**Appendix 11. The Role of Women in the Church**

**1 Corinthians 14:34-35:** One of the advantages of living in our modern age is that we continue to improve in our ability to reconstruct the “original” text. Of course, this is of inestimable value because the original God-breathed Word is priceless, but it also allows us to see into the mindset of the copyists who sometimes altered the text. Although often changes to the biblical text were just simple copying mistakes, sometimes they were an attempt to “correct” the Bible and reflected the theology and culture of the time. When scholars encounter a word (or words) that is in some ancient manuscripts but not in others, they have certain tests they apply to see whether the word was added to the original, or omitted from it. Scholars consider things such as the age of the manuscripts, the type or style of the writing, the ink that is used, and the “manuscript family” the texts come from. A very important principle in finding the original text is that the more difficult reading tends to be original. That is because scribes tended to alter texts to make them easier to understand or to fit into accepted theology more easily.

One test of the originality of a verse is its placement in the Bible. If a phrase is in the original text, then obviously, when it is omitted, it is always omitted from the same place. However, if a phrase is not in the original text, a scribe adds it but a later scribe, thinking it fits better somewhere else, adds it in a different place or moves it somewhere else. The sentiment that women should not be leaders, or take a prominent role in the Church, caused scribes and copyists to change quite a few biblical texts about women, and the fact that 1 Corinthians 14:34-35 do not appear in the same place in every manuscript of 1 Corinthians, is one reason some scholars conclude they were added to the text by a copyist. Alan Johnson (The IVP New Testament Commentary Series: *1 Corinthians*, p. 271), and Richard Hays (*A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching: 1 Corinthians*, p. 247), are two such scholars.

Additions to the text often break the context and even cause contradictions, and that is the case here. Scholars have long noticed that 1 Corinthians 14:34-35 break the flow of the passage, which makes perfect sense without them. 1 Corinthians 14:36 makes perfect sense after 1 Corinthians 14:33 because the prophets who spoke had a revelation (1 Cor. 14:30), but they still must listen to other prophets. The word of the Lord had not come “to you only,” i.e., only to those prophets. However, if we add verses 34 and 35, we create contradictions in the text.

One of the contradictions created by the addition of these verses is that there is no evidence any women thought the Word of God came to them only, as verse 36 asserts. There is nothing in Greco-Roman or Jewish culture, or in the context of these verses, that leads us to think that the women in Corinth asserted that the Word of God came only to them, or only out from them. The fact that the women of Corinth wore head coverings as a sign of the authority over them (1 Cor. 11:5) is evidence that they were not being rebellious or acting as if God was speaking only to them. Paul’s comment in verse 36 seems especially inappropriate if addressed to the women because it is harsher than a simple statement, it is, as Robertson and Plummer point out, actually sarcasm (Robertson and Plummer, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the First Epistle of St. Paul to the Corinthians*, p. 326).

Being sarcastic to the women is inappropriate and out of place. On the other hand, writing the phrase about the Word of God coming to “you only” would make perfect sense if it were written to one of the prophets. A prophet who got a revelation from God, as is indicated in verse 30, might have felt so strongly about his revelation that he might try to persuade the entire congregation of his point of view no matter how other prophets saw the situation. Since it can take a real jolt to convince a prophet to let go of his idea, if the sarcastic sentences in verse 36, and the phrase, “has it come to you only” are applied to the prophets in verses 29 and 30, they fit perfectly. That verse 36 applies best to the prophets of verse 30 and not to the women of verses 34 and 35, is powerful evidence that the verses about the women being silent were added.

The phrase about the women “asking their husbands” at home is more good evidence these verses were added to the text. Earlier in Corinthians the Word of God says, “But I say to the unmarried and to widows that it is good for them if they remain even as I [Paul]” (1 Cor. 7:8 NASB). How “good” would it be to remain as a widow if it meant that you could not express yourself in the church and also had no husband at home to ask questions and represent you in the Church? It seems quite insensitive and disingenuous for God to say in chapter 7 that it would be good for a woman to remain single and then in chapter 14 to say she cannot express her opinions in church, and to ask her “husband.”

Another problem with limiting women to asking their husbands is that not every husband could answer the questions of their wives. The wording of the text would leave the women who had no husbands, or whose husbands could not answer their questions, with no clear instruction about what God wanted them to do. Still another problem with “asking the husbands at home” is it unrealistically limits the reasons that women speak in meetings. Women speak in the church for a lot more reasons than just to ask questions so they will “learn.”

