

The Role of Men and Women in the Church

1 Timothy 2: 9-15

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⁸ I desire then that in every place the men should pray, lifting holy hands without anger or quarreling;

⁹ Likewise also that women should adorn themselves in respectable apparel, with modesty and self-control, not with braided hair and gold or pearls or costly attire, ¹⁰ but with what is proper for women who profess godliness—with good works. ¹¹ Let a woman learn quietly with all submissiveness. ¹² I do not permit a woman to teach or to exercise authority over a man; rather, she is to remain quiet. ¹³ For Adam was formed first, then Eve; ¹⁴ and Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and became a transgressor. ¹⁵ Yet she will be saved through childbearing—if they continue in faith and love and holiness, with self-control.

Do you know that in the first century only about fifty percent of children survived past the age of six? Additionally, girls who made it past age six, could expect to live only through their late twenties or thirties. In the ancient world, the term woman usually meant a female who was married. Women became mothers by their mid-teens and grandmothers by their mid-thirties. Mary, the mother of Jesus was very likely a teen mother in the first century.

According to S.M Baugh, who has studied first century history in Ephesus, there were two reasons for this high mortality rate.

First reason: The ancient diet lacked iron and therefore girls were the hardest hit especially during pregnancy.

Second reason: Women commonly died during or after childbirth.

Thanks to advances in medical science today. Not only has our diet improved but mortality rate is very low. In the United States we have about 5.8 deaths per 1000 live births.

Why are we talking about first century Ephesus? Ephesus is the city that Timothy was ministering in. This is the context of the letter we are studying and preaching and teaching from. And we saw that the purpose of this letter is for Timothy to instruct how one ought to behave in the household of God. Today, we are looking at the passage that Paul instructs regarding the roles of men and women in the church.

Some more context about the Greco-Roman world in the first century. Women were not treated with respect and dignity. Women were dehumanized and exploited women in many ways. Slaves (both male and female) made up a high percentage of the urban population. They lacked any

legal rights or social standing. But not in the first century church, women and men were part of church gatherings.

The men and women who were part of the first century church in Ephesus came from different backgrounds. Ephesus was an urban center where polytheism flourished in its day. There was one religion that dominated the public worship in Ephesus. The worship of the goddess Artemis was the major religion at that time. It is said that the building the temple of Artemis was the largest building in the Greek world in the first century. It was also a huge tourist attraction. And, there in that temple men served as priests and a few women also served as priestesses in the temple of Artemis.

So, last week we saw Paul pleading with Timothy and the church to pray so that we may lead a peaceful and quiet life, with godliness and dignity in every way. And in verse 8, Paul specifically addresses the behavior of men on how to pray. Paul tells men to pray without anger or quarreling. They ought to pray without any disputes. If men are to lead in public prayer but have a divisive and angry attitude or disposition, that prayer dishonors God and does not build up the church. That was verse 8.

Today, we are picking up in verse 9. Here Paul addresses women. He continues his instructions by using the word “likewise” or “in the same way”. This could mean women pray without anger or disputes in every place.

Now, before we look at this passage a few biblical affirmations about men and women. Males and females are distinctively biologically different but equal in dignity, worth and value in the sight of God.

All the way back in the book of Genesis chapter one, “*God created man (human kind) in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them*”. Genesis 1:27

In the Gospel of Matthew and Mark, Jesus affirms this truth. Also, Jesus says that in marriage male and female are one, there are one flesh. There are one in Christ.

“But from the beginning of creation, ‘God made them male and female.’⁷ ‘Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife,⁸ and the two shall become one flesh.’ So they are no longer two but one flesh.⁹ What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate.” Mark 10:6-9

Furthermore, the apostles affirm that men and women are joint heirs in salvation.

“There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. ²⁹ And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise”. Galatians 3:28-29

“Likewise, husbands, live with your wives in an understanding way, showing honor to the woman as the weaker vessel, since they are heirs with you of the grace of life” 1 Peter 3:7

So while unbelieving world looked down on women, the Christian faith saw men and women in the light of how God sees them – as made in the image of God. Male and female.

Also, modern day movements like feminism may have some things true about the oppressive and violent nature of men. Therefore, the movement. But by and large feminism is unbiblical. The question I would ask, “Do the husband and wife pray together? Does the husband love and does the wife respect?”. Growing up, I regularly saw my father and mother praying together.

