

1 Timothy – The Household of God

This charge I entrust to you, Timothy, my child, in accordance with the prophecies previously made about you, that by them you may wage the good warfare (1 Timothy 1:18 ESV)

I hope to come to you soon, but I am writing these things to you so that, ¹⁵ if I delay, you may know how one ought to behave in the household of God, which is the church of the living God, a pillar and buttress of the truth. (1 Timothy 3:14-15 ESV)

Men and Women in the Household of God

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1 Timothy 2:8-10

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Introduction:

Good morning! Please turn with me in your Bibles to 1 Timothy chapter 2.

Our passage this morning is built on a premise that has been universally accepted by every generation up to our day, but which has recently been dismissed as barbaric and out of touch. The underlying idea here is the kind of thing that could get a person fired from the public square. It is one of the most outright offensive things that a person could say in today's Canada and, in our text, the Apostle Paul just assumes it as public knowledge! And he offers no apology!

Our passage this morning is built upon the premise that men and women are equal but *different*.

In this text, Paul instructs Timothy to pass along one set of instructions for the men in Ephesus and another set of instructions for the women in Ephesus because Paul understands that men and women face different temptations and, therefore, need different encouragements.

That's what we will see in today's text. There are instructions for how men and women should conduct themselves in the household of God. Look with me to 1 Timothy 2:8-10. Hear now God's holy, inspired, inerrant, living and active word to us today.

I desire then that in every place the men should pray, lifting holy hands without anger or quarreling; ⁹ likewise also that women should adorn themselves in respectable apparel,

with modesty and self-control, not with braided hair and gold or pearls or costly attire, ¹⁰but with what is proper for women who profess godliness—with good works. (1 Timothy 2:8-10 ESV)

This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God.

We discover here that the church in Ephesus had adopted some bad habits. They had allowed pride and anger and division and haughtiness to seep into their corporate worship. Timothy's assignment, therefore, was to identify those habits and to ROOT THEM OUT. Because, as we said a few weeks ago, bad habits are dangerous. Practice makes permanent, so a young church that makes peace with sin early on will very quickly find itself in schism and ruin.

This morning, we are going to consider and apply these instructions for men and women. As we do, we're going to see that there is nothing new under the sun. The temptations that men and women faced in Ephesus are strikingly similar to the temptations that we face in 21st century Orillia.

So let's turn our attention now to the instructions for men in the household of God.

Instructions for Men in the Household of God

We find these in verse 8:

I desire then that in every place the men should pray, lifting holy hands without anger or quarreling (1 Timothy 2:8 ESV)

Really, this is one command – pray – with a qualifier. Paul is saying, “Tell them to pray, Timothy, but make sure that they understand that they are not allowed to bring their sin with them to the service.” So, let's unpack the text in that order. First, Paul says:

1. The men should pray

Now, before we go any further, I want to clarify something. Paul is not saying in this text that ONLY men are to pray. He can't be saying that, because he gives the church in Corinth instructions on how the women ought to pray! So, this verse is not given to limit women – it's not

about women at all! It's about the men, and it begins with this clear instruction: The men should pray! Amen?

Now that we're seven weeks into our Life Together program, I'll go ahead and confess that one of our primary motives for that night was to get our men praying together. Some of you had never prayed out loud in your life. Some of you were still nervous to give thanks for your meal at the dinner table. But if we are going to be used by the Lord to see salvation and transformation in this city, then we can't content ourselves to remain as infants in prayer. The great preacher E.M. Bounds once said:

The Holy Ghost does not flow through methods but through men. He does not come on machinery but on men. He does not anoint plans but men — men of prayer.¹

Redeemer, let me ask you a question: Would we describe ourselves as men who are strong in prayer? I see good men in this room. I see men who tremble at the word of God. I see men who care about the lost. I see men who take seriously the call to lead in their home. But are we men of prayer?