Another clear contradiction caused by 1 Corinthians 14:34-35 is that the women were in fact speaking in the first-century Church. The immediate context mentions prophecy, and even scholars who believe that women should not lead or teach admit that God allows women to prophesy in the congregation. At the very start of the Church when the gift of holy spirit was poured out, Peter made it clear that both men and women would receive holy spirit, and both would prophesy (Acts 2:17-18). Since it is quite clear even from Paul’s Epistle to the Corinthians that women could prophesy and pray openly in the church (1 Cor. 11:5), it makes no sense that Paul would immediately follow a verse about them prophesying with a verse saying they had to be “silent” and not speak.

But the women were regularly speaking up besides just giving prophecy. One verse that gives evidence for that is 1 Corinthians 14:26 (the word “brothers” is often used to refer to both men and women; cf. Matt. 25:40, Rom. 8:29, Eph. 6:23, Rev. 12:10). Both the context of 1 Corinthians 14:26 and its contents make it clear that everyone, not just the men, was speaking. As for women teaching in the Church, the fact that some of the Church Fathers spent time condemning teaching by women seems to be a good ancillary argument that they did teach, something confirmed in 1 Timothy 2:12, a verse that has been historically mistranslated and misunderstood (see commentary on 1 Tim. 2:12). Furthermore, in the book of Revelation, the prophetess Jezebel is castigated because “she teaches and leads My bond-servants astray, so that they commit *acts of* immorality and eat things sacrificed to idols” (Rev. 2:20 NASB). It is important to note that she is not reproved for teaching, but for teaching error.

Another very good piece of evidence that 1 Corinthians 14:34-35 was added to the text is the phrase, “as the Law also says.” Scholars have long had a problem with this phrase because the Law does not say women should be silent. Commentators have tried very hard to justify Paul’s supposed statement by coming up with verses from the Law which would support the idea that women should be silent, and cited verses such as Genesis 2:20-24; 3:16, and Job 29:21, but these verses do not say women should be silent. In fact, there is nothing in the Law about women being “silent.” Would the actual Word of God contain a contradiction as blatant as this one seems to be? We say, “No.”

Another problem with 1 Corinthians 14:34-35 is that they contradict 1 Timothy 2:12 (This is true no matter how the verses in Timothy are translated or understood.) When properly translated and understood, 1 Timothy 2:12 confirms that women can teach in the Church, see Catherine Clark Kroeger and Richard Clark Kroeger, *I Suffer Not a Woman* (Baker Book House, Grand Rapids, MI, 1992), pp. 79-113, and also the commentary on 1 Tim. 2:12). As traditionally understood, however, 1 Timothy 2:12 says that women cannot teach. But 1 Timothy was written a decade or so after 1 Corinthians, and if Corinthians said that women could not even speak, then there is no logical reason that Timothy would be more lenient than the verses in Corinthians, perhaps even causing confusion in the Church. Timothy is a leadership epistle, and it is a general tenet of the leadership epistles that the directions within them are more specific and more stringent than the directions within the epistles written to the Church in general. Therefore, if 1 Corinthians 14:34-35, which say women should not speak, are actually in the original text, it makes no sense that Paul would seem to water that down in Timothy and say the women could not teach. In reality, there was no confusion in the early Church because the verses we know as 1 Corinthians 14:34-35 were not in the original text.

Yet another piece of evidence that Paul did not write 1 Corinthians 14:34-35 is that those verses contain some vocabulary that is not characteristic of Paul. This is something that has been pointed out by a number of Greek scholars, and in and of itself would be a weak argument that the verses were not written by Paul. However, given the other weighty evidence that the verses were a scribal addition, the unPauline vocabulary is more evidence that leads us to the conclusion that the verses were not part of what Paul originally wrote (cf. Gordon Fee, The New International Commentary on the New Testament: *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., Grand Rapids, MI, 1987), p. 702).

Another reason that it would not be out of the ordinary for these harsh verses about women speaking in the Church to be added to the biblical text was that soon after the era of the first apostles, an anti-feminine bias entered the Church from the Greco-Roman culture. This bias against women eventually became so strong that women were denied positions of authority in the Church and the men who ran the Church, the clergy, were forced to be celibate. In time, many verses that elevated women were changed by scribes. One text that scribes changed was Acts 18:26. The original text listed Priscilla before Aquila, but it was “corrected” by scribes so that Aquila came first in the list. Since this error was in the Byzantine manuscripts that were used in translating the King James Version, the KJV has Aquila first.

