

Are Men and Women to be Equal in the Church?

Part 2

1 Timothy 2:9-15--Part 2

Do you remember the story about the blind men and the elephant? It was originally developed in China, possibly around the time of the birth of Christ. This parable spread through many countries and in the process was changed and embellished until in the 1800s John Godfrey Saxe put it into a poem:

It was six men of Indostan
To learning much inclined,
Who went to see the Elephant
(Though all of them were blind),
That each by observation
Might satisfy his mind.

The *First* approach'd the Elephant,
And happening to fall
Against his broad and sturdy side,
At once began to bawl:
"God bless me! but the Elephant
Is very like a wall!"

The *Second*, feeling of the tusk,
Cried, "Ho! what have we here
So very round and smooth and sharp?
To me 'tis mighty clear
This wonder of an Elephant
Is very like a spear!"

The *Third* approached the animal,
And happening to take
The squirming trunk within his hands,
Thus boldly up and spake:
"I see," quoth he, "the Elephant
Is very like a snake!"

The *Fourth* reached out his eager hand,
And felt about the knee.
"What most this wondrous beast is like
Is mighty plain," quoth he,
"'Tis clear enough the Elephant

Is very like a tree!"

The *Fifth*, who chanced to touch the ear,
Said: "E'en the blindest man
Can tell what this resembles most;
Deny the fact who can,
This marvel of an Elephant
Is very like a fan!"

The *Sixth* no sooner had begun
About the beast to grope,
Then, seizing on the swinging tail
That fell within his scope,
"I see," quoth he, "the Elephant
Is very like a rope!"

And so these men of Indostan
Disputed loud and long,
Each in his own opinion
Exceeding stiff and strong,
Though each was partly in the right,
And all were in the wrong!

MORAL.

So oft in theologic wars,
The disputants, I ween,
Rail on in utter ignorance
Of what each other mean,
And prate about an Elephant
*Not one of them has seen!*¹

Our topic for today is debated as hotly as these blind men argued about the elephant, and sometimes with about as much insight. Traditionally, conservative Christians have used 1 Timothy 2:12 to forbid women from doing much in the way of ministry in the local church. So today we will look at what is being taught in this passage as well as in the whole of Scripture.

1 Timothy 2:9-15 NAS:

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*

¹ The Poems of John Godfrey Saxe, Complete edition; Boston: James R. Osgood and Company, (1873); from http://www.noogenesis.com/pineapple/blind_men_elephant.html.

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.*

If you recall, in the earlier part of chapter two, Paul had been stressing the importance of praying for the government. He said in verse 8: “*Therefore, I want the men in every place to pray, lifting up holy hands, without wrath and dissension.*” Then Paul moves on to make the point that 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. Women should dress themselves in a way that reflects equal reverence to what we have discussed about men.

If you recall, we pointed out, when commenting earlier about verses 8 through 10, that 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 that 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 to women, emphasizing that they should give most attention to their inner beauty that comes from godliness, not their outward stylishness.

Paul was concerned that the women in the church at Ephesus would not overly dress themselves up with hair styles and jewelry that made them look like the women of the world. There should be an evident difference between the dress of a Christian woman and a non-Christian woman.

Women and men should know that the way they dress and style their hair can affect their Christian testimony. The clothes we wear say something about the person we are within and the person we want others to perceive us to be. Christian women have to be careful that they do not let the culture of our day dictate their fashions.

Paul was concerned that the women would put so much effort into dressing themselves in fine clothes and jewelry that they would forget to be godly in their character and conduct. Their conduct should make evident what is in their hearts. They should be more interested in the attractiveness that comes from their behavior rather than the attractiveness that might come from their hair styles and clothes. The spirit that shines out from within is true beauty and lasts far longer than any makeup. Christians should not use the world’s standards to measure their loveliness, since the attraction of Christianity should emphasize how we treat others, not how stylishly we can dress. The way a person dresses, however, should display that we care about our appearance and how we present

ourselves as Christ's ambassadors. I've always felt that I want to give my best to the Lord when I come into His house.

