

1 Timothy 2:8-15 Instructions for Worship

Issues for Discussion

1. “Therefore, I want the men everywhere to pray, lifting up holy hands without anger or disputing” (1 Timothy 2:8)

Remember the original instruction was for Timothy to command certain people not to teach false doctrines any longer or to devote themselves to myths and endless genealogies,” which promoted controversial speculations rather than advancing God’s work” (1:5). It was creating an antagonistic atmosphere rather than producing genuine love. This false teaching had something to do with a wrong understanding of the purpose of the Law of Moses (1:6-11). It was contrary to the Gospel message, which was a message extolling God’s grace and immense patience toward wicked men. Paul encouraged Timothy to boldly battle these false teachers in keeping with his ministry, which was prophetically commissioned.

Paul directed Timothy to start with prayer for everyone, especially those in authority, with a view toward providing a peaceful atmosphere for Gospel witness, which God desired and was uniquely through the one Mediator, Jesus Christ. Within this directive, Paul encouraged the men in particular to pray, “lifting up holy hands,” which was a common posture for prayer from the Old Testament (cf. 1 Kings 8:22; Psalm 28:2; Isaiah 1:15). The expression “holy hands” is probably a synecdoche, expressing a part for the whole, such that “holy hands” represent not simply hands but the whole person; that is, holy men should be praying.

Men should pray “without anger or disputing.” This should remind us of Jesus’s command in the Sermon on the Mount:

Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother or sister has something against you, leave your gift there in front of the altar. **First go and be reconciled to them;** then come and offer your gift (Matthew 5:23-24).

Jesus taught that worship required brotherly reconciliation. You cannot effectively pray if someone is holding a grudge against you. The Apostle John put it this way: “Whoever does not love their brother and sister, whom they have seen, cannot love God, whom they have not seen” (1 John 4:20). The “seen” relationship must be right for the “unseen” relationship to be right.

Conflict in the Body of Christ precludes effective prayer. James, the half-brother of Jesus, wrote, “The prayer of a **righteous** person is powerful and effective” (James 5:16). This verse immediately precedes the command, “Confess your sins to each other so that you may be healed” (James 5:15). As one person has astutely observed, ‘This command may not be to simply tell your sins to fellow Christians but rather to confess the specific sins you committed against your brother and sister in Christ so that you might be “healed” or reconciled to them.’ It is in this context of reconciliation that Jesus also taught, “Again, truly I tell you that if two of you on earth agree about anything they ask for, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven. For where two or three are gathered in my Name, there am I with them” (Matthew 18:19-20). Jesus promised His presence and healing in the context of conflict resolution and reconciliation where there was confession and forgiveness of sin.

So then, prayer is incompatible with anger and disputing. Concerted prayer happens in the context of reconciliation, peace, unity, harmony, and love. Remember, the goal of the original command was authentic, personal, heart-felt “love” (1 Timothy 1:5). So Jesus also taught, “And when you stand praying, **if you hold anything against anyone, forgive them,** so that your Father in heaven may forgive you your sins” (Mark 11:25). You cannot pray effectively if you are holding a grudge against someone.

Therefore, Paul's call for all Christian men to pray was a call to peace, unity, harmony, reconciliation, and loving purpose while seeking God's divine favor and providence.

2. "I also want the women to dress modestly..." (1 Timothy 2:9-10)

Appearance and apparel ("dress") were in view. The word "modestly" suggests order as well as decency, virtue and respectability. In fact, it was the same word used to qualify men for the position of church overseer in 1 Timothy 3:2 ("the overseer is to be... respectable").

In case there was any misunderstanding Paul added many descriptors: "with decency and propriety..." The word translated "decency" literally means "a sense of shame." It means women should be concerned how others look upon her. It is not enough that she thinks that she is decently or modestly dressed. Others should think so as well. The word translated "propriety" literally means "sanity" or "soundness of mind" and figuratively "self-control" or "sobriety." In other words, women ought to consider their appearance with a clear mind and not with the kind of looseness that drinking or drunk women might consider dressing. This word is also used in the last verse of this pericope in 1 Timothy 2:15 ("But women will be saved....if they continue... with propriety"). Paul also used this word in his instruction to older men (Titus 2:2), younger women (Titus 2:5), and to young men (Titus 2:6). Clearly, the instruction to be self-controlled was not gender-specific.

