

1 Timothy 2:12

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

But I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man, but to be in silence.

Analysis

But I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man, but to be in silence. This verse has generated extensive debate but states Paul's restriction clearly: he does not "suffer" (epitrepō, ἐπιτρέπω—permit or allow) a woman "to teach" (didaskein, διδάσκειν) or "to usurp authority over the man" (authentein andros, αὐθεντεῖν ἄνδρός). "Teach" refers to authoritative doctrinal instruction of the church, the teaching office Paul elsewhere reserves for qualified elders. "Usurp authority" or better "exercise authority" translates authenteō (αὐθεντέω), appearing only here in the New Testament, meaning to have authority over or govern.

The prohibition involves two related activities: authoritative teaching and governing authority over men in the church context. This doesn't prohibit all teaching by women—Priscilla taught Apollos (Acts 18:26), older women teach younger women (Titus 2:3-5), women prophesied (Acts 21:9; 1 Corinthians 11:5). Rather, it restricts the specific role of authoritative doctrinal teaching and governing oversight in corporate worship, roles belonging to qualified elders (who must be men, 1 Timothy 3:1-7; Titus 1:5-9).

The phrase "but to be in silence" (einai en hēsychia, εἶναι ἐν ἡσυχίᾳ) parallels verse 11—peaceful receptivity rather than absolute muteness. Women participate in church life fully but not in roles that involve teaching men authoritatively or exercising governing authority. This distinction maintains created order while

affirming women's equal worth, spiritual gifts, and extensive ministry opportunities in roles not restricted to male leadership.

Historical Context

The restriction on women teaching and governing in churches wasn't innovative but reflected Jewish synagogue practice and early church order from the beginning. While women served prominently (Phoebe the deacon, Priscilla co-laboring with Paul, Lydia hosting a church), no evidence exists of women serving as elders or authoritative teachers of mixed congregations in the apostolic church.

Some argue this restriction was merely cultural accommodation to first-century patriarchy that should be discarded in modern egalitarian contexts. However, Paul grounds it not in culture but in creation order (v. 13) and the fall narrative (v. 14)—transcultural theological realities. The instructions apply to all churches in all times because they flow from God's design in creation, not merely cultural conventions.

The false teaching in Ephesus may have particularly involved women, explaining why Paul addresses this issue here. Second Timothy 3:6-7 describes false teachers influencing gullible women. Perhaps some of these women had then begun teaching, spreading the errors they'd learned. Paul's restriction protected the church from false teaching while maintaining proper order in worship.

Related Passages

1 Corinthians 13:4 — Characteristics of love

John 15:13 — Greatest form of love

Study Questions

1. How do you handle biblical teachings that conflict with contemporary cultural consensus?

2. In what ways can complementarian churches better honor, equip, and deploy women in extensive ministry while maintaining biblical boundaries?
3. How can you distinguish between biblical gender role distinctions and mere cultural traditionalism or sinful oppression?

Interlinear Text

γυναικὶ	δὲ	διδάσκειν	οὐκ	ἐπιτρέπω	οὐδὲ	αὐθεντεῖν
a woman	But	to teach	not	I suffer	nor	to usurp authority
G1135	G1161	G1321	G3756	G2010	G3761	G831
ἀνδρός	ἀλλ'	εἶναι	ἐν	ἡσυχία		
over the man	but	to be	in	silence		
G435	G235	G1511	G1722	G2271		

Additional Cross-References

1 Corinthians 14:34 (Parallel theme): Let your women keep silence in the churches: for it is not permitted unto them to speak; but they are commanded to be under obedience, as also saith the law.