Another place the text was altered to minimize the importance of women was Acts 17:12. The original text read καὶ τῶν Ἑλληνίδων γυναικῶν τῶν εὐσχημόνων καὶ ἀνδρῶν οὐκ ὀλίγοι. (“also of the prominent Greek women, and of the men, not a few”). In codex Bezae, a fifth-century manuscript, the text was altered to καὶ τῶν Ἑλλήνων καὶ τῶν εὐσχημόνων ἄνδρες καὶ γυναῖκες ἱκανοὶ ἐπίστευσαν (“and many of the Greeks and men and women of high standing believed;” See Metzger; *Textual Commentary on the Greek NT*). This shows us that by the 400s AD, it was offensive enough to some scribes that the women were referred to as “prominent” and were placed before the men, that they would change the text so that the men and women were both said to be prominent, and the men came before the women.

Another example of bias against women in the Church is Romans 16:7, in which the feminine name “Junia” was altered to the masculine name “Junias” (see commentary on Rom. 16:7).

Another place the text about women was altered is Mark 3:31. The original text, which read “his mother and brothers” (referring to Mary and Jesus’ brothers), was changed to “his brothers and his mother.” This was the reading of some of the Byzantine texts that were used as source texts for the King James Version, and so “brothers” comes before “mother” in the KJV. Interestingly, the word “mother” was allowed to remain first in verse 32.

A place where the text may have been altered to minimize the influence of women is Acts 17:34. Although the original text contained the line, “and a woman named Damaris,” that line does not appear in codex Bezae. The scholars are divided as to whether the omission of the line about Damaris is a case of anti-feminine bias in the Church or was accidental.

One thing that Christians can be thankful for is that when something is wrong with Christian doctrine, the spirit of God usually moves powerfully in people to overcome the problem. That certainly is the case when it comes to 1 Corinthians 14:34-35. Perhaps no supposed command of God is as regularly ignored as this one. In churches and fellowship halls around the world, women speak up. Even in many denominations that do not allow women to teach the congregation, they are allowed to contribute before or after the sermon.

Their speaking up is even more apparent in the many house churches and cell groups that are being run all over the globe. In those small settings, women often openly share the Word of God, their testimonies, ideas, and opinions. This is important, because when Corinthians was penned by the apostle Paul around the middle of the first century, house churches were the only “churches” that existed. Were first-century house church meetings so different from ours today? Could it be that a spirit of rebellion is running rampant in today’s Christian women who speak up in spite of the command not to, and Christian men either cannot seem to hear the spirit of God or are too spineless to force the women to be silent? That is not likely. It is much more likely that God did not tell the women to be silent in church, but rather that was the opinion of a copyist or scribe that years later became copied into the Bible, and the spirit of God is moving in people today to ignore that spurious command.

In spite of the evidence the verses were added, many scholars feel that 1 Corinthians 14:34-35 are original, even though they are “difficult.” This has led to a large number of ways, some of them quite imaginative, that these verses have been explained. The explanations generally fall into two general categories. The first category is that the verses are literal and women should not speak at all in the Church, and the second is that women can speak, but with limitations as to who and when.

Commentators who fall into the first category, saying that women are to be silent in public worship, must explain the verses that say they can speak, and frankly, they have been unsuccessful in doing that.

The second category of dealing with the verses is to say that it cannot be God’s true intention to have all women be silent and never speak, so therefore the verses must mean something other than what they literally say. Some commentators say that Paul only meant for these verses to apply in Corinth, but the actual language of the verses themselves does not support that conclusion. Some scholars say that these verses apply only to married women, but again, the verses do not say that, and besides, married women such as Prisca (or Priscilla in some versions) did lead in some ways and are commended by Paul. Other commentators say that these two verses were not Paul’s position at all, but that of people opposing him and that Paul was actually refuting that position. However, again, a straightforward reading of the verses does not show that. Some commentators say that the Greek word translated “speak,” *laleō*, refers to “chatter,” speaking that is not pertinent to the meeting. However, a study of *laleō* even in just the 34 times it is used in the First Epistle to the Corinthians shows that it has a wide range of meaning, so saying it means “chatter” in this particular verse is just an arbitrary explanation without actual support. The truth of the matter is that there is no explanation of this verse that actually explains what the verse says in plain Greek (or English), which is strong evidence that the verse is not part of the original text in the first place.

