

Women In Public And Private

1 Timothy 2:9-15

Introduction

We must place our text in context. Paul has been writing about the place of prayer in the Church. Now Paul will address the issue of the place of women in the Church. In the first chapter Paul spoke of the discipline of sound doctrine and now Paul broadly deals with the discipline of prayer and public worship (chapter 2). The passage is of course the focus of fiery debate and deep division. The subject of authority is immediately challenged. Does Paul have the right to speak on this issue? Does Paul's view of women and the place of women in the Church run contrary to the Old Testament revelation or the New Testament Jesus? Let me be clear. For those who would pit Paul against Jesus on the subjects of sin or salvation or the role of leaders or the role of women will find little comfort from the revelation of Scripture, the church fathers or me. Paul knows false teachers and legalists will not be happy with Paul's conclusions about false teaching and legalism. Paul has mentioned prayer (vv.1-2). We pray for all (v.1). We pray in the will of God (vv.3-7). Now Paul makes mention of the role of women in public, in the church and in private (vv.9-15). Paul addresses in brief the issues of both apparel (vv.9-10) and attitude (v.11). There are prohibitions (vv.11-12) and then Paul gives the reason for the prohibition (vv.13-14). In brief Paul speaks of the woman's responsibilities (vv.9-11); restrictions (vv.12-14) and redemption (v.15).

Are Paul's instructions inconsistent with the revelation of God in the Old Testament or the character and commands of Christ in the New Testament? Are these suggestions or mere opinions or observations which the Church is free to either take or leave? One of the key words in the epistle is "charge" or "command" (1:3,5, 18; 4:11; 5:7; 6:13,17). Paul claims apostolic authority (1:1); a divine message (2:7) and a commitment to truth and honesty (2:7). The risen Lord Jesus has entrusted Paul with the gospel and Paul is entrusting that treasure to Timothy and future leaders (2 Timothy 2:2).

Paul encourages women to exercise modesty and purity (v.9); industry (v.10); and humility (vv. 11-14). For the critic who insists that Christianity demeans, restricts or places women in barbaric and archaic roles denies both Bible and history. Let me be clear. Some have perverted and distorted the Bible's teaching in order to abuse women. This does not reflect God's Word or God's heart. The Lord Jesus and Christianity did more to elevate women in the ancient world than any other source. This epistle was written to Timothy in Ephesus the home of worship to Diana (Greek Artemis). In the ancient world many considered Diana and the moon one and the same. Paul will remind and emphasize the principles of headship and authority in the local church; Jesus is the head over His body (Col.1:18); the headship of the pastor over the flock (Acts 20:28) and the headship of the man over the woman (1 Corinthians 11:1-16; 1 Timothy 2:12).

Women In Public (vv.9-10)

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1 Timothy 2:9-10 (NKJV) in like manner also, that the women adorn themselves in modest apparel, with propriety and moderation, not with braided hair or gold or pearls or costly clothing,

In the previous passage men lift holy hands showing a life of transparency and obedience to Christ. “*in like manner also*” women demonstrate their character virtues of modest and purity. Paul is not insisting that women dress in second hand clothes from ancient thrift shops and shun the Roman clothing fabric stores. Paul is not condemning fashion or trends. The passage does not condemn braided hair or wearing jewelry. The point of the passage is purity and modesty. How do women communicate their internal character? By their outward adornment. Paul issues standards of modesty. The person who wants to push the limits will automatically say; “modest by what standards?” What constitutes good taste and good sense within the culture?

Paul admonishes women in the church setting (worship setting) to dress in such a way that reflects their commitment to Christ and their character in Christ! Paul consciously uses the terms ‘*propriety*’ and ‘*moderation*’. What exactly is Paul’s concern? Paul’s concern was that women not draw undue attention to themselves. Women in the Church were not to give themselves “. . . *to ostentation, costly, attire, and excessive adornment. Neither was seductive or sexually suggestive clothing appropriate. They were not to detract from the worship by drawing attention to themselves*” (see *Life Application Commentary 1&2 Timothy & Titus; p.47*).

Imagine the protest; “are you saying the Bible condemns beauty”—the answer is of course not. What the Bible condemns is emphasizing outward beauty over inner character. It is a tragic fact that some men value external beauty over inward beauty. It is also a tragic fact that some women dress—not so much to impress men—but other women. But God looks at the heart.

10but, which is proper for women professing godliness, with good works.