With these expressions Paul conveyed the instruction that women should be clear and intentional in their dress and appearance before others and that these comport with decency, respectability and virtue.

"adorning themselves, not with elaborate hairstyles or gold or pearls or expensive clothes" – It appears that women in Paul's day would draw attention to themselves by braiding into their hair lots of gold and pearl ornaments. Some also wore costly clothes, and as we will observe later, may have abused the "Widows Care" ministry, such that though they had the means to care for their widowed relatives, sought to use the church's resources instead (1 Timothy 5:16).

Rather than seeing a universal application of a literal practice, it is probably best to see a universal application of a spiritual principle. Every generation and culture may have their own expression of adornment that draws attention to the person's vanity or physical appearance rather than their devotion to the Lord. Paul felt it necessary to be very specific with the congregation in Ephesus. It was not enough just to ask the women to be sensible in their appearance. These Ephesian women needed both general directions and specific guidance. Notably, Paul did not defer such instructions to elder women in the church. He gave the instructions and passed this authority onto Timothy. Now, in Paul's letter to Titus, he encouraged the older women to teach the younger women in matters of propriety, but there too, he himself outlined the specific areas of application (cf. Titus 2:3-5).

Support for an application by principle over specific practice comes in the last verse of this pericope: **"adorning themselves... with good deeds, appropriate for women who profess to worship God" (1 Timothy 2:15)** – In contrast to drawing attention to "good looks," Paul encouraged drawing attention to "good deeds." This is also what Jesus taught in the Sermon on the Mount:

In the same way, let your light shine before others, **that they may see your good deeds** and glorify your Father in heaven (Matthew 5:16).

The Apostle Paul also taught this principle of showing forth good deeds with respect to unbelievers:

In everything, **show yourself to be an example by doing good works**. In your teaching show integrity, dignity, and wholesome speech that is above reproach, so that anyone who opposes us will be ashamed to have nothing bad to say about us (Titus 2:7-8).

The Apostle Peter had a very similar message:

Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, **they may see your good deeds** and glorify God on the day he visits us (1 Peter 2:12).

Paul wrote, "Appropriate for women who profess to worship God," by which he meant that women should dress consistent with their godly profession of faith. Since these women professed to worship God, their apparel and appearance should also direct people to worship God, where God receives the attention, not man. **In other words, Paul commanded the women to order their appearance in such a way that they would not distract from giving attention and worship to God in the congregation of believers.** Instead, their behavior (e.g. temperance, hospitality, kindness, service, and submission to their husbands) would cause people to commend the worship of God, who motivates this kind of good deeds in their lives.

3. "A woman should learn in quietness and full submission..." (1 Timothy 2:11-15)

What sounds disparaging to us, namely, "a woman should learn..." was really affirming to women in the 1st century, as they did not have much opportunity or encouragement to gain formal education. The New Testament encouragement for wives to submit to their husbands in everything (Ephesians 5:24) parallel the NT encouragement for slaves to obey their masters in everything (Colossians 3:22). The practice of slavery and the low status of women were entrenched both in Jewish and Gentile cultures. Consequently, we do not find Jesus or the apostles making revolutionary changes in these areas a priority, rather, while affirming the dignity of both groups in their teachings, they chose to work within the cultural framework in order to proclaim the Gospel with the expectation that the Gospel would bring about the cultural changes through the transformation of people's hearts and their relationships with each other in the faith.

Therefore, we should not expect Paul to wax eloquently about women's rights or their equality with men, but he did provide guidance for the church in order to promote the most effective Gospel witness to its community. So he wrote to the younger women "to be subject to their husbands, so that the no one will malign the word of God" (Titus 2:5).

The difference between the New Testament treatment of slaves and the role of women is that while slavery was simply accepted without affirmation or condemnation, Paul provided biblical justification for the role of women in the church and in the home; therefore, we cannot treat these things exactly the same.

In 1 Timothy 2:11-15 and 1 Corinthians 14:34-38 and 1 Corinthians 11:2-16, the three primary places Paul dealt with the role of women in the church, Paul built his case on nature, creation, and the Law of Christ ("the Lord's command"), which makes the argument for a local or temporary application of Paul's teaching on the role of women difficult at best.

