

GUARDIANS OF THE MINISTRY

1ST TIMOTHY 2:8-15

Notes on

1 Timothy 2:8-15

How one reads this highly controversial text depends in large measure upon one's prior commitment to a view of men and women in the church that affirms equal access to teaching and leadership roles ("egalitarian") or one that affirms that such roles are for men only ("complementarian"). Over the years, through the witness of trusted Christian teachers and my own reading of the entirety of God's Word, I have come to see the "egalitarian" view as the one most faithful to God's intentions for His Church (see back page & attached paper). So, I believe that *context* is an extremely important aspect of this passage in 1 Timothy for us to consider as we set about the task of interpreting what Paul is saying to his younger colleague here. Many sincere interpreters would lift this passage out of its context, read it as a timeless expression of God's unchanging and transcendent will and design for men, women and His church, and insist that others do the same. Others, like me, see it more as immediate instructions for particular circumstances as they notice its immediate literary context (instructions about propriety in worship in the Ephesian church), remember its broader location in a particular letter (written primarily to combat false teachings), and consider its instructions in light of all we read in the rest of God's Word. In the rest of God's Word we find the concept of "headship" consistently attached to men/husbands and not to women/wives but we also find Jesus Christ as the supreme model of this "headship," and He died for those He is "head" over, and He shares what is His with others. We also find women on occasion filling leadership and teaching roles among God's people.

v. 8 - pray, lifting holy hands without anger or quarreling... Paul has just spoken of the universal nature of prayer as a vital part of authentic worship in Christ's church. Now he shifts to a focus on propriety in worship, and first he says our prayer in worship is to be *holy* (the key word in this verse!), pure, set apart, uncontaminated by our social or ideological agendas. Prayer must never be a weapon used in our political battles for personal power in Christ's church. Standing with hands lifted up was, according to Roman artwork of the time, the typical posture for prayer in the 1st century...

⁸I desire then that in every place the men should pray, lifting holy hands without anger or quarreling; ⁹likewise 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, ¹⁰but with what is proper for women who profess godliness—with good works. ¹¹Let a woman learn quietly with all submissiveness. ¹²I do not permit a woman to teach or to exercise authority over a man; rather, she is to remain quiet. ¹³For Adam was formed first, then Eve; ¹⁴and Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and became a transgressor. ¹⁵Yet she will be saved through childbearing—if they continue in faith & love & holiness, with self-control. - 1 Tim. 2:8-15

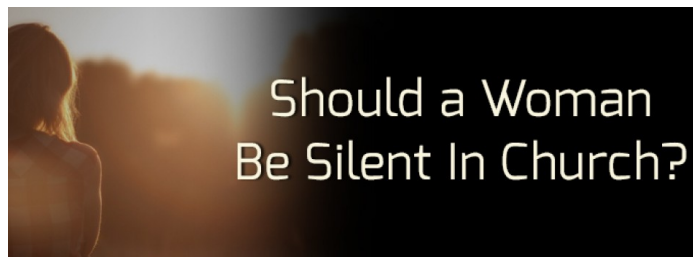
vv. 9-15 - ...Paul now considers the proper role of women in worship in the Ephesian church where heretical teachings were threatening its very existence...

vv. 9-10 - adorn themselves... not with braided hair and gold... but with... good works... The universal principle commanded here is that of appropriate modesty and humility before God and one another in worship. This principle is translated into cultures in ways that shift from one to another ("braided hair" and jewelry containing any gold in it would mean different things in different cultures)... The point is that women in church should not dress in a way that would be interpreted by others in their culture as suggesting loose morals or marital unfaithfulness. The idea here is "to protect women from the enticements of the false teachers (see 4:1-3 & 6:3-10) and the temptations of sexual infidelity within Greco-Roman

culture to which the false teaching could lead. Thus, 2:9-10 is part of Paul's specific response to the false teaching in Ephesus that had been directed especially at women who had been made vulnerable by their treatment as inferior or marginal in their society" (fr. A.

