

Are Men and Women to be Equal in the Church?

1 Timothy 2:9-15, Part 1

We will continue our study this morning in 1 Timothy 2 with a passage that may very well have caused more doctrinal arguments and church splits than perhaps any other single issue in the history of the Church. We find this passage in the closing verses of 1 Timothy chapter two. And let us say up front that we are not going to completely explain this passage in one sermon. Today's message is the first of several on this section of Scripture.

But before we read the passage, let us consider several comments that have been published in the last few years.

“Judge Beatrice Mullaney of Fall River, Mass., affirmed that women are almost entirely to blame for lowered moral standards in the United States. ‘Women are anxious to exercise freedoms and permissiveness promoted by the women’s movement, and the result is dissolution of marriages, homes, and families. In nearly two decades as a judge I’ve heard more than 10,000 divorce, separation, and custody cases. And I’ve seen moral decay, especially in family responsibilities, divorce, permissiveness, and shirking of duties. I blame women almost entirely for lowering the moral standards of this country.’”¹

Well, I very much doubt that Judge Mullaney will ever be invited to speak before the National Organization of Women. Another story came out of Los Angeles (AP) a while back that was similar in nature:

“The United States is on the verge of a ‘crime wave like the world has never seen before,’ warns Los Angeles police chief Edward M. Davis. And he says the women’s liberation movement and politicians must share the blame.

“In an address to the Los Angeles Breakfast Club, Davis said crime ‘is going to continue to go up, up, up,’ primarily because of ‘the new morality which condones lying, stealing and killing.’

¹ Tan, Paul Lee: Encyclopedia of 7700 Illustrations : *A Treasury of Illustrations, Anecdotes, Facts and Quotations for Pastors, Teachers and Christian Workers.* Garland TX : Bible Communications, 1996, c1979.

“He said more mothers should stay home to instill old-fashioned values in their children.

“‘If you don’t have that culture in which to bring up that young human with love and discipline, he’s going to become some sort of savage if he wants to,’ Davis said.”²

Then there are those who have a little different perspective:

“A noted anthropologist thinks that men are inferior to women, and women lower themselves by demanding equality with men.

“Ashley Montagu, speaking at Virginia Commonwealth University, said a woman who claims equality with a man ‘has taken a step down.’

“Montagu said that ‘only inferior people tell people they are superior, and this is what men have been doing.’

“He said women discovered their superiority long ago and ‘have the good sense to be quiet about it.’

“He said women are more intellectual because of their everyday experiences, which differ from those of most men.

“He also said they are constitutionally superior because they bear and nurture children, and biologically superior because they have two X chromosomes.”³

So we have here a sampling of three different opinions concerning women which demonstrate how much the world needs to study the Word of God. Let us go back to verse 1 of 1 Timothy chapter two to get the flavor of the verses leading to that controversial passage in verses 9-15. And Here is what God says:

1 Timothy 2:1-15 NAS:

¹ *First of all, then, I urge that entreaties and prayers, petitions and thanksgivings, be made on behalf of all men,*

² *for kings and all who are in authority, so that we may lead a tranquil and quiet life in all godliness and dignity.*

³ *This is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior,*

⁴ *who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.*

⁵ *For there is one God, and one mediator also between God and men, the*

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

man Christ Jesus,

⁶ *who gave Himself as a ransom for all, the testimony given at the proper time.*

⁷ *For this I was appointed a preacher and an apostle (I am telling the truth, I am not lying) as a teacher of the Gentiles in faith and truth.*

⁸ *Therefore I want the men in every place to pray, lifting up holy hands, without wrath and dissension.*

Paul says that he wants “*men to pray in every place,*” public and private, wherever men are, there should be prayer.

“*Lifting up holy hands*” means to be cleansed of sin.

“*Without wrath*” means we should not feel rage against any creature. Every feeling we have that is not love is some form of wrath.

“*And dissension (doubting)*” suggests we should not be disputing with each other. Such behavior blocks our prayers. Wrath (rage), or unholy actions, or lack of faith in God are roadblocks that prevent our prayers from being heard by God. Christianity consists of faith and love embracing truth and grace. Therefore our goal in life should be to pray and live and die, without any clashes or quarrels with others and without doubting God.⁴

Continuing in verse 9:

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.*

Now we want to read just verses 9-15 in the “*Message*” translation, which is written in the language of twenty-first century America.

