

July 7, 2024

INSTRUCTIONS FOR MEN AND WOMEN IN THE CHURCH

1 Timothy 2:8-15

(5 of 15 in a series through 1 Timothy)

I don't think I'm surprising anyone to say that there is great confusion in our culture over the topic of humanity. "What is a man or a woman?" and "What constitutes a marriage?" are just a couple of the questions that, surprisingly, many are getting wrong. If there's one topic that we want to bring up to expose just how low our culture has fallen, just begin to ask questions dealing the doctrine of humanity. It will soon lead you to ask, "How in the world did we get here?"

But it's not fair to think that this confusion is just in the world and not in the church. We just finished the month of June which is largely recognized as pride month, a celebration of the sin of homosexuality. And, perhaps surprisingly, if you want to be sure to see the most prominent displays celebrating this sinful theme, just go to some city and look at the church buildings. It's often professing Christians who seem to be leading the way in the celebration of debauchery among mankind.

And if you want to almost certainly offend someone, just walk up to a pulpit in some local church and start talking about what the Bible says about men, women, their differences, their roles, etc. There's little more that can make you feel like you're walking in a minefield, even among professing believers. As my son mentioned one time as we were discussing these matters: "You can offend some believers just by reading certain texts of the Bible."

But the Bible doesn't shy away from these things. Our Lord is comfortable not only stating that men and women were created with differences and in a complementary way, but he tells us that there are certain roles men and women are to fulfill in the home and in the church that are different. Nor does the Bible shy away from stating that there are certain sins men are more prone to and others that women are more prone to. The Bible doesn't seem to mind being labeled "stereotypical." Paul will warn fathers—not mothers—against doing things that will provoke their children to anger because he's aware that men are more prone to that. And he'll warn younger widowed women against going from house to house, being gossips and busybodies, knowing they can be prone to that. Again, Paul seems to have missed out on the manual that tells us what is appropriate to say and not say. And our text is one such place where we see these kinds of things take place. In 1 Timothy 2:8-15 Paul will speak of roles of men and women in the church, once more targeting things that he thinks men can be more prone to do and others that women can be more prone to do. And Paul obviously does this without blushing.

But it's precisely because the culture is pushing so hard against these biblical standards that it's crucial for us to make sure that we understand what God says on these matters, what he commands, and why he tells us to think certain ways and do certain things. Therefore, this morning, we're going to dive into 1 Timothy 2:8-15 and look at what our God commands concerning men and women and our roles in the church.

Now, before looking at the details of the text, let me provide some context for us. I mentioned last week that starting in chapter 2 Paul turns his attention to matters of corporate worship. In other words, he's talking about the nature of the church, what we do when we gather, what is allowed, how it should be done, etc. Last week Paul noted the importance of praying for all kinds of people—but especially those who govern us—as we gather together as a church. And when we get to 2:8, you'll notice that Paul is connecting our text this morning to what we saw last week. He'll begin by writing, "I desire *then* that in every place men should pray." The presence of the word "then" shows that he's connecting this to what has come before. It's his way of saying, "In light of what I just said, do this also." Therefore, having spoken about offering prayers in verses 1-7, it should not be surprising that Paul focuses immediately upon how praying should be done in verse 8.

Also, however, note that Paul uses the phrase "in every place" in verse 8. In other words, he's not writing in such a way that his instructions apply to those believers in Ephesus but nowhere else. He's giving instructions concerning the actions and roles of men and women in the church that apply to all churches everywhere. So with that setup, we're going to see that Paul gives one word of particular instruction to men and two to women. Let's then begin with what he says to men.

As men pray, they should be walking in holiness, free from anger and arguing

As Paul continues this section, he continues the theme of praying, but now he focuses on *how* we should pray, and he specifically speaks to men. He writes, "I desire then that in every place the men should pray, lifting holy hands without anger or quarreling" (v. 8). Now, the fact that he focuses on men here doesn't mean that women can't pray. Paul will actually give instructions about women praying and prophesying in 1 Corinthians 11 as the church gathers for prayer and edification. We've tried to model our Sunday evening service after this in many ways.