The word translated ‘godliness’ is a reference to ‘god-likeness’. In what sense? In the sense of the character of Christ and we might add the fruit of the Spirit. The sentence makes women who profess godliness manifest ‘*good works*’ (*here it probably means industry*). In this letter Paul will later condemn women who wander from house to house and give Satan the opportunity to lead them to sin (the implication is that women travel from house to house in never ending gossip). In a real sense Paul points out the fact that the most powerful teaching and preaching comes from the way we live our lives.

The reader is invited to ask the question—how does my appearance enhance or limit my ability to represent Jesus Christ? How does my appearance represent Christ? Does your appearance incorporate the elements of modesty, purity, submission and respect for the Lord Jesus Christ?

In the Biblical worldview beauty begins on the inside and continues on the outside. Elegance, grace, humility and confidence in Christ offers a glow that no amount of make-up can match.

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Christian women are not called by Christ to be unattractive! Christian women simply reject the world's standards for what constitutes what is beautiful, attractive and places both these words in the context of Christ's character. **The Christian woman's measure of beauty is not in the clothes she wears or the color or shape or texture of her hair; rather beauty is found in compassion and care given to others.** There are no limits or restrictions in what Paul calls 'good works'. Of course these good works do not save. The good works serve as evidence of women professing godliness.

Women In Church (vv.11-14)

11 Let a woman learn in silence with all submission.

It's funny how so many people read this statement and immediately their attention fixes on the words 'silence' and 'submission.' They are important words but they must be considered in the context of the word 'learn'.

The Greek word translated *silence* is *hesuchia*. The word is found in verse 2 and again in verse 12. It means 'settled, calm, undisturbed, implying a voluntary restraint. There is another Greek word *sigao*—which means *silent or to be silent*.

Here submission does not mean—absolute surrender of mind, conscience or moral responsibility. Submission never mean subjugation or subordination to evil or corruption or immorality.

Paul's use of the word submission seems to be to the authority of Christ and His Word and Paul's instructions—which are not evil, or corrupt or immoral.

12 And I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man, but to be in silence.

What does this mean? What does the Bible allow or not allow when it comes to the subject of women in the context of congregational worship?

The Greek grammar allows the translation—“*To teach, a woman I am not allowing*” and completes the thought about attentive learning in verse 11. The women in the Ephesian church were allowed to learn but not to teach or exercise authority over men. Does this prohibition mean a blanket prohibition for women everywhere in all christian churches to never teach?

Some have argued because of the culture and condition of the church at that time Paul saw this as a necessary prohibition. Although there may be some merit to that argument I think the merit loses force in the reasons that Paul cites later in the passage. Paul does not cite the Temple of Diana or the presence of false teachers and false teaching as the reasons for the temporary prohibition or restriction.

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Those who see a blanket prohibition for women teaching men in all circumstances seem to ignore Paul's allowances for women to teach elsewhere. Paul commended his co-worker Priscilla, who taught Apollos, the great preacher (Acts 18:24-26). Paul frequently mentions other women in responsible leadership and service roles; Phoebe worked in the Church (Romans 16:1; Tryphena and Tryphosa were the Lord's workers (Romans 16:6, 12) as were Euodia and Syntche (Philippians 4:2).

Was this prohibition in fact a temporary prohibition limited only to the congregations in Ephesus? Paul uses the term authority—and it would seem to mean in the sense of spiritual authority in the context of the congregation. Some have suggested that it means authority in the hierarchical or administrative sense when it comes to congregational rule or church governmental rule. Modern scholars are tempted to suggest that what Paul is regulating is the temptation for women and men to engage in gender struggle. They argue that Paul is making a limited cultural accommodation because the women in Ephesus were unlearned or unskilled and untrained. The women did not have sufficient training or knowledge to exercise the role of **teaching elder or ruling elder**.

I don't think the text or the context supports that view. John Frame writes; "Scripture, and only Scripture, has the final word on everything, all our doctrine, and all our life. Thus it has the final word even on our interpretation of Scripture, even in our theological method" (see *The Doctrine of the Word of God*; Philipsburg, NJ: P&P Publishing).

I am willing to concede there is a cultural context. I am willing to concede that in the ancient world women and men sat separated in congregational worship. I am willing to concede that the likelihood that some women could interrupt the service or appeal to their husbands sitting across the room for explanation.

The point Paul seems to be making is that women cannot occupy the role of ruling elder or teaching elder in the Church. For the person who objects you must be willing to explain away Paul's justification for verse 12 in verses 13-15. Women are not the only ones prohibited from occupying the role of teaching or ruling elder. Some men are disqualified (see chapter 3:1-7).

Paul's blanket prohibition and restriction for women to teach or exercise authority over a man is given in the context of the fall and false teachers and false teaching and church government.

