WOMEN TEACHING IN CHURCH

Arguments For Women Teaching Publicly

Several New Testament passages and patterns are commonly cited in support of women teaching in church gatherings or Bible studies open to the general congregation (including men). These come primarily from egalitarian interpretations; complementarian readings generally restrict authoritative teaching/oversight of men in the gathered church while affirming other forms of women's ministry. The supporting arguments focus on positive examples of women's public speaking/teaching roles, the nature of spiritual gifts, and contextual readings of the restrictive texts.

Positive examples of women teaching or speaking publicly

- **Priscilla (Prisca) and Aquila teaching Apollos (Acts 18:24–26):** When the eloquent Apollos taught inaccurately in Ephesus, Priscilla and Aquila "took him aside and explained to him the way of God more accurately." Priscilla is frequently named first in the New Testament references to the couple (Acts 18; Romans 16:3; etc.), which many take as indicating her prominence. This is presented as a woman (with her husband) correcting and instructing a male teacher in doctrine. Paul later calls them his "fellow workers in Christ Jesus" (Romans 16:3–4) and notes the church that met in their house.

- **Women prophesying in the assembly (1 Corinthians 11:5):** Paul assumes women pray and prophesy in the gathered church and gives instructions about head coverings while they do so. Prophecy is public proclamation of a message from God for the edification of the congregation (see also 1 Corinthians 14). This is taken as evidence that women spoke God's word in mixed gatherings.

- **Philip's four daughters (Acts 21:9):** They are described as prophetesses, consistent with the outpouring of the Spirit on both sons and daughters (Acts 2:17–18, citing Joel).

- **Phoebe (Romans 16:1–2):** Paul calls her a diakonos ("deacon"/"minister"/"servant") of the church at Cenchreae and a prostatis (benefactor, patron, or leader) of many, including himself. As the probable courier of the letter to the Romans, she would have read it aloud to the house churches and explained its contents—an act of teaching in the ancient world.

- **Junia (Romans 16:7):** Paul greets Andronicus and Junia as "outstanding among the apostles." The name is widely accepted as feminine in modern scholarship, and early interpreters (including Chrysostom) treated her as a woman apostle.

- **Other women co-workers:** Paul commends multiple women who "worked hard in the Lord" or labored with him in the gospel (e.g., Tryphaena, Tryphosa, Persis, Euodia, Syntyche in Romans 16 and Philippians 4). House churches met in the homes of women such as Lydia, Nympha, and Priscilla, sometimes implying leadership roles.
- **Women as first witnesses of the resurrection:** Jesus and the angels commissioned the women at the tomb to announce the news to the disciples (Matthew 28; John 20, etc.). This is sometimes called the apostola apostolorum ("apostle to the apostles") role.

Broader theological and gift-based arguments

- Spiritual gifts (including teaching, prophecy, and exhortation) are distributed by the Spirit without regard to gender (1 Corinthians 12; Romans 12; Ephesians 4). The same Spirit who falls on men and women at Pentecost empowers public ministry.
- Galatians 3:28 ("there is neither male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus") is often extended from salvation equality to functional equality in ministry roles.
- 1 Corinthians 14:26 expects that "when you come together, each one has a hymn, a lesson, a revelation…" for the building up of the church—language that is not explicitly gendered.
- Older women are explicitly to be "teachers of what is good" (Titus 2:3–5), though the immediate focus is younger women.

Handling of the restrictive passages

Supporters argue that the two main restrictive texts must be read in light of the positive examples above and the specific situations they address:

- 1 Timothy 2:11–12 ("I do not permit a woman to teach or to exercise authority over a man; rather, she is to remain quiet") is frequently interpreted as addressing a local problem of false teaching or disorder in Ephesus (where women may have been particularly influenced by false teachers or cultural factors related to the Artemis cult). Some take authentein ("exercise authority") as referring to domineering or usurping authority rather than all legitimate teaching. The grounding in creation/Fall is read by some as illustrating a particular problem of deception rather than a permanent hierarchical rule.
- 1 Corinthians 14:34–35 (women should keep silent in the churches) is commonly limited by the earlier permission for women to pray and prophesy (ch. 11) and by the

surrounding context of orderly evaluation of prophecy. It is often seen as prohibiting disruptive speech, questioning of prophecies in a way that undermines order, or speaking out of turn rather than all public teaching or prophecy.

