

Should Women Teach Doctrine?

Scripture is clear with respect to two prohibitions regarding the teaching role of women in the church. Paul writes, “And I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man” (1 Timothy 2:12a). From Scripture we understand that not all teaching roles are authoritative, and that not all authoritative roles in the church involve teaching. So in keeping with the Biblical command for women to abstain from 1) teaching men and from 2) exercising authority over men in the church, should women be involved in teaching doctrine at all?

1. Matthew 28:19-20. The Great Commission demands that women teach doctrine.
 - Men and women alike are commanded to “go therefore and make disciples of all the nations...teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you” (Matthew 28:19-20).
 - “Teaching them to observe all things...” necessitates the teaching of doctrinal truth from Scripture. It is given as a command that women must obey.
 - “Disciples” (learning followers) and the personal pronoun “them” (v.19 and 20) are plural indicating more than one. “Of all the nations” (v.19) would indicate the making of many disciples of varying ethnic backgrounds either one-on-one or one-on-several.
 - One-on-several discipleship, where one biblically gifted woman teaches doctrine to a small group of women “disciples” in the context of the church body is both appropriate and expected.

2. 1 Corinthians 12:4-31, Romans 12:3-8. God’s gifting demands that women use their giftedness to teach doctrine.
 - God gives gifts, including teaching, to whom He wills for the profit of all (1 Corinthians 12:4-31). Certainly there are women in the church who are gifted to teach.
 - These gifts are then *to be employed* for the edification of the body according to guidelines set forth in Scripture (e.g. 1 Timothy 2:12). Therefore women would be gifted and then expected to teach other women.

3. Titus 2:1-5 demands that women teach doctrine.
 - Paul commands Titus to “speak the things which are proper for sound doctrine” (v.1)
 - This doctrine is that which “accords with godliness” (1:1) and produces the godly character we see in 2:2-5. For example, how are you to “admonish the young women to love their husbands?” By teaching doctrine (truth) from the Word of God, of course.
 - Admonishment involves warning against particular faults in thinking or behavior. An older woman cannot “admonish the young women” apart from teaching doctrine. Doctrine provides the basis on which we are to admonish one another.
 - In Titus 2:4, Paul specifically states that older women should “admonish the young women to love their husbands.” How is this command to be practically carried out? This admonition requires the teaching of *doctrine*:
 - The doctrine of male headship (1 Corinthians 11:3)
 - The doctrine of female submission (1 Corinthians 11:3)
 - The doctrine of authority (1 Corinthians 11:10)
 - The doctrine of marriage (Genesis 2:24)
 - The doctrine of creation (Adam and Eve, 1 Timothy 2:13-15)
 - The doctrine of the church (Ephesians 5:22-33)
 - *and others...*
 - Women specifically are commanded to be teachers of “good things” (v.3) which certainly includes proper doctrine. The exhortations that follow proceed from the teaching of sound doctrine and cannot be taught apart from biblical truth. Paul goes on to exhort young men to show integrity in their doctrine and for bondservants to “adorn

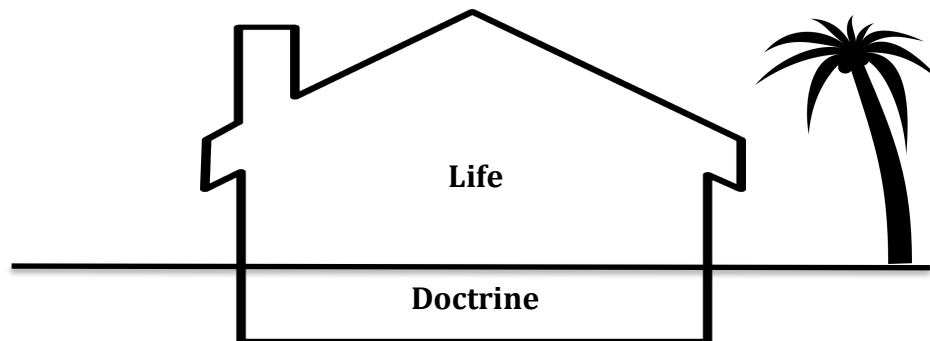
the doctrine of God” with that behavior that flows from it. Teaching good doctrine is central and necessary to every godly behavior we see listed in this passage.

