by holding the two together; it gets into problems as soon as it collapses the tension one way or the other. The duty of the Church in every age is to continually reappraise its practices to ensure that the tension is properly maintained. This is the process of contextualization. It’s a work that’s never complete.



In Paper 2, I argued that contextualizing the gospel message means ensuring that we don’t uncritically adopt or replicate practices that *unnecessarily* bring the gospel into disrepute. It will be clear from the previous points that I consider the practice of restricting teaching to men to be an unnecessary obstacle. It does nothing for the credibility of our message.

<sup>18</sup> While we can’t know for certain whether reputational concern inspires what Paul writes in 1 Timothy 2:11-15, it does come to the fore in other parts of the letter (3:7; 5:14; 6:1, 14).

It's true that the issue of reputational concern does need to be handled with enormous care. It can't be considered in isolation. The other pole of biblical faithfulness reminds us that we must always take our lead from God's Word and not from culture. To be clear: if there was one passage in the Bible, just one, that taught, unequivocally, that women in the church shouldn't teach men, then that would be enough to restrict the pulpit to men. God's Word must be given the final say. The inconvenience or embarrassment of saying 'No' to gifted women who aspire to teach would be less important than obeying what God commands.

My position, however, is that there's *no clear divine command* that prohibits women from teaching men in whole-church settings. If anything, the passages I looked at in the previous paper nudge us in the opposite direction: by sensitizing us to the need to contextualize our message, they provide encouragement to give women the same opportunities to teach as men. Not all accommodation to culture amounts to compromise. Adapting to culture doesn't always mean acquiescing to culture. For today's Church in the West, permitting women to teach is an appropriate way in which we can help safeguard the reputation of the gospel.

## Summary

In this section, I've proposed five reasons why women should teach on Sunday mornings:

- There's no clear biblical prohibition against women teaching men.
- Holding a complementarian position doesn't preclude women teaching.
- There are good reasons why a church eldership team might invite people who aren't part of that team (or on the track to eldership) to teach the local congregation.
- Having women teach demonstrates a clear commitment to male-female complementarity.
- Legitimate concern for the church's reputation encourages us to have women teach.

This doesn't mean a church settling for teaching on a Sunday that's 'unauthoritative'. While my reading of 1 Timothy 3:2 and Titus 1:9 leads me to think that elders should do lion's share of teaching on a Sunday morning, an eldership team may well have good reasons to have others address the local congregation. Even though these teachers don't hold governmental office in the life of the church, they can still speak with significant authority if they're addressing the congregation at the invitation of the elders.

I realise that not everyone will accept the case that I've made for women teaching men. This could be for a variety of reasons. If that's you, I want to take a moment to speak to you directly in the spirit of unity with which I concluded Paper 1. I know I speak for all of us in the Grace Church eldership team when I say that none of the us would dream of attempting to bind your conscience. We want you to know that there's a place for you in Grace Church, whether you agree or disagree with our stance on women teaching. We really do believe that what unites us in Christ is greater than any differences we may experience on this issue. And we're committed to do everything we can to help you find a spiritual home with us in Grace Church.



## Conclusion

My position in this paper is that I see no biblical or theological justification for treating women who are gifted to teach differently to male non-elders who are gifted to teach. While the lion's share of teaching should come from the elders, I don't believe that women should be prohibited from teaching a congregation when men are present.

Our view in Grace Church is consistent with a complementarian perspective but it's a far cry from the complementarian teaching advocated for in *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood* (Piper & Grudem, 1991). The 'moderate' (e.g. Ryland, 2011) or 'soft' (e.g. Betts & Kemm, 2013) complementarianism argued for in this paper differs from its more hardline counterparts by starting with the presumption of permission rather than restriction. Where there's an absence of any clear biblical prohibition against women teaching, our position is that it's better to err on the side of generosity than caution. We're committed to sending a strong message that we deeply value the contribution of women to church life and are equally committed to helping every member of the church publicly develop their God-given gifts. We think that receiving occasional teaching from women in our Sunday gatherings is an important way of expressing that commitment.

Our position also recognises that there will always be a range of opinions on this issue. What an individual thinks about who can teach will be a product, not only of the hard data of what's written in God's Word, but of a wide range of influences that work together to shape their understanding of ministry in the local church. This means that, in a movement as diverse as Newfrontiers, we shouldn't expect total uniformity in belief and practice when it comes to the question of who can bring teaching on a Sunday. It's also unrealistic to expect everyone to agree on this question in a local church. Enormous generosity of spirit is called for when we discuss and debate this issue. We must resist the temptation to set up a particular position as the touchstone of biblical orthodoxy and resist vilifying people who take a different view to ourselves.