So, if men and women are equal in worth, dignity value and they are joint heirs in salvation, what is Paul taking about here in this passage?

Paul is instructing Timothy about the roles of men and women in the church.

Now, some may push back saying Paul is only addressing the culture of his day. Therefore, his instructions do not apply to us today. To that I ask which instructions? Some instructions that are not popular today, those that you may not like or all of them?

Here are three words that may be helpful as we look at Paul’s instructions or any other instruction in the Bible.

Command, Culture and Context.

With that lets look Paul’s three instructions to Timothy for women in the church.

Verse 9 and 10.

⁹ Likewise also that women should adorn themselves in respectable apparel, with modesty and self-control, not with braided hair and gold or pearls or costly attire, ¹⁰ but with what is proper for women who profess godliness—with good works.

Paul is referring to the how women ought to conduct themselves when there is public worship or public church meetings. How do we know this? In verse 8, Paul says men to pray in “every place”. “Every place” is very likely a general term for church meetings. And, Paul, begins verse

9 with the “likewise”. So you could say “likewise in every place” the women are to conduct themselves a certain way.

So, if the issue that came to Paul’s attention was that men were praying by being angry and being quarrelsome, the issue with women was that they were not respectable in their clothing choices, they lacked self-control and some were extravagant in their display of external adorning. All these, Paul says are not proper for women who profess godliness.

Again, Paul has the Spirit led insight and apostolic authority into each issue. Both men and women are called to live life in a godly and dignified in every way. How? For men Paul says to pray or worship without anger and a contentious attitude. For women, to dress in a way that suitable and modest. The adorning should be godliness with “good works” rather than spending time in the excesses of gold, pearls and clothing.

Second instruction:

¹¹ Let a woman learn quietly with all submissiveness.

This is actually a command from Paul. The verse could also be translated ‘A woman *must* learn’. What does Paul mean? Paul means what he says. Let me unpack a little bit.

If you remember a few years, there was a girl in Afghanistan who wanted to go to school and was shot by the Taliban for her desire to learn.

Here, Paul is encouraging and commending the women to learn and giving the “how to” for women to learn.

And how are they to learn - Quietly and with submissiveness. How are we to understand these two words? *Quietly* with all *submissiveness*.

Quietly does not mean absolute silence. It means the disposition that is pleasing to God in what is being taught. *Submissiveness* means recognizing that those teaching (pastors, elders and teachers) are those who have the responsibility of leading the church. The apostle Peter tells in 1 Peter 3 that such an attitude is pleasing in the sight of God.

And Paul does not say men shouldn’t learn without submissiveness but he is addressing an issue about women teaching in the church. Because, on one hand, Paul encourages women to learn but on the other hand, women could keep learning and come to the conclusion to say, “I want to a teacher and preacher too”. Surely, in the secular world, there are many wonderful teachers. I have had more women school teachers than men. My grandmother was a teacher, my mother was my teacher at home and was a college level teacher.

But in the public church meeting, Paul says the teaching and preaching role is *not* for women. He does not prohibit all forms of teaching but some teaching.

So Paul gives the third instruction: (verse 12).

¹² I do not permit a woman to teach or to exercise authority over a man; rather, she is to remain quiet.

In verse 12, Paul does not say women are never to teach in church life to anyone. What Paul means is that in the household of God, in the church, in every place (which is very likely the public worship, not in the home), the women are not to teach or exercise authority. That role belongs to a man.

So, in what context can women teach? Women must teach to younger women and children.

“Older women likewise are to be reverent in behavior, not slanderers or slaves to much wine. They are to teach what is good, ⁴ and so train the young women to love their husbands and children, ⁵ to be self-controlled, pure, working at home, kind, and submissive to their own husbands”. Titus 2:3-5

You see, again, family is where godliness, dignity, self-control is modeled. And when that happens well, it extends to the church.

So here in verse 12, what does Paul prohibit? The role of authoritative teaching in public worship services. That is limited to men. We will see more on that in chapter three. He does not mean that women must never ask or suggest or even instruction in a non-public setting. My dear wife reminds me many times at home of some wonderful scriptures. Now, this passage also does not mean men can use this against wives to put them down.

Now, verse 12, *I do not permit a woman to teach or to exercise authority over a man.* These two phrases mean more or less the same thing. Paul instructs Timothy to see to it that women do not usurp authority of the teaching role. They must, however, learn keep learning and teach in some contexts just not in a public worship service. Now, how do we know this instruction is not limited to Ephesus only and extends to churches even today?