Mickelsen, *Women, Authority & The Bible*, IVP).

vv. 11-12 - Immodesty, then, seems to have been one of the practical threats that came with the anti-Gospel teachings of Paul's opponents in Ephesus. Another was what could be called the problem of aggressive assertion... **I do not permit...** this could also be translated "I am not allowing," and it is reasonable to believe Paul is focusing on the specific situation in the Ephesian church when compared to what he says in places like Romans 16:1-3 (about Phoebe & Priscilla) and Philippians 4:2-3 (about his partners in the gospel Euodia & Syntyche). Women,



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perhaps because of their newfound freedom in Christ, so different from the highly patriarchal Hebrew culture they were used to, were perhaps complicit in some of the false teaching. So Paul tells them to quiet down, listen and learn before asserting themselves as authoritative teachers... **to teach or to exercise authority**... the question here is whether this is two prohibitions (*women are not to teach and not to have authority over men*) or one prohibition in two parts (*women are not to teach men in a domineering way*). The key word here is the Greek conjunction “*oude*” (“and/or”). Everywhere else in his letters when Paul uses this word in this kind of sentence, he is presenting a “single, coherent idea, so it seems likely that what he is prohibiting here is women teaching in a domineering way” (Richard Peace, *1 & 2 Timothy*, p. 23). “Authority” (*authentain*) is also an odd Greek word used only here in all the New Testament. It conveys the idea of “domineering” or “pushing one’s own way.” If Paul’s concern here was women exercising authority in a normal sort of way, he probably would have used a more familiar word... **she is to remain quiet**... Just as Paul began his letter by urging Timothy to “*charge certain persons not to teach*” (1:3), in other words—to silence the false teachers, so Paul urges the offending women in Ephesus to stop with their pushy proclamation of teachings that put them on a collision course with the truth of God’s word.

vv. 13-14 - Adam was formed first, then Eve... Paul points back to the Biblical story of Creation... He may be

countering some kind of 1st century feminist/earth-goddess heresy that asserted the primacy of females over males as their source of life & wisdom that was part of the Ephesian heresy (plausible considering the region’s infatuation with female deities like Artemis — see Acts 19!) ... In any case, he seems to be emphasizing that these women in the Ephesian church, by following and propagating such false teachings, are being deceived as Eve was before them...

v. 15 - ...saved through childbearing... Concerning this very difficult verse, the early church fathers believed and taught that this was a somewhat poetic reference to *the* Childbearing, done once-and-for-all by the Virgin Mary when she gave birth to Jesus our Savior, the Son of God Incarnate. It also gives divine value and dignity to the “normal” processes of human life... marriage, childbirth, child-raising, etc....which the heretical teachers were likely denigrating (see 4:3). Women throughout the history of God’s people, continued to honor God by living “ordinary” lives of domestic faithfulness. Children were born. Generation after generation after generation. And then, at just the right time, as part of this process, *the* Child was born. This interpretation makes the most sense especially in light of the linking of childbearing and salvation. Jesus is the “seed” through whom Satan would be defeated (see Genesis 3:15) and the effects of the Fall would be overcome. Nowhere does Paul ever suggest that anyone is saved through any agency other than Christ.

Read & Reflect - 2:8-15

First Reading: Which of these punctuation marks would you put over this passage? [! ? : ; , . “ ”] Why?

Search & Consider

2:8 - When is a good time for prayer? Where is a good place? What does not go well with prayer? Why is this written to “men”?

2:9 - What does it mean to dress respectfully and modestly? How might this change from one culture to another? Does the principle change from one culture to another? Why do you think these things are written to “women”?

2:10 - In what is a Christian woman best adorned for worship? What does this mean to you?

2:11 - From the background of a highly patriarchal Jewish culture, why might it be significant that a woman is called to “learn” in this passage? What is to be her attitude in this learning endeavor? Is this different than it would be for a male student?