In spite of much evidence that 1 Corinthians 14:34-35 were added to the text, we must still admit to the possibility that they were original. If they are original, then they need to be understood and acted upon like the other verses that are in the original text but are specifically applicable to the culture of the time when Paul wrote. What they say must be understood in a limited sense that would apply to the church at Corinth due to the customs and culture of the time. In that sense, they would be similar to other verses such as those that say women should wear a head covering when they pray or prophesy, or those that direct women not to cut their hair but leave it long. These are understood to have applied to the church at Corinth but are not generally applicable today. If God authored these verses due to the specific circumstances of the first century, then it should be obvious that today, when women are as educated and equipped as men to minister in the church, they should be allowed to do so, especially since it is clear that there is neither male nor female in Christ. Thankfully, women are leading and teaching in the Church today, and the evidence from congregations around the globe is that they are as spiritually able to minister as the men.

Our Adversary, the Devil, has worked overtime to keep Christians from fulfilling their God-given calling. Let’s not allow the Devil, or people who have been tricked by him, to limit the effectiveness of half of the Body of Christ by some mistranslations and misunderstood verses. Women have an important place in the Body of Christ and a calling on their lives, and the Church needs them fulfilling their ministries.

[For more about women’s position in the family, society, and Church, see commentaries on Acts 17:12; 18:26; Rom. 16:7; 1 Cor. 7:2; 1 Tim. 2:11, 12; 3:2; 5:14; and 1 Pet. 3:7.]

**1 Timothy 2:12:** In light of the complex grammar, and the literally hundreds of pages of commentary that have been written on 1 Timothy 2:11 and 2:12, we will be setting forth our view of the text and limiting our comments to some major points we feel need explanation. One thing that seems to be self-evident is that the interpretation has to fit with both the immediate context, the historical context, and the scope of Scripture. Whenever a verse is capable of multiple translations, it is even more important than usual that the interpretation fit with both the context and historical context, and that the explanation be logical (God tells us that wisdom is the principal thing, so we dare not discard wisdom when trying to understand a verse of Scripture). Some commentators have done massive word studies on the vocabulary of the verse and in part based their interpretation on the weight of numbers (a certain word means this more often than it means that). That is not the right way to interpret verses, because even if a given Greek word in the text is translated one way many times and another way only a few times, the few times are still valid if that translation best fits the context and historical context.

We feel there are serious problems with the standard interpretation of the verse, that women are not to teach or have authority over men. R. T. France is correct that if Paul meant the verse to be interpreted as the orthodox Christians do, then he worded the verse in a very obscure way. We believe there is a much better translation that better fits both the historical context and the context of the chapter.

**1) “Teach.”** We believe that the meaning of the verb “teach,” *didaskō* (#1321 διδάσκω), must be understood in light of the verb *authenteō* (#831 αὐθεντέω; traditionally “exercise authority”). It does not stand on its own, making the verse mean that women cannot teach to men, period. The essence of the meaning of the verse seems to be well expressed by the Kroegers (*I Suffer Not a Woman*) and by A. Nyland (*The Source NT*): that Paul did not permit women to teach a specific thing, in this case, that a woman is the originator of man.

One reason we say that the verb “teach” is not forbidding women from teaching men is that women did teach in the early Church. It had always been a practice among the Jews that if a woman had the spirit of God, she could teach what the Lord had taught her. A good example of this is the prophetess Deborah, who was a Judge over Israel (Judg. 4-5), and the Bible gives other examples of prophetesses to whom men went for guidance and direction, even kings. That brings us to Acts 2, when Peter quotes the book of Joel and makes the point that now, in the Christian Church, both men and women have the spirit of God and will prophesy and dream dreams (Acts 2:17, 18). Can it really be the case that in the Old Testament, a woman with the spirit of God could instruct men, but today women with the spirit of God cannot? That seems very unlikely, especially given what we know about the manifestations of holy spirit, including the revelation manifestations, which are given to both men and women “for the common good” (1 Cor. 12:7; cf. commentary on 1 Cor. 12:7-10).

Also, when someone came into a church, that person could be prophetically called to account and convicted by the “whole church,” both the men and women. Furthermore, today in the Church, all the members are “one,” and there is neither male nor female (Gal. 3:28). God recognizes the sexes, but we are “one” because “we were all baptized in one spirit into one body” (1 Cor. 12:13). It is the gift of holy spirit born inside every Christian that makes men and women equal in Christ, and it is the degree to which people dedicate their lives to the Lord that determines how spiritual, and how spiritually powerful, they are. It is due to the spirit of God that a woman can be an apostle (Rom. 16:7) or a deacon (Rom. 16:1; 1 Tim. 3:11). In fact, Ephesians says that when Christ assembled, he gave gifts to people (Eph. 4:8; *anthrōpos* is not “men,” but collectively to “people.”). These gifts include “apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers.” It is well-known that the purpose of these equipping ministries is to build up the Body of Christ, but how are women who have these ministries supposed to walk in the fullness of them if they cannot teach? For example, is it really the will of God that a woman evangelist can teach about Jesus to women everywhere, but only to men if they are in “informal settings?” Or can a woman pastor give helpful advice to women anywhere, but only to men if the men are in “informal settings?” Given what we know about proper decorum and wisdom when it comes to men and women being together, it actually makes more sense that a woman would speak to a group of men rather than just to one man alone.

When we study the history of women as teachers, we find there is historical precedent for women teaching in religious settings in both the Jewish and Greco-Roman cultures. In some of the worship of Roman gods and in the Roman mystery religions, women led the religious services and/or acted as priests. Among the Jews, in spite of the fact that it was usual for women to not be educated like the men were, there were exceptions, and thus sometimes women acted both as elders in synagogues and even sometimes as synagogue leaders (cf. Nyland; *The Source NT*; note on 1 Tim. 2:11). Thus as the Christians Church developed and it was accepted that both men and women had holy spirit and could walk in the inspiration and power of God, it would have been culturally accepted for women to actively participate in Church meetings. The Bible teaches that women can pray in meetings (1 Cor. 11:5), speak in tongues (1 Cor. 14:5, 23), interpret tongues (1 Cor. 14:5), prophesy (1 Cor. 14:24), receive revelation from God (1 Cor. 12:8; cp commentary), and contribute that revelation in the meeting (1 Cor. 14:26).

As for women teaching in the Church, we have seen in 1 Timothy 2:11 that women were to learn, and one of the main reasons for learning was to be able to raise up disciples. We have seen that Priscilla taught the great orator Apollos (Acts 18:26). Colossians 3:16 says Christians are to teach one another. Furthermore, in the book of Revelation, the prophetess Jezebel is castigated because “she teaches and leads My bond-servants astray, so that they commit *acts of* immorality and eat things sacrificed to idols” (Rev. 2:20 NASB). It is important to note that Jezebel is not reproved for teaching, but for teaching error. Furthermore, some of the Church Fathers spent time condemning teaching by women, which is good ancillary evidence that women did teach in the Church. We should also note that historically, by the time of the Church Fathers, the orthodox Church was returning to the cultural belief of the Greco-Roman world that women were inferior to men. Thus the problem that the Church Fathers had with women teaching was not a continuation of Apostolic beliefs, but a return to the error of the culture around them, an error that even led to the teaching that marrying these “inferior women” made a man less pure or powerful spiritually, which then led to the doctrine that clergy should be celibate (a direct contradiction of the Word of God).

Commentators such as Thomas Schreiner who defend the traditional orthodox understanding of 1 Timothy 2:12, agree that the Bible says Priscilla taught Apollos, but asserts her teaching him was okay with God because she did so as “private teaching.” He also notes that Col. 3:16 can be taken to mean that women can teach men, but says that was “mutual instruction that occurs among all the members of the body [of Christ]” (*Women in the Church*; p. 128). Similarly, most conservative commentators recognize that God permits women to instruct men and have authority in settings outside of “formal church,” such as scholastic settings, job-related settings, etc., but they say that in a formal assembly of the church, God has limited the teaching to men. Does the “setting” make that much difference to God? We think not, and believe 1 Timothy 2:12 should not be interpreted the way it usually is in the orthodox Church.

We must keep in mind that for the first two or three centuries after Christ, almost every Christian church was a home church or a church in a small setting such as the catacombs or in an outdoor setting (cf. Acts 16:13). After more than 40 years of house church ministry across the globe, we of Spirit & Truth have seen that most house churches are a dozen or fewer people, and even large house church meetings are less than two dozen people. Can it really be true that it would be fine for Priscilla to teach Apollos one-on-one, but as soon as eight or ten people gather in a house, the women can no longer contribute until the meeting breaks up and there is “mutual instruction?” Frankly, most home churches we know of are run in such a way that “mutual instruction,” i.e., people speaking up and contributing as the opportunity presents itself, occurs throughout the meeting.

At this point, it is helpful to remember that the typical Western teaching format used in schools and big churches that consist of a teacher in front of a class reading from a book and mostly talking about information and theories while students sit quietly paying attention, was only a small part (and sometimes not a part at all) of the biblical style of “teaching.” We have no examples of Moses, Samuel, or Elijah lecturing students, yet they were all revered teachers. When Jesus taught, he spoke to audiences, but he also taught by example, told stories, and shared his experiences. Jesus taught everywhere he was, but the only time he is recorded actually having a text of the Bible in front of him was when he was in a synagogue. Thus, “teaching” was not connected to a certain style, it was whatever best communicated information in the situation.

It was not easy for people in the small first-century churches to open a Bible and teach from it. For one thing, only a small percent (10% or less) of the population could read. Also, the books of the Bible were on individual scrolls, and every scroll was handwritten and very expensive. Thus, although most churches might have a piece of the Bible, almost none would have even a large part of it, much less an entire Bible (it took a scribe about a year to hand copy the entire Bible—imagine how much a Bible would cost if it cost a year’s salary for a professional writer). We assert that in small home meetings, both ancient and modern, women often openly shared their experiences, testimonies, ideas, and opinions—which biblically is “teaching.”

Seen in that light, the supposed prohibition against women teaching in a “formal” setting cannot be the correct interpretation of the verse. That interpretation would make the Bible say that women can learn (2:11). However, if they learned something and wanted to share it, they could tell it to all their male acquaintances one at a time, but if the church was meeting and all their male acquaintances were at one place at one time, then God forbids them from sharing what they have learned. God tells us to rule our lives by wisdom (Prov. 4:7; 16:16), but there does not seem to be any wisdom in that interpretation of the text.

Once we understand that “teaching” was not just explaining a text of Scripture, but was communicating the heart of God to people to help them live more godly lives, we can see how limiting it would be to say women cannot “teach” men. For example, if a man and woman go on a missionary trip together and are invited to speak at their church and share their experiences, that, biblically, is “teaching,” because people are learning from their experiences. The orthodox interpretation of 1 Timothy 2:12 would dictate that the man would be allowed to share his experiences with the church, but the woman would not. Interestingly, this is ignored even by Churches that strictly prohibit women from “teaching” from the pulpit on Sunday morning, because almost all of them allow women missionaries or women who have had powerful personal experiences to share them from the front of the Church. So in fact, even churches that say women should not teach, often allow them to “teach” without knowing it.

Another reason we believe that 1 Timothy 2:12 is not saying that women should not teach men is the “reason” for that prohibition, which is given in verses 13 and 14. The standard conservative orthodox answer to why women cannot teach men is the “reason” given in verses 13 and 14: that Adam was created before Eve, and Eve, not Adam, was tricked by the Devil. We will have more to say about their order of creation later, but if the reason women cannot teach men was that Adam was created before Eve, then Adam’s primacy is a “creation ordinance,” i.e., linked to the very creation of men and women. But if women cannot teach men because Eve was created after Adam, then women should never be able to teach men at any time, not just in “formal church.” To say, “Adam was created first, so women cannot teach men in church, but they can teach men in the workplace, the university, and informal settings” invalidates the very “creation ordinance” argument. Worse, if we say that God does not permit women to teach because they are more likely to be deceived than men based on Eve’s example, then we have to say that men are more likely to sin deliberately than women based on Adam’s example (Adam sinned deliberately; cf. Rom. 5:12-14). But to us, it seems worse to let deliberate sinners teach than people who can be tricked into sinning. These problems leave the conservative orthodox scholar with no logical reason women are not supposed to teach men, and in fact, show that the conservative interpretation of the verse is in error.

Another reason why 1 Timothy 2:12 should not be interpreted in the standard orthodox way is that there is nothing specifically stated about the setting (“Church”) in the context of this verse. The assertion that this verse is speaking of women teaching men in a formal church setting is actually unsubstantiated in the text, but is an arbitrary explanation without any solid evidence to back it up. The first verse in the chapter starts with prayers, and prayers are offered in both formal and informal settings. The context then shifts to the behavior of men, admonishing that men be holy “in every place.” Then the context shifts to the adornment of women, that they should dress modestly, which also applies everywhere, certainly not just in “formal Church situations.” Then the context shifts again to the section about women learning and teaching (vs. 11-15). But there is nothing in those few verses that dictates that the Bible is now only referring to a formal church setting. After speaking of activities of Christian men and women that can and do occur everywhere, we should assume that the next verses continue that same idea unless we are clearly directed otherwise by the text, which we are not. In contrast, if the verse is about teaching error like we assert it is, then like prayer and modest attire, teaching doctrine that blatantly contradicts the Bible is forbidden in every place.

One thing that Christians can be thankful for is that when something is wrong with Church doctrine, the spirit of God usually moves in people to overcome the problem. That certainly is the case when it comes to 1 Timothy 2:12 and women teaching men. The supposed command is regularly ignored in the Church. Although there are denominations that do not allow women in the pulpit, even in those denominations women do often end up teaching men in many contexts. More and more denominations and churches either ordain women or allow women to speak from the lectern on certain occasions. Furthermore, many denominations that do not allow women to teach the congregation allow them to contribute to any discussion before or after the sermon. Also, more and more women are writing books on theological subjects that are used for reference in seminaries and churches, and women are also included on the translation committees of many of the newer versions of the Bible. Also, women teachers can be found instructing boys in Christian schools across the world, and whether we want to admit it or not, the female instructors in Christian colleges are not teaching “male children,” but men, many of whom are supporting themselves and sometimes are married and the fathers of children. Does it make sense that God allows a woman to teach men as long as she is standing behind a desk in a classroom and the men are in sitting in chairs behind desks, but He does not allow her to teach those same men if she is standing in a pulpit and they are sitting on benches we call pews? We say it does not.

When properly translated and understood, 1 Timothy 2:12 is one more verse among many that supposedly is against women but is actually not. Interestingly, even the way this verse has been interpreted by more conservative commentators, it is still less restrictive than the way it is acted out in many conservative Churches. When properly translated and understood in light of both the Jewish and Greco-Roman culture of its day, it is obvious the New Testament was a Magna Carta for women, giving them rights and privileges they had never had before.

[For other verses in the NT that elevate women’s position in the culture, see commentary on 1 Cor. 7:2; 14:34, 35; commentary on 1 Tim. 2:11; 3:2; 5:14; and commentary on 1 Pet. 3:7.]

**2) “Claim authorship.”** The Greek verb is *authenteō* (#831 αὐθεντέω; traditionally “exercise authority”). Since this word is used in combination with “teach,” above, in order to fully understand it, that entry should be read first. *Authenteō* is a very rare word, with several meanings. Traditionally it is said to mean “authority,” but many scholars take issue with that definition here. After pointing out that *authenteō* is a rare word even in Greek literature, and used nowhere else in the Bible, R. T. France says: Had he [Paul] wished to speak about authority in the normal sense, he could have used a more regular Greek verb, such as *proistēmi*...or the noun *exousia*. ...If he intended to say that no woman may ever be in a position where she has authority over a man, he has chosen an unnecessarily obscure way to say it! (*Women in the Church’s Ministry*, pp. 65, 66). France makes a powerful point. If Paul simply meant to say that he did not want women to teach, and he did not want them to have authority over men, he had easy and clear ways to say that. The fact that both the grammar and the vocabulary of verse 12 are obscure should lead us to the conclusion that translating the verse as if it were saying something that ordinarily would have been said in a much more straightforward way is probably a poor translation.

In the previous commentary on this verse, we have seen why the standard conservative orthodox translation, that women cannot teach or have authority over men, is almost certainly not what God meant. Another major problem we face if we translate *authenteō* as “authority,” is that it does not make sense, even in a formal church context. What would it mean to say that a woman should not have authority over men in a formal church service? The act of teaching or preaching is not “authority.” Every teacher knows this, and both men and women often modify or ignore what the teachers say. So what kind of “authority” does the person in front of the congregation have? He cannot make the congregation arrive for the service on time or stay for the whole church service, he cannot order them to behave in certain ways, he cannot make the congregation believe what he says. There is no actual “authority” in leading a Church service.

Genuine “authority” over others in a church service would have to involve some kind of ability to command people or exercise church discipline. However, an individual leading the meeting almost never has autonomous “authority” to discipline a person in the church, and if he tried to “command” people, he would soon see his building empty. Leaders almost always must have the consent of others before they direct the congregation, and usually, any actual “discipline” that is carried out is merely enforcing the rules and regulations that have been established beforehand by committees or the vote of the congregation. Most matters that actually do involve the “authority” of the church, such as what is proper attire at church functions, what kinds of music can be played in a worship service, what version of the Bible will be used, and what behaviors are allowed or forbidden, are voted on by the members of the church, or the decision is made by church staff or committees. But since church congregations are usually more women than men, and since church staff and committees almost always have women members, the fact is that the real “authority structure” in the Church includes women.

Thus, there are a couple serious problems that occur if we try to translate *authenteō* as “authority.” The first is, as we have seen, that even a man does not have “authority” over men in the formal church service, so saying a woman should not have authority over men in that formal setting does not make sense. The second is that although there is no real authority in leading a church service, there is real authority in the church, but that authority is based on the decisions that have been made by the congregation, staff, or committees in the church, and these almost always involve women. It makes no sense for God to command that women cannot “lead meetings,” which does not involve any genuine authority over men, but then allow women to make decisions on church policy, which does involve genuine authority over men. On this basis, it seems clear that “authority” cannot be the correct translation of *authenteō*, and cannot be what the verse is speaking about.