Well, we saw 1 Timothy 3:15 already. *“That you know how one ought to conduct themselves in the household of God”.*

Also, in 1 Corinthians 14, in a different church, men and women were causing quite some confusion. There Paul says, *“As in all the churches of the saints, ³⁴ 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”. “..the things I am writing to you are a command of the Lord” 1 Corinthians 14:33-34, 37

You may be hearing all these injunctions, limitations and prohibitions on women and thinking. Why does Paul do this? Is he prejudiced against women? Is he promoting what we call chauvinism?

Well, Paul gives his reason for his instructions. Before we look the reason, we must remind ourselves that Paul in this letter tells Timothy that some men not women are the false teachers and he needs them to stop. And out of those false teachers Paul singles out two men - Hymenaeus and Alexander. He has handed them over to Satan that they may not blaspheme. So Paul could have said that all these men are spreading false doctrine in the church, lets entrust the whole teaching duty to women. And Paul had wonderful Gospel partners who were women. He lists many of them in Romans 16. Paul doesn't do that because he is faithful with what God has entrusted to him.

Now, let's look at Paul's reason. Verse 13 and 14.

¹³ For Adam was formed first, then Eve; ¹⁴ and Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and became a transgressor.

As I was studying this passage, you know what I learned? It is said that there was a myth floating during those days that man was born out of a woman. Whether the Christians in Ephesus believed this myth or not is not known but Paul's wants to kill two birds with one shot.

The reason for his prohibition of women for teaching role is not cultural but creation and sin. So he tells Timothy that way back in Genesis, God made Adam *first* then Eve. But then the tragic fall of humanity happened. How? Eve was deceived and violated God's command. She became a transgressor. Eve should have trusted Adam when the serpent tempted Eve. But Adam failed too miserably. He failed to uphold the command of God and protect his wife. So Adam became a co-transgressor.

What did God say to Adam and Eve when they violated his command?

And to Adam he said,

“Because you have listened to the voice of your wife and have eaten of the tree of which I commanded you, ‘You shall not eat of it,’ cursed is the ground because of you; in pain you shall eat of it all the days of your life; ¹⁸ thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you; and you shall eat the plants of the field. ¹⁹ By the sweat of your face you shall eat bread, till you

return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; for you are dust, and to dust you shall return.”
Genesis 3:17-19

“¹⁶ To the woman he said, “I will surely multiply your pain in childbearing; in pain you shall bring forth children. Your desire shall be contrary to your husband, but he shall rule over you.”
Genesis 3:16

I began my message that child birth was painful and very traumatizing in this first century. You know that is not the last word for women. Paul says there is hope. Wonderful hope for men and women. Specifically, women.

Look at verse 15.

¹⁵ Yet she will be saved through childbearing—if they continue in faith and love and holiness, with self-control.

Another way to translate this verse could be women will be saved inspite of child birth. Paul says women need not be afraid of losing their life because of childbirth. Women have this wonderful privilege that men don’t and will never have. The role of becoming the carriers of the handiwork of God in their wombs. And then nurturing them when they deliver babies. Those babies will become men and women. A pastor said that mothers have a depth of intimacy with their children that men can never have. This is the mother’s legacy – to continue in faith and love and holiness and self-control. And for those women who cannot be mothers – they will be saved the same way - in faith and love and holiness and self-control.

Women deserve the honor, respect and the value God ascribes to them in how he made them. Women learn and nurture. Only qualified men teach in the church. That is God’s order and command.

----- Discipleship Questions -----

MESSAGE SUMMARY: **Role of Men and Women in the Church.** 1 Timothy 2:8-15

HEAD: These questions help you examine the truth of God's Word.

1. What are Paul's instructions for men and women in the church in this passage? 1 Timothy 2:8-9, 11-12, Titus 2: 2-6

HEART: These questions help you wrestle with what you believe.

2. Are Paul's instructions for churches today or only for the church where Timothy ministered or for the first century church? 1 Timothy 2:8, 3:14-15, 1 Corinthians 14: 33-34
3. What hope does Paul give for women to continue in? 1 Timothy 2:15

HANDS/HABITS: These questions help you bring the truth into your everyday life and develop behaviors that change your habits.

4. For personal reflection: What is God convicting you of and to believe in light of this message?