2:12 - What does Paul say women should not do? Do you see this prohibition as permanent/universal or temporary/circumstantial? Why?

2:13-15 - Why do you suppose Paul uses the story of Adam & Eve at this point in his letter? How do you believe Eve/women are “saved through childbearing”?

Apply

1. Our church, like many others, allows women to serve as deacons/elders/pastors. Do you believe this is the right thing to do? How does what Paul says here support or challenge your answer?

2. How would you respond to someone who said we are not following God’s Word, the Bible, as we elect women to serve as deacons, elders and pastors and pointed to this passage from 1 Timothy in support of his/her criticism?

For Small Group Discussion - 1 Timothy 2:8-15

A. **OPENER...** “In essentials, unity. In non-essentials, liberty? In all things, charity.” This is the motto of our Evangelical Presbyterian Church denomination. What do you see as this motto’s chief strengths and weaknesses?

B. **1 TIMOTHY 2:8-15...** Share your Personal Study Guide answers above... As time permits, you may also want to focus on these questions...

1. Is the role of women an important issue in the life of any given church?

2. Is the role women are allowed to play (affirming an “egalitarian” or “complementarian” view) an essential element of an authentic church? Why/Why not?

A FINAL THOUGHT... What does this say about how we should relate to churches that operate according to a view differing from ours?

Teaching the Word of God A Back Page Thought from Pastor Jay

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One Day Pastor Jay Received an E-mail...

Hello Jay: Thank you for talking the time to talk to my wife and I this morning after the morning service. We certainly felt at home visiting with you all this morning. The Spirit of God certainly testified to the work of the Lord within the body there. Our only misgiving was that you have female elders and have had a female pastor. I'm not sure that I can get around that, seeing that I truly believe in Sola Scriptura. How do you get around what seems to be a contradiction of the Word? Anyway let me know where I'm going wrong. We'll pray on going back, I was very hopeful as well as my wife.

Dear Friend -

Thanks for your note... I too enjoyed getting to know you a little bit last Sunday... I certainly understand your misgivings on Biblical grounds regarding females in leadership positions. I have some resources that I can pass on to you, if you can come by the office here some time. To offer just a brief response to your deep question...

I also truly believe in Sola Scriptura (The Holy Scriptures alone are our final authority concerning what we believe and how we live). Whatever arguments we make must be Biblical. We must be trying to interpret with integrity what is in the Word rather than trying to impress our own preferences and desires upon it. Thus, I am not comfortable with the notion that what I or you need to do, or are trying to do, is to "get around" what the Bible says. I want to get "into" what the Bible says.

As I mentioned before, I believe the Bible clearly teaches the concept of male "headship." Ultimately, this means that men and women are not the same. And they are not the same in how they are to relate to one another (Though they both fall under the command to "submit to one another out of reverence for Christ"—see Ephesians 5:21). God has placed a different sort of responsibility, a greater responsibility, upon males to protect and care for and love females. The model for this is Jesus and His church. What did He do for His "bride?" He gave up his life for her. That's what men are called to do in their headship role in relationship to women.

The question for me is whether this "headship" role rightly, properly, Biblically extends to a ban against women exercising leadership roles -- teaching, administrating, prophesying, etc. -- in relationship to men in the Church.

Paul says: *A woman should learn in quietness and full submission. I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man; she must be silent.* - 1 Timothy 2:11-12. And *every woman who prays or prophesies with her head uncovered dishonors her head — it is just as though her head were shaved.* - 1 Corinthians 11:5. Two issues are raised (which make this women-in-ministry issue seem much less than air-tight either way -- maybe there are issues God cares more about than whether we allow or forbid women to teach or lead or be pastors or be elders)... 1. How can Paul mean that a woman must be silent, period, in relationship to men, in church, etc. and then say that when she prophesies her head must be covered (how does a woman prophesy without making noise?). 2. Why don't we insist today that women keep hats on at all times because that is what God wants (could this be an example of how an important and godly principle -- like modesty or submission in Christ -- is translated into a particular culture at a particular time? And then is it possible that women's roles in the life of a church family could be like this too?)

