

Can Women Speak at Church? (Because of the Gospel)

SPEAKER	Matt Ryniker
DATE	Sunday, March 19, 2023
PASSAGES	1 Corinthians 14; 1 Timothy 2; 1 Timothy 1; 1 Timothy 5; John 20; Romans 16; Galatians 3; Joel 2
MESSAGE	Begins at 1:04:38 in the service

THE BIG IDEA

The passages that appear to silence women in church sit alongside passages where women pray, prophesy and announce the resurrection — and the hardest of them turns on a Greek verb that appears exactly once in the entire Bible. Matt's conviction is that we should be far less dogmatic about what is genuinely unclear, and that the reason God revealed himself as Father is about him, not about our ranking.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- ◆ The absolute-silence reading collapses on contact with Paul himself: three chapters earlier he regulates *how* women pray and prophesy in the assembly. You cannot be silent and prophesying at once.
- ◆ Matt's confusion is not a progressive bias. He described his own instincts as conservative in the preservationist sense — find things as they were, dust lightly, change as little as possible.
- ◆ In both covenants leadership trended male by default, and in both God raised up women whenever he wanted to. Miriam, Deborah, Esther, Phoebe.
- ◆ The verb translated “exercise authority” in 1 Timothy 2:12 is *authentein*, used nowhere else in Scripture, and a well-attested contemporary sense is “to be the author of, the one who did it.”
- ◆ Read that way, the sentence flows with its neighbors: don't teach that woman authored man, because Adam was formed first.

- ◆ For three hundred years no Greek-speaking church father commented on 1 Timothy 2:12 — odd, if it settled a live dispute.
- ◆ The “men make better leaders because they are more assertive” argument runs backwards through a kingdom where the low are lifted and strength is made perfect in weakness.
- ◆ Women are not exempt from the Great Commission. Matt’s charge to any woman God raises up: preach him, not your abilities.

► 1:04:38

This message was an accident of the calendar. Hope was working through 1 Corinthians, landed on the head coverings passage the week before, and rather than wait, Matt pulled the “women should keep silent” section of chapter 14 forward so the church could take both at once and then return to communion and resurrection theology after Easter. It arrived, unplanned, on the morning Amy Diosima opened her testimony with, “I’m a woman, I’m going to speak at church.”

Laying the cards on the table

► 1:08:08

Before reading anything, Matt named his own commitments. “Generally I approach the scriptures conservatively” — and he meant it in the preservationist sense, not the political one. “I want to find things as they were and just kind of dust lightly and not change things too much.” Much of the work behind the message came out of a seminary paper he wrote for Reformed Calvinist professors, who returned it without correction or reprimand. The point of saying so was to remove one exit from the room: nothing that followed could be waved off as a progressive reading.

1. The text, and the problem the text creates

► 1:08:37

“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.”

1 CORINTHIANS 14:33–35 ↗

Matt read the New King James alongside it and pointed at the seam. That translation starts a new paragraph at “Let your women keep silent,” and adds the word *your*; the ESV runs “as in all the churches of the saints” into the sentence and has no *your*. The committees themselves disagree about where the thought begins — whether it closes the preceding discussion about weighing prophetic words, or opens something new.

► 1:10:41

Then the collision. Only three chapters earlier Paul assumes women are speaking in the assembly and regulates the manner of it (1 Corinthians 11:5). And prophecy, unlike uninterpreted tongues, is for everyone else’s benefit — which requires it to be audible. “How can they be silent and speaking? Thus the confusion.” The church is not a building; it is an assembly. “So we know that the absolute silence view is silly. There’s got to be something contextual here, but we just don’t know how far and where’s the cutoff.”

2. The other passage — and the first preacher of the resurrection

► 1:11:58

“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.”

1 TIMOTHY 2:11–14 ↗

Set that beside John 20:16–18, where the risen Christ sends Mary Magdalene to the disciples, and Matthew 28:10, where the instruction includes a command: go to Galilee. You can answer that Mary was conveying rather than teaching — but Matt refused the escape hatch, because the same move excuses anything. “I generally like to solve problems with word games. Genica pricks my conscience — that’s why.” If it was an exception, then the never-under-any-circumstances position is already gone.

3. The pattern across both covenants

► 1:14:27

Here is the shape Matt kept returning to. Under the old covenant leadership tended male by default — and God raised up women whenever he pleased. Miriam led. Deborah judged, and the verb is the ordinary one for sitting in judgment; men came to her to settle disputes (Judges 4:4–5). “It’d be odd to say, Lord, you cannot use Esther. I don’t know if you noticed, she’s a lady.” How much of the default was

culture, Paul never says; he was not in the habit of flagging which percent of his instruction was culturally rooted, and his readers would not have known what he meant if he had.