Why focus on men, then? It could be because they'd be seen as leading the corporate worship service, but my guess is that it's more likely he focuses on men here because he wants to target an issue that he thinks men are more apt to struggle with than women.

As Paul describes how men should pray, he speaks of them "lifting holy hands." And the reason he uses this picture of lifting one's hands when praying is because this was a common posture for prayer in the Bible. Writing about Jesus, for example, Luke says, "And he led them out as far as Bethany, and lifting up his hands he blessed them" (Luke 24:50). So, you can see that this was a posture Jesus used in prayer as well. And it's why when one of the pastors pronounces the benediction (i.e. blessing) at the end of the service, we do so with lifted hands.

But I don't think the focus of Paul's description here is on the exact posture of lifted hands. After all, many other postures are given in the Bible as well, such as kneeling or the like. The key seems to be that Paul says as men pray, they should be lifting *holy* hands. In other words, Paul is warning the men against leading the congregation in prayer while holding onto sin and

concealing it in his heart. But then he focuses on one specific sinful attitude and action, saying, “Without anger or quarreling.”

Brothers, as we enter the gathering of the church for corporate worship, this is not a time to be driven by anger or a desire to be right. If a man gets up to pray, and what comes out of his heart is anger or a kind of argumentative spirit that is more passionate about being seen as right than loving God and neighbor, that is not acceptable. And it corrupts our worship. Moreover, I think the reason Paul focuses on men here is because we’re more likely to be hot-headed, argumentative, or wanting to be proven right. Men, more often than women, can delight in getting into arguments and find themselves energized by disagreements. But Paul tells us that as men pray in the corporate gathering, they need to be lifting *holy* hands that are free from anger and quarreling. Brothers, let’s make sure this is true of us.

But, as I noted, Paul doesn’t stop with an exhortation to men. He also gives two commands to women. The first is that women should be more concerned with good works than their appearance.

Women should be more concerned with good works than their appearance

In verse 9 Paul turns his attention to women, writing, “Likewise also [I desire] that women should adorn themselves in respectable apparel, with modesty and self-control, not with braided hair and gold or pearls or costly attire, but with what is proper for women who profess godliness—with good works” (vv. 9-10).

If we might say that verse 8 focuses on a tendency that can often be true of men, then Paul’s focus in verses 9-10 focuses on a tendency that can often be true of women. Women can tend to be focused on their appearance more than other more important things, like godliness. So, just as men can be more consumed in being angry or being shown right than in being holy as he gathers with the saints, women might be more concerned with adorning themselves in such a way to draw attention to themselves rather than adorning themselves with good works. And just as the man’s sinful desires can negatively affect corporate worship, so can a woman’s.

Paul specifically says “that women should adorn themselves in respectable apparel, with modesty and self-control” (v. 9). That is, a woman shouldn’t dress in a way that is seductive or sensual, attempting to draw attention to her body in a way that is unholy. Nor should she allow vanity to drive her to great excess as she adorns herself. That seems to be Paul’s message in speaking against braided hair, gold, and pearls. I doubt that Paul would forbid braiding one’s hair, wearing a golden necklace, wedding ring, earrings, or the like or even having clothes that are not of the cheapest material in this specific setting. That seems to be a particular application in their setting of this universal rule he’s establishing. The point is that external adornment shouldn’t be the woman’s main focus. To draw the attention of others away from exalting the Lord and edifying one’s brothers or sisters because you dress or do yourself up in such a way as to draw attention to yourself is to be avoided. It is selfish and unloving.

Rather, adorn yourself with good works. Of course, Christian women do not have to jettison every fashion style. Perhaps adorning oneself in a burka or as a character in *Little House on the Prairie*, would wrongly draw attention as well, defeating Paul's aim. In the end, we must make sure that in all things we value holiness more than our external appearance, drawing people's attention more toward the Lord in worship than to our appearance.

