

CAN WOMEN TEACH MEN?

- A. Introduction: Before we begin our next series we're going to take a couple of weeks and consider a question that frequently comes up: Can women teach the Bible, particularly to men?
1. Based on something Paul wrote I Tim 2:12, many would answer this question with a resounding: No, they cannot. However, is that what Paul meant when he wrote those words? Was he establishing a universal, for all time ban on women teachers? In these lessons, we're going to find out that he was not.
 2. I have an important purpose in addressing this topic—to clear up confusion in this area.
 - a. More and more people are being exposed to this ministry through various forms of social media. Some have expressed confusion because they see the value in the teachings we offer, but they have been told that women aren't supposed to teach the Bible. Consequently, they are confused as to whether it is right or wrong to listen to the teachings.
 - b. When we examine I Tim 1:12 in the context in which it was written, we find that that Paul was dealing with a particular situation in a specific time and place. He was not barring half of the members of the body of Christ (women) from forever teaching.
- B. As with any study of any verse in the Bible, we must begin with context—everything in the Bible was written by someone to someone about something. These three factors set context. A verse cannot mean something to us that it would not have meant to the original readers. So, let's first consider who Paul wrote to and why.
1. Paul, like other writers of the books and letters that make up the New Testament, was an eyewitness of the resurrected Lord Jesus Christ. Paul had been an ardent persecutor of Christians, but when Jesus appeared to him while he was traveling the road to Damascus, Syria he was transformed. Acts 9:1-9
 - a. Jesus appeared to Paul on a number of subsequent occasions and taught Paul the gospel message that he preached (Acts 26:16; Gal 1:11-12). He spent the rest of his life traveling the length of the Roman Empire establishing and caring for churches (communities of believers in Jesus).
 - b. Paul established a church in the city of Ephesus (in modern day Turkey) and spent three years there, teaching believers (Acts 19). He ultimately moved on and eventually put a man named Timothy in charge of the work. Timothy came to faith in Jesus through Paul's ministry.
 1. Acts 20:28-32—Before Paul left Ephesus after his initial stay, he warned church leaders that once he departed, false teachers with false teachings would arise and try to draw believers away from the truth. That is exactly what happened. (It happened at other places besides Ephesus).
 2. You may recall that Jesus told His apostles that when the gospel is preached Satan comes to steal the Word of God (Mark 4:15). One of the ways he steals the Word is by corrupting the message through false teachings.
 - A. Paul wrote I and II Timothy (two epistles or letters) to Timothy to help guide him through his responsibilities as overseer in Ephesus (and some nearby cities).
 - B. In these letters Paul urged Timothy to teach sound doctrine, combat false teaching, encourage Christian conduct among believers, and raise up qualified leadership to aid him.
 - c. Paul's prohibition of women teachers has nothing to do with their gender. It has to do with what they were teaching—their doctrine. Timothy was facing false teachers, some of whom were women.
 1. I Tim 1:3—Note the first thing that Paul wrote to Timothy once he finished his usual greeting: I left you in Ephesus to charge some that they teach no other doctrine:
 2. "Other doctrine" has the idea of something other than right doctrine. The word "some" comes from a neuter pronoun in Greek which means either male or female. "I urged you to stay in Ephesus and stop those who are teaching wrong doctrine" (I Tim 1:3, NLT).
 - A. According to W. E. Vine's *Greek dictionary of New Testament Words*, "some" is better translated as certain persons or teachers (Conyebear; 20th Cent; Weymouth).