Are we gripped by the conviction that no spiritual battle will ever be won without prayer? Do we believe that? Are we gripped by the conviction that we are in a spiritual fight and that there is an enemy who wants to seek, to kill, and to destroy our church and our family? Do we truly believe that the most significant battle that we will ever fight is a battle that we must fight on our knees? When is the last time that you prayed with your wife? Men, lead the way in prayer in your home! You be the one who says to your wife, "Let's turn off the tv for a while and pray for our family." When is the last time that you woke up early to pray for your family? When is the last time that you're kids walked in to find daddy deep in prayer? Do we pray with our friends? When we get together with our Christian friends for dinner, why shouldn't that night include prayer? It did in the early church! In Acts 2:42, we read:

And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. (Acts 2:42 ESV)

¹ E. M. Bounds as quoted by John Blanchard, eds. *The Complete Gathered Gold: a Treasury of Quotations for Christians*. Accordance electronic ed. (New York: Evangelical Press, 2006), paragraph 7087.

Share a meal. Talk about what God has been teaching you. And pray together. What if our get-togethers looked like that? How much deeper would our love for one another be? How many more lives would be transformed in our midst? We have access to the throne room of heaven! We are in a spiritual battle and eternal souls are at stake! The God of the universe has invited us to ask for the nations! He has instructed us in His word that He desires that all should be saved! Therefore, the men should pray! Amen? Let's resolve grow in this together.

And, as we approach the Lord in prayer:

2. The men should repent of their anger and quarreling

Paul writes:

I desire then that in every place the men should pray, **lifting holy hands** without anger or quarreling (1 Timothy 2:8 ESV)

Carrying over from Judaism, the most common posture in prayer involved outstretched hands, with palms facing upward toward heaven. At first glance, it might seem as if this verse is mandating our posture in prayer, but as the commentators unanimously point out.:

the emphasis here is not on the posture of prayer but on the hands being “holy,” meaning that the conduct of the person praying should be acceptable and appropriate to God.²

Paul is saying, “Men, as you lift your hands up to God in prayer, make sure that you are lifting up HOLY hands!” If you remember, one of the problems in Ephesus was that people were ignoring their conscience. Hymenaeus and Alexander had shipwrecked their faith by turning a blind eye to God’s clear instruction, and that example was surely rippling through the church. It appears that there were men in the church who had made peace with their sin who were standing with hands held high during prayer time.

But Paul here alludes back to Psalm 24 to highlight the hypocrisy of such prayers. In Psalm 24, we read:

Who shall ascend the hill of the Lord?
And who shall stand in his holy place?
⁴ He who has clean hands and a pure heart,

² William D. Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles – World Biblical Commentary*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2000), 108.

who does not lift up his soul to what is false
and does not swear deceitfully. (Psalm 24:3-4 ESV)

If your hands are still clinging to sin, then why are you publicly grandstanding in prayer before the church? If you've made peace with your sin and rejected God's instruction – if Jesus is not the Lord of your life – then what confidence do you have to approach His throne? That's an important, Biblical question. In Psalm 66:18 we read:

If I had cherished iniquity in my heart,
the Lord would not have listened. (Psalm 66:18 ESV)

“Well, that's in the OLD TESTAMENT” you object. Well, guess what: Jesus said this too! In Mark 11, for example, he warned:

And whenever you stand praying, forgive, if you have anything against anyone, **so that your Father also who is in heaven may forgive you your trespasses.** (Mark 11:25 ESV)

That is a terrifying verse, isn't it? Do we believe what Jesus is saying here?

“If you are standing up to pray, and you're mad at Bob because he offended you in some way, you need to forgive Bob or else **your heavenly Father will not forgive you.**”

Unforgiveness is deadly serious. Anger and a quarrelsome spirit are deadly serious. So Paul warns men:

I desire then that in every place the men should pray, lifting holy hands **without anger or quarreling** (1 Timothy 2:8 ESV)

I'm sure that there were some angry women in Ephesus, but they were the exception, not the norm. This sin was – AND CONTINUES TO BE – a particular temptation for the men. They were coming to church angry. They were coming to church ready for a fight. They were lifting up their prayers to God while simultaneously holding onto their bitterness and resentment. The men in Ephesus had an anger problem.