"A woman should learn **in quietness and full submission**" (1 Timothy 2:11) The word "quietness" is the same word used in 1 Timothy 2:2, where Paul commanded prayer for those in authority in order that Christians may live "peaceful and **quiet**" lives. It is used also in the very next verse (1 Timothy 2:12 – "she must be quiet"). This word does not mean "speechlessness," as there is another Greek word that means just that (*sige* – "silence" as in Acts 21:40; Revelation 8:1). Rather the word implies a calmness that

precludes unrest, argumentativeness or discord (e.g. 2 Thessalonians 3:12; Acts 22:2).

Secondly, the idea of “**full submission**” should not be seen as mandatory obedience as a slave to his master under the threat of corporal punishment. It should be seen as something voluntary and in the context of close personal relationship, as wives to their husbands and as children to their parents. This submission is not exacted by compulsion but cultivated by love. The Church most readily submits to Christ because He so completely loved the Church and gave His life for her. So, husbands are to love their wives in a self-sacrificing manner, and wives are to submit to their husbands as to the Lord in everything (Ephesians 5:21-25). While these commands are separate, so that they are not conditioned on the response of one spouse to the other, in practice they are intimately connected.

“I do not permit a woman to teach or to assume authority over a man; she must be quiet” (1 Timothy 2:12) – One can improperly read this verse by simply stopping with “I do not permit a woman to teach.” If this were the case, Paul would be contradicting himself, because he certainly did permit women to teach in Titus 2:3-4 (“to teach what is good...urge the younger women”). Paul even commended Lois and Eunice, Timothy’s grandmother and mother, for passing on their faith and perhaps the Holy Scriptures to their son Timothy (2 Timothy 1:5 and 3:15). And Priscilla and Aquila, whom Paul called his co-workers in Christ Jesus (Romans 16:3), are said to have taught Apollos in their home (Acts 18:26). What is more, we read that in the last days God’s Spirit will lead “daughters” to “prophecy” (Acts 2:17). Paul also referred to women praying and prophesying (1 Corinthians 11:5). The prohibition for women in 1 Timothy 2:12 was not in teaching or in speaking but in exercising their authority over men. As in government, as in the home, so also in the church, God established an order of authority.

This order does not measure one’s worth before God, for both men and women are created in the image of God (Genesis 1:27), and there is no distinction between men and women with respect to their salvation in Christ (Galatians 3:26-28; 1 Peter 3:7); however, the absence of distinction in worth and salvation does not mean there is no distinction in form or function. Although it may not be so politically correct to say today, men and women are created different, and they have different God-given functions in creation, in the church, and in the home.

Paul explained his rationale for not having women teach men or exercise authority over men in church (cf. 1 Timothy 3:15) on the basis of creation and the fall of Adam and Eve. God’s order of creation put man first. This argument is extended in Paul’s letter to the Corinthians, where he argued “neither was man created for woman, but woman for man” (1 Corinthians 11:9). We must remember that Paul’s logic is an inspired logic, so there is really no room for argument if you want to disagree. Paul said as much in 1 Corinthians 14:36-38, where he wrote,

Or did the word of God originate with you? Or are you the only people it has reached? If anyone thinks they are a prophet or otherwise gifted by the Spirit, let them acknowledge that **what I am writing to you is the Lord’s command**. But if anyone ignores this, they will themselves be ignored.

Paul then argued from the standpoint of Satan’s distortion of God’s order of creation, when he, as a serpent, approached Eve in order to deceive her so that she sinned. While Adam’s sin condemned mankind (Romans 5:12ff), this condemnation came through the deception and sin of Eve.

4. **“But woman will be saved through childbearing...” (1 Timothy 2:15)**

If this verse simply read, “But women will be saved if they continue in faith, love and holiness with propriety,” there would be no real question or controversy, as most evangelical theologians would conclude that Paul was referring to the future aspect of salvation, where enduring faith, love, holiness and

propriety were the natural fruit of the initial, justifying faith. This future salvation can be seen from Paul's other letters. For example, in Romans 5:9, Paul wrote, "Since we have been justified by his blood, how much more **shall we be saved** from God's wrath through him!" Paul, thus, wrote of the consummation of our salvation, or our glorification, using the same terminology of "salvation." Peter also wrote about this future salvation: "Who through faith are shielded by God's power **until the coming of the salvation** that is ready to be revealed in the last time" (1 Peter 1:5). Again, Paul wrote, "The hour has already come for you to wake up from your slumber, because **our salvation is nearer** now than when we first believed" (Romans 13:11). In this passage Paul included himself among those who would be saved in the future. The only problem here is that Paul never refers to future salvation as something to be earned, which the conditional clause "if they continue in faith, etc." presumes.