- B. The use of this particular word indicates the possibility that there were women teaching at Ephesus because, if Paul intended to say that only men were teaching (since only men are allowed to teach) he could have used the Greek word for men, *aner*.
2. Much of what Paul wrote in his epistles (not just I and II Timothy) was written to counter false teachings which began to develop almost immediately in the places where the gospel was taking root.
 - a. Paul had to deal with two primary groups—the Judaizers and teachers of what would become Gnosticism in the 2nd century AD.
 1. Many Judaizers were Pharisees who insisted that Gentiles believers had to be circumcised and keep the Law of Moses in order to be saved. To them, Gentiles were second class Christians.
 2. Gnosticism was a false teaching that would not be fully developed until the next century, but its seeds were already present in the apostles' time. Many Gnostics claimed to be Christian but what they believed and taught was contrary to apostolic (or sound) doctrine.
 - b. I Tim 1:4—Note that Paul exhorted Timothy to charge false teachers not to pay attention to endless genealogies and fables (myths), both of which were issues with the Judaizers and the Gnostics.
 1. The Jews people kept genealogies for centuries to help maintain tribal distinctions within the nations (for practical and messianic reasons). A public registry of genealogies was kept in archives at the Temple in Jerusalem. King Herod (of Jesus' time) destroyed the records.
 2. Herod was an Idumean (a descendant of Esau and not from the family of David) so he had no legal claim to Israel's throne. He destroyed the genealogical records in part because of jealousy since he himself lacked a pedigree.
 3. From that time on Jews could refer to genealogies only from memory or imperfect tables held by private individuals. This led to endless arguments and discussions.
 4. The Gnostics also used genealogies (genealogies of spirits and beings from the beyond) to prove certain points of doctrine. The primary problem at Ephesus came from the Gnostics.
 - c. Most of what we know about the Gnostics comes from the writings of the Church Fathers, not from the Scriptures. Church Fathers were the men who became leaders after the original apostles died—men like Polycarp (who knew the apostles) and Irenaeus (who was taught by Polycarp).
 - d. Gnosticism became a full blown heresy in the 2nd and 3rd centuries. Church Fathers such as Clement of Alexandria, Irenaeus, and Hippolytus wrote to refute the heresy. In their writings they named Gnostic leaders (including women) and explained Gnostic doctrines.
 3. The basis of Gnosticism was special or hidden, secret knowledge. The word Gnosticism comes from the Greek word for knowledge, *gnosis*. The word translated science in I Tim 6:20 is *gnosis*.
 - a. The Gnostics taught that salvation came to an elite few through knowledge. These few with special knowledge were considered mediators. Gnostics believed that if you followed the mediators' secret knowledge you could be saved. They taught nothing about sin, guilt, or faith. Gnostics exalted the mind and taught that matter was evil.
 - b. The Gnostics had elaborate genealogies and myths about their beginnings. According to their doctrine Eve was created first and that she was the “bringer of life” to Adam. Gen 3:20
 1. They believed that when Eve ate from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil she received hidden, special knowledge. Her act was good, not sinful, because she enlightened humanity. From this myth developed the idea of women as mediators.
 2. Hippolytus wrote about the Gnostics, “They magnify these wretched women above the apostles ... so that some of them presume to assert that there is in them something superior to Christ.”
 - c. Lewd sexual practices were part of many ancient religions that believed fornication brought people into contact with deity. Ephesus was home to the great shrine of the goddess Diana and thousands of temple prostitutes were available for “acts of worship”. The Gnostics were no different.
 1. The Book of Revelation is a record of a vision John had of Jesus. Jesus gave John messages

for the seven churches in Asia Minor (where Ephesus was located). His message to Thyatira concerned a woman teaching false doctrine. Rev 2:20-21

2. This church let a woman teach. If women are not supposed to teach, then why was she teaching? Notice that Jesus had no problem with the fact that she was a woman. He took issue with her doctrine. Jezebel taught heresies combined with sexual immorality. She was possibly a Gnostic.
4. Most of the converts to the church at Ephesus were Gentiles (former pagans) and they had a lot of false ideas and practices when they came to Christ. Ephesus was a sensual, wicked city. It was Timothy's responsibility as overseer in Ephesus to foster Christian behavior and weed out immoral practices among those in his charge. Paul wrote to instruct and aid Timothy.
 - a. I Tim 2:8-9—Paul gave instructions on modest dress for women when they prayed in public.
 1. He told men how to pray, with uplifted hands, without wrath, without doubt (v8). Then Paul told women how to pray (v9). In like manner (likewise) refers to the previous statement. Women were to pray with raised hands, etc. Many commentators say that, for grammatical clarity, the word prayer should be in v9 as well as v8. (Conybeare)
 2. Paul told women to dress modestly. In that culture wealthy women used excessive adornment, especially in their hair. Wealthy women braided their hair with gold to flaunt their wealth and to draw attention to their physical appearance. Lusting after a woman for her hair was both a Greek and Jewish tradition (according to contemporary writings).
 - A. Paul wasn't saying that women can't wear make-up or jewelry. There's a cultural context to his words—excessive hair ornamentation. That's what it meant to the original hearers.
 - B. Paul told them that they need shamefacedness or a sense of modesty and sobriety or soundness of mind and self control in the way that they dress.
 - b. I Tim 2:10—Many interpret this verse to mean that women should adorn themselves with good works. And that is absolutely true. But Paul had more in mind with his statement.
 1. These women who were dressing immodestly were also promising godliness. The word professing in the Greek is not the commonly used word, *homologia*. Paul used the word *epaggellomai* which means to promise something to someone. It is also used in I Tim 6:21.
 2. We know from other statements Paul made that there were young women going around talking about things they should not have been (I Tim 5:11-15) and that women at Ephesus were being influenced by false teaching (II Tim 3:1-7).
 3. The context doesn't tell us who taught these women strange doctrine, but the social customs of the day make it highly unlikely that men were sneaking into houses to teach women. It was probably other women.
- C. With this background information (the historical and cultural context) in mind and with the information from the epistle about some of the problems with women at Ephesus, let's look at the context of I Tim 2:12.
 1. Paul told Timothy to stop people from teaching false doctrine (1:3-4). Paul told him to instruct certain women how to pray and dress in public—women who were promising godliness to people (2:8-10).
 - a. These women who promised godliness were some of the Gnostic teachers that Paul told Timothy to keep from teaching. How can we be sure?
 1. Historical records tell us Gnostics were a problem at this time in this place. We know that Gnostics promised godliness to those who followed their teachings, their secret knowledge, their hidden wisdom.
 2. Gnostic women were considered mediators who brought special, secret knowledge to men to enlighten them as Eve did to Adam. Note that Paul addressed mediators right here.
 - A. I Tim 2:1-7—Paul made it clear there is only one mediator between God and man, Jesus.

