

THE FOREST HILL NEWS



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May a Christian Woman Ever teach a Man?

By Wayne Jackson

The pattern is common in Christian history. A religious leader will craft a doctrine that coincides with his theological perspective (based on a misunderstanding of a few Bible texts). Once a proposition is formulated, zealots forage through Scripture collecting passages that conflict with their theory, mercilessly twisting them into submission.

Born out of misdirected defense of New Testament teaching related to "woman's role," a fairly new idea has evolved within our brotherhood. It contends a woman may **never**, in **any** "didactical" (from the Greek *didaskos*) way, instruct a man in biblical matters (Fox 2006, 140ff).

The underlying error in this theory is in assigning a static definition to the term *didasko* (rendered "teach" in 1Tim. 2:12). Such reveals a failure to recognize that words may be employed variously in different **contexts**. For example, there is a sense in which a woman is forbidden to "speak" (*laleo*) in the church assembly (1 Cor. 14:34), and yet at other times she is authorized to "speak" (*laleo*) when singing (Eph. 5:19). Who would contend that women may not sing in church?

Accordingly, a few in the church are insisting that because a Christian woman is forbidden to assume an **authoritative** teaching role, by which a man is subordinated to the **formal** student status, there is never a circumstance where a woman might converse with a man in a context where she "teaches" (*didasko*).

Some allege she may not "teach" (*didasko*) a man in an ordinary conversation or answer his questions. A Christian woman is not permitted to "teach" her unbelieving husband the gospel. She even is forbidden to grade a correspondence course in which she writes "informational comment" which "teaches" an adult male.

Didasko (To Teach)

The Greek term *didasko* is found ninety-seven times in the New Testament. In the King James Version it is rendered either "teach" or "taught", and is employed in several ways. Frequently it indicates a formal teacher-student relationship. At other times, however, with a more general import, *didasko* constitutes informal instruction, or simply a lesson conveyed.

The word frequently is used of the authoritative instruction of a formal teacher (Mat. 4:23; Acts 5:25). However, the verb can signify merely a general lesson, such as conveyed by "nature" (1 Cor. 11:14). It can denote the nurturing instruction new converts are to receive (Mat. 28:20). It can even signify the reciprocal edification of Christians singing in a worship service (Col. 3:16), with no "authority" exercised. The **context**, combined with complementary information, prohibits a woman from arrogating herself to the formal role of "**the** teacher" in an assembly where men are subordinated to the status of students (cf. 1 Cor. 14:24-35).

In 1 Tim. 2:12, the grammatical construction of Paul's prohibition clearly in-

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dicates that the term “teach” (*didasko*) in **this setting** is the **type** associated with exercising “authority”. The woman is not to teach in a situation wherein she exerts “authority” as “teacher.”

In my commentary on Paul’s letters to Timothy and Titus, I have discussed this in detail (Jackson 2007, 60-78). In my research, I consulted dozens of scholarly works pertaining to 1 Tim. 2:12. **Not once** did I discover a scholar, in the church or out, who contended that this text indicates a woman can **never** teach (*didasko*) a man.

Affirmative Argument

Is there any new Testament evidence that a woman, under proper circumstances, could instruct a man scripturally? How much evidence would be required? Would **one example** be sufficient? How much documentation is needed to establish the fact that early Christians communed on the first day of the week? Is there **anything** beyond Acts 20:7?

The Priscilla Case

While Priscilla and Aquila were in Ephesus (Acts 18:18ff), they met a Jewish convert named Apollos, who though “mighty in the scriptures,” was lacking in an understanding of certain gospel facts. When this couple heard him, “**they** took him unto them, and expounded (plural) unto him the way of God more accurately” (v. 26b).

The following facts are indisputable: (a) Apollos was lacking in necessary spiritual information. (b) **Both** Priscilla and Aquila took him aside and **instructed** him in “the way of God.”

The term “expounded” (*ekithemi* - “explained,” ESV) is used in Acts 18:36, 11:4, and 28:23 in the sense of “to convey information by careful elaboration, explain, expound” (Danker et al. 2000, 310). It was a “deliberate and detailed narrative” (Robertson 1930, 152).

The term carries the meaning of presenting “Christian truth with painstaking thoroughness,” and “suggests an extended one-way presentation” (Bromiley 1982, 248). McGarvey says they “took the powerful and zealous preacher to their own home, and taught him the truth on the subject” (1892,148).

In his book, *The Role of Women*, one brother incorporates thirty-six pages attempting to establish his theory that Priscilla was not involved in teaching gospel truth on this occasion. The major point is supposed

to be that Apollos was provided no “new information” (Elliott 2001, 136-152).

Unfortunately for the writer, Luke disagrees, stating that Apollos’ teaching was less than accurate because he **did not know** that John’s baptism was obsolete (vv. 25-26). He needed “new information,” namely that Jesus died, was resurrected, ascended, and a new regime was in place.

The Unbelieving Husband

In his first epistle, Peter provides instruction to Christian wives. One aspect relates to the difficult situation of a Christian woman whose husband has not obeyed “**the word**” (with the article), i.e., the gospel (1 Pet. 3:1). The expression “obey not” reflects a strong Greek verb that conveys the idea of **refusing** to believe and obey (Thayer 1958, 55).

It implies the man had been taught the truth, but he stubbornly resisted. Who had taught him the gospel? Quite obviously his wife, for the apostle continues by suggesting that she might even yet, “without a word” (no Greek article), win him to the Lord by her Christian behavior (see Davids 1990, 116; Woods 1959, 87).

An Ad Hominem Point

The *ad hominem* (“to the man”) argument frequently is used to expose the inconsistency of one who espouses an erroneous position. Jesus employed this sort of refutation frequently (Luke 14:5). The advocates of this new doctrine contend that the term “teach” (*didasko*) is **never** used to depict a situation in which a woman can instruct a man (Fox, 36). Supposedly, it always involves an “authoritative” type of teaching involving the official role of a teacher who is over his student. This is an error; there is nothing intrinsic to the word that demands a role subordination. **Only context can indicate that.**

Paul wrote: “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly; in all wisdom **teaching** and admonishing one another with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts unto God” (Col. 3:16). Note the word “teaching.” In the Greek Testament it is the present tense participle form of *didasko*. Paul is describing the reciprocal instruction in which Christians engage when they worship God collectively.

If *didasko* **always** denotes teaching that excludes women, it necessarily follows that women are not permitted to **sing** in the church assembly. A leader of this movement devotes more than twenty pages in attempting to avoid this conclusion, mostly based upon a punctuation

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difference in some modern versions (Fox, 118-139; yet as Prof. Melick observes: "The specific vehicle for teaching and admonishing is song," [991, 305].)

Conclusion

This doctrine that a woman may never "teach" a man is new, void of genuine evidence, and divisive.

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