Warren Wiersbe offers this helpful comment; "When the local church meets in assembly, the women are instructed to exercise submission. If they have any questions, rather than interrupt the meeting, they should ask their husbands at home. This rule does not prevent a woman from teaching or from leading in ministries assigned by the local assembly" (see *Wiersbe's Expository Outlines p. 624*). Almost always someone will ask; "What if the woman doesn't have a husband to ask or answer the question?"

13For Adam was formed first, then Eve.

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14 And Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived, fell into transgression.

Paul gives reasons for the prohibitions and restrictions. He cites creation, Adam and Eve. Paul does not believe gender is fluid or that the roles of men and women are culturally determined. Some scholars suggest that Paul is appealing to the Garden of Eden to reflect what was happening to the church in Ephesus. Were some women usurping their husbands authority? Were some women intruding into the office of teaching or ruling elder?

Was Paul suggesting that some women or most women are more gullible and easily deceived than some men or most men? I doubt that's true. I think Paul makes it clear that the real issue is not gullibility but submission. Paul placed the blame for man's sin in another passage squarely on Adam! "*By one man sin entered the world*" (Adam—Romans 5:12-21). Paul was well aware of the Bible's testimony concerning headship. The Lord God told Adam not to eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Adam apparently told Eve. For Eve the struggle was not simply whether or not to believe God but also to believe what Adam said about God. What was Eve's struggle? Would she submit to God by submitting to her husband? Eve was deceived by Satan. Adam's rebellion goes far deeper. Adam failed to submit to God. Eve failed to submit to Adam. Paul's argument for the blanket prohibition for women to occupy the office of ruling or teaching elder is **God's revelation on the subject of submission.**

This same argument could be made for the headship of Christ over the Church. Jesus is the head over the Body of Christ. The Church must not usurp Christ's headship or authority. Whenever the Church usurps the authority and headship of Christ the results are always malignant.

Paul's argument is not simple deception; but deception coupled with a lack of submission. In Genesis 3:16 the Lord said to the woman; "He shall rule over you." The liberal theologian or the radical feminist says; "No—no he won't." The liberal theologian or the radical feminist argues; "God's statement was made in the context of the curse—and the curse has been lifted by Calvary's Cross." But Paul argues in the book of Ephesians (after the Cross) "Wives submit to your own husbands" because the husband is the head of the wife, as also Christ is the head of the church; and the Savior of the body (Ephesians 5:22-24). Paul argues that the church is subject to Christ and the wives are subject to their husbands in everything (v.24).

Paul appeals to the created order for the prohibition and also to avoid confusion and resentment among pagans and Jews. In Paul's appeal he points out that God assigned roles and responsibilities both in home and in church. These are lines of authority—not always superiority. Clearly Jesus is superior to man and church. But male is not always superior to female. The Father is not superior to the Son but the Son submits to the Father. The Father and the Son are not superior to the Spirit; but the Spirit submits to both Father and Son.

I would argue that man is not superior to woman but in the case of home and church God's plan is that the man exercises authority in the home and the ruling elders exercise authority in the church. It is a losing battle and a lost cause to argue sexual superiority or gender superiority.

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But it remains a Biblical truth—that God created men and women with unique and complimentary characteristics.

There are many views that a number of Christians and scholars have concerning the role of women. All the views hinge on one's interpretation of 1 Timothy 2:9-15.

The Non authoritative View

The Authoritative and Absolute View

The Authoritative but culturally limited View

The non authoritative view sees this as Paul's opinion—not God's opinion and some go so far as to suggest an interpolation (the addition by an individual or cabal motivated by misogyny). These writers suggest that whatever this passage means it does not provide any meaningful prohibition on the role of women in the church.

The authoritative and absolute position hold that women should occupy no role or exercise any spiritual authority over men in roles like ruling elder, pastor, deacon. Some go even further and prohibit public verbal prayer or teaching in congregational worship settings. Some even restrict certain missionary functions.

The authoritative but culturally limited view holds that Paul is targeting the Ephesian culture and limits the role of women in that specific situation—but the general principle still applies but that should not hider the gospel message.

My own view is that women are called and gifted by God and His Holy Spirit to serve in a number of different roles and functions in the Body of Christ according to the gifts and callings by His Holy Spirit. The prohibition that Paul outlines in this passage is a prohibition for a woman to occupy the office of teaching elder or ruling elder in a local congregation. In my view authority and submission are Biblical teachings that promote health and order in our home, and in our church. Authority and submission were not meant to serve as wedges to destroy God's order. Can you imagine a child insisting on equal authority as parents and insisting on submission from parents?

Women In Private (v.15)

CONCLUSION

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