

Gender Roles in the Church

1 TIMOTHY 2:8-15

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This morning, we return to our series of lessons from the book of 1 Timothy, a letter written by the apostle Paul to the young preacher serving the church in Ephesus. As we have noted before, 1 Timothy is something of a guide as to how to manage a congregation (at least that is how we might summarize it today). We have something of a purpose statement in 1 Timothy 3:14-15, where Paul says, ***“I am writing these things to you, hoping to come to you before long; but in case I am delayed, I write so that you will know how one ought to conduct himself in the household of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and support of the truth.”*** We are looking, then, at some inspired advice concerning how we as God’s people need to conduct ourselves as a part of his church.

Today, we move into 1 Timothy 2:8-15 and into a discussion concerning the special roles that are to be filled by men and women in the spiritual life of the congregation. This has obviously been a point of some controversy in the religious world for many years, but it is extremely important. We have some guests with us this morning, and our hope today is that you will appreciate going with us to the word of God as we always try to do, whenever we are faced with any spiritual question. Our goal is to take God’s word and to apply it to our congregation and to our own lives. We want to adjust our lives to fit his word, not the other way around. As we study, we would invite you to be thinking of any special questions or concerns you might have, and we would welcome your feedback. You can use a card from the pews, or you can email or text me using my contact information, which is on the wall up here, and which can also be found on the front of the bulletin.

As we usually do, let us begin with the text itself (p. 1855) - 1 Timothy 2:8-15,

⁸ Therefore I want the men in every place to pray, lifting up holy hands, without wrath and dissension. ⁹ Likewise, I want women to adorn themselves with proper clothing, modestly and discreetly, not with braided hair and gold or pearls or costly garments, ¹⁰ but rather by means of good works, as is proper for women making a claim to godliness. ¹¹ A woman must quietly receive instruction with entire submissiveness. ¹² But I do not allow a woman to teach or exercise authority over a man, but to remain quiet. ¹³ For it was Adam who was first created, and then Eve. ¹⁴ And it was not Adam who was deceived, but the woman being deceived, fell into transgression. ¹⁵ But women will be preserved through the bearing of children if they continue in faith and love and sanctity with self-restraint.

This morning, as we move through 1 Timothy, I'd like for us to look at Paul's inspired words - first, for men, and then, for women.

I. But we start with the **MEN**.

And as we notice in verse 8, and if we think back to some of what we've learned from the previous verses over the past few weeks, it should be obvious to us that Paul, in a very specific way, changes the words he uses with regard to either referring to people (in general) or to men or women (more specifically). And again, translations vary on how they handle this, but I want us to look back at verse 1 as Paul urges that various prayers be made on behalf of **"all men."** The word he uses here is a generic word (gender neutral), referring to **"all people,"** or **"everyone."** As we noted a week or two ago, the word he uses is the basis of our English word "anthropology." Anthropology, of course, is not the study of "males" (in particular), but it is the study of "human beings," the "human race." We are to pray for **"everyone."** Again, I'm not sure how your translation handles this, but as the human language continues to evolve, I hope that more translations will make this distinction. By the way, as I was getting ready to teach class this past Wednesday, I walked past one of our young men, and I happened to notice that he had a Greek-Hebrew interlinear open on his phone; and that is awesome! If you do that, then you can very easily see what I'm talking about here. Or, if you are using an app with a Greek-Hebrew dictionary behind it, you can usually tap on the word in English, and the Greek or Hebrew equivalent will pop up in a little window. That also makes it very obvious. So, in verse 1, we are to pray for **"all people"** - not just for males, but for **"everyone."** But as we continue on, we notice in verse 4, how Paul says that God **"desires all men to be saved."** And again, Paul once uses a gender-neutral word there - God wants **"everyone"** to be saved, not just men, but men and women - all people. In verse 5, he explains that that Jesus is the **"one mediator between God and men."** Again, he's not referring to males in particular, but Jesus is the go-between between God and all people, the human race, everyone. Toward the end of verse 5, Paul refers to **"the man Christ Jesus."** And again, he uses the same word. The emphasis isn't on Jesus being a male as opposed to a female, but the emphasis is on the fact that Jesus is human being. So we have this word for human beings used four times, and then, when we get to verse 8, suddenly, Paul uses a different word. He could have said that **"people"** in every place should pray, but he doesn't. Instead, he very specifically says that he wants **"the MEN (the MALES) in every place to pray."** This is in contrast to what comes next (in verse 9) as he addresses the **"women."** So, we have **"people," "people," "people," "people,"** and then **"men"** and **"women."** We have separate instructions, then, for the men and for the women. And in this context, as Paul makes a distinction between the two, he wants the men to pray.