Some women claiming to be Christians in the Ephesian church may have been trying to impress others by their beauty rather than conducting themselves in a Christ-like manner. Perhaps there were others who needed to pay more attention to Peter's message in 1 Peter 3:3-6 (NAS):

³ *Your adornment must not be merely external—braiding the hair, and wearing gold jewelry, or putting on dresses;*

⁴ *but let it be the hidden person of the heart, with the imperishable quality of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is precious in the sight of God.*

⁵ *For in this way in former times the holy women also, who hoped in God, used to adorn themselves, being submissive to their own husbands;*

⁶ *just as Sarah obeyed Abraham, calling him lord, and you have become her children if you do what is right without being frightened by any fear.²*

The immediate problem seems to have been disturbances in the worship service. On the one hand, changing attitudes about the man-woman relationship led women to assert themselves in the worship service in ways that threatened unity. False teachers seem to have been able to influence various members of the congregations, especially women, who were then becoming contentions during the worship services.³ (See also 2 Timothy 3:6-7.) Disruptions by women included inquiring about the meaning of prophecies (1 Corinthians 14) and teaching men (1 Timothy 2:12). But we also see in this chapter that the anger and arguments of some men were contributing to the disruption of the church's worship service as well. Paul's concern both for biblical patterns and for the perceptions of those outside of the church is evident.

It is also possible that Paul could have been concerned with specific traits and behavior in Ephesus that were common to the prostitutes in the local temples. Artemis (also called Diana) was the goddess of Ephesus (Acts 19:28). She was also known as the goddess of fertility. There was a large statue of her in the great temple at Ephesus, which was one of the wonders of the ancient world. The festival of Artemis involved wild orgies and carousing. Obviously, Christian women should not look like or even copy the styles of the prostitutes in the temple of Artemis.

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, 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

² Underline added.

³ Davis, John Jefferson, "First Timothy 2:12, the Ordination of Women, and Paul's Use of Creation Narratives." *Priscilla Papers*, Vol. 23, No. 2, Spring 2009, pp. 7, 9

must express inner modesty and a mature outlook on life, the outlook of the Christian.⁴

The general rule for both women and men emphasizes that both our behavior and dress must express our submission to and respect for Jesus Christ. If a woman claims to be a believer and makes an effort to call attention to herself for any other reason than to glorify God, that is offensive to God. A Christian's adornment comes not from what he or she puts on, but from what he or she does for others in service to God.⁵

It is also important to understand the culture of Ephesus and the context of Paul's letter in order to fully understand this passage. In a church plagued with false doctrine and false leaders, it is not surprising to find them struggling over gender roles. Some women were leading impure lives (cf. 5:6, 11-15; 2 Tim. 3:6), and their indecency carried over into the worship service. They were letting themselves be influenced by purveyors of false doctrine rather than searching the Scriptures or consulting with Timothy, their pastor, to find out if what was being said was true.⁶ Under the pretense of gathering to worship God, women were flaunting themselves and becoming domineering.⁷ Their actions revealed that the intent of their heart was evil. These false teachers had misled some women into teaching wrong doctrine and doing it in an obnoxious, domineering way.⁸

Alan Padgett, a theologian, sheds some helpful light on the context of this passage:

“At first glance, 1 Timothy 2:8-15 might seem like a universal principle, grounded in the creation story of Adam and Eve, for women never to have teaching authority over men. This is not the view of a growing number of Bible scholars today. Like all of the Letters of Paul, this passage is written to a particular church, in its own special situation. These verses are written to a particular group of wealthy women, who were causing dissension and anger among the men by their false teaching (vv. 8-10). Like Eve, these women had been deceived by the “snake” (false teachers) and had therefore fallen into sin (v. 14). The emphasis is upon silence for these women--not for all women all of the time--while they submit to sound teaching. They are called to learn sound theology in silence and full submission (v. 11).

The submission in this verse is not to men, as is commonly thought, but to sound doctrine. Implied here is submission to the teachings of Paul and Timothy rather than to the false teachers who were leading the women astray (2 Tim. 3:6). Understood in its own time and context, and read with Christ at the center of the whole of the Bible, Scripture does not limit the leadership of women in the church. Women and men of all races and classes are equally responsible to the call of God on their lives in society,

⁴ Life Application Bible Commentary.

⁵ Life Application Bible Commentary.

⁶ *Op. Cit.*, Davis.

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ *Ibid*, p. 9.

home, and the fellowship of believers.”⁹

Now, as we move on to the next verses in this chapter, we see that Paul makes reference to Adam and Eve in the Book of Genesis.

1 Timothy 2:13-14 NAS:

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.*

Now there are some scholars who jump on these two verses to make their point that the Fall was the fault of the woman, Eve. They say that Eve's fall occurred when she ignored her divinely ordained position, which, incidentally, was not mentioned until after the Fall. Instead of following she chose to lead. Instead of remaining submissive to God, they say, she wanted to be "*like God*." She—not Adam—was indeed (or was completely) deceived or deluded.¹⁰

According to these interpreters, Eve "*was deceived*," but Adam "*was not deceived*." Adam was not deceived in the same way in which Eve was deceived (Genesis 3:4-6). She listened directly to Satan; Adam did not. However, they don't say where they think Adam was during this conversation. Had he gone off somewhere so that he was not listening to it? Eve sinned before Adam 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 obedience. Then she chose to rule her husband who at that moment was still sinless. Did Eve assume the role that was not intended for her? And if so should we forever conclude that the daughters of Eve should not teach, rule, or lead, when the congregation gathers for worship?