1 Timothy 2:9-15 MSG:

⁹ *And I want women to get in there with the men in humility before God, not primping before a mirror or chasing the latest fashions*

⁴ John Wesley, *Explanatory Notes upon the New Testament*, (London: Wesleyan-Methodist Book-Room, n.d.), WORDsearch CROSS e-book, Under: "Chapter 2".

¹⁰ *but doing something beautiful for God and becoming beautiful doing it.*

¹¹ *I don't let women take over and tell the men what to do.*

¹² *They should study to be quiet and obedient along with everyone else.*

¹³ *Adam was made first, then Eve;*

¹⁴ *woman was deceived first—our pioneer in sin!—with Adam right on her heels.*

¹⁵ *On the other hand, her childbearing brought about salvation, reversing Eve. But this salvation only comes to those who continue in faith, love, and holiness, gathering it all into maturity. You can depend on this.*

When either men or women spend a lot of time, money, and mirror gazing to decorate their bodies, it suggests that there is a lack of intelligence or morality within them.⁵ It is as if they listen to a little voice that keeps saying, “*If you wear the best and most expensive clothes, jewelry, and have botox treatments every week, starve yourself and work out every day so that you have an absolutely perfectly proportioned body, then maybe people will like and respect you.*”

Having made clear that prayers must be offered for **all men**, then Paul goes on to advise who should offer these prayers and in what frame of mind they should be offered. This naturally concerns the conduct of **men** in public worship (verse 8). Men are psychologically inclined to taking action; they are more likely to react with anger and rage when they are attacked or believe something is wrong. They want to argue and fight it out. Therefore, Paul has said they should come to prayer and worship without those attitudes. They are to pray “*without wrath*,” that is, “*without rage and disputes.*” On the other hand, women are psychologically inclined to care how they look. So Paul speaks to that in the instructions he gives concerning how a woman should conduct herself during public worship and where her focus should be when she comes to prayer (verses 9-15).

Paul says that these prayers for all men are to offered by Christians wherever public worship is held. However, the manner of worship in the synagogue was followed as much as possible. In the matter of prayer in the synagogue, only men were allowed to offer prayer. Therefore, Paul’s instructions here were in line with hundreds of years of the tradition for prayer in the synagogue. There was, however, a possible contradiction to this policy based on Paul’s teaching of the new covenant which Christ announced during His ministry while here on earth. Paul himself taught equality of the sexes in Galatians 3:28 where he wrote:

²⁸ *In Christ's family there can be no division into Jew and non-Jew, slave and free, male and female. Among us you are all equal. That is, we are all in a common relationship with Jesus Christ.*

(The Message)

Some people have interpreted these verses in 1 Timothy 2 as suggesting that Christian women were to be excluded from praying in public worship as Jewish women were in the synagogue. However, a careful reading of verse 9 does not say that at all. Rather it is

⁵ Adam Clarke’s Commentary on 1 Timothy 2:9. WORDsearch E-book.

saying, “*likewise*,” or “*in a similar manner*” as the men were to avoid harboring hatred and dissension in their hearts when they came to pray, women also were to tend to their state of mind and focus when they prayed. But what makes it easy for theologians to reach the conclusion that this passage excludes women from prayer, or service of any kind?

In order to answer this question we need to consider both the culture and the history of Ephesus. Now many of the new Christians were of course Gentiles from within the city of Ephesus. So we think it important that we establish some background understanding of the city of Ephesus in order to better understand what is going on here in 1 Timothy 2. Ephesus was the most important city in the Roman province of Asia, on the west coast of what is now Turkey. A magnificent road, some thirty feet wide and lined with columns ran down the center of the city to its picturesque harbor. This was home to the Greek fertility goddess, **Artemis**, who was later referred to by the Romans as **Diana**.

Ephesus became the greatest commercial city of the Roman province of Asia. It then occupied a vast area, and its population may have numbered around 330,000. It is estimated that the great theatre built in the center of the city had a capacity of about 25,000.