- Titus 2, however, is not a prescription for how we are to arrange women’s small groups in the church, nor does it *restrict* what women are to teach. The context is *relational*; older women to younger women, older men to younger men, bondservants to their master. Therefore this passage is certainly not implying that women cannot teach doctrine and it is not implying that the behaviors listed there are all that women can or should teach in the church to other women. In fact, it would be impossible for women to teach Titus 2 behavior without teaching doctrine. Should women learn doctrine from their husbands? Absolutely! However, that good practice does not restrict women from learning doctrine from older women in the church as well.
 - Restricting the teaching role of women in the church to only those external behaviors we see in vv. 3-5 is to attempt a divorce of those behaviors in vv. 3-5 from the doctrine that supports them. This is both unwise and dangerous. Sound biblical doctrine must come first, foundationally, and frequently if we are to avoid both legalism and license. Those behaviors must be taught, but taught within an established context of the constant teaching of God’s truth which drives them. Any attempt to divide the two or to prioritize the behavior over the supportive doctrine could lead to either dead orthodoxy on the one hand or rank phariseeism on the other. By keeping them in proper priority and perspective, God’s information applied by the Holy Spirit will lead to life transformation.
 - Additionally, women who teach doctrine fulfill a very valuable role for many women who otherwise would be limited by their circumstances. For example, who would teach an unmarried woman with no Christian father? What about the women in a church married to unbelievers or those married to disobedient professing believers?
 - Lastly, Titus 2 does not reflect the only or even primary responsibility of older women in the church any more than 1 Cor. 11:5, 1 Timothy 5:5, 5:9-10, Proverbs 31, or others. The duties and responsibilities of a godly older woman in the church are varied indeed.
4. 2 Timothy 1:5, 3:15, Deut. 6:7. Raising children demands that women teach doctrine.
 - Young Timothy learned the Scripture at an early age from his mother Eunice (2 Timothy 1:5, 3:14-15).
 - Certainly Deuteronomy 6 necessitates that the mother is involved in this instruction.
 5. Proverbs 1:8. Commands a son to heed the instruction of his father and mother.
 - Proper instruction necessarily flows from biblical truth (doctrine).
 - This godly mother’s “law” is certainly founded in biblical principles that are to be taught to her son.
 6. 1 Corinthians 14:34-35 does not prohibit women from teaching doctrine to other women within the context of the local church body.
 - 11:5, 13 implies that women were allowed to prophesy and to pray. However, the issue of adornment (vv. 3-10) demonstrates that the point here is submission to male headship.
 - The reference to “prophesy” in chapter 11 would here include both revelatory and declaratory prophesying in context. Although revelatory prophesying is no longer a gift in operation today, this passage certainly provides sound instruction for declaratory prophesying (teaching) among women in churches in our day – again, that it is to be in submission to male headship (v. 3).
 - The specific context is related to eliminating “confusion” and maintaining “peace” (v. 33, 40) in the main assembly of the church (e.g. worship services).

