

Living in God's Church Today

Men and Women in Public Worship

1 Timothy 2:8-15

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March 13, 2022

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Scripture

In 1 Timothy 2, Paul wrote on the subject of *public worship*. In verses 1-7, which we studied last week, Paul emphasized the need for a global concern in public worship. Today we are going to study verses 8-15, and see how Paul addressed the respective roles of men and women in public worship.

Let us read about men and women in public worship in 1 Timothy 2:8-15:

⁸I desire then that in every place the men should pray, lifting holy hands without anger or quarreling; ⁹likewise 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. ¹¹Let a woman learn quietly with all submissiveness. ¹²I do not permit a woman to teach or to exercise authority over a man; rather, she is to remain quiet. ¹³For Adam was formed first, then Eve; ¹⁴and Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and became a transgressor. ¹⁵Yet she will be saved through childbearing – if they continue in faith and love and holiness, with self-control. (1 Timothy 2:8-15)

Introduction

Today we are going to examine a text that has caused a great deal of debate. However, that was not always the case. I was surprised to learn that it has only been hotly debated in the last fifty years or so. Kent Hughes writes the following:

It is also crucial that we understand that the historic interpretation of 1 Timothy 2:11–15 has been the majority view of the church at large for most of the last 2,000 years. Bob Yarbrough, Professor of New Testament at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, surveyed the scholarly articles in the standard bibliographical reference tool *New Testament Abstracts* and noted that it was only in 1969 that the progressive, revisionist view began to appear in the literature of the academy. But then in the period between 1969 and now a flood of articles appeared. He concludes that the rise in the progressive interpretation's promotion following the women's movement of the 1960s is "indebted significantly, and at times probably culpably, to the prevailing social climate rather than to the Biblical text."¹

But the women's movement of the 1960s pales in comparison to the modern transgender movement. If male/female differences were challenged by the women's movement in the 1960s, the current transgender movement is seeking to eradicate those differences completely today. Philip Ryken writes:

Lorna Smedman believes that gender is a fiction. Each year she teaches a course called "Reimagining Gender" at Hunter College in New York City and begins her first class session with the following words: "My working assumption in this course is that gender is already imaginary in the first place, meaning that it's a construction – a fiction that we all live and work with in our daily lives."

If Smedman is right, then the line between the masculine and the feminine can be erased. There is no inherent reason why women should not behave like men, and vice versa. This view seems to be becoming more dominant in Western

¹ R. Kent Hughes and Bryan Chapell, *1 & 2 Timothy and Titus: To Guard the Deposit, Preaching the Word* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2000), 66.

culture, with the result that some women no longer want to be women, and many men no longer know what it means to be men.²

There is no doubt that we live in challenging times with respect to gender roles. Our culture is increasingly embracing an understanding of gender that is contrary to Scripture.

But for the Christian, our authority – indeed, our *sole* authority in matters of faith and practice – is in the inerrant, infallible, authoritative, and sufficient word of God. We do not – indeed, we dare not – take our cues from culture. We must take our direction from God and his word.

That is not to say that we do not face difficulties. Today's text is in places not easy to interpret. Moreover, one of the challenges when interpreting Scripture is determining what has a cultural application to the time in which the text was written and what has a universal application to all people in all times.

So we approach today's text in humility and yet also with confidence because God's word is always a sure guide.

Paul wrote his First Letter to Timothy to correct some of the problems in the churches around Ephesus. Timothy was pastoring the churches around Ephesus and problems had arisen due to false teaching. Paul told Timothy to charge the false teachers not to teach their errors. Paul also wanted to correct some problems in the public worship services.

Lesson

1 Timothy 2:8-15 teaches us about the behavior of men and women in public worship.

² Philip Graham Ryken, *1 Timothy*, ed. Richard D. Phillips, Daniel M. Doriani, and Philip Graham Ryken, Reformed Expository Commentary (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2007), 73–74.

Let's use the following outline:

1. Appropriate Behavior of Men in Public Worship (2:8)
2. Appropriate Behavior of Women in Public Worship (2:9-15)

I. Appropriate Behavior of Men in Public Worship (2:8)

First, let's look at the appropriate behavior of men in public worship.

