

## **When and where does Scripture permit or restrict women to preach and teach in the life of a Church.**

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At an outreach event, a woman got up in front of a mixed group of listeners and unpacked a scriptural passage and called upon the hearers to come forward to give themselves to Christ. Was that preaching??

The Bible doesn't expressly address the variety of circumstances we find ourselves in, as with this outreach event. Rather, it gives us a spectrum ranging from illicit to licit.

At one end of the spectrum we have the apostle Paul commanding in 1 Timothy 2:12 – “I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man, rather she is to remain quiet” – apparently, there are some places in a church's life where women teaching men is illicit (forbidden by God).

At the other end of the spectrum, we hear about Apollos preaching in the synagogue and immediately after being challenged by Priscilla and Aquila who Acts 18:26 - “took him aside and explained to him the way of God more accurately.” In other words, took him aside and privately taught and corrected this mighty preacher Apollos, “Your getting the text wrong!” Where is the line between these two examples? What segregates illicit from licit teaching by a woman to a man?

Perhaps I'm biased, a great influence in my life was my mother, who whilst never preaching to a congregation, was described by those in her acquaintance who did preach as being “forthright” and known for the instructive critique she gave. These acquaintances included: Anglican, Baptist, Presbyterian preachers, evangelists, Bishops, Archbishops and teachers at Bible Colleges.

John (Chappo) Chapman described my mum as the most forthright woman he had ever met and one whose corrections shaped him second only to that of his own mother.

Simply put, my belief is that scripture supports the view that it is illicit for women to teach in mixed settings, without male oversight, when that teaching is connected to the gathering church.

### **What makes it illicit or licit?**

Paul restricted women from teaching at church.

The simple and intuitive answer that Christians have obeyed for centuries based upon Paul's teaching where Paul forbids women from teaching or having authority over men in a church.

The context of this is 1 Timothy 2 being the gathering church (see also 1 Timothy 3:1-13 re church oversight) Paul makes explicit the need for women to remain quiet and we hear again in 1 Corinthians 14 “the women should keep silent in the churches” :34-35 “if there is anything that they desire to learn, let them ask their husbands at home, for it is shameful for a woman to speak in church”. So, *it looks like Paul had some experiences with the women being disruptive during preaching sessions.*

When Paul excludes women from teaching or exercising authority over a man, he is plainly speaking about during the weekly gathering of the church and during the service of worship. So put simply – women should not teach at such gatherings.

For a woman to teach, instruct, or exhort a man outside of the church worship service, is formally licit, as shown in Precilla joining her husband in the teaching of Apollos.

Clearly her “explaining the way of God more accurately” didn’t occur during a worship or service gathering at the church.

I believe that it is inappropriate to disrupt anyone in the process of unpacking scripture yet should that delivery be awry or unfaithful to that of scripture, it is appropriate to later challenge the preacher with an open Bible where any correction has a reference and clear up what is awry or unfaithful. Such an action is needed and commendable whether done by a woman or a man.

Again, we hark back to Paul declaration in 1 Timothy 2:12 where Paul wouldn’t allow women to teach, even when under his oversight.... So, the question is, is this simply Paul’s take on this matter or is it in fact a Godly directive. This is something that I still personally struggle with to a degree.

In Deuteronomy 6:4~25 We are commanded that it is the responsibility of fathers to teach their children to love God with the whole of their being. So, it is the man who must bear the responsibility. Now we know that in many households it is the mother and/or grandmother who does most of the teaching, and this is fine as long as it occurs under the oversight of the father – he remains responsible and accountable, as well as he needs to be involved for his own walk of faith.

Many revered teachers hold the view that women may teach as long as there is a man providing supervision oversight.

According to Biblical Author **John Dickson**, in his book “Hearing her voice: a biblical invitation for women to preach” 2014 – he provides a quite compelling argument for allowing women to preach in that his interpretation is that the teaching defined by Paul would be the laying down of foundational principals to be followed rather than the preaching of what we know of sermons which Dickson considers as being exhortations and thereby scripturally endorsed by women to give. So, for Dickson – he is saying it is ok for women to be preaching from the pulpit.

I really **cannot endorse Dickson’s viewpoint** as he is saying “women can’t teach, but because preaching doesn’t involve teaching, it’s permissible for women to preach. The *Didache* was a late 1<sup>st</sup> Century document which said a lot about teaching, yet it did not have the narrow view of Dickson of what teaching was according to him. It would be expected that if Dickson’s view was supportable, this document would have defined that narrow view of teaching, not only did it not – it expanded on what was deemed as teaching. How can you preach without an element of teaching? – I really don’t think you can nor should.

I agree with Dickson that women are not forbidden from transmitting knowledge to someone else, we have many examples of women in scripture doing this (Titus 2, Acts 18).

Whist I may personally disagree (personal opinion, with which my mother had much influence) that there should exist any hierarchy where men should be of a superior designation to a woman, I am not God and to act upon my personal opinion is to place my opinion as being superior to that of my God, so my right default must be to always reject my “personal opinion” viewpoint on this issue and continue to follow the directive s of scripture.