

Introduction

For generations, the church has wrestled with the question: *Can women serve as pastors, elders, or teachers with spiritual authority?* Today, I want to address this—not through cultural arguments, but through **Scripture, history, and the heart of God** as revealed throughout the biblical story.

Let's start with some OT examples of women as leaders of God's people.

Deborah — A Judge, Prophet, and Leader (Judges 4–5)

Deborah was not an exception; she was an example of God placing spiritual authority on a woman. She judged Israel, prophesied, instructed generals, and led the people into victory. Scripture does not make her out to be something very special because of her leadership—it celebrates it.

Another example for the OT is Huldah — She was a prophet who instructed God's Priests and the king.. (2 Kings 22:14–20)

When Josiah needed spiritual direction, he had the priests consult Huldah. God entrusted her with His authoritative word to the king and the nation.

These women were not “helpers behind the scenes.” They held visible, authoritative leadership over God’s people.

If God empowered women before Pentecost, how much more in the age of the Spirit?

In the NT, Jesus Elevated and Commissioned Women as Witnesses and Teachers

Women Were the First Preachers of the Resurrection (Luke 24:1–10; John 20:17–18)

The greatest announcement in Christian history—Jesus is risen!—was given first to women. Jesus said to Mary Magdalene:

“Go and tell my brothers, that is the men who followed me (John 20:17–18)

This is preaching. This is proclamation.

The first gospel message was delivered by a woman to a group of men. The word apostle literally means, one who is sent. The first person to be an apostle, that is sent with the good news of Jesus’ resurrection was Mary Magdalene.

We also know that Women Were Among Jesus' Disciples

Luke 8:1–3 shows women traveling with Jesus, learning from Him, and funding His ministry—roles equivalent to the male disciples of the day.

Jesus never said, “Follow Me, but don’t preach.”

Jesus never said, “You may learn, but not teach.”

Jesus commissioned *all* His disciples. When he told his followers to go and make disciples, he wasn’t referring to just his male followers, but rather to both men and women who would be his disciples and he didn’t say “but you women, only go to other women.” He said make disciples of all nations, both male and female.

3. The Early Church Recognized Women as Pastors, Apostles, Teachers, and Leaders

Phoebe — A Pastor/Deacon and Teacher (Romans 16:1–2)

Paul calls her a *diakonos*—the same word used for male pastoral leaders—and a *prostatis*, meaning “leader, overseer, or protector.”

She likely carried and explained the letter to the Romans, making her the first *teacher* of that letter.

Junia — A Female Apostle (Romans 16:7)

Paul calls Junia “outstanding among the apostles.”

Junia is a female name and Paul affirms her apostleship.

Priscilla — A Teacher of Teachers (Acts 18:24–26)

Priscilla taught Apollos, one of the most powerful preachers of the early church.

Her name appears before Aquila’s, indicating she was the leading teacher. This is especially strong evidence, because a woman would not normally be mentioned prior to her husband.

Women Hosted and Led House Churches

Lydia (Acts 16:40), Nympha (Colossians 4:15), and others led spiritual communities.

Pastors lead churches. Women led churches. Therefore, women functioned as pastors in the early church.

Here’s a fourth thing we need to see from the scriptures. The Holy Spirit Calls and Gifts Without Gender Restrictions

Pentecost Fulfilled Joel's Prophecy (Acts 2:17–18)

“Your sons **and daughters** will prophesy...

I will pour out my Spirit on **both men and women**, and they will prophesy.”

This was not a poetic metaphor—Peter said it was being fulfilled *that very day*.

Prophecy is preaching.

Prophecy is proclaiming God’s word.

Prophecy is authoritative spiritual ministry.

When the Spirit falls, He does not ask for a gender before giving a gift.

5. The Heart of the Gospel: Equality in Christ

Galatians 3:28

“There is neither male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.”

This doesn’t erase gender but eliminates spiritual ranking.

The gospel tears down the very walls that keep women out of ministry.

Conclusion: When God Calls a Woman, the Church Must Say “Yes.”

Women have:

- preached the first gospel sermon,
- led God’s people in battle,
- taught pastors,
- planted churches,
- prophesied,
- discipled apostles,
- and shepherded congregations.