We need to ask, then, in what sense should men be praying in a way that women are NOT told to pray? Or maybe a better question would be: Are women not allowed to pray? Are women not allowed to pray? Obviously, that is not what this passage is teaching. Of course, women are supposed to be praying. And yet there must be some kind of praying where men have a special responsibility. And when we make a contrast between this and what comes next, it seems that Paul is referring to leading prayers in some kind of public setting, **"in every place,"** as he says. In the context of prayer, when we pray together in some kind of group, in some kind of religious setting, in a place where prayers are offered, it seems that men have a special responsibility.

On a somewhat related note, I would also point out that the context of these comments is PRAYER. And we will get to the women in just a bit, but as he distinguishes roles, Paul is not referring to the secular or business world. I think back to the handful of jobs I had before full-time preaching. I didn't even think about it at the time, but years later it hit me: In every job I had before going into preaching, all of my supervisors were

women. My first job involved weeding around tiny trees on a Christmas tree farm. My supervisor was a woman. My next job was working as a photographer for a newspaper in the Chicago area. My editor was a woman. And then, at Freed-Hardeman University, I worked as a photographer and darkroom technician for the Office of Public Information. The head of that office was a godly woman, married to an elder in the Lord's church. And all three of those jobs were great experiences. Some, though, try to apply these passages in the secular world. Years ago, we had a guy at camp who heard the camp cook, a woman, come out of the kitchen and ask everybody to make sure to scrape their trays. He pulled me aside to complain that since we were all Christians, this woman had just preached to the church. I thought he was joking, but he wasn't. I probably could have handled this better, but this is what came out - I said, "Brother, you have lost your mind!" During a week in the woods with 60 kids, I cannot handle that kind of drama! But my point here is: These comments are dealing with prayer and religious instruction. Remember: 1 Timothy is a letter about how to conduct ourselves **"in the church."** We aren't talking about secular matters here. But this crazy guy thought that he didn't need to listen to a woman at any point in his life. I remember praying in my way home, "Dear God, please send a female state trooper to pull this man over!" I really wanted to see what might happen.

But back to the men: We have a special responsibility to lead in prayer, but he doesn't leave it there, does he? He adds that as men, when we pray, we are to be **"...lifting up holy hands, without wrath and dissension."** From time to time, we have discussed various postures we might take in prayer - and it seems we have some options, we have some freedom - in scripture, sometimes people stood to pray, sometimes they knelt down, sometimes they bowed their heads, sometimes they laid out flat on the ground, and here we have a reference to **"lifting up holy hands."** And it seems to me that the emphasis is not necessarily on the position of our hands, but on holiness. After all, you might remember that in a prayer specifically described as being pleasing to God, we have the tax collector, who in Luke 18:13-14 is described as **"beating his breast."** In these arguments about what position we take when we pray, I don't think I've heard anyone argue that we need to beat ourselves in the chest, and yet that is one Biblical option for the prayers that we offer. I remember reading about a group of preachers debating what position was best for prayer, and as they argued for standing, or kneeling, or whatever, the telephone repair guy happened to walk by, and he said, "My most fervent prayer to God happened one day at work when I lost my grip on the telephone pole and found myself suspended upside down by one ankle, dangling 30 feet in the air." So, he recommended the hanging-upside-down-by-one-leg method of prayer. But the point of all of this is: As men, if we lead a group in prayer, our hands had better be holy! The emphasis is not on what we do with our hands as we pray. I might compare this to the passages that refer to the **"holy kiss."** There are many ways we might choose to greet each other in the church, but if we choose the kiss, it had better be holy! The emphasis is on the holiness, not on the form of greeting. So, these are some instructions for the men: Take on a leadership role in prayer, and when you do, make sure that your life is holy, that you are not full of wrath and dissension. If you will be leading people in worship, make sure you are not a jerk during the week. So, there is an emphasis on behavior. As men, we might lead in worship, but we need to be looking at our personal lives. I am so thankful that the men have started meeting together before worship for the purpose of prayer. For years, I thought this would be a waste of time, so I hesitated to start it. But I'm so glad we did. There is a huge value to getting together before worship, asking God to bless us, asking for God's forgiveness, making sure we are focused, before we lead the church in worship. And that seems to be what Paul is addressing here. As men, we are to lead prayer with **"holy hands, without wrath or dissension."**