- Verse 34 does not prohibit women from learning with respect to the prophecy, but merely commands them to ask any questions of their husband at home so as not to disrupt the preaching of God's Word.
 - This passage clearly does not prohibit women from learning doctrine from other women. It does not prescribe that a woman's *only* source of doctrinal information is to be her husband. It does not prohibit women from discipling other women in doctrine (e.g. Titus 2, Matt. 28, etc.). This passage does not prohibit women from teaching doctrine to a small or large group of other women in the context of the local church body.
 - This passage DOES necessitate that men are leading in teaching doctrine in their homes, properly leading their wives and children. The man is to be the head over his wife (1 Cor. 11:3) and the wife is to submit to her husband (cf. Eph. 5:22-24). The husband should be availing himself of the means necessary to be a primary source of instruction for his wife.
7. Acts 18:26. The example of Priscilla.
- It is implied that Priscilla assisted in the explanation and may have taken the more vocal role alongside her husband according to the Greek construction.
 - Paul describes her as a "fellow worker" in the gospel (Romans 16:3). This means that she taught theology, evangelized, made disciples, and taught practical matters.
 - Her involvement in ministry is further explained by the fact that a church was in the house of Priscilla and Aquila (1 Corinthians 16:19).
 - It is apparent from Scripture that Priscilla taught doctrine in preaching the gospel. For example, try to explain the gospel without ever teaching doctrines such as the depravity of man, the existence of God, the creation of man, the fall of man, the incarnation, the Trinity, the person of Christ, the substitutionary atonement, the bodily resurrection, election, faith, repentance, perseverance, the ministry of the Holy Spirit, the person of the Holy Spirit, the doctrine of hell, the doctrine of judgment, the doctrine of the church, the doctrine of baptism, justification, sanctification, glorification, and others.
 - This passage or others do not state that Priscilla in any way exercised leadership or authority over men.
8. 1 Timothy 2:11-15. What is prohibited?
- Women are prohibited from either teaching men or exercising authority over men.
 - This does not restrict or imply that women cannot or should not teach doctrine to other women / children. Otherwise we would expect that the qualifying use of "man" (v. 12) would be absent.
 - This correlates well with the contextual intent of 1 Corinthians 14:34-35.
9. Acts 2:17-18. The outpouring of the Holy Spirit.
- Daughters and maidservants will prophesy.
10. Old Testament examples of women teaching (prophesying).
- Deborah (Judges 4) was described as a prophetess and was judging Israel according to verse 4. The children of Israel came to her for judgment (v. 5).
 - Huldah (2 Kings 22:14-20) was also described as a prophetess and gave a word from God to Hilkiah the Priest.
 - Miriam (Exodus 15:20) the sister of Aaron was used of God as a prophetess and it was said of the other women that they "went out after her" as she sang to the Lord of His triumph over Pharaoh and his army.

11. 1 Corinthians 11:16. The uniform practice of the church throughout history.
- Olympias, friend to Chrysostom, who “catechized many women” (Palladius, *Lausiac History*, p. 56). Olympias was described as teaching other women.
 - “Kaiserworth Nurses and Teachers” of the 1830’s founded by Lutheran pastor Theodore Fliedner.
 - Selina Hastings (d. 1791) who founded missionary societies and led women.
 - Susanah Spurgeon who taught women and girls in her husband’s church.
 - Present day: Martha Peace, Susan Heck,
 - *and others...*
12. Doctrine is the basis for a biblical culture of strong marriages and families within the church.
- Doctrine applied to life is the required program. We must exhort one another with sound doctrine practically applied to our marriages and families (Hebrews 10:24-25).
 - There must be high accountability with older men and older women leading the way.
 - The practical application of doctrine to marriage and family must be taught in classes, preached from the pulpit, spoken of in the halls, learned in discipleship, and demonstrated in life. It must be woven into the fabric of church life and practice.

Doctrinal teaching from Scripture under the powerful working of the Holy Spirit is to be the foundation for holy living (see illustration). Orthodoxy leads to orthopraxy. God’s truth is the bedrock from which flows life transformation. Therefore the church and its teaching ministries, including both men and women, must prioritize the teaching of sound biblical doctrine *in conjunction with* how that doctrine should be applied to life. To divide the two or to reverse the order would produce dead orthodoxy on the one hand or phariseism on the other.



Resources for further study:

Fee, Gordon D., ed. *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1987.

Hurley, James B. *Man and Woman in Biblical Perspective*. Grand Rapids: Inter-Varsity Press, 1981.

Knight, George W. III. *The Role Relationship of Men & Women: New Testament Teaching*. Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1977.

Piper, John and Wayne Grudem. *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1991.

Stinson, Randy L. and Christopher W. Cowan. “Women in Ministry: Practical Application of Biblical Teaching,” *The Journal for Biblical Manhood and Womanhood* (Spring 2008): 17-22.