

# Women in Ministry

## What is your position on women in ministry? Should Messianic women be allowed to be teachers, pastors/rabbis, or occupy positions of leadership?

The issue of women in ministry is something, which as of today, there is likely no Messianic consensus upon. There will be leaders, teachers, congregations, and organizations which (strongly) oppose women in positions of rabbinic/pastoral leadership, **and** there will be leaders, teachers, congregations, and organizations which support women in positions of rabbinic/pastoral leadership. Not surprisingly, the position that the editor holds, regarding various passages which inform Bible readers about this issue, is largely his own.

The most common passage used against women in ministry is **1 Timothy 2:11-12**: “A woman must quietly receive instruction with entire submissiveness. But I do not allow a woman to teach or exercise authority over a man, but to remain quiet” (NASU). Those who oppose women in positions of leadership place a very strong emphasis on these verses. Many believe that the Apostle Paul has just issued a moratorium on all women in positions of ministry leadership for all time. It is not difficult to see why the current feminist movement has claimed that much of Christianity (and to a lesser extent Judaism) is dominated by male chauvinists, and why liberals largely discount 1 Timothy and the other Pastoral Epistles (2 Timothy and Titus) as authentically Pauline. What are we to do with 1 Timothy 2:11-12?

In the Hebrew Tanach, we certainly see some women in positions of critical leadership. Heroines such as Deborah (Judges 4-5), Ruth, and Esther are certainly godly women to be considered as models of exemplary service. In significant sectors of Judaism, the issue of women in leadership is not as severe as it is in various sectors of evangelical Christianity (and by extension, the Messianic community), because there are significant examples of women leading others in the Tanach. **These examples cannot be disregarded in any examination of whether or not women should be allowed to occupy positions of spiritual leadership.**

While the evil woman Queen Jezebel is often cited as the example of what will happen should women ever be placed in any positions of spiritual authority—as “Jezebel” represents the epitome of an evil, controlling female—Jezebel likely receives too much attention at the expense of *all* of the evil males seen in Scripture. While Jezebel is targeted as the epitome of evil females—what one *single* male example could be given to represent evil men? The Pharaoh of the Exodus, Haman, (Antiochus Epiphanes), Judas Iscariot, the antichrist? This is difficult for many Bible readers to determine. Many claim that if women are given positions of spiritual authority that things will run amok, but this is a rather weak argument in view of the fact that there are scores of examples available from religious history where men have controlled things and problems have abounded. Both men and women are equally guilty of causing problems for the faith community across the centuries.

In the Apostolic Scriptures themselves, we do see women take on a significant role in leadership. In Galatians 3:28, Paul says “There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Messiah Yeshua.” There is to be a status of unity for those with faith in Yeshua the Messiah where gender does not significantly matter.<sup>1</sup> Following Paul’s visit to Philippi in Acts 16, it is the female Lydia who leads the new group of Believers, and Paul’s letter to the Philippians includes a reference to two women, Euodia and Syntyche (Philippians 4:2), who presumably occupy positions of leadership. Paul extends greetings to a

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<sup>1</sup> For a further examination, consult the author’s exegesis paper on Galatians 3:28, “Biblical Equality and Today’s Messianic Movement,” appearing as Appendix C in his commentary *Galatians for the Practical Messianic*.

female apostle, “Junia,” in Romans 16:7 (NRSV, ESV, HCSB). And, we cannot forget the wife-husband teaching duo of Priscilla and Aquila in Acts 18.<sup>2</sup>

If there are witnesses in the Pauline corpus and Book of Acts to women being in positions of leadership in local assemblies of ancient Messiah followers, then is Paul contradicting himself in 1 Timothy 2:11-12? Or, is there a part of Paul’s letter to Timothy that is commonly missed or not considered?

To accurately understand Paul’s remarks in 1 Timothy 2:11-12 about women not teaching, we have to consider what 1 Timothy probably meant for the circumstances Timothy faced while administrating the assemblies in the vicinity of Ephesus. For the cultural norms of the day, Paul’s instruction “*I want* women to adorn themselves with proper clothing, modestly and discreetly, not with braided hair and gold or pearls or costly garments” (1 Timothy 2:9), was undeniably appropriate. Braided hair, gold, pearls, and expensive clothing would have been considered signs of opulence, and possibly also sexual lewdness, for many females. Are these signs of opulence today, in the Twenty-First Century? Some who embrace a strict reading of the text, as though it speaks directly to all generations and all cultures at all times—without any kind of consideration for ancient history and setting—would say yes. Yet, we should be a bit more cautious in making such an extrapolation, as various interpreters would *not argue* that this is a prohibition for women wearing these things for all time. A value judgment regarding ancient and modern culture, and what is considered “modest,” has to be made.