Adorn yourself with what the Lord says is attractive, giving more attention and effort to these things than the latest fashion trends or seductive dress. Remember the Scripture reminds us that "Charm is deceitful, and beauty is vain, but a woman who fears the Lord is to be praised" (Prov 31:30). And, finally, Paul exhorts women, telling us that in the church women are not permitted to teach or exercise authority over a man.

In the church, women aren't allowed to teach or exercise authority over a man

After noting the need for a woman to adorn herself with good works, modesty, and self-control, Paul adds in verse 11, "Let a woman learn quietly with all submissiveness." And if you ask, "Paul, what do you mean by "quietly" and "with all submissiveness," he answers in the next verse, writing, "I do not permit a woman to teach or exercise authority over a man" (v. 12).

Now, let me tackle a few things here before we launch into Paul's reasons he gives for why. First, this seems to be an exhortation in the church. In other words, outside the gathered church, there's no reason to think that a woman couldn't exercise authority over a man or teach him. So, if you have a female professor or boss, I don't think you have to withdraw from school or quit your job (if you're a man) or step out of your position (if you're a woman). Second, this prohibition is actually against two things—teaching and exercising authority. I say that because there are some who have begun to argue that Paul is prohibiting simply "authoritative teaching," as if a woman can teach men, in the church, simply acknowledging that some man in the church holds greater authority. But the presence of the word "or" alone makes clear Paul has two things in mind. He is prohibiting a woman in the gathered church setting from teaching men and from exercising authority over men.

This would obviously exclude a woman from being a pastor, since the pastor will be spoken of a few chapters later as "ruling" in the church (1 Tim 5:17), and one of his qualifications is that he must be "able to teach" (1 Tim 3:2). But it extends past a mere prohibition against fulfilling the role of pastor, for a woman is prohibited here from teaching in any setting in the church where men would be present.

At the same time, this isn't a prohibition against women teaching other women or children. In fact, older women are exhorted to teach younger women in Titus 2:3-4. But we should see it as it clearly is, a biblical command that a woman not teach or exercise authority over a man in the gathered church setting or teach him.

Now that we've stated that, let's answer why. Paul gives two reasons. First, he writes, "For Adam was formed first, then Eve" (v. 13). That is, Paul sees something important in the order in which

God made humanity. And though it is true that God made humanity as male and female, he did first make the man and then the woman. Paul will note this elsewhere, saying in 1 Corinthians 11:8-9, “For man was not made from woman, but woman from man. Neither was man created for woman, but woman for man.”

What Paul seems to be picking up on here is that men and women were made for different tasks, and because man was created first, he was created to be a leader and the woman a helper. This is why in marriage Paul will tell us that the man is the head of his wife (Eph 5:23). And so, by creating man first, the Lord was showing that men should play a role of leadership in the home and in the church. And this would be contradicted if a woman were to take the role of teaching a man or exercising authority over a man in the church.

The second reason Paul gives may seem more confusing, but I think we can make sense of it. Paul adds, “And Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and became a transgressor” (v. 14). This is obviously a reference to Genesis 3 where the serpent approaches the woman, she eats of the fruit, and then she gives some to her husband, and he eats. So, what is Paul getting at here in noting that the woman was deceived?

Some suggest that this was particular for the church at Ephesus, that women there had fallen prey to false teaching, and so Paul is noting that the women there were being easily deceived by false teachers, and thus didn’t need to teach. But I think that reasoning fails because Paul doesn’t say that *women* were being deceived *in Ephesus*; he says that *Eve* was deceived. Nor does that argument account for Paul’s first reason—that Adam was formed first. If this issue were simply a particular issue of women in Ephesus being deceived, then what do we do with Paul’s first reason?