II. We continue with some words for the WOMEN (in verses 9-15).

And in the second part of this passage, we have several instructions, starting with the reminder that women are to clothe themselves modestly and discreetly. Of course, when we think about “modesty” today, what are we usually talking about? Usually, we are warned about the danger of not having ENOUGH clothing. Usually, we think of “modesty” in terms of thinking that everything that needs to be covered is covered. But is that what Paul is concerned about here? Unless I have missed something, it seems to me that the warning in this passage is against wearing TOO MUCH clothing, or we might say, the wrong kind of clothing. Apparently, the custom in Ephesus at the time was for the women to go all out. They were dressing to impress. They would weave strands of gold in their hair, they would go all out to be noticed. In Ephesus, the women would go to the temple of Artemis all decked out in their finest clothing as sacred priestesses. They came to be seen. They came to be noticed. We might think of the “priestesses” in our culture today. I think of the Academy Awards or one of those huge get-togethers. As a child of the 80’s, I think of some of Madonna’s outfits. Pretty much nothing shocks us these days. And the message seems to be: When you get together for prayer, tone it down a bit! Don’t be coming to worship dressed like you might be dressed to go to the temple. Instead of being known for your fancy clothing, and braided hair, and gold jewelry, a Christian woman should instead be known for her good works. Years ago, I visited a large congregation in the Nashville area, and I remember shaking a woman’s hand and actually getting cut on her gold ring. The stone and the setting on her ring was so huge that it cut me! I looked down and I was bleeding. I think of her when I read this passage. When we interact with a Christian woman, we shouldn’t be in fear of our own safety due to the size of her jewelry, but we should notice who she is and what she does. She needs to stand out, not for her clothing, not for her hair, not for her gold, but for her good works. Instead of being known as the woman with the huge gold ring, be known as the woman who helps the poor. Instead of being known as that woman with the amazing hair or dress, or whatever, be known as the woman who makes a claim to godliness. Be that woman who wants to “be Jesus.” Years ago (it might have been my sister, I’m not sure), but one of the young women in Crystal Lake (as I remember it) started getting ready for the prom, and as they looked into it, they realized the expense involved - tickets to the event, the clothing, the flowers, the before and after events, and so on, and she and whoever she was going with decided to skip it and to use what they would have spent to go help the homeless. And as I remember it, they took the \$500 (or whatever it was) to take the commuter train downtown Chicago and to help feed the homeless on the streets of that city. That is what Paul is talking about here! So, that is the first part of this. Godly women are to dress modestly and discreetly, being noticed not for what they wear, but for who they are.

The second part of this is that Christian women are to learn (in a religious setting) with a quiet and submissive spirit. And there is so much that we could say about this, but just the fact that Paul says that women should “*receive instruction*” is a revolutionary statement of its own. Some rabbis back then considered it a waste of time to teach a woman. And we see this in the world today as young women in some cultures throughout the Middle East can be dragged out of their homes and killed just for learning, just for going to school, just for learning to read.

So, Paul wants women to “*receive instruction*,” but he also says that this learning is to take place “*quietly*” and with “*entire submissiveness*.” As we get into this, I want us to notice that one of the words Paul uses here is the same word he uses back up in verse 2 with reference to all of us. Remember: We want to live “*tranquil and quiet lives in all godliness and dignity*.” The word “*quiet*” is the same in both verses. So, before we get too excited over the “*quiet*” part of this, let’s remember that this is not a new concept and that it applies equally to both men and women in other passages. The same word is also used in 2 Thessalonians 3:12 where

those who are lazy are commanded to get jobs, so that they can ***“work in QUIET fashion and eat their own bread.”*** Not that they can never utter a word on the job, but they are to work ***“quietly,”*** they are to be calm and respectful on the job so they can earn a living. So, in 1 Timothy 2:12 at least, the demand is not for absolute silence when it comes to learning scripture, but Paul is asking the women of the congregation in Ephesus to learn with a calm and quiet spirit - calm, as opposed to being perhaps agitated or argumentative with the teacher.

This passage is why the women of the congregation are encouraged to make comments and to speak up in our Bible classes. Some of our women might not like making comments in class, and that is fine. Speaking for myself as a teacher, I will not call on you and put you on the spot (I try not to do that with anybody), but the scriptures certainly allow women to be deeply involved in the learning process, even making comments and asking questions, as long as it takes place with a quiet and submissive spirit.

In verse 12, we come to a part of this that completely flies in the face of modern culture, as Paul gives a two-part restriction, that in a religious setting women are not to either teach over or exercise authority over a man. As I understand the grammar of verse 12, we have two activities that are both modified by the phrase ***“over a man.”*** So, it’s not that women cannot teach, and it’s not that women cannot exercise authority in any way, but these two things are not to be done ***“over a man”*** in spiritual matters. I do need to point out a rather unfortunate translation that has led to some confusion. The King James Version has Paul saying that he doesn’t allow a woman to ***“usurp authority”*** over the man. I don’t use the word ***“usurp”*** in my everyday life, but some have seen the issue here as women somehow ***“taking”*** authority away from the man. Some have tried to reason, then, that if we simply give women permission to teach, or preach, or whatever, then we have somehow found a loophole. And so the idea might be, ***“We have women preaching here at this church, but it is okay, because we allow it.”*** However, there is nothing in the actual text that implies a taking of authority by force. So, Paul is not calling for this authority to be delegated.

On a somewhat related note, I have observed that there are more men who abandon their responsibility to lead than there are women who forcibly take that authority away. That doesn’t excuse anything, but it’s a reminder to the men: We need to be doing what Paul tells us to do here. We need to be leading in prayer, and we need to be pure and holy in our personal lives.

As we look at verses 13-14, I want us to notice the reason for these roles. But before we look again at what Paul said here, I’ll share just some of the reasons I’ve heard for dismissing this passage. I’ve heard people argue that these restrictions are merely cultural, that the situation in Ephesus was different than the situation here in Madison nearly 2000 years later; therefore, these words no longer apply. I’ve heard people argue that the women in Ephesus were ignorant, and that Paul makes these comments because the men were more highly educated; therefore, these words no longer apply. I’ve heard that the men outnumbered the women back then, and now that the situation is reversed, Paul’s words no longer apply. However, I want us to notice that Paul gives us a reason, doesn’t he! In verses 13-14, Paul explains that the special roles for men and women in the church are TIED TO CREATION. In other words, these roles are not tied to the culture in Ephesus, they are not tied to the ignorance of the women in Ephesus, they are not tied to whether the women of Ephesus were educated or talented, but the roles are tied to creation, to a time when there was no culture.