Paul wrote about men in public worship in verse 8, **“I desire then that in every place the men should pray, lifting holy hands without anger or quarreling.”**

The word **“then”** can also be translated as “therefore,” which would make verse 8 a summary statement to conclude what Paul has just written about prayer in verses 1-2. It was the practice in synagogues and then followed by the first-century church for the men to lead in prayer in the worship services.

“In every place” referred to wherever Christians met for worship. There were likely several meeting places in the city of Ephesus and its surrounding villages where believers gathered together for worship.

Saying that prayer should be offered by **“lifting holy hands without anger or quarreling”** focuses on the proper attitude in prayer. It was common for men to stand in prayer and raise their hands with palms turned upwards to indicate the offering of themselves to God in his service.

Paul set down two principles for acceptable prayer.

A. Acceptable Prayer Must Come from Purified Hearts (2:8a)

First, acceptable prayer must come from purified hearts.

The expression **“lifting holy hands”** (2:8a) is Paul’s way of saying that prayer must come from a purified heart. Bodily posture is not what is primary. Prayer may be offered when standing, kneeling, prostrating, and sitting. However, what is essential is that prayer must come from a purified heart. Paul used the expression of **“holy hands”** as an outward sign of an inward reality.

B. Acceptable Prayer Must Come from Right Relationships (2:8b)

And second, acceptable prayer must come from right relationships.

Paul also said that prayer must be offered **“without anger or quarreling”** (2:8b). It is possible that there was anger and quarreling among the men in the churches in Ephesus. Paul insisted that acceptable prayer must come from those who are in a right relationship with one another. One cannot pray to God when one is angry or quarreling with a brother or sister.

Our prayer must come from purified hearts and right relationships. It cannot be otherwise if we want our prayers to be acceptable to God. The answer to Question 98 (“What is prayer?”) in *The Westminster Shorter Catechism* is, “Prayer is an offering up of our desires unto God, for things agreeable to his will, in the name of Christ, with confession of our sins, and thankful acknowledgment of his mercies.”³ Prayer is an expression of our submission to God, who is supreme over all things. It is right that we offer ourselves to God every time we pray. We want to live for him. We want to serve him. We want to be used by him in his service. And though we don’t have to raise our hands in prayer (although it would not be wrong to do so),

³ *The Westminster Shorter Catechism: With Scripture Proofs*, 3rd edition. (Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1996).

we must pray with purified hearts and right relationships.

II. **Appropriate Behavior of Women in Public Worship (2:9-15)**

And second, let's examine the appropriate behavior of women in public worship.

Paul went on to write about women in worship. Given the limitation of our time, we will not discuss this extensively. I will discuss Paul's point by stating two principles.

A. Adornment in Public Worship Must Be Appropriate (2:9-10)

First, adornment in public worship must be appropriate.

Paul now addressed the women in worship. He wrote in verses 9-10, **“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, but with what is proper for women who profess godliness – with good works.”** The Greek word for **“adorn”** (*kosmeo*) occurs 10 times in the New Testament. It is the word from which we get our English word for **“cosmetics.”** It means **“to make more attractive by adding ornament or color.”** The general principle for Paul was that adornment in public worship must be appropriate. That is, women must wear **“respectable apparel, with modesty and self-control.”**

In the city of Ephesus, some women apparently braided their hair with gold and pearls. They also wore extremely expensive clothes. Paul said that women should not attend the public worship services with **“braided hair and gold or pearls or costly attire.”** Instead, the proper deportment for public worship was **“women who profess godliness – with**

good works” (2:10).

Paul wanted women to dress in respectable apparel, with modesty and self-control. He wanted women with good works to attend worship. What is respectable in one culture may not be respectable in another culture. For example, a short-term missions team was told that women in that culture wear dresses to worship. They did not wear pants to worship. So our women were asked to wear dresses rather than pants to worship because in that culture dresses were considered to be **“respectable apparel”** for worship.

The point is that adornment in public worship must be appropriate.

B. Participation in Public Worship Must be Appropriate (2:11-15)

And second, participation in public worship must be appropriate.