Ultimately, I believe that how we navigate this issue is more important than the conclusions that we reach. I'm indebted to Mike Betts and Angela Kemm (2013) who first helped me appreciate this point. In his wisdom, God hasn't laid down the law on whether a woman can or can't teach on a Sunday. Given the sensitivity of the issues surrounding gender, gifting, vocation and identity, Betts suggests that this may be a deliberate strategy on God's part. The lack of any clear biblical command forces us on our knees before God and into dialogue with one another. It prevents us from using the Bible as a kind of arsenal of proof verses with which we can hammer the opposition. It compels us to reflect on the values, convictions and ideals that are most deeply rooted in our hearts. In Betts and Kemm's own words, coming to any resolution on the question of who can teach is truly 'a journey you have to go through in your heart' and not just your head.

# Appendix 1: Douglas Moo on Timothy 2:11-15 (1991)

## STORY BEHIND THE TEXT (GENESIS)

Eve exerted influence over Adam, as a result of which he also sinned (3:6).

Eve was formed from Adam (2:21-23).

Eve was deceived by the serpent in the garden (3:13). She sinned because she took initiative over the man whom God had given to be with her and to care for her.

Eve was 'the mother of all the living' (3:20).

## 1 TIMOTHY 2

A woman should learn in quietness and full submission.



I do not permit a woman to teach or to assume/exercise authority over a man; she must be quiet.



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.



But women will be saved through childbearing – if they continue in faith, love and holiness with propriety.

## SITUATION IN EPHESUS

The pressing need is for women to submit to their husbands and, perhaps, the male leadership of the church. Women at Ephesus were apparently adopting 'libertarian attitudes', declaring their independence from male leaders.

Timeless principle: God intends for men to exercise authority, and women to submit to male authority.

Women are proclaiming their independence from the men of the church.

False teachers were probably urging women to become actively involved in teaching and leadership roles in the church by neglecting the home.

## NOTES

Submission is best understood as submission to male authority as in Eph 5:24, Ti 2:5 & 1 Pet 3:1, 5. This is supported by the fact that the instruction is only directed to women and that the verses that follow focus on the relationship of men to women.

The transition from vv. 11 to 12 is from one activity that women are to carry out in submission (learning) to two others that are prohibited in order to maintain their submission (teaching and having authority). *Authentein* is best understood as 'have authority over.'

The priority of Adam's creation is indicative of the headship that man is to have over woman. This is to be understood in terms of male authority and female submission.

The situation in Ephesus is analogous to the situation in Eden. The sin of the women in Ephesus consists in their acting independently of men rather than in their failure to submit to the Lord's instructions.

'Childbearing' is best understood as a shorthand for domestic responsibilities.



## Appendix 2: Andrew Perriman on 1 Timothy 2:11-15 (1998)

STORY BEHIND THE TEXT (GENESIS)	1 TIMOTHY 2 <i>Primary argument</i> <i>Secondary point</i>	SITUATION IN EPHESUS	NOTES
<p>Eve exerted influence over Adam, as a result of which he also sinned (3:6).</p> <p>Eve was formed from Adam (2:21-23).</p> <p>The serpent targeted the woman, not the man (3:1-6a). She sinned because she disobeyed God's command (2:17).</p> <p>Eve was 'the mother of all the living' (3:20).</p>	<p>A woman should learn in quietness and full submission.</p> <p>↓</p> <p>For Adam was formed first, then Eve.</p> <p>↓</p> <p>And Adam was not the one deceived; it was the woman who was deceived and became a sinner.</p> <p>↓</p> <p>But women will be saved through childbearing – if they continue in faith, love and holiness with propriety.</p> <p><i>I do not permit a woman to teach or to assume/exercise authority over a man; she must be quiet.</i></p>	<p>The pressing need is for women to learn the sound teaching.</p> <p>Permitting women to teach runs the risk that they will mislead others with false doctrine.</p> <p>Men are more advantaged in society: socially and educationally.</p> <p>Women are less advantaged, and therefore more susceptible to false teaching.</p> <p>Women are less vulnerable to deception when they focus on the 'good deeds' of domestic activities (4:9-10, 14).</p>	<p>Submission is best understood, not as submission to male authority, but to sound teaching (1 Tim 1:10; cf. Titus 1:10-11). Eve didn't subvert Adam's authority (this idea doesn't appear in Genesis), but God's.</p> <p><i>Authentein</i> is best understood, not in terms of having or usurping authority, but in terms of actively exerting influence.</p> <p>The priority of Adam's creation prefigures the historical prominence of the man. Paul does not link this idea with male authority (he goes on to talk about Eve's deception).</p> <p>The situation in Ephesus is analogous to the situation in Eden. Paul's point is not that women are more gullible than men (in 2 Cor 11:2-3 he references Eve's deception as a warning to both women and men). It's simply that, in Ephesus, many women were proving susceptible to being deceived. Their sin consists in disregarding the instruction of God, not in their refusal to submit to the authority of church leaders or their husbands.</p> <p>'Childbearing' is best understood as a shorthand for domestic responsibilities.</p>

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