The temple of Artemis itself had been the largest building in the Greek world. It contained an image of the goddess which, it was claimed, had fallen from heaven (Acts 19:35). Indeed, it may well have been a meteorite originally. Silver coins from many places show the validity of the claim that the goddess of Ephesus was revered all over the world (Acts 19:27). They bear the inscription *Diana Ephesia* (Acts 19:34).

There was a large colony of Jews at Ephesus. The earliest reference to the coming of Christianity to Ephesus is in A.D. 52 when Paul made a short visit and left Aquila and Priscilla there (Acts 18:18–21). During Paul’s third missionary journey he stayed in Ephesus for over 2 years (Acts 19:8, 10), attracted, no doubt, by its strategic importance as a commercial, political and religious center. His work was at first based in the synagogue. Later he debated in the lecture-hall of Tyrannus, making Ephesus the home base for the evangelization of the whole province of Asia.

The spread of Christianity, which did not permit the combining of different religions, angered many of those who remained committed to the already established religious practices. It affected not only the magic cults which flourished there (Acts 19:13ff.) but also the worship of Artemis (Acts 19:27), **causing damage to the trade in cult objects and books of magic which was one source of the prosperity of Ephesus.** Then there followed the huge riot that is described in Acts 19.

Now as Paul writes this letter to Timothy, the church in Ephesus is growing rapidly, but it is having trouble with false teachers, and has lost its “*first love*” (Revelation 2:4). The false apostles (2:2) are most probably like the **Nicolaitans** (Revelation 2:6) who seem to have attempted to blend false religion with Christianity for the new Christians who were constantly tempted not to give up their sinful behavior. Therefore, the problems in the

church at Ephesus were the problems of a successful church trying to change the culture and behavior of the people of Ephesus.⁶

These false teachers could have very well been teaching their own doctrine about the roles of men and women in the church. Therefore, Paul realized that some instruction had to be given regarding the individual roles of men and women within the church. Paul must have realized that a complete break with their past would not be beneficial in his efforts to bring the people of Ephesus to faith.

So Paul begins with the men and he says they should pray, lifting up holy hands without wrath or rage and without evil thoughts. Now this does not mean that the only posture for prayer is to lift up your hands. Scripture itself allows for a number of positions which are acceptable for prayer as long as they reflect the feelings of a person's reverent frame of mind, and as long as they truly interpret the honest feelings of the heart.

All of the following postures are considered proper: (1) The standing position indicates reverence. (2) The lifting up or spreading out of the hands—arms outstretched, with palms upward—is a fit symbol of utter dependence on God and of humble expectancy. (3) Bowing the head is the outward expression of the spirit of submission. (4) The lifting heavenward of the eyes indicates that one believes that his help comes from Jehovah, from him alone. (5) Kneeling pictures humility and adoration. (6) Falling down with face toward the ground is the visible manifestation of awe in the divine presence. (7) Striking the breast beautifully harmonizes with the feeling of utter unworthiness.⁷

What is emphasized, however, throughout Scripture **is not** so much **the position of the body** or the position of the hands **but the inner attitude of the heart**. A person who has just committed a murder or an act of adultery or a theft cannot offer up a prayer that is pleasing to God until the person has repented and received forgiveness.

Psalm 24:3-4 NLT:

³ *Who may climb the mountain of the Lord? Who may stand in his holy place?*

⁴ *Only those whose hands and hearts are pure, who do not worship idols and never tell lies.*

Matthew 18:31-35 NLT:

³¹ *“When some of the other servants saw this, they were very upset. They went to the king and told him everything that had happened.*

³² *Then the king called in the man he had forgiven and said, ‘You evil servant! I forgave you that tremendous debt because you pleaded with me.*

³³ *Shouldn’t you have mercy on your fellow servant, just as I had mercy on you?’*

⁶ Wood, D. R. W.: New Bible Dictionary. InterVarsity Press, 1996, c1982, c1962, S. 327

⁷ Ibid.

³⁴ *Then the angry king sent the man to prison to be tortured until he had paid his entire debt.*

³⁵ *“That’s what my heavenly Father will do to you if you refuse to forgive your brothers and sisters **from your heart.**”*

Do not offer prayer to the Lord if you know you have not asked for and received forgiveness for your sins, because your prayers will just bounce off the ceiling.