In light of the problems with the standard translation and meaning, scholars have set forth many other interpretations. Some say the verse refers only to wives, but that ignores the context, which is not about wives. Some scholars point out that *authenteō* is often related to violence (especially murder), and think the verse means something like Kenneth Bailey’s paraphrase of the verse: “I do not allow these ignorant women to batter the men. They are to stop shouting and calm down” (quoted in R. T. France, *Women in the Church’s Ministry*; p. 66). Although that could be a legitimate translation of the Greek (as we already pointed out, the Greek is very complex and can be translated many ways), it does not fit with the context, which is about Adam being created first and Eve being tricked by the Devil.

The best answer we have found to the difficult grammar and the difficult context of 1 Timothy 2:12 are solutions set forth in works such as *I Suffer Not a Woman* by Richard and Catherine Clark Kroeger, and *The Source New Testament* (text and notes) by Dr. A. Nyland. Although the Clark Kroegers offer several translations (pp. 103, 191, 192), and these differ from Nyland’s translation, the gist is the same. Paul was writing to Timothy, who was based in Ephesus. Between some types of Gnostic doctrine, and some of the types of the “mother goddess” worship of Asia Minor, it was being taught in the culture surrounding Timothy that a female god created Eve before Adam, or that God created Eve before Adam. It is typical of converts to Christianity that they blend Christian beliefs with their past pagan beliefs (this is referred to by scholars as syncretism, and is how orthodox Christianity picked up many of its modern beliefs and practices, such as “Easter Sunday”). Syncretism could have certainly been occurring in Ephesus, and would have been a very important reason why Paul would tell the women to learn, but forbid them from teaching things from their pagan past such as that a woman was the origin of men.

Added to the above historical context is that *authenteō* can mean “originator” or “author,” and when linked to the word “teach,” can refer to a person teaching that woman is the originator of man. The translation given by the Clark Kroegers that they feel is the most likely is: “I do not allow a woman to teach nor to proclaim herself author of man” (p. 103, 192). However, they also say the verse could be translated “I do not permit a woman to teach that she is the originator of man...” (p. 191), or “I categorically forbid a woman to teach [anyone] to maintain that she is responsible for the origin of man” (p. 192). Nyland translates the verse: “I most certainly do not grant authority to a woman to teach that she is the originator of man....”

Given the historical context of 1 Timothy, the difficult vocabulary and grammar of the verse, and the “reason” for the verse in the first place, which is verses 13 and 14, we felt that the best understanding of 1 Timothy 2:12 was the general understanding of Nyland and the Clark Kroegers, that Paul was forbidding women to claim feminine origin of man.

**3) “Not to cause a disturbance.”** (See commentary on 1 Tim. 2:11). We should pay attention to the fact that *en hēsuchia* (ἐν ἡσυχία #2271) is in verse 11, then repeated in this verse. Why would it need to be repeated, which is obviously for emphasis? Could it really be that the Christian women, who supposedly had been commanded to be silent in the Church (1 Cor. 14:34; 1 Tim. 2:11, 12), were being so rebellious that they had to be told twice in these two verses to be silent? That hardly seems credible. It is much more likely that the women had never in fact been told to be silent in the Church, but instead were used to speaking up and expressing their thoughts and deeply held convictions. However, in areas where those deeply held beliefs contradicted true biblical teaching, such as about the origin of men, the women had to be told and reminded not to press their traditions and cause a disturbance, but to be in subjection to what they were learning and those they were learning from.

One of the points that conservative scholars make against the translation that Paul is forbidding women from teaching feminine origination of men is that if that erroneous teaching was being circulated, it would make sense that Paul would not just forbid women from teaching it, but would forbid anyone from teaching it. This argument seems to make sense on the surface. But when we read the leadership epistles, we can see that there are a number of issues that actually pertain to both men and women that are addressed only to one or the other. For example, is it the case that only men should pray everywhere and be holy (1 Tim. 2:8), or does that apply to women also? Similarly, should only women dress modestly and adorn themselves with good deeds, and not be gossips (1 Tim. 2:9, 10; 3:11), or do those things also apply to men? We know that those things apply to men and women, but are more appropriate for the gender to whom they are addressed. Similarly, it would be the normal tendency for women to be more vocal and defensive than men about the teaching that Eve was created before Adam, so it makes sense that Paul would address that reproof to women.