They brought their anger with them to worship. And God hated it. As one commentator notes:

In our prayers we leave our differences behind us.³

I must confess, over the last year and a half I have been deeply unsettled and – quite frankly – disillusioned by the anger and the quarreling that seamlessly found a home in the Canadian church. This text leaves me wondering how many prayers have been prayed in vain across our province. How many quarrelsome, divisive, angry men have recited long, cantankerous prayers from their pulpits with the delusion that such prayer is fit for the Prince of Peace?

Men of Redeemer, if you are carrying a chip on your shoulder, then you need to repent and you need to do it now! If you are harbouring a grudge, then you need to repent and you need to do it now. If you are making a habit of coming to church with a snarl on your face and a bone to pick, then you need to know that your prayers are bouncing off the ceiling.

Repent.

And, as you repent, believe. Brothers, Jesus bled and died for the sins of anger, bitterness and unforgiveness. Jesus bore in his body the curse for the quarrelsome. He offers forgiveness, and he offers it in spite of the fact that we could never deserve it! In 1 John 1:9 we read:

If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. (1 John 1:9 ESV)

Men. We need to stop fighting about disputable matters. We need to stop quarreling about things that we don't understand. We need to lay down our swords and let go of our grudges. We need to ask for forgiveness and to extend that forgiveness to those who have wronged us. Or else we will find ourselves praying in vain. That's Paul's message for the men in the church.

Let's turn our attention now to Paul's instructions for women:

Instructions for Women in the Household of God

We find these instructions in verses 9-10 where Paul goes on to say:

³ J.H. Bernard as quoted by Ralph Earle, *The Expositor's Bible Commentary (Ephesians - Philemon)*, ed. Frank A. Gaebel, vol. 11, 12 vols. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1978), 360.

likewise also that women should adorn themselves in respectable apparel, with modesty and self-control, not with braided hair and gold or pearls or costly attire, ¹⁰ but with what is proper for women who profess godliness—with good works. (1 Timothy 2:9-10 ESV)

While the men in Ephesus were polluting their worship with anger and schism, the women in Ephesus were polluting their worship with pride and vanity. The first instruction we find here is that:

1. **The women should dress modestly**

Can I lament for a moment? Somehow, at least in my Christian circles, modesty has become a swearword. The argument – if I’m understanding it correctly – is that if we emphasise modesty, we unintentionally insinuate that women’s bodies are dangerous and something to be hidden from men who can never be expected to control their lust. If THAT is what is being railed against when people complain about “modesty culture” then I will join my voice in protest. No, women should not be ashamed of their bodies! Yes, men should show self-control and men are responsible for their actions. Yes. Of course!

But.

But if that line of argument leads you to dismiss the idea of modesty outright then you have moved into unhelpful and unbiblical territory. Paul explicitly states:

women should adorn themselves in respectable apparel, **with modesty** and self-control (1 Timothy 2:9a ESV)

Modesty is not a cultural carryover from the “I Kissed Dating Goodbye” 90’s. It’s a biblical principal that women are called to value.

So, let’s look closely at this passage. For starters, let’s notice that Paul calls the women to “adorn themselves.” That’s significant. If Paul were operating under the assumption that women’s bodies were evil temptation-magnets, then he wouldn’t teach women to *adorn* their bodies. He would teach them to HIDE their bodies, as we see practiced in many of the Eastern religions of the world.