Yet these commentators are looking at the subject with blinders on, ignoring the other passages of Scripture that would shed additional light and guidance on the subject. For instance, "in writing to the church in Rome, Adam, not Eve, is singled out as the representative figure who brought guilt and death upon the entire human race (Rom. 5:12–21); Eve is not so much as mentioned. Adam is singled out as the representative head of the fallen human race."¹²

According to Alan Padgett, "It is highly likely that the reference to Adam and Eve here is typological, not a reference to a so-called creation-order of man's leadership over women. This is an important point, for Paul's supposed appeal to a "creation-order" (which does not in fact exist in Genesis) is a major argument that absolutists depend upon... If Paul's argument in fact is typological or figurative, then he is not asserting that

⁹ Padgett, Alan. "What Is Biblical Equality?" *Priscilla Papers*, 16:3, Summer 2002. P.24.

¹⁰ Life Application Bible Commentary.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² *Op Cit*, Davis, p. 6.

women are submissive to men by nature, but only that the Ephesian women were deceived (as Eve was).”¹³

Also, Paul uses a similar analogy when writing to the Corinthians, but he means something different by it. If you look at 2 Corinthians 11:3 you see that he refers to Eve as a way of describing the entire church, composed of men and women:

2 Corinthians 11:3 NAS:

But I am afraid, lest as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, your minds should be led astray from the simplicity and purity of devotion to Christ.

“The point to be noticed is that Paul draws a parallel here between the deception of Eve and the danger of the entire *Corinthian congregation* (or its [male] leaders) being deceived by false teachers. In this text, the figure of Eve is clearly taken to apply to the entire congregation and not specifically to the women within it, as though they, merely by virtue of their gender, were uniquely susceptible to such deception.”¹⁴

God gives each believer one or more spiritual gifts upon their conversion. It then becomes the responsibility of that believer, man or woman, to use that spiritual gift in the Church to serve the Lord.

Romans 12:6-8 NAS:

⁶ *and since we have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let each exercise them accordingly: if prophecy, according to the proportion of his faith;*
⁷ *if service, in his serving; or he who teaches, in his teaching;*
⁸ *or he who exhorts, in his exhortation; he who gives, with liberality; he who leads, with diligence; he who shows mercy, with cheerfulness.*

There are a number of instances throughout the Bible, and in the New Testament in particular, where God chooses, uses, and blesses the ministry of women, either as leaders or as teachers. For instance, “one can recall the prominent leadership roles exercised by Deborah the prophet (Judg. 4), Huldah the prophet (2 Kgs. 22), Miriam the sister of Moses (Exod. 15:20–21), Priscilla (Acts 18:26), the four daughters of Philip who were prophets (Acts 21:9), and Phoebe (Rom. 16:1) to be reminded of the ways that women have been used by God at different times in biblical history.”¹⁵

Most of you have probably heard of Jill Briscoe, the wife of Stuart Briscoe. Stuart is a prominent pastor, teacher, and writer on his own behalf. But so is his wife, Jill. She has been a speaker/preacher, as well as a writer and teacher for years, and not only of women. Listen to what he has to say about women in ministry:

¹³ Padgett, Alan. “The Scholarship of Patriarchy (on 1 Timothy 2:8-15).” Article published by Christians for Biblical Equality.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid, p. 7.

“As a pastor, a husband and a father, I have a dread of burying someone else’s talents, particularly those bestowed on women. Accordingly, I have tried to scrutinize my views, the place of tradition, the thrust of theology and the force of my prejudices. Repeatedly, I have come back to this fact: If the Lord has given gifts, I had better be careful about denying freedom for their exercise. More than that, I need to ensure that the women in my life have every encouragement from me to be what He called and gifted them to be. A major part of my life must be spent as a man caring for, nurturing, encouraging and developing gifted women because they aren’t the only ones who will give account for their stewardship. As a man in a male-oriented church, I may one day be asked about their gifts, too. I would like to be able to say I did considerably more than burying. A talent is a terrible thing to waste.”¹⁶

Stuart is referring also to the admonition to church leaders, in Hebrews 13:17, which suggests that church leaders will be called to account for their ministry and watch care over those in their charge. Stuart is realizing that pastors may one day have to answer for stifling the gifts that God gave to women in their congregations. Perhaps the ministries of some churches today suffer because only a portion of the people are allowed to serve.