To deny a calling God has given is to fight against the Spirit of God.

The church is strongest when *all* of God’s people—male and female—use their gifts freely for the building of the kingdom.

Because **the same Spirit that raised Jesus from the dead** is poured out on **sons and daughters**, calling them to proclaim the good news to the ends of the earth.

There are 3 passages of scripture which are often used to exclude women from the role of a pastor.

1 Timothy 2:11–15, 1 Corinthians 14:34–35, and 1 Corinthians 11:2–16. Unfortunately, those who hold the position that women should not be pastor, ignore all the Biblical evidence we just looked at and use these 3 passages as the sources of their beliefs. In doing so, they overlook obvious evidence that contradict they're interpretation. For today, I want to look only at the Timothy passage, since it is used as the primary scripture to keep women from serving as pastors.

I focus on Greek language, historical background, literary context, and Paul's theology.

1. 1 Timothy 2:11–15 — “I do not permit a woman to teach...”

This is the most frequently cited passage against women pastors, so we treat it with care.

A. The Greek Grammar Matters

Paul uses the present, **temporary** verb:

ouk epitrepo — “I am **not permitting** (now).”

Not “I never permit,” not “God does not permit,” not “women must never teach.”

It indicates a *current*, “for now,” situational restriction.

Paul uses this same grammatical form elsewhere for temporary instructions (1 Tim. 5:23, “stop drinking only water, and use a little wine because of your stomach and your frequent illnesses.” It's seems obvious to me that Paul wouldn't tell Timothy to stop drinking water forever and only drink wine.” We all know, water is essential to life, but for a time, Timothy is instructed to cut back on his water intake.

When Paul says, “I do not permit a women to teach” he is referring to a particular point in time and to a particular group of women in one particular congregation.

B. In addition to the grammar, we need to consider the Setting: That is the False Teaching spreading through Ephesus

Paul's letters to Timothy repeatedly address:

- **women being deceived** (2 Tim. 3:6–7)
- **false teachers targeting women** (1 Tim. 5:13–15)

- the Artemis cult in Ephesus, led by priestesses teaching female superiority
- uneducated women in a culture where women were rarely taught

Paul is addressing *a problem specific to Ephesus*:

untrained women spreading false teaching—just as Eve was deceived.

The “Eve deception” analogy only makes sense if deception is occurring **in Ephesus**, not universally among all women everywhere.

Thirdly, what does the phrase Have Authority over a man” Really Mean? Again, understanding the original Greek is important. The Greek word translated Have Authority is (authentein)

Paul does **not** use the normal word for pastoral authority (*exousia*).

He uses *authentein*, a rare verb meaning:

- to dominate
- to control
- to bully
- to act in a destructive or violent manner

This is **not** “exercising healthy leadership.”

Paul is prohibiting **abusive domination**, not pastoral teaching.

A better translation is:

“I am not permitting a woman to teach or to domineer over a man...”

Paul is restraining *false teachers* and *abusive behavior*, not restricting God-called women.

As we continue looking at this passage, we read “She must learn”—This is Radical statement in and of itself.

Paul commands:

“Let the woman **learn...**”

In Greek, this is an **imperative**—a command.

Jewish and Roman culture did **not** permit women to receive formal theological training.

Paul insists they *must be taught* before they teach.

Learning before teaching is a qualification, not a prohibition.

E. Adam and Eve Argument (vv. 13–14)

Paul is not arguing “women are more easily deceived.”

If he believed that, he would never allow:

- women to prophesy (1 Cor 11)
- women to lead (Rom 16)
- women to disciple pastors (Acts 18)

Again, this was a particular problem in a particular place, Ephesus was full of women influenced by false teachers.

Paul says:

“Eve was deceived—don’t repeat that pattern. Learn well first.”

He is addressing a **local problem of deception**, not universal female inferiority.

F. “Saved through childbearing” (v. 15)

This is widely misunderstood. Two best scholarly explanations:

1. “Saved through the Childbearing” — A reference to Christ’s birth

The Greek has a definite article: *tēs teknonōias* — “**the** childbearing.”