Now just as *the men* are expected to properly prepare themselves for prayer, so must the women give evidence of the same spirit of holiness, and must show this while they are still at home, getting ready to attend the service. Again we remind you to **pay attention to the word “*likewise*”** in verse 9. It means that the women are also to pray, but **just as the men needed to be aware of their inner feelings, women were to pay attention to their concerns.** I once knew a woman who stopped going to church. When I asked her why, she said that she refused to go to church because of her concern about the way she thought she looked. This woman was overly concerned with some age lines in her face and with the clothes she would need to wear, so she solved the problem by staying away from church. The women in Ephesus were not staying away from church, but apparently they were trying to outdo each other in fancy dresses, jewelry, and hair styles. Paul is saying that they are putting their emphases in the wrong place. He said they should dress themselves in a way that reflects equal reverence to what we have discussed about men.

We believe Paul is being clear here that he does not criticize the desire on the part of girls and women, a desire by the way created in them by God, to dress and present themselves in a manner that makes them attractive. He does suggest that they should be dressing themselves in good taste. They must not try to show off, to be “*all the rage,*” wearing flashy apparel so as to make others jealous of them. They must not look decidedly old-fashioned, awkward, or weird. Extremes, however, should be avoided. That is what “good sense” implies. A woman’s appearance must express inner **modesty** and a mature outlook on life, the outlook of the Christian.⁸

In a woman who claims to be a believer an effort to call attention to herself for any other reason than to glorify God is offensive to God.

1 Peter 3:3-5 NLT:

³ *Don’t be concerned about the outward beauty of fancy hairstyles, expensive jewelry, or beautiful clothes.*

⁴ *You should clothe yourselves instead with the beauty that comes from within, the unfading beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is so precious to God.*

⁵ ***This is how the holy women of old made themselves beautiful. They trusted God and accepted the authority of their husbands.***

Flashy clothes do not reflect the kind of heart God welcomes at the service of His Word.

⁸ Ibid.

As we hear Paul's call to modesty, it becomes a real challenge for Christian women today to dress modestly. Fashion designers have thrown that word out of their vocabulary.

Modesty is out of style in our society today. So shopping becomes a real challenge for the woman who wants to follow God's will in her styles.

We've all known women who might not qualify for the front cover of a fashion magazine, but who radiated a beauty that made a deep impression because it was beauty of the heart and soul. That is a beauty that improves with time because it reflects a life lived with the God of all beauty.

Even though our comments about how women are to dress modestly might trouble some, the real controversy over the years has been about the verses that follow. Now, and in the coming sermons, we will look at how various theologians have interpreted this passage. Then we will endeavor to bring the light and message from other Scriptures to help us understand what God wants us to realize from these words.

Now according to a number of commentators, Eve's fall occurred when she ignored her divinely ordained position.⁹ Instead of following she chose to lead. Instead of remaining submissive to God, she wanted to be "*like God*." She—not Adam—was indeed (or was completely) deceived or deluded.¹⁰

These writers comment on the phrases in verse 14, Eve "*was deceived*," but Adam "*was not deceived*." They say that Adam was not deceived in the same way in which Eve was deceived (Genesis 3:4-6). She listened directly to Satan; he did not. She sinned before he did. She was the leader. He was the follower. She led when she should have followed; that is, she led in the way of sin, when she should have followed in the path of righteousness.¹¹

And so she fell from the path of obedience. Now she chose to rule him who at that moment was still her sinless husband. Did Eve assume the role that was not intended for her? So should we conclude that the daughters of Eve should not teach, rule, or lead, when the congregation gathers for worship?

Well, if all of you women are ready to tar and feather me for this message so far, I ask you to remember that thus far I have been expressing the views of other scholars, and I would ask for another chance to clarify where I am going with this. I do believe you will be pleased at the conclusion, so be sure and come back next week as we continue to explore a topic that needs clarification because many people have been misled over the centuries.

⁹ Yet, before the Fall, there is no record of a "divinely ordained position" other than that of a helper taken from the rib, the side (not the head or the foot), of Adam. (See Genesis 1:27-28 and 2:7, 20-25.)

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid.