

Women in church

As always, the meaning depends on the context, which is summarized and discussed here after the Scripture in question:

[1 Timothy 2:11-12](#) (BSB) – “A woman must learn in quietness and full submissiveness. I do not permit a woman to teach or exercise authority over a man; she is to remain quiet. For Adam was formed first, and then Eve.”

Note that Paul says “I do not permit ...”. He doesn’t say that *God* does not permit. This seems to be Paul’s personal opinion, presumably based on issues in various churches (notably the Corinthian church; see below).

His insistence on quietness and submissiveness echoes his discussion on order in the churches in [1 Corinthians 14](#) and, as there, seems more concerned with order and disorder than with prohibition on either learning or teaching.

In the next verses, Paul continues to explain and justify based on Adam and Eve. Frankly, I don’t understand his Adam and Eve rationale (or logic), nor salvation through childbearing (though I suspect that culturally, he didn’t then mean what we think that means in our 21st century culture today). But that’s not the main point.

Do note that Paul assumes and agrees that women should and will learn ([1 Tim 2:11](#)) Christianity is nothing like the Afghan Taliban who prohibit education and learning for women and in fact repress them in every way.

Also note that teaching is a spiritual gift of the Holy Spirit ([Eph 4:11](#); [1 Cor 12:28](#); [Rom 12:7](#)), as well as a talent and skill. The Holy Spirit provides these spiritual gifts *to the church*, through the people (in this case, teachers) for the edification of the church. As these three cited passages make clear, anyone through whom God so gifts is exhorted to not to squander the gift but *exercise* and *use* it for the benefit of the church. It is clear that many women are so gifted.

Regarding both other gifts, roles, and authority, note that there were women deacons, prophets, and apparently even apostles in the early church ([Acts 21:8-9](#); [Luke 2:36](#); [1 Cor 11:5](#); [Acts 18:2,18,26](#); [Rom 16:1](#); [Rom 16:7](#); [Rom 16:12](#); etc.).

See also [Galatians 3:28](#) – “There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus” (BSB).

[1 Corinthians 14:34](#) (BSB) – “Women are to be silent in the churches. They are not permitted to speak, but must be in submission, as the law says.”

First of all, *what* law? *Which* law? (Note that the “L” is not capitalized.) This isn’t the Law of Moses, the Old Testament, which (as nearly as I can tell) *nowhere* prohibits

women from teaching or speaking in the assembly (whether synagogue or church), though it wasn't common. It may have been either a Roman law or a Corinthian city ordinance. Clearly, it was a cultural practice that is different than ours today. Nevertheless, that misses the point.

Importantly, this is not about women teaching, but about women chattering in the congregation.

This verse (and paragraph) are part of a larger discussion in the rest of [1 Corinthians chapter 14](#) about order in worship. There were several otherwise-legitimate things that Paul addresses that, when not done decently and in order ([1 Cor 14:40 \(KJV\)](#)) are disruptive. Women in the congregation talking, asking others questions, or hollering across the room seem to have been one of these disruptions, and is what Paul is addressing here. He is explicitly *not* addressing women teaching in church.

[1 Peter 3:1](#) (BSB) – “Wives, in the same way, submit yourselves to your husbands, so that even if they refuse to believe the word, they will be won over without words by the behavior of their wives”

As the rest of Peter's paragraph makes even clearer, this is not about submission *per se*, but about evangelism. Specifically, it is all about winning others (here, husbands) over to faith in Jesus. Voluntary submission where there might otherwise be strife or dissent is but one of the winning behaviors that may help.

Note that it is never permitted for *anyone*, including husbands, to “lord it over” others, including their wives (see [Matt 20:25-26A](#); and also, to an extent, [2 Cor 1:24](#); [1 Pet 5:2-3](#)). Submission, regardless of whose, is by definition always voluntary. If coerced, it is no longer submission. And coercion, not to mention force, is not allowed.

For more on submission and what it does and doesn't mean, see [Ephesians 5:21-6:9](#) (especially [Eph 5:21](#), which exhorts *all* Christians to be submissive *to each other*, wives to husbands being but the first of several examples in Paul's discussion in the larger [Ephesians](#) passage). Deeper discussion of that is beyond our present scope and is addressed elsewhere.

[1 Corinthians 11:5, 13](#) (BSB) – “And every woman who prays or prophesies with her head uncovered dishonors her head, for it is just as if her head were shaved. ... Judge for yourselves: Is it proper for a woman to pray to God with her head uncovered?”

The specifics of this was a cultural issue at the time, perhaps only in Corinth, or possibly in the larger first century Mediterranean or Jewish culture. It's relevance (today or then) can be summarized as, “Don't dress like a harlot or prostitute”; doing so is counterproductive.