Future salvation is one possibility. Another possibility may be found in the same letter to Timothy, where Paul wrote of something other than a justifying salvation: "Watch your life and doctrine closely. Persevere in them, because if you do, **you will save** both yourself and your hearers" (1 Timothy 4:16). Here, Timothy was included among those who would be saved. Paul was not questioning Timothy's salvation, but may have been exhorting him to protect himself and his hearers from false teaching. In 2 Timothy 2:25, Paul wrote,

Opponents must be gently instructed in the hope that God will grant them repentance leading them to a knowledge of the truth and that they will come to their senses and **escape from the trap of the devil**, who has taken them captive to do his will.

Paul spoke of a deliverance from "the trap of the devil" through gentle instruction and God's grace to bring them to repentance and a knowledge of the truth. Consequently, just as there are different aspects in time in salvation (e.g. past, present, future) in Scripture, there are different aspects in kind (e.g. salvation from sin, from false teaching, and from the devil) in Scripture. Consequently, in 1 Timothy 2:15 Paul may have been referring to a salvation, not from sin, nor from false teaching, but from the devil's trap (i.e. his deception of Eve). I mentioned overlapping qualifications for women with overseers as to character qualities (e.g. self-controlled, respectable, temperate, etc.), there may also be an overlapping warning with respect to the devil. Paul warned that an overseer should have a good reputation so that he would "not fall into disgrace and **into the devil's trap**" (1 Timothy 3:7). Similarly, while not specifically mentioned, the devil was clearly the one who "deceived" Eve (1 Timothy 2:14).

Let's take this connection further. Paul wrote, "through childbearing." What connection does childbearing have with salvation. If, as we surmised, Paul used the word "saved" to refer to something other than salvation from sin; namely, salvation from the devil's trap or deception, then we find an interesting connection. A few chapters later in 1 Timothy 5:14-15, in the only other place in Scripture that mentions "childbearing," we read,

So I counsel younger widows to marry, **to have children**, to manage their homes and to give the enemy no opportunity for slander. Some have in fact already **turned away to follow Satan**.

In this context, Paul was not excluding barren widows. He used the ideal of "having children" as representative of normal domestic duties, along with marriage and managing the house, of faithful women. Paul gave this counsel to the younger widows to help them escape Satan's trap, which was characterized by idleness, loose living, being busybodies, and speaking nonsensical things (1 Timothy 2:13-15). On the other hand, godly women were described by Paul as those who were faithful to their husbands, well known for their good deeds, including bringing up children, showing hospitality, washing the feet of the Lord's people, helping those in trouble and devoting themselves to all kinds of good deeds (1 Timothy 5:9-10).

Taken together, both the immediate and book-level context suggest that what Paul had in mind when he wrote, “they will be saved through childbearing,” was that women could be saved from the devil’s trap, by which he deceived Eve, by adhering to their faithful domestic responsibilities, carried out in “faith, love and holiness with propriety.” Paul was not referring to their eternal salvation but rather their salvation from the devil’s trap, even his deceptive ways, as the Apostle Peter also warned:

Be alert and of sober mind. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour (1 Peter 5:8).

I’ve read a number of pastors, commentators and theologians and their perspectives, including John MacArthur, John Piper, Steven J. Cole; however, the view I found most compelling was articulated by Andreas K. Kostenberger in his article entitled, “Saved Through Childbearing? A Fresh Look at 1 Timothy 2:15 Points to Protection from Satan’s Deception” (Read the full article here: <https://s3.amazonaws.com/5mt.bf.org/2017/10/12-Saved-Through-Childbearing.pdf>)

Discussion Questions

1. Paul commanded Christian men everywhere to pray in holiness and harmony. How are we NOT doing this today? How can we begin doing this?
2. Paul commanded women to dress modestly and demonstrate good deeds. How is this NOT done by women today? How can women begin to do this?
3. Paul taught that women can be spiritually protected when they pursue their God-given directives within God-ordained boundaries. How is this NOT being done by women today? How can women begin to do this?
4. Women bring trouble when they usurp men’s role, but they often do this when men fail to acknowledge and fulfill their God-given role. What are some ways men have FAILED to fulfill their God-given directives? How can men begin to fulfill their God-given directives?