But he doesn’t command women to hide themselves. They are to ADORN themselves, but they are to do so in **respectable apparel with modesty**. This is where the difficult principal of

modesty comes into practice. There is a way to present yourself as a woman that brings glory to God and there is a way to present yourself as a woman that brings glory to you. We all know that this is true. In the city of Ephesus, for example, this lack of modesty manifested itself in obvious ways. Paul writes:

women should adorn themselves in respectable apparel, with modesty and self-control, **not with braided hair and gold or pearls or costly attire**, (1 Timothy 2:8 ESV)

Commentator William Mounce is helpful here. He explains:

The clothing Paul is considering is not slightly expensive but extravagantly expensive as suggested by the use of gold jewelry. A. H. M. Jones says clothing could cost as much as 7000 denarii, which equalled more than nineteen years' wages for an average day laborer.⁴

The issue in Ephesus, then, was that women were getting dressed for church with a motive of impressing others. They were treating the worship gathering like a beauty pageant. Listen: If you are picking your outfits with the intention of flaunting your wealth, or flaunting your beauty, or flaunting your weight loss, then you are guilty of what Paul is identifying in this passage. While there are undoubtedly some men who struggle with the sin of immodesty, we find here that this is a particular temptation for women. As John Stott summarizes:

The general impression is clear, that women are to be discreet and modest in their dress, and not to wear any garment which is deliberately suggestive or seductive. **This establishes a universal principle.**⁵

And here's the unique challenge: Modesty is a heart issue – not a rubric that can be standardized and enforced upon others. So, by way of example, what was immodest in Ephesus when Paul wrote to Timothy would not be considered immodest by our grandparents. And what was immodest when our grandparents were in their thirties would not be considered immodest today.

Therefore, I want to think very practically about this. I'm mindful of the fact that I'm walking into a minefield here, but I'm a dad with two daughters, and I'm a pastor of a church that is 60% female, so I can't simply skip this topic. Let's pray that I don't lose a leg.

⁴ William D. Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles – World Biblical Commentary*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2000), 115.

⁵ John Stott, *Guard the Truth – The Message of 1 Timothy & Titus*, (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1996), 83.

I would suggest two guiding principles that should shape the way that we think and talk about modesty as a church.

First, let's make sure that we understand that modesty is primarily a heart issue. And, since none of us has the ability to judge another person's heart, we need to operate with humility and grace. That means, as a rule, we should always assume the best in each other. To the older women, that means that there will be times when you will need to resist the urge to assume a young woman's motives when she walks in with an outfit that you never would have worn at her age. The necklace that appears to you to be a flaunting of wealth might be a gift from a deceased relative. You don't know! We can't see into each other's hearts and therefore, we need to train ourselves to assume the best in one another.

But, while modesty is primarily a heart issue, it is also an issue that is necessarily *communal*. Meaning – modesty and immodesty don't exist as categories when you're hanging out by yourself at home. Modesty is all about the way that we present ourselves in community. Therefore, it is very possible that someone in the community might be affected by the way that you dress in a way that you didn't anticipate. They will need to conduct themselves with humility as they consider whether to address you on the issue, but you also need to conduct yourself with humility in the off chance that they do. If an older woman approaches you and suggests that your outfit is flaunting wealth or sexuality – as awkward as that conversation might be – then you need to hear that with humility. Perhaps, even though your heart is in the right place, your outfit IS communicating a message that you didn't anticipate. The world would respond in that moment and say, “Mind your own business. I can dress however I want.” But as Christians, we operate differently.

Perhaps it would be helpful to contrast this issue with another issue that involved the conscience. The church in Rome really struggled with the issue of food. Some people believed that they needed to continue to observe the dietary restrictions of the Mosaic Law while others – like the Apostle Paul – understood that they were free from such restrictions. So, what did Paul suggest? Should the believers who felt freedom to eat anything push back at those with weak consciences? Should they demand their rights? Nope. He writes:

So then let us pursue what makes for peace and for mutual upbuilding.

²⁰ Do not, for the sake of food, destroy the work of God. Everything is indeed clean, but **it is wrong for anyone to make another stumble by what he eats.** (Romans 14:19-20 ESV)

For the sake of the gospel – for the sake of the unity and the upbuilding of the church – Paul would have eaten an old sock! He was ready to stop eating certain foods for the rest of his life if that meant protecting his brothers and sisters from stumbling! Therefore, if someone comes to you and says, “I think this outfit might lead others to stumble,” the Christian response should not be, “But God made my body and there’s nothing wrong with it!” even though that’s true, and the Christian response should not be, “I am not responsible for weak men and their lust!” even though that’s also true. But the Christian response should be, “My heart was not in the wrong place when I picked this out, and my conscience is clean, but if you think this outfit is leading anyone to stumble, I’ll happily wear something else.”

Our text this morning calls us to swim against the stream of the contemporary evangelical culture and to embrace modesty. And lastly, Paul gives one final instruction for women:

2. The women should prioritize inner beauty

This is the overarching thrust of Paul’s instructions to the women in Ephesus. Look at the text one last time:

likewise also that women should adorn themselves in respectable apparel, with modesty and self-control, not with braided hair and gold or pearls or costly attire, ¹⁰ but with what is proper for women who profess godliness—with good works. (1 Timothy 2:9-10 ESV)

Look closely at what Paul is prescribing: Modesty. Self-control. Good works. Paul’s point isn’t to instate a dress code in Ephesus but to reorient the women in the church to prioritize a different kind of beauty. As one commentator notes:

Therefore, here Paul is not requesting the total absence of external beauty but a priority placed on the internal.⁶

We’ve already discussed modesty, so let’s focus in on the other attributes Paul highlights in this text. What does it mean for a woman to adorn herself with self-control? Self-control is one of the fruits of the Spirit listed in Galatians, and it manifests itself in countless ways. Later in this letter,

⁶ William D. Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles – World Biblical Commentary*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2000), 114.

Paul will give a rebuke for some women in the church who were spending their days running around the town spreading gossip, so at least one of the ways that Paul would have these women display self-control is in the guarding of their tongues.

Women are also to strive to adorn themselves with good works. A beautiful Christian woman is one who honours her parents, and who serves those who are in need, and who studies the word diligently, and who is clearly growing in holiness day by day. She is comfortable in her own skin – not because of the designer clothes that she has in the closet – but because she knows Who she belongs to and because she lives a life of service to Him every day. We find a similar commendation to women in 1 Peter 3 where we read:

Do not let your adorning be external—the braiding of hair and the putting on of gold jewelry, or the clothing you wear—⁴ but let your adorning be the hidden person of the heart with the imperishable beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which in God's sight is very precious. (1 Peter 3:3-4 ESV)

Mothers and fathers, the world is telling our daughters to pursue an external beauty. Let's make sure that we set a different example in here. Amen? As a father of two daughters, can I make a personal plea to the women in this church? For every 1 conversation my daughters overhear about diet and exercise can you please let them overhear 99 conversations about holiness and grace? They are going to get enough of the shallow, superficial nonsense out there. Let this be the place where they are reminded of what really matters.

Conclusion

Moms and dads, mentors and friends – we do a disservice to the people that we are trying to care for when we pretend that gender is nothing more than a social construct. God made men, and He made women, and they while they are equal in worth and dignity, they are wonderfully and gloriously DIFFERENT! They possess different strengths. They possess different weaknesses. They are susceptible to different temptations. They require different support. To pretend otherwise will win you applause from the culture, but it will hamper your ability to give any counsel that's actually helpful.

Is it just me, or is it remarkably refreshing to return week after week to a text that isn't shaped in any way by the cultural dos and don'ts of our day? If I could simply preach on whatever I want, I confess that I would have avoided ALL of this. And yet, we NEED all of this. In a culture full of angry men trying to prove how strong they are with their words; Paul tells us here that the household of God should be filled with men who are strong in prayer and who check their anger at the door. In a culture full of promiscuity and objectification Paul tells us here that the household of God should be filled with women who are beautiful in character. Isn't that glorious? Isn't that a breath of fresh air?

The household of God should be the place – should be the community – where we can escape from the smog of the culture for a moment to breathe deeply of God's good design. And, having caught our breath, God calls us to go back out into the world to be salt and light wherever we go. Men who are strong in prayer. Women who are beautiful in conduct. This is who God has made us to be. This is who He has saved us to be. And this is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God.

To that end, let's ask the Lord for His help.