4. Five reasons to scrutinize one verse

► 1:18:38

The deep dive was on 1 Timothy 2:12, and Matt was careful to say this is not fringe: there are objective measures of how hard a verse is to translate, and this one rings nearly all of them.

First, the early church shows real tension about women's influence — the Gnostic *Gospel of Thomas*, the *Gospel of Mary*, John Chrysostom complaining in the 300s that women could get a man hired or fired as deacon. Yet searching the index of everything the church wrote before the year 350, Matt found not one Greek-speaking father who so much as mentioned this verse. “If they didn't even care about this verse, why would they not care, if this was a tense topic? Is this verse about something different than I think it is?”

Second and third, the harshest reading — that women are constitutionally more deceivable, case in point Eve, case closed — would forbid a woman even to serve as deacon, and grounding it in Adam and Eve leaves no room for the exceptions Scripture plainly contains. Fourth and fifth are grammar, and they are where the message earns its keep.

5. One word, used once

► 1:26:02

Paul's usual word for authority, *exousia*, appears over a hundred times in the New Testament. It is not the word here. The word here is *authentēin* — the only occurrence in the Bible, from anyone, and the only time Paul uses it. There is no parallel passage to check it against. And it sits in the infinitive, so “I do not permit a woman to teach authoritatively” is not what the grammar offers.

► 1:27:46

The case rests on a spelling. In Greek the ending of a noun tells you what it is doing in the sentence. “Man” here is *andros*, not the form that would make it the direct object of “teach.” So it belongs to *authentēin* — which leaves the second verb as the object of the first, an ordinary construction: *teach us to pray* (Luke 11:1), *teaching them to observe* (Matthew 28:20). Matt cited a discussion between Tim Keller and Don Carson — hardly progressive credentials — landing where he does: one prohibition, not two. The doubled negative is no obstacle; Greek uses it for a single idea, as when Jesus ate nothing in the wilderness, or the tax collector would not so much as lift his eyes. The closest parallel of all is Acts 16:21 — customs “not lawful for us as Romans to accept or practice,” two verbs, one idea.

Which puts the whole weight of the sentence on a verb nobody else in Scripture uses.

6. What the neighbors were doing with it

► 1:30:58

Published glosses run from “to have authority” to “to domineer” to “to murder.” Matt wanted sources close to Paul in time, on the reasonable grounds that you would not hand someone the Magna Carta and ask what a word means today. Polybius in 150 BC and Josephus both use the noun for the one who did a deed — a perpetrator, when the deed was a crime, but at root simply the doer. Clement of Rome, forty years after the New Testament, calls Christ *authentēs* where the translation reads “Creator.” Eusebius uses it three times of Christ as the author and originator of the gospel. Athanasius and Chrysostom use the verb for instigating and being responsible. Grudem’s objection in *Countering the Claims of Evangelical Feminism* was that no ancient evidence supports this sense; the studies since 1980 say otherwise.

7. The reading that makes the paragraph flow

► 1:35:22

Matt’s proposed adjustment is small — keep everything the ESV has, keep the infinitive, choose the other well-attested sense of the verb: *I do not permit a woman to teach to author a man*. Suddenly verse 13 stops being a non sequitur and becomes the reason: *for Adam was formed first, then Eve*. And verse 14 stops being a slur and becomes a deflating aside to anyone claiming spiritual superiority by sex — and by the way, Eve was deceived first, so nobody is arriving here undefeated.

► 1:40:21

Is there anything for such a correction to correct? Ephesus sat in Anatolia, where Herodotus reports the Lycians traced descent from their mothers and put their mothers’ names on their tombstones. Ancient revisionist retellings of Genesis circulated — Lilith made at the same time as Adam; Gnostic accounts descending through Sophia, in which the material world is the botched work of a lesser god and enlightenment comes by partnering with the feminine. Irenaeus complains in *Against Heresies* about people expressing the divine as overly feminine. And it flows with the letter itself: Timothy is charged to stop “certain persons” teaching a different doctrine and devoting themselves to myths and endless genealogies, and by chapter five the problem has a face: younger widows going house to house saying what they should not.

8. The extremes on both ends

► 1:45:33

Both edges fail. Reading Galatians 3:28 as erasing sex proves too much — being in Christ does not delete your ethnicity either, and Paul clearly still thinks the difference between a man and a woman matters. What the verse removes is the barrier to entry. At the other edge, Matt described a conference where a woman was brought up and the leader publicly laid a hand on her back to confer permission to speak. “Didn’t you give the last guy authority to speak? Everyone is speaking with permission. Why the dog and pony show about the lady?”

