

# WHO IS IN AUTHORITY?

*David P. Brown*

*“But I suffer not a woman to teach,  
nor to usurp authority over the man,  
but to be in silence” (1 Tim. 2:12—KJV).*

## **QUESTION: SOME THINK THAT THE MAN IN 1 TIMOTHY 2:12 SHOULD BE TRANSLATED “HUSBAND.” IS THAT THE CASE?**

Regarding the view of the last sentence of the preceding paragraph, please consider the following thoughts. I do not see how the word “man” in 1 Timothy 2:12 could be correctly translated “husband.” The context pertains to male and female relationships in general. It does not only deal with the husband and wife relationship. It is not husbands pray, but men pray (verse 8). It is not wives dress modestly, but women dress modestly (verses 9-10). It is not husbands teach, but men teach (verse 12). It is not wives learn, but women learn (verses 11-12). Thus, Eve (the female) and not Adam (the male), was deceived and by the deception fell into sin. Adam, however, went into the sin with his “eyes wide open.” He abdicated his responsibility as the head of the race of man (1 Cor. 11:3). Certainly Adam and Eve were husband and wife, but they were the only male and female on the earth at the time.

Women may be saved from sin (be faithful to God) by remaining in their God given role: which role is designated by the term “childbearing”—that which is peculiar to the female and not the male. It is my conviction (though I am not dogmatic) that “childbearing” is used in this passage as a synecdoche (where a part stands for the whole or the whole for one of its parts). Hence, “childbearing” in verse 15 references the sphere of activity of or role that God intended for women. Just as man sins if he abdicates his God given role, so also does a woman sin if she forsakes her sphere of activity assigned to her by her Creator (verses 13-15). In the great majority of cases this involves the home—husband, wife, and children. However, such direction also covers the single woman and her relationship to men. In other words it would govern Lydia of Act 16 as well as the apostle Paul. Therefore, a single woman must respect the headship of a man, not in the husband and wife relationship, because such biblical principles peculiar to husbands and wives are not bound on the single person, but by that set out in 1 Corinthians 11:3 and, I believe, elaborated on by the apostle in 1 Timothy 2:8-15.

With the previous remarks in mind please consider the following. Some time ago I read where a person took the position that if at any time or any place a woman imparted Bible knowledge to a man she was by her action necessarily exercising dominion over him and thereby in violation of 1 Timothy 2:12. Such a view is palpably false. If that were the case, a woman could not by her remarks in a Bible class enlighten the male members of the class on some scripture. A wife could not enlighten her husband regarding the meaning of scripture. In fact, no woman anywhere or at anytime could engage in the discussion of the Bible with a man or in the presence of men, lest she risk saying something that might enlighten one of the men regarding the meaning of some scripture, and in so doing, according to some, exercising dominion over men and,

thereby, sinning. She could not write a letter to her adult son and refer to the scriptures lest she impart biblical information to him. If a man asked her what to do to be saved she could not tell him. Of course, this would mean that it would be a sin for a man to read any religious article, tract, or book written by a woman, lest he learn something from the woman who wrote it. Indeed, a grown man could not even listen to his aged mother sing a gospel song lest the words of the song instruct him and thereby she would exercise dominion over him.

### WHAT IS REALLY AFFIRMED

One who holds such a view is really affirming the following proposition: “The scriptures teach that under any and all circumstances it is a sin for a female to impart biblical knowledge to an adult male.” Therefore, if she writes a religious article, only women are authorized by the New Testament to read the article. Furthermore, that being the case, such a person would be forced to affirm: “The scriptures teach that it is a sin for an adult male to read any religious literature produced by a woman.” This would forbid elders to go into a class to learn what is being taught by the female teacher and the kind of teacher she is.

The problem with such thinking is this: it equates “imparting of information” by a woman to a man with “*exercising dominion over the man*.” But such is not necessarily the case. That is obvious by Aquila and Priscilla’s teaching of Apollos. Priscilla taught Apollos in such a way as not to exercise dominion over him.

It does no good (it possibly does a great amount of harm) to say Aquila and Priscilla’s teaching of Apollos has no bearing on this study because Apollos was not a Christian. One who holds such a view is affirming far more than he realizes. Does such a one not understand that he is affirming that the scriptures teach that Christian women may exercise dominion over non-Christian adult males in teaching them the gospel? By this erroneous logic a Christian woman could preach the gospel to a thousand adult males in one assembly just as long as all them are not Christians. Who believes it? Indeed, 1 Timothy 2:12 deals with the Christian woman’s relationship to non-Christian as well as Christian adult males. **This is the case, because, all persons (in and out of the church) are amenable to the perfect law of liberty—the New Testament System, the Faith** (Matt. 28:18; James 1:25; John 12:48; Col. 3:17; Jude 3).

### WHAT GOD FORBIDS

Indeed, for a woman to exercise dominion over a male in the process of her imparting Bible knowledge to him there must be some other element involved. What is it? The answer: **a woman must be in a position of controlling the man**. Likewise, the male must be in a subservient state of mind to the woman. He must be submissive to her as the one who leads, directs and guides him. **Such inspiration clearly forbids** (1 Timothy 2:12).

Thus, we have **male** song leaders. However, in the assembly lead by the male song leader, women are singing. As they sing they are “*teaching and admonishing*” all that hear them—including any males who are found in most of our worship assemblies (Col. 3:16). Moreover, these Christian sisters are not in a leading and controlling relationship to the adult males who are taught by them. It is the song leader who occupies that position. Thus, they teach adult males without violating 1 Timothy 2:12.

It is obvious by this biblical instruction and compliance thereto that the mere

impartation of knowledge by a woman to an adult male does not in and of itself alone constitutes a woman exercising dominion over a man or men. Hence, there is no sin necessarily inherent in a religious article written by a woman for the public to study.~