Early church fathers interpreted this as:

“Women are saved through the birth of the Messiah.”

Meaning: women are not inferior because salvation also came through a woman.

2. Protected through childbirth

In Ephesus, women believed Artemis protected them during labor.

Paul may be saying:

“You don’t need Artemis—God Himself will preserve you.”

If this verse is interpreted to mean that women must bear children to be saved, what does that say to all the women who for whatever reason are unable to bear children. Is their faith in Jesus Christ meaningless and void. I don't believe so.

In either way of reading, this verse does **not** say women must bear children to be saved.

Conclusion

When we read Scripture **in context**, three truths emerge clearly:

1. **Paul empowered women rather than restricting them.**
2. **The few restrictive passages address local problems—and Paul often corrected men more harshly than women.**
3. **The overall biblical witness shows women serving as prophets, apostles, teachers, evangelists, and leaders.**

The debate only exists when a handful of verses are lifted out of their context.

Once restored to their historical and literary setting, Scripture overwhelmingly supports:

Women can teach, preach, lead, shepherd, and serve as pastors in the body of Christ.

2. 1 Corinthians 14:34–35 — “Women must keep silent in the churches.”

This appears absolute—until we read *1 Corinthians 11*, where Paul **affirms women praying and prophesying publicly.**

So the same letter cannot mean, “Women must never speak.”

A. Three Possible Interpretations

1. Paul is silencing disorderly interruptions

Corinthian services were chaotic (see ch. 14).

Many scholars believe women were interrupting:

- asking questions aloud
- challenging speakers
- disrupting prophecy judging

Thus Paul says:

“If they want to learn, let them ask at home.”

Not “never speak,” but “not in a disruptive way.”

2. Paul is quoting the Corinthians—and rejecting their statement

Paul often quotes Corinthian slogans (6:12; 7:1; 8:1, etc.).

Some scholars argue 14:34–35 is another slogan:

Corinthians: “Women should keep silent!”

Paul: “What? Did the word of God originate with you?” (v. 36)

Verse 36 is a sharp rebuke—likely of the restrictive statement.

3. The “silence” refers to *weighing prophecies*, not preaching

The context in 1 Cor 14 is about **evaluating prophets**, not forbidding preaching or praying.

In that culture, women were largely uneducated and not permitted to evaluate men publicly.

Paul temporarily restricts *that specific activity*, not all speech.

3. 1 Corinthians 11:2–16 — Women Praying and Prophesying

This passage is crucial because it **clearly shows women exercising public ministry**.

A. Women Are Praying and Prophesying in Church

Paul writes:

“Every woman who prays or prophesies...” (11:5)

Paul gives **instructions on how** they should minister—not if they may.

Prophecy is the highest gift in the New Testament church (1 Cor 14:1).

Prophets play teaching roles (Acts 13; Eph 4).

If Paul wanted women silent, he would not give rules for how they should speak.

B. The Head Covering Issue

The Greek “head” (*kephale*) can mean:

- authority
- source/origin

Many scholars argue “source” is the better translation here:

God is the source of Christ

Christ is the source of man

Man is the source of woman (Eve)

Paul is grounding his argument not in **authority hierarchy**, but in **honoring relational origins**.

C. The “Angels” Argument

Verse 10 is notoriously complex, but most interpretations emphasize:

- order
- propriety
- reflecting God’s glory in worship

Nothing in the passage restricts women from preaching or praying.

Summary of Pauline Theology on Women in Ministry

1. **Paul celebrates women leaders** (Rom 16).
2. **Paul works alongside female apostles, teachers, pastors, and prophets.**
3. **Paul commands women to learn theology** (radical in his day).

4. **Paul opposes domineering or deceptive teaching—by anyone** (men or women).
5. **Paul's temporary restrictions are situational, not universal.**
6. **The Holy Spirit gifts women with the same gifts as men (Acts 2).**

Conclusion

When we read Scripture **in context**, three truths emerge clearly:

4. **Paul empowered women rather than restricting them.**
5. **The few restrictive passages address local problems—and Paul often corrected men more harshly than women.**
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