

Why does God forbid women positions in the church like Preachers and Elders?

The admonitions in 1 Timothy, including 2:8-15, regard the formal assembly of the church (3:15). Here's what the passage says and why:

2:8, Paul wants Ephesian men to lift up “holy hands” instead of hands that are filled with anger and argument (the last word is better rendered “disputing” instead of “doubting.” The erroneous teachers in Ephesus have produced arguing and fighting, 1:4).

2:9-10, likewise¹, Paul wants the women to comport themselves properly: they should dress up, but not provocatively or flashy with expensive clothes and jewelry. They should dress modestly as is fitting a woman claiming to be godly, whose emphasis is to be what she does (her good deeds, which speak of her godly character) not what she wears.

2:11, “silence” is better rendered “quietness.” Paul’s point is not total silence but whether or not a woman will submit to (“with all submission”), i.e., will she respect the authority God ordained in the church.²

2:12, “silence” again means “quietness” and the wording is clear: God doesn’t want women to teach or to have authority over men in the church.³ Some give various reasons why this doesn’t apply to women today (but these explanations fail based on the reasons Paul gives in 2:13-14):

- 1) In the 1st century women were typically uneducated but they’re not anymore,
- 2) Paul was addressing Ephesian women only because of the temple of Diana (Acts 19:23-41), which was female-led,
- 3) Based on the Greek words Paul used for “man” (andros) and “woman” (guney), he was referring to husbands and wives not men and women in general. But the primary definition of these words is “man” and “woman,” which is how Paul uses them in 2:8 and 2:9, and
- 4) There have been other women leaders in Scripture: Miriam, Deborah, Huldah, Priscilla, and Phoebe. But Miriam (Exodus 15:20-21; Numbers 12) and Huldah (2 Kings 22:14ff) were prophetesses. They didn’t lead men; they were under the authority of other men. Priscilla with her husband taught Apollos one-on-one (Acts 18:26); she wasn’t a preacher or elder. Phoebe was a deaconess (Romans 16:1-2) but not a preacher or elder. Deborah was one of Israel’s judges, but she was the exception not the rule: she was a judge but she didn’t lead the troops in battle. In fact, this whole incident was likely a rebuke for Barak (especially the killing of Sisera by Jael, something Barak should’ve done) because he wouldn’t go to battle unless Deborah went with him (Judges 4).

2:13, the first reason Paul gives is God’s created order for men and women: Adam was made first, then Eve, i.e., the significance of Adam being made first is that he is the leader and Eve is the follower, the helper (Genesis 2:18-23). This is why she’s not to teach or have authority over a man because the position of authority, the position of leading is the man’s not the woman’s.

¹ “Likewise/also/in like manner” in 2:9 may also mean that Paul wants women to pray too, which argues against Paul wanting absolute silence from women in 2:11-12.

² God’s authority structure is: God→Christ→Man→Woman. As to a woman’s silence in the church, she could pray and prophesy, 1 Corinthians 11:3, 5.

³ Women could pray and prophesy but were not allowed to speak when it came time to judge a prophesy, that was reserved for the male prophets in the church, 1 Corinthians 11:5, 14:29-35. Women were not forbidden from all teaching. They could teach but not in the formal assembly of the church, Proverbs 1:8; Acts 18:26.

2:14, the second reason Paul gives sounds confusing. It's not about a woman's gullibility; it's about men leading and women following: Adam was not deceived, but Eve was, so she fell into sin. The problem and Paul's focus is not that Eve was gullible and Adam incapable of being deceived (in point of fact, he was deceived by Satan too, Genesis 3:10-11). The problem was that in the Garden there was a colossal breakdown in God's ordained authority structure. God left Adam in charge; it was his responsibility to lead and protect, but he failed miserably and he did it knowing full well what he was doing. This left Eve unprotected and she unwittingly took the lead; she took the position of authority over the man and it had a disastrous outcome. The fact that God blamed Adam (Romans 5:12; 1 Corinthians 15:22) and not Eve tells us what the problem was: Adam failed to lead and protect. 1 Timothy 2:14 can be seen as follows:

"Adam was not deceived" = Adam *knew* that he failed in his responsibility to lead and protect

"The woman being deceived, fell into transgression" = Eve was deceived into taking the position of authority and she unwittingly took lead and led them both into transgression

God ordained that men be the spiritual leaders in the home and the church (Genesis 2:18-23; Ephesians 5:22-24; 1 Timothy 2:12; 3:1). When this authority structure breaks down, terrible things can happen. God hates it when men fail to lead (Genesis 3; Isaiah 3:12; Judges 4).

2:15, this verse too seems confusing. There are four different interpretations regarding the salvation Paul mentions:

- 1) Preserved physically from the difficult and dangerous process of childbirth,
- 2) Preserved from insignificance by means of her role in the family,
- 3) Saved through the ultimate childbirth of Jesus Christ the Savior, and
- 4) Preserved from the corruption of society by being at home raising children

There may be a fifth option. First, in the context what is the woman saved from, what's the danger? The danger is that she will lead when she should follow, that she will take the authority that rightly belongs to the man in the church. She must avoid Eve's mistake. Second, how does childbearing save women from this? We must first notice that it's not just giving birth to children that saves them. The childbearing-salvation is conditioned on whether or not women continue in "faith, love, and holiness, with self-control." And that's the key, i.e., will she recognize her God-given role in the authority structure as the "helper" and not the leader? That is, one of the two mandates at the beginning of creation was procreation (Genesis 1:28). The woman's role in this is bearing the children not the man's. When a woman responds to God's authority structure with "faith, love, and holiness, with self-control," she will have no problem submitting to her role and to the authority that God ordained. This is what God is focused on in this passage as it relates to women: will she learn in quietness *with all submission* (2:11), i.e., will she respect the authority of men to teach and have authority in the church without saying a word about it, i.e., *in quietness* (2:12), and will she respond to her God-given role of submission exemplified by her role in procreation with *faith, love, and holiness, with self-control* (2:15)? So giving birth to children is not the key, but submission to God's ordained authority structure is.

In addition, giving birth to children will save her from her desire to teach or take authority in the church. How so? The children she gives birth to will need her teaching and authority, which she can do to her heart's content. And a mother's role as an authoritative teacher is vital to the men teaching and having authority in the church. Why? Because today's little boys and girls become tomorrow's leaders or losers. A mother's instruction, i.e., her teaching is crucial to the child's (and the world's and the church's) future (Proverbs 1:8).