

# Can women be pastors? What I discovered during 50 years of research.

By [Philip B. Payne](#), Contributor | Friday, March 31, 2023

<https://www.christianpost.com/voices/can-women-be-pastors-what-i-found-during-50-years-of-research.html>

332



Getty Images

Shortly after beginning my Ph.D. studies in Cambridge, a lecturer stated, “No passage in the New Testament, understood in its original context, limits the ministry of women.” I almost stood up and shouted, “That’s not true.”

I thought [1 Timothy 2:12](#)’s prohibition of women teaching men was the perfect refutation. So that evening I read 1 Timothy in Greek and continued to do so repeatedly for over a month. I was struck by the letter’s pervasive concern with false teaching. Since women are the only people 1 Timothy identifies as deceived by the false teaching, this explains why Paul prohibited women in Ephesus from seizing authority to teach a man. Realizing that [1 Timothy 2:12](#) does not disprove the lecturer’s statement, I began to examine every other passage about women in the

Bible. Fifty years of research later, I still have not found any original Bible passage that excludes women from any church ministry.

In 2010 I submitted to the committee chairmen of the NIV and ESV revision committees 21 examples of [1 Timothy 2:12](#)'s key verb meaning "to assume authority that one does not rightfully have," including one written shortly before Paul's time. In contrast, the first clear instance of this verb meaning "to exercise authority" was from circa AD 370 in Saint Basil, The Letters 69, line 45. I still remember the day Doug Moo phoned me to say, "The NIV revision committee has chosen to adopt your recommended translation, 'to assume authority.'" In contrast, the ESV revision committee chairman did not even let his committee see my study.

I always wondered why [1 Corinthians 11:4](#) calls "disgraceful" every man "having down from his head" when praying or prophesying since draping a garment over one's head was not disgraceful, but signaled piety in Roman worship. Corinth was a Roman city. A key to understanding this passage is H. Herter's "Effeminatus" (RAC 2:620–650). It cites over one hundred passages from classical antiquity, the largest number from Paul's time, that railed against men with effeminate hairstyles. In many, effeminate hairstyles solicited illicit sexual hookups, particularly in the Dionysiac cult near Corinth. Because men's effeminate hairstyles were known to attract illicit sexual hookups, 11:14 states, "It is degrading for a man to wear long hair."

[Numbers 5:18](#) and [Leviticus 13:45](#) show that "uncovered head" refers to loosened hair. Verse 15 confirms this: "Long hair is given to her as a covering." When a woman's hair was let down loose, it symbolized undisciplined sexuality. A woman who did this in effect accused herself of adultery. In Paul's day, a woman convicted of adultery had her hair shorn. This explains why 11:5 states that a woman who uncovers her head [by letting her hair down] is "one and the same as the shorn woman." Dionysiac revelries were infamous because women (called "maenads") let their hair down, uttered ecstatic "prophecy," and engaged in orgies. Pervasive Dionysiac influence in Corinth, with its strong emphasis on freedom from cultural restraints, best explains why at least one man in the church in Corinth would display effeminate hair and at least one woman let her hair down when praying or prophesying. Paul prohibits both because of their cultural association with attracting illicit sexual liaisons.

After reading my *New Testament Studies* article explaining Vaticanus text-critical symbols, Paul Canart invited me to the Vatican to determine whether any of the Vaticanus two-dot symbols match the color of the original Vaticanus ink. We entered the Manuscript Room through a bank vault door, then the interior room containing the most precious manuscripts and each Vaticanus leaf in its own acid-free folder in a long steel chest. Through an internally-lighted loupe, each original dot was like a huge apricot-color moon. I still remember Paul Canart exclaiming when comparing it to the original ink on the same page, "It's the same color." We published our findings in *Novum Testamentum*. In *Le Manuscrit B de la Bible*, we identify fifty-one original-ink two-dot symbols and argue that [1 Corinthians 14:34–35](#) is a spurious addition. *The Bible vs. Biblical Womanhood* includes sixteen Vaticanus two-dot-plus-bar-symbol photographs. Each marks four-or-more-consecutive-word spurious additions, including [1 Corinthians 14:34–35](#). Four-or-more-consecutive-word additions occur on average only once in 83.5 Vaticanus lines.

My father was the head of our home. He treated us to thousands of adventures all over the world. He had a song for every occasion.

J. Barton Payne was also an outstanding Bible scholar who knew all the Semitic languages well. In family devotions, while reading a chapter around the table after breakfast and dinner, when it was his turn, he would always give us a fresh translation directly from the Hebrew or Greek text. I have no recollection of his stumbling over the translation of any word in any verse of Scripture. Dad taught Semitic languages at Princeton and many other schools. He was one of the founders and later president of the Evangelical Theological Society. When I shared what I discovered about women in ministry, he affirmed my findings and showed me how women were approved by God in leadership positions throughout the Hebrew Scriptures as well. Largely because of my home experiences and what I was taught in church, long after I had become convinced that God places no restrictions on the ministry of women, I still thought of myself as the head of my own household.

It was only after I researched how “head” was translated in the Greek Bible that I realized that Paul probably didn’t intend “head” to mean “authority” in [Ephesians 5](#) or anywhere else.

Looking back, it is now glaringly obvious that I would have been spared from some of the worst decisions of my life if I had not thought of myself as the “head” of our family but had submitted myself to my wife and her wisdom. If you think you’re the exception who does not need to be answerable to your spouse, just imagine what your life would be like if your spouse had the final say over all your decisions.

I didn’t know how serious the consequences could be when fathers assume the right to do what they choose as head of the house until Dad and Mom were visiting us while we were missionaries in Japan. Dad was eager to climb Mt. Fuji, as he had climbed Mount Whitney, Mount Olympus, and many other mountains. The only day he could do this was the day we moved from Tokyo to Kyoto, but it was a miserable, rainy day. Mom, Nancy, and I pleaded with Dad not to go, but he was adamant and went. He did not arrive in Kyoto on the promised day or the next day. I went to Mt. Fuji to search for him with many of the seminary faculty and students he had been teaching. The lead mountain climber experienced a leg muscle cramp far up the mountain. So the rest of the search party spread out. Only because of that cramp were we able to find Dad’s body.

Living by mutual submission like [Ephesians 5](#) and [1 Peter 3](#) teach would have saved my Dad from death on Mt. Fuji.

Philip B. Payne (Ph.D. The University of Cambridge) has taught New Testament in colleges of the University of Cambridge and has been a Visiting Professor of New Testament at Trinity Evangelical Theological Seminary, Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, Bethel Seminary, and Fuller Theological Seminary. He is well known for seminal articles on the parables of Jesus, women in the teachings of Paul, textual criticism, and Codex Vaticanus. His books include *Man and Woman, One in Christ: An Exegetical and Theological Study of Paul’s Letters*, *Why Can’t Women Do That? Breaking Down the Reasons Churches Put Men in Charge*, and (forthcoming April 4, 2023) *The Bible vs. Biblical Womanhood: How God’s Word Consistently Affirms*

*Gender Equality*. He founded Linguist's Software, which provides fonts and input systems for over 2600 languages, including the fonts used to publish the Nestle-Aland *Novum Testamentum Graece* 28th edition, the UBS *The Greek New Testament*, and *HALOT (The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament)*. He and his wife Nancy were missionaries in Japan. Their three children and six grandchildren all love the Lord.