► 1:48:42

And the ordering is strange for anyone insisting teaching is the closed door. Paul ranks the gifts — apostles first, then prophets, then teachers — with the church built on apostles and prophets. “Sad for me to say as a teacher, prophecy outranks teaching. I’m in third place here.” Yet prophecy is the gift Joel promised on sons and daughters alike:

“I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh; your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, and your young men shall see visions. Even on the male and female servants in those days I will pour out my Spirit.”

JOEL 2:28–29 ↗

Matt also flagged Romans 16:1, where Phoebe is called a *diakonos* — rendered “deacon” by the NIV and NRSV, “servant” in most others, though the same word is translated “deacon” everywhere else. Which fits the deacon qualifications in 1 Timothy 3 read as a template rather than a fence: pressed literally, husband of one wife would disqualify Paul from his own churches.

9. Why the default might be male at all

► 1:51:24

Matt gave the common answer without endorsing it — men score higher on assertiveness, so they make better leaders — and then took it apart. We lead from weakness as much as strength, and in this kingdom the high go low and the great serve. “Would this not make Goliath a bishop? Should Shaquille O’Neal be the next Pope?”

► 1:53:22

His own answer, offered as a suggestion, is about revelation rather than ranking. Strip away chromosomes and sonograms and stand where an ancient reader stood: in procreation the male

initiates, the woman receives, carries and gives birth. That, he thinks, is why God chose to reveal himself as Father, Son and Spirit, and why the church — half of it male — is the bride and never the groom. Not a statement about male superiority; a parallel God selected on purpose. “He didn’t say, I reveal myself as your gender-neutral employer.”

10. Which is the point of the whole morning

► 1:56:13

Matt suspects the early church wrote less about the roles of men and women than we imagine because it was busy with the imminent return of the bridegroom and with preaching Christ. That is where he landed. “Women are not exempt from the Great Commission — I was going to say we need you in this, but actually we’re not the ones pulling it off anyway. Christ is.” He named the desert fathers’ deep respect for the desert mothers and their own communities, and Heidi Baker and Mother Teresa: “Who’s going to say no to that?” Then the charge, which was for everyone in the room and not only for women: “If the Lord did raise you up, ladies — preach him, not your abilities. It shouldn’t be about breaking a glass ceiling. It should be about revealing the risen Lord.”

He was open about where this leaves us. Translating committees know everything he laid out and move slowly by design. He can find no solid argument against rendering *authentein* as “author,” and he still will not call it settled. “When you don’t know, you kind of have to be less dogmatic — which is kind of odd, why we get super dogmatic about stuff that is genuinely confusing.” He revealed himself as Father because he wants to be family to you, and the way in is through his Son. “I never want to get too close to the steering wheel and just start man-mangling it.”

FOR FURTHER STUDY

SCRIPTURE IN THIS MESSAGE

- 1 Corinthians 14:33–35
- 1 Corinthians 11:5
- 1 Timothy 2:11–14
- John 20:16–18
- Matthew 28:10
- Judges 4:4–5
- 1 Timothy 2:12
- Luke 11:1
- Matthew 28:20
- Luke 4:2
- Luke 18:13
- Acts 16:21
- 1 Timothy 1:3–5
- 1 Timothy 5:13
- Galatians 3:28
- 1 Corinthians 12:28–31
- Joel 2:28–29
- Romans 16:1
- 1 Timothy 3:8–12

FOR YOUR HOPE GROUP

1. Before this message, what had you been taught these two passages meant, and who taught you? How much of that had you examined?
2. Matt would not let himself off the hook with the word game that Mary was “conveying, not teaching.” Where do you use a distinction like that to make a hard text easier?
3. No Greek-speaking father commented on 1 Timothy 2:12 for three hundred years. What do you make of a silence like that, and what would it change if the verse addressed a local dispute rather than all churches everywhere?
4. Where are you most dogmatic about something you have never actually studied — and what would it cost you to hold it more loosely?
5. Matt’s charge was to preach him, not your abilities. What is one thing you will do this week that puts the risen Lord in view rather than your own standing?

ABOUT THE SPEAKER

Matt Ryniker is Hope Chapel's senior pastor — his own description of the job — and reports to the church's governing board, who he cheerfully calls his boss. He and his wife Mandy have been held up from Hope's own pulpit as an example to the congregation. He spent a stretch of his working life as a public school teacher, and he still teaches the parent dedication classes where families commit to raising their children to follow Jesus — a theme that runs straight into this message.

Watch the full message:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kVKYFYDkTw&t=3878s>

These notes summarise a message preached at Hope Chapel in Austin, Texas. They are a reader's aid, not a transcript — scripture references link to the full passage so you can read it in context.