In short, the affirmative case rests on the concrete New Testament examples of women prophesying, correcting doctrine, serving as deacons/patrons, hosting and leading house churches, and being named as co-workers and (in Junia's case) among the apostles, combined with the claim that the restrictive texts address specific first-century problems rather than establishing a universal ban on women teaching mixed groups. These arguments are debated; the counter-case emphasizes the plain reading of 1 Timothy 2 and 1 Corinthians 14, the creation order, and the consistent male pattern in the appointment of elders/overseers.

Arguments Against Women Teaching Publicly

Arguments against women teaching in the gathered church or exercising authoritative teaching over men in mixed congregations draw primarily from two explicit New Testament passages, the qualifications for church leaders, the broader biblical pattern of male headship, and the example of Jesus and the apostles. These are the core complementarian (or traditional) positions.

Explicit prohibitions

- **1 Timothy 2:11–15:** "Let a woman learn quietly with all submissiveness. I do not permit a woman to teach or to exercise authority over a man; rather, she is to remain quiet. For Adam was formed first, then Eve; and Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and became a transgressor. Yet she will be saved through childbearing—if they continue in faith and love and holiness, with self-control."
  This is treated as a direct, universal command for the church (the context is "how one ought to behave in the household of God," 1 Tim 3:15). The prohibition is grounded in the creation order (Adam formed first) and the Fall (Eve was deceived), not in temporary cultural factors. Teaching and exercising authority are linked as the primary pastoral functions that women are not to perform over men.

- **1 Corinthians 14:33–35:** "As in all the churches of the saints, the women should keep silent in the churches. For they are not permitted to speak, but should be in submission, as the Law also says. If there is anything they desire to learn, let them ask their husbands at home. For it is shameful for a woman to speak in church."
  This is understood as applying to the public assembly. While women may pray and prophesy under certain conditions (1 Cor 11), they are not to speak in a way that involves authoritative teaching, evaluating prophecy, or disrupting order. The appeal to "the Law" and "all the churches" points to a consistent apostolic practice rather than a local Corinthian problem only.

Qualifications for elders/overseers and teachers

- 1 Timothy 3:1–7 and Titus 1:5–9 describe the overseer/elder as "the husband of one wife," able to teach, managing his household well, etc. The consistent use of male pronouns and the "husband of one wife" requirement are taken to restrict the office of elder (which includes authoritative teaching and governing) to qualified men.
  The New Testament nowhere describes a woman holding the office of elder, overseer, or pastor-teacher in a local church.

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Creation order and headship

- Male headship is rooted in creation before the Fall (Genesis 2: the man is formed first, the woman is made as a helper corresponding to him; the man names the woman). Paul repeatedly appeals to this order (1 Cor 11:3, 8–9; 1 Tim 2:13; Eph 5:22–33).
  Teaching with authority in the church is viewed as an exercise of headship that belongs to men in both the family and the gathered church. Allowing women to teach the mixed congregation would invert this God-ordained structure.

Pattern of Jesus and the apostles

- Jesus chose twelve men as apostles. While He treated women with radical dignity, taught them, and appeared first to women after the resurrection, He did not appoint any women to the foundational apostolic office of authoritative teaching and leadership over the church.
  The early church continued this pattern: the apostles and the elders appointed in the churches were men.

Distinctions in permitted ministry

These arguments typically do not forbid all teaching by women. Women are encouraged to:

- Teach other women and children (Titus 2:3–5; 2 Tim 1:5; 3:14–15).
- Prophesy, pray, and exercise spiritual gifts in appropriate settings (1 Cor 11:5; Acts 21:9).
- Share the gospel, give personal testimony, and instruct privately (as Priscilla did with Aquila when they corrected Apollos privately).
- Serve as deaconesses or in many other ministries.

The restriction is specifically against women teaching or exercising authority over men in the public, authoritative, congregational setting of the church.

In summary, the case rests on the plain reading of 1 Timothy 2 and 1 Corinthians 14 as ongoing norms for church order, the male-only qualifications for the teaching office of elder, the creation-based principle of male headship, and the consistent New Testament pattern of male apostles and elders. These texts are understood as theological and transcultural rather than merely addressing first-century cultural problems.