When Paul further admonishes Timothy, “A woman must quietly receive instruction with entire submissiveness. But I do not allow a woman to teach or exercise authority over a man, but to remain quiet” (1 Timothy 2:11-12, NASU), additional considerations have to be recognized. If Paul believes that various gender restrictions are irrelevant in Yeshua (Galatians 3:28), has he contradicted himself? (Is the letter of 1 Timothy a Deutero-Pauline composition as liberals commonly claim?) Or, have circumstances arisen in Ephesus that require the Apostle to tell Timothy to pull back the reins on the involvement of the women in the assemblies he oversees?

It must be noted that the verb *authenteō* (αὐθεντέω) is rendered as “**usurp authority**” in the KJV, and this can significantly alter our perception of the circumstances in Ephesus that Timothy was facing. While commonly rendered with “I do not allow a woman to teach or **exercise authority** over a man” (NASU), 1 Timothy 2:12 in the TNIV has the noticeably different, “I do not permit a woman to teach or to **assume authority** over a man.”

A scholastic lexicon like *BDAG* does define *authenteō* (αὐθεντέω) as “**to assume a stance of independent authority, give orders to, dictate to,**”<sup>3</sup> followed by a more classical lexicon like *LS*, having “*to have full power over.*”<sup>4</sup> *AMG* actually defines *authenteō* as being related to the noun “*authéntēs* [αὐθέντης]...murderer, absolute master, which is from *autos* [αὐτός]...himself, and *éntea* [έντεα] (n.f.) arms, armor. A self-appointed killer with one’s own hand, one acting by his own authority or power.”<sup>5</sup> At our disposal are lexical definitions which would support how authority in general terms is *not* the issue Paul is addressing in 1 Timothy 2:12. The rather negative verb *authenteō* only appears in one place in the Greek Apostolic Scriptures (and not in the Greek Septuagint either), whereas the noun *exousia* (ἐξουσία) and verb *exousiazō* (ἐξουσιάζω) are used throughout the Pauline letters to describe “authority” in general.<sup>6</sup> In the estimation of Philip B. Payne,

“If Paul wanted to convey the meaning of ‘to have authority’ without any negative nuances, it would have been natural for him to use a term such as he did in verse 2 of [1 Timothy 2] ἐν ὑπεροχῇ εἶναι [*en hyperochē einai*] or ἐξουσίαν εἶχειν [*exousian echein*] [Romans 9:21] or ἐξουσιάζειν [*exousiazerein*] [1 Corinthians 6:12; 7:4] or one of the many other expressions Paul uses for having, using, or sharing authority.”<sup>7</sup>

We know that there were women in positions of leadership in the First Century *ekklēsia*, per the examples of those like Lydia, Euodia, Syntyche, Priscilla, and Junia. Is it possible that with the spread of the gospel, women in Timothy’s Ephesian congregations were feeling “liberated”—and “liberated” so much so that they tried *to usurp the authority* of the already existent male leadership? To what extent did the false teaching that advocated that the resurrection had already occurred factor in (2 Timothy 2:18)?

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<sup>2</sup> Of useful consideration per this subject matter, are some of the key observations made in Craig S. Keener, “Another Egalitarian Perspective,” in James R. Beck, ed., *Two Views on Women in Ministry* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005), pp 205-248.

<sup>3</sup> *BDAG*, 150.

<sup>4</sup> *LS*, 132.

<sup>5</sup> Zodhiates, *Complete Word Study Dictionary: New Testament*, 288.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. *LS*, 276; *BDAG*, pp 352-354.

<sup>7</sup> Philip B. Payne, *Man and Woman, One in Christ: An Exegetical and Theological Study of Paul’s Letters* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2009), 375.

If Paul's admonition to Timothy more specifically concerns *women usurping leadership* in the Ephesian congregations, then his words "A woman must be a learner, listening quietly and with due submission" (1 Timothy 2:11, NEB), can be more easily understood. Women in the First Century Mediterranean world were largely uneducated, untaught, or untrained (and illiterate). Men, on the contrary, were those who were largely allowed to be given some kind of schooling. If the Ephesian women—the largely untaught, uneducated women—were trying to usurp the authority of the taught, trained Ephesian men, Paul would absolutely want them to remain quiet and submissively learn. Many of these women would have been speaking about things they knew little or nothing about, either from the Holy Scriptures or society in general, and Paul would have instead wanted them to be prepared *by the men who already had schooling*, were literate, and were largely informed about Biblical matters.

Of course, the ramifications of this view are quite severe for any religious movement since. If Paul's argument more specifically concerns First Century untaught and untrained females usurping the position of taught and trained males in the *ekklesia*, then a modern-day application could be that either unqualified **females or males** are prohibited from usurping the position of those qualified for positions of spiritual leadership. This might ask various sectors of today's Messianic movement some questions it is (largely) unprepared to answer.