Now let’s move to the final verse in this passage

1 Timothy 2:15 NAS:

¹⁵ *But women will be preserved through the bearing of children if they continue in faith and love and sanctity with self-restraint.*

This is a particularly difficult verse to understand and interpret, until and unless one understands the culture in Ephesus, and especially the role and influence of the goddess Artemis. Artemis is also sometimes called Diana. Worship of her was extremely strong in Ephesus. Artemis was considered to be the goddess of fertility and childbirth. In those days, there were no Lamaze classes, not much prenatal care, no medications to dull the pain of childbirth, and no knowledge to assist deliveries. Childbirth was often a long, painful, and sometimes deadly experience. Therefore, the women of Ephesus would call on the goddess Artemis to save them as they went through the process of childbirth.¹⁷

So here Paul is telling the women in the church, “don’t turn to the goddess Artemis for your salvation during childbirth. She is non-existent and cannot help you. Rather call on God and trust in Him and you will be saved during the experience of childbirth.”

But since the myths about Artemis said she was also a virgin who never married and therefore never had children of her own, Paul could also be reassuring the women in the

¹⁶ Stuart Briscoe; <http://bible.org/illustration/talent-terrible-thing-waste>

¹⁷ Glahn, Sandra. “Who Was Artemis and Why Does it Matter? Part II.” <http://blog.bible.org/tapestry/content/who-was-artemis-and-why-does-it-matter%3F-part-ii>

Ephesian church that when they are having children they are entering into a meaningful ministry. He may be pointing out that women can influence children in the ways of the Lord and lead them to faith and understanding in their formative years. She must submit herself to God's will to do that for which she is naturally equipped.

The act of child-bearing in and of itself does not provide salvation, even though some have suggested this verse implies that. It is the love of God that fills one's heart with the accompanying peace which passes all understanding. When a person submits themselves completely to the will of God and becomes obedient to all of His commands and ordinances,¹⁸ she or he will experience a **JOY AND PEACE** that they have not known before. When a woman becomes truly saved, she remains saved forever, even though hardship and temptation cross her path. But the Holy Spirit will provide the power for her to endure and keep the faith.¹⁹

The mutual roles of men and women is still an important issue in the Church today. To understand God's will in the matter, we must look at it in light of the whole Bible. We must take into account the whole teaching of Scripture and not be like the blind men, each looking at only one part of the elephant. Many other passages speak of the leadership of women in the church. The example set by Christ is also a powerful statement about women. Jesus set women free. He treated them as human beings. He recognized and responded to their needs as human needs. He taught women and included them as His followers. He proved Himself to be their Savior too. The accepted view of women in the time of Christ was as property rather than persons. Jesus shattered that conception.

The Gospel offered to women the gift of personhood—they were worthy of salvation and were given spiritual gifts to use in ministry

Paul's instructions to the Christian women in Ephesus must be read in both their **IMMEDIATE** and **LARGER** contexts before applying them. The immediate context was the church in Ephesus, which was suffering from the effect of false teachers who used women as their prime targets.

These women were also affected by their personal experiences within Ephesian culture. They would have struggled as much with cultural conditioning as we do. **THE LARGER CONTEXT** includes what Paul taught elsewhere about the role and place of women in the church, and we find a very revealing message in **Galatians 3:28-29 (NASB)**:

²⁸ *There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female; for **YOU ARE ALL ONE IN CHRIST JESUS.*** ²⁹ *And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's descendants, heirs according to promise.*

¹⁸ Teaching and/or traditions. *The Handbook To Bible Study.*

¹⁹ Op cit, Baker.

Look also at Peter's message at Pentecost, Acts 2:17-18 NAS:

*¹⁷ 'And it shall be in the last days,' God says, 'That I will pour forth of My Spirit on all mankind; And **YOUR SONS AND YOUR DAUGHTERS SHALL PROPHECY**, And your young men shall see visions, And your old men shall dream dreams;*

*¹⁸ Even on my bondslaves, **BOTH MEN AND WOMEN**, I will in those days pour forth of My Spirit And they **SHALL PROPHECY**.*

First Timothy chapter two as a whole may be summarized as a calling from God for men and women to relate to one another in the church according to the standards God has established for Christians throughout the Bible.

In our culture today it may appear obvious that certain women have the gift for preaching, teaching, and leadership. If such gifts are obvious there is no provision I know of in the Scripture that would prevent women from using those spiritual gifts to serve the Church. There may also be women who should be doctors, lawyers, and engineers. The primary criteria for service is not gender but rather to exercise the spiritual gifts and natural talents God has given them so that God can be glorified from a heart filled with love.

Modesty and self-restraint apply to all Christians at all times, but taking the Bible as a whole, the instructions regarding women given in 1 Timothy chapter 2 apply only to the church at Ephesus.