B. Then, he urged men and women to pray (v8-9). They don't have to go through a mediator. They can go directly to God because of Jesus.

b. I Tim 2:11—Paul said, “Let a woman learn.” In other words, women need to learn proper doctrine before they teach. What women—the women in v10, the ones promising godliness.

1. They need to learn in silence with subjection. Paul isn't referring to women submitting to men. The word silence (also used in v12) is the same word translated quiet in I Tim 2:2 and it has the idea of “tranquility from within causing no disturbance to others” (*Vine's Dictionary*).
2. The learning style in that day was questions and answers which lead to endless questions and discussions without respect for the teacher. I Tim 1:4; I Tim 6:20
3. Paul wasn't demanding quiet women. He was asking for submissive students—students, submissive to the word, who would learn without interrupting the teacher.

2. I Tim 2:12—Paul was not saying that women can't teach. Suffer is more accurately translated, “I am not permitting”. (NIV, Rotherham, Weymouth, etc.). He is saying: I am not permitting women to teach at Ephesus, not because they are women, but because they are teaching false doctrine.

a. Paul could not be saying he never lets women teach because he let Priscilla teach. He actually worked with her and commended her for her work. Paul met Priscilla and her husband Aquila in the city of Corinth. Acts 18:1-3; I Cor 16:19

1. Acts 18:18-19; 24-26—Aquila and Priscilla went with Paul to Ephesus (the place where Timothy was instructed not to let women teach) where they taught a man, Apollos.
2. In Rom 16:3 and II Tim 4:19 Paul mentions Priscilla before Aquila—contrary to the custom of the day, unless the wife surpassed the husband in some significant way. Many Bible scholars believe that Priscilla, not her husband, had the teaching gift, and that he supported her in it.

b. I Tim 2:12—Usurp authority in the Greek is not the usual word for authority (*exousia* which is used 32 times in the New Testament). The word used here is *authentain*, a rare Greek verb, used only here. It was considered coarse and vulgar.

1. In Paul's day Greek dramatists used it for suicide or for family murder. It also had a sexual connotation. The did the word come to mean rule or usurp authority until the 3rd or 4th century.
2. Many Gnostics combined sex with their teaching. These women teachers at Ephesus were combining sexual enticement with their teaching. That was not uncommon in the culture. Female teachers in Greek schools were courtesans or prostitutes with a wealthy, upper class clientele. They made it clear in their lectures to males students what their second job was.

A. The original hearers and readers of this letter would have understood authority to mean causing erotic or symbolic death. Proverbs has many warnings about the sensuous woman who leads men to death. Prov 2:16-19; 5:3-5; 9:13-18

B. In other words, Paul told Timothy: Don't let these women teach false doctrine and entice their male students sexually.

c. I Tim 2:13-14 give more proof that Paul was combating women teachers at Ephesus because of their doctrine (as opposed to their gender) when he attacked two of their Gnostic teachings.

1. Paul clearly stated that Eve was not created first, Adam was. And, Paul wrote, Eve did not receive hidden knowledge when she ate from the tree. She was deceived and committed sin.
2. Note that v13-14 are linked to v12 by the word “for”. In other words, v12 is based on the facts listed in verses 13 and 14. Women can't be allowed to teach this sort of doctrine.

D. Conclusion: We haven't addressed every issue connected with women teachers and the place of women in the church, but we've laid a foundation. And we've shown the importance of reading verses in context. More next week!