

The Role of Women in the Church

1 Timothy 2: 11-15

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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.

Betty Stam was a missionary to China in 1926. She labored there for souls and gave up her life for Christ. Betty died at the tender age of 28 along with her husband John who was 27. They both died at the hands of the Red Army. Her life was one of surrender and submission to Christ. There is a book titled “To Gain Is Gain” if you want to know more. Here is what Betty wrote before she dedicated her life to missions.

“The Way is just Christ—and complete concentration to His will in our lives... It’s as clear as daylight to me that the only worthwhile life is one of unconditional surrender to God’s will.” – Betty Stam.

Not everyone may be called to missions like Betty but every believer is someone whose life is in submission to the Lordship of Christ.

The relevance of our passage for today cannot be overstated. Particularly, with the whole shift on gender and identity in our culture today. As a heads up, when Paul says man and woman, he means biological man and woman.

Males and females are uniquely 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 the uniqueness of male and female.

“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.

You know water boils at 100 degrees centigrade. If I said water is now going to boil at 70 degrees centigrade, do you think the water is going to evaporate? No. Just as water has its own properties, men and women have their own unique identity and role in the church. It is just the way God created order in this world. To go against God’s order is to fight against God and thereby deprive yourself or even deny God’s blessings.

Before we expound this passage, let me give some context. Paul wrote this letter to Timothy in the first century to the church in Ephesus.

In this passage, Paul instructs Timothy regarding the role of women in the church. And in the next chapter, Paul focuses almost entirely on the role of men in the church.

In the first century, in the Greco-Roman world, 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. However, in the first century *church*, both women and men were part of church gatherings.

And these 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. The worship of the goddess Artemis was the major religion at that time. It is said that the building of the temple of Artemis was the largest building in the Greek world in the first century and was 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.

While the unbelieving world looked down on women, the early Christian church saw men and women in the light of how God sees them – as made in the image of God. Male and female – distinct, unique, equal and complementary.

Furthermore, the New Testament authors 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, if men and women are equal in worth, dignity, value and are joint heirs in salvation, how should we understand Paul’s instruction?

Some have said 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.

Culture, Context and Command.

With that lets briefly look at Paul’s instruction in verse 9 and 10 before we get to verse 11.

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.

Here Paul is referring to the how women ought to conduct themselves in church gatherings. In verse 8, Paul says men to pray in “*every place*”. Paul uses this phrase in 1 Corinthians 1:2 and 1 Thessalonians 1:8 referring to gathered church. And Paul begins verse 9 with the word “likewise”. Likewise in every place” the women are to conduct themselves a certain way. How?

Modesty, self-control, godliness and good works. It would be absurd to say women should never aspire to conduct themselves this way. These qualities are precious in God’s sight (1 Peter 3:4).

Second instruction:

¹¹Let a woman learn quietly with all submissiveness.

This is actually a positive command from Paul. The verse could also be translated ‘A woman *must* learn’. The word *learn* is the verbal form of the noun disciple.

Paul is encouraging and commending women to learn and be disciplined.

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.

Apparently, the church in Ephesus had some women not displaying godly self-control. An excellent example of someone who *learned* with *submissiveness* is Mary, the sister of Martha. Jesus commended Mary for her attitude and disposition of learning. “*..Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet and listened to his teaching.. Mary has chosen the good portion*” Luke 10:39,42.

Paul gives the third instruction in verse 12.

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

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 the gathered church, during public worship), the women are not to teach or exercise authority. That role is limited to qualified men.

Not all men are to lead, preach and teach. Only some men who are qualified and tested should lead but all are to learn and be disciplined.

Verse 12 has two phrases *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. 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. “*I am writing these things to you so that, ¹⁵ if I delay, you may know how one ought to conduct themselves in the household of God*”.

Also, Paul writes to the church in Corinth where 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

Paul does not prohibit all forms of teaching but some teaching.

“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

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

This passage also does not mean men can weaponize this verse to silence women.

You may be hearing all these injunctions, limitations and prohibitions on women and ask - Why? Is Paul prejudiced against women? No, on the contrary Paul names more women ministry partners than any other New Testament author.

Paul gives his reason or rationale for his instructions or prohibition in 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.

It is said that there was a myth floating during those days that woman was created first. Whether the Christians in Ephesus believed this myth or not is not known but Paul takes Timothy and the believers back to Genesis. Look at God’s order not myths. Not Artemis. Not feminism or whatever ideology that has infiltrated some churches today.

If someone thought Paul was singling out women, it is men that Paul singles out. Paul singles out two men, two false teachers - Hymenaeus and Alexander. Paul has handed them over to Satan that they may not blaspheme. These men were causing far more serious damage in the church than the women. Paul could have said because all these men are spreading false doctrine in the church, lets entrust the whole teaching duty to women. And Paul had competent Gospel partners who were women (Romans 16) Paul doesn’t do that because he is faithful with what God has entrusted to him. And competence doesn’t necessarily imply it is God’s will.

The reason for his prohibition of women for teaching role is not cultural but creation. God made Adam *first*. Then Eve. And Eve was deceived and violated God's command. She became a transgressor. Adam failed miserably too. He failed to uphold the command of God and protect his wife. So ,Adam became a co-transgressor. See what God says 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

Adam and Eve fell into sin and effects of sin have been tragic ever since. However, there is hope. Wonderful hope for men and women. Specifically, for 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 is that women will be saved in spite of child birth. 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.

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.

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 carrying God's handiwork in their wombs. And then nurturing them when they deliver babies. Those babies become men and women. One 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.

Back in Genesis God promised that the woman's offspring would crush Satan's head – *“I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel”* Genesis 3:15. Jesus Christ is that offspring - born of a woman and our Savior.

Women deserve the honor, respect and the value God as image bearers. Women learn and nurture. Only qualified men teach and preach in the church. That is God's order. We will be greatly blessed by following God's order and instruction.

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

MESSAGE SUMMARY: Role of Women in the Church. 1 Timothy 2:11-15

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?