Others have tried to expand the point a bit more broadly. They’d say, “Fair, it wasn’t just women in Ephesus. Paul is saying that all women are easily deceived, and this is why they shouldn’t teach or exercise authority over a man.” But this argument clearly fails as well. After all, Paul’s prohibition is simply against women teaching men, not teaching period. If women were by nature easily deceived, falling prey for false teaching, then Paul would surely prohibit them from teaching anyone. But he wants them to teach other women. So that’s not what Paul is saying.

Rather, what Paul is noting in pointing out that Eve was deceived is that in the fall, Eve was deceived by the serpent. In other words, the serpent didn’t approach Adam to deceive him. He approached Eve. And he approached Eve, not because she was more gullible, but because he was trying to invert and upend the created order according to God’s design.

The design of the Lord was for the man to be head of his wife and the man and the woman to rule over the created order. But here everything is reversed. The serpent deceives the woman instead of being ruled over by her. The woman takes the lead while Adam is silent, and she is deceived. Notice how the Lord, on the other hand, upholds this. Even had been the first to eat of the tree, and yet the text says that God “called to the *man* and said to him, ‘Where are you?’”

(Gen 3:9). The Lord was addressing the couple in their proper order, but the serpent had (intentionally) done the opposite.

Consequently, by bringing up that the woman was deceived by the serpent, Paul is noting the enemy's design in upending the created order God had provided, and is saying to the church, "Don't mimic what the enemy sought to do in the garden." Recognize God's proper order. Men should step forward and lead and teach, and women should learn "quietly with all submissiveness."

And then Paul adds in verse 15, "Yet she will be saved through childbearing—if they continue in faith and love and holiness, with self-control." Now, I know at first glance this can feel quite odd, perhaps unrelated, and definitely confusing. I mean, why in the world would childbearing be linked to salvation? Does this mean that if a woman is infertile she can't be saved? And that's just the beginning of a number of questions that we might want to ask upon a cursory reading of this text. But I think if we remember what has brought us to this point in Paul's argument, what he's saying will make sense.

He's just shown us that though God has made men and women equal—both in the image of God—he has made them different and to function in different roles. The serpent sought to upend that, approaching the woman to deceive her, and she took the bait (as did Adam, sitting silently by). What Paul is saying in verse 15 is that a godly woman is willing to accept the role that the Lord has given her to walk in and not rebel against it. Then, as an example of a particular role that God has given women, he points to childbearing—something that only women are designed and able to do. In other words, Paul is saying to women, "Don't try to walk in the role that God has given for men. Rather, recognize that there are roles for women to walk in (that men aren't designed to walk in and, indeed, can't), such as childbearing, and submit to God's design for you and walk in it.

Moreover, the woman who happily submits to God's design, order, and call upon her life is bearing the fruit of someone who is saved, provided she also demonstrates faith, love, holiness, and self-control. That, I believe, is Paul's argument.

And so, in 1 Timothy 2:8-15, Paul reminds us that men and women have particular temptations. This isn't to say that women can't be hot-headed and argumentative or that men can't be obsessed by our appearance and want to draw attention to ourselves. But each of these temptations is more common to each sex, respectively. Therefore, men, let's make sure that when we lead in worship on Sundays, particularly in prayer, that we pray with holy hands. Don't hold anger and an argumentative spirit in your heart. That could corrupt our worship. And, women, don't focus on how you dress and adorn yourselves more than you focus on adorning yourself with good works. Don't dress in such a way to be seductive or draw people's attention away from the Lord and toward yourself. Also, submit to God's role for your life. Don't aspire to do those things that God has set aside for men to do. You need not have to function in a role God has designated for a man in order to be valuable. Rather, walk in the role that God has

designed for you as a woman, and you will show yourself to bear the fruit of submissive obedience to Christ.

Then, as we walk in these ways—brothers and sisters—we'll ensure that God is honored in our corporate worship and that our brothers and sisters are edified as we gather, give thanks, and praise our Lord for his saving life, death, and resurrection. Amen.