And there are two parts of this, starting with the order of creation (the fact that God created Adam first, and then Eve). And part of this seems to be the fact that Adam was given the responsibility of teaching his wife the word of God. I’m not sure whether we’ve thought about that, but in Genesis 2:16, God tells Adam that he can

eat from any tree in the garden except the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. God then creates woman. How did Eve learn what could and couldn't be eaten? How did Eve learn what God had said? It seems to me that she had to learn it from her husband. God apparently gave him that responsibility. But as to a reason for these roles, Paul first says (in verse 13), ***"For it was Adam who was first created, and then Eve."*** So, it has nothing to do with her talent, or skill, or education, or anything like that.

The second part of this, the second reason given, is that Eve was deceived and fell into sin. Eve stepped outside God's plan, ignoring her husband's spiritual leadership, and she did what God had commanded Adam not to do. So, it's not that women are inherently more gullible or anything, but it seems that God put these roles in place in the church as a reminder of what happened at the beginning. But I want us to notice something else, and that is: Adam is not innocent here! Eve was deceived, but Adam sinned on purpose. Adam sinned willingly. Adam knew that what he was about to do was wrong, but he did it anyway. And what I find interesting is that although EVE is the first one to sin, God does not go to HER first to get her in trouble, but instead, God starts by going to ADAM. Remember: God calls out to the man in the garden by saying, ***"Where are you?"*** And then, as God gives a reason to Adam he says, ***"Because you have listened to the voice of your wife,"*** and then he goes on to explain the punishment. Not that it is a sin to listen to our wives, but the emphasis in Genesis is on Adam abdicating his God-given role of spiritual leadership within the family. When those roles get reversed, sin enters the world for the very first time. So, this is Paul's appeal. We have these distinct gender roles in the church, 1.) Because of the order of creation, and 2.) Because this flip-flopping of the gender roles is what led to the very first sin. These roles are TIED TO CREATION.

On so many issues, people will appeal to culture, "The world is changing, we need to keep up; therefore, we must change what we believe to conform to culture. We need to make some amendments. We need to take a vote and move on." Perhaps you remember the nationwide ad campaign by a main-line denomination several years ago, where they had billboards that said, "God is still speaking." Some of those ads featured a huge comma, indicating that the Bible ends with a comma, in a sense, and that yes, God spoke a long time ago, but he is still speaking, and the message today is different from what it was back then. I've looked at the end of my Bible, by the way, and it does, in fact, end with a period, not a comma. Not only that, but there's a warning there at the end, isn't there? That we are not to add to or take away from the words of the book. Some, then have dismissed the words here as being cultural. Paul, though, does not tie this issue to culture. Instead, he takes it all the way back to creation, all the way back to the beginning. So, the question is: Do we conform to the culture around us, or do we believe that God knows best, even when his word goes against the culture around us? Do we change ourselves, or do we try to change the word of God?

As we come to the end of this passage, we come to Paul's closing reminder (in verse 15), that a woman's greatest fulfillment in this life comes through being a mother, ***"But women will be preserved through the bearing of children if they continue in faith and love and sanctity with self-restraint."*** He's not saying that salvation is conditional on having children, but he seems to be giving the reminder that a woman's greatest fulfillment in this life comes in being a mom! So, he ends this passage on something of a positive note - not a restriction, but a reminder, that women will be preserved through the bearing of children.

Conclusion:

I know we've covered quite a bit this morning. Again, I welcome your comments and questions. Hopefully next week we can continue with the next chapter, but if you have a special question or comment, I would love to look into that.

As we close, we'd like to give everyone here another opportunity to obey the gospel. The good news is that Jesus, as the Son of God, came to this earth and lived a sinless life. He gave his life as a ransom for us. He died in our place. We respond to that sacrifice in faith, with obedience. We turn away from sin and we allow ourselves to be buried with him in baptism, for the forgiveness of sins. If you have any questions, we hope you will get in touch. But if you are ready to become a Christian right now, we hope you will let us know as we sing this next song. Let's stand and sing...

To comment on this lesson: furlakeschurch@gmail.com