With this in mind, we also have to consider what Paul means afterward in 1 Timothy 2:13-15:

"For it was Adam who was first created, *and* then Eve. And *it was* not Adam *who* was deceived, but the woman being deceived, fell into transgression. But *women* will be preserved through the bearing of children if they continue in faith and love and sanctity with self-restraint" (NASU).

1 Timothy 2:13-14 can be interpreted that since it was Eve who was deceived by the serpent in the Garden of Eden, that women are less intelligent and more susceptible to sin than men. Paul's observation, though, is that Adam was "formed" (RSV, NIV, NRSV, ESV) before Eve, the verb *plassō* (πλάσσω) better viewed as "*to form, mould, shape,*" which in a classical context could mean "generally, *to mould and form* by education, training" (LS).<sup>8</sup> Adam had more experience in the Garden interacting with God and His Creation than Eve who came after him, and he failed to pass knowledge of this onto his wife who was deceived by the serpent.

Continuing, 1 Timothy 2:15 has been widely interpreted as meaning that the only place for women in the assembly is to be mothers and raise children. Yet, there is a translation issue that needs to be considered for women "saved through bearing children" (RSV). The Greek clause *dia tēs teknogonias* (διὰ τῆς τεκνογονίας) is literally "through the child-bearing" (YLT), including the definite article. *The New Oxford Annotated Bible* notes,

"This much debated verse has also been translated (a) 'she will be saved through the birth of the Child' [referring to Jesus Christ], or (b) 'she will be brought safely through childbirth.'"<sup>9</sup>

A version like the New English Bible, likewise includes the alternate rendering, "through the Birth of the Child," in a footnote.<sup>10</sup>

The emphasis of 1 Timothy 2:15 appears to more specifically be on "the Childbearing," who is Yeshua the Messiah (the Seed promised to Eve in Genesis 3:15), rather than a physical act of giving birth to children. Paul's instruction to Timothy in Ephesus is that the women are to seek their salvation in Him, and continue in proper faith, holiness, and piety. It is not a statement that women should just be placed in the corner and remain perpetually pregnant, completely oblivious to what goes on in some kind of a male-dominated and male-controlled congregation, male leaders that they are—for all time—to blindly follow without question.

The editor is personally convinced that when 1 Timothy 2:11-15 is weighed with the heroines of the Tanach, and other significant examples of women in positions of leadership in the Apostolic Scriptures, **that there is no major or substantial basis for excluding women from positions of leadership in the assembly today.** 1 Timothy 2:11-15 depicts a local situation to First Century Ephesus, with various translation issues that must be considered for an appropriate interpretation.

The major factor to consider for individuals holding positions of leadership, either as pastors/rabbis of local assemblies or greater positions, is **not gender** but is having the right qualifications. What makes this a

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<sup>8</sup> LS, 643.

<sup>9</sup> Herbert G. May and Bruce M. Metzger, eds., *The New Oxford Annotated Bible With the Apocrypha*, RSV (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977), pp 1441-1442.

<sup>10</sup> *New English Bible* (Oxford and Cambridge: Oxford and Cambridge University Presses, 1970), NT 267.

controversial view is that it assumes that today's leaders in the current, largely male-dominated Messianic movement, have the right qualifications (and some may not).<sup>11</sup>

In time, especially as evangelical Christianity continues to struggle with the issues of women in ministry, so will today's Messianic community likewise have to struggle with them. At present, forming any kind of consensus seems unlikely.

This issue is more thoroughly addressed in the author's book *Men and Women in the Body of Messiah: Answering Crucial Questions*.

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<sup>11</sup> As it concerns the issue of women not being permitted to speak in 1 Corinthians 14:34-35, it is noteworthy that earlier in 1 Corinthians 11:5 Paul recognized the role that women played in praying and prophesying in public. These two verses later would seem to contradict this. It might be suggested that female "chatter" (Grk. verb *laleō*, λαλέω) in Corinth could be the issue instead, but the authority of the Torah is notably appealed to justify a silence of women.

Various conservative, evangelical Christian interpreters have made a strong case in favor of 1 Corinthians 13:34-35 actually being an interpolation of a later copyist. Of significant interest would be the direct appeal made to "the Law" in silencing women, especially as there is **no specific prohibition** in the Torah or Pentateuch that bars women from speaking in the assembly. This is a position that the editor is inclined to seriously consider.

Cf. Gordon D. Fee, *New International Commentary on the New Testament: The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), pp 699-708; "1 Corinthians 14:34-35: Did Paul Forbid Women to Speak in Church?", in Payne, pp 217-267.