And here are some women who apparently had some kind of speaking/teaching ministry among the whole church early on... *Leaving the next day, we reached Caesarea and stayed at the house of Philip the evangelist, one of the Seven. He had four unmarried daughters who prophesied.* - Acts 21:8-9

When Paul speaks against women speaking or leading in church, is he pointing us to a hard and fast rule that is part of the fabric of creation and a necessary component in proper church structure? Or is he responding to a reality that is part of his day and time... We must remember that 1 Timothy was written in response to the threat of false teachers in the church in Ephesus... Are women, with new found freedom in Christ, trying to push some sort of 1st-century feminist agenda, violating principles of mutual submission, humility, Christ-like servant-heartedness...? Are they pushing against a tolerable but imperfect Hebrew patriarchy (which no Christians I know adhere to today) too hard and too fast, violating important principles to gain ground in less important ways?... Is what Paul says in 1 Timothy and 1 Corinthians *descriptive* (His response to a contemporary conflict between biblical norms and cultural realities and human behaviors) or *prescriptive* (His reaffirmation of God's law regarding God's limits on what a woman is allowed to do in His Church).

To affirm the former is an uncomfortable thing to do. What Paul says seems to be so clear and so unequivocal. And all of this stuff about "1st-century feminism" etc. is highly conjectural. To affirm the latter is also uncomfortable, I think. If women are supposed to be silent and never lead, why doesn't God (and even Paul) demonstrate a consistent approach to this fundamental principle. Why is there a Prophetess/Judge in Israel named Deborah? Why were the disciples first told (presumably through speech) about Jesus' resurrection by women? Why does Paul list females among his colleagues and co-workers and seem to indicate that they have some kind of authority? Why were Philip's daughters prophetesses (If men wrote the Bible they must have heard of their ministry which must have involved speaking... so did these women "teach" men in violation of God's gender-limitation-in-church principle?)

Saying "Yes" to women in leadership/teaching may be an accommodation to culture and a violation of God's will because we want to be nice and open to new ideas. Saying "No" to women in leadership/teaching may be just the same because we want to preserve an un-Biblical and un-Christ-like sense of male domination over females in our beloved churches.

How can we choose which way to go?... Keep our noses in God's Word and our hearts submissive to His authority over us.

For me, what tips me toward allowing a female to be a pastor is Jesus' model of "servant-leadership." Leaders in the church are not "over" everybody else but "under" them. The problem with forbidding females to use their gifts in any given role in the church just because they are females, is that it assumes that those roles are inherently "above/higher/better/more important/privileged/ special/honored/etc." and I think this misses the point of authentic Christian leadership. Jesus came to love and to serve. He is the model. God didn't seem to balk at women in leadership - like Deborah and Priscilla (even though this isn't the norm, given His design for the human family where men usually are going to be the leaders -- because of how God has made them and not because of their rules and regulations). Jesus said those who would be great should be the servant of all. I think that is an unchanging, non-culturally conditioned principle. Should we really have a problem with a woman following that call into forms of servant-leadership or servant-teaching in God's church?

I have great respect for my brothers and sisters who lean the other way on this. I believe they do so for very good reasons and with sound interpretive principles and genuine love for God behind them. I would hope that they could also affirm these things for me and agree that this is an issue that we can in fact agree to disagree about across denominational or church congregation lines with mutual respect and love.

Please know you are welcome and encouraged to discuss this further with me. I hope my thoughts have stimulated yours toward deeper thinking and greater love and faithfulness to Jesus as your thoughts have done for me.

- Yours in Christ, Pastor Jay Hull