Paul wrote in verse 11, **“Let a woman learn quietly with all submissiveness.”** In the Greek text, there is no connecting particle at the beginning of this verse. This indicates that Paul introduced a new topic. Though Paul used the singular noun for **“a woman”** it is a reference to women in general regarding their relationship to the congregation, specifically the worship service. Women were not to speak during the public worship services but rather were to receive the instruction that was given to them. It is important to keep in mind that Paul's direction to women was radical. In Paul's day, women were not held in high esteem. Women were not typically present in the synagogue worship, from which Christian worship developed. Paul wanted women to receive instruction and be part of the worshiping congregation. They were to participate in public worship by learning along with the men.

Then Paul wrote in verse 12a, **“I do not permit a woman to teach.”** There may have been women in Ephesus who wanted to be preachers. However, Paul forbade women from filling the office and role of pastor.

He did not prohibit women from teaching in other appropriate situations. For example, Apollos was an eloquent man, competent in the Scriptures. However, his understanding was deficient since he only knew of the baptism of John. Acts 18:26 says, “He began to speak boldly in the synagogue, but when Priscilla and Aquila heard him, they took him aside and explained to him the way of God more accurately.” Here was private instruction by a husband and wife to Apollos.

Another example is given by Paul himself in Titus 2:3-4, where he wrote, “Older women likewise are to be reverent in behavior, not slanderers or slaves to much wine. They are to teach what is good, and so train the young women to love their husbands and children.”

In verse 12b, Paul wrote that he did not permit a woman **“to exercise authority over a man; rather, she is to remain quiet.”** In what sense did Paul mean that he did not permit a woman **“to exercise authority over a man”**? The Greek word that is translated as **“exercise authority over”** (*authentein*) appears only here in the New Testament. Some have said that the word means something like “abusive authority” or “to domineer.” If that is how the word is used, then Paul meant that women were not to exercise abusive authority or to domineer over men. Paul did not want women in leadership to be domineering or abusive in their leadership.

However, a study of that Greek word (*authentein*) in extra-biblical sources – that is, in sources outside the Bible – makes it clear that the word simply means “authority” and not “abusive authority.” It does not carry the negative connotation of

abusive or domineering authority. Therefore, Paul simply forbade women from exercising authority over men in the church. This did not prohibit women from teaching, however. Priscilla and Aquila both instructed Apollos (Acts 18:26), but they did so in private and not in the public worship service. Moreover, Paul also stated that women must teach women (Titus 2:3-4).

Paul's point was that women were not to exercise authority in the assembly since the elders are the ones who rule (see 5:17).

Paul gave the reason for this prohibition on teaching and exercising authority in verses 13-14, **“For Adam was formed first, then Eve; and Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and became a transgressor.”** First, it has to do with the order of creation (**“Adam was formed first”**), and second, it has to do with the deception of Eve (**“the woman was deceived”**). Paul's point is that gender roles in the church are based on creation order and not the result of the fall. Therefore, it applies to all cultures at all times.

Our culture sees a biblical church that has only men serving as church officers as hopelessly out-of-date. The culture argues that we are now enlightened and that both men and women may serve in the church eldership and the office of teaching. Liberal churches in the past and progressive churches today want to accommodate culture and give approval to having women teach and exercise authority. In our day, we are dealing with the problem of progressivism. Progressive churches want to be as acceptable to the culture as possible. They want to have a seat at the table of cultural discussion. However, biblical churches will stand firm on the truth of God's word, even if it is culturally unpopular. They do so because they want to obey God rather than please the culture.

Paul concluded in verse 15, **“Yet she will be saved**

through childbearing – if they continue in faith and love and holiness, with self-control.” This is a difficult verse to interpret and understand. It seems to me that Paul does not have Eve in mind when he wrote that **“she will be saved through childbearing”** because the verb **“will be saved”** is future, and he also uses the plural pronoun **“they”** later in the verse. Paul is instead referring to women after Eve. The Greek word for **“she will be saved”** (*sothesetai*) can also mean “will be preserved,” which is how the *New American Standard Bible* translates the word. The word can also mean “to rescue,” “to preserve safe and unharmed,” “to heal,” or “to deliver from.” The word appears several times in the New Testament without reference to spiritual salvation (cf. Matthew 8:25; 9:21, 22; 24:22; 27:40, 42, 49; 2 Timothy 4:18). Paul was not teaching that women are eternally saved through childbearing, which would contradict the teaching that eternal salvation is by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone. Instead, Paul was teaching that while a woman may have led the human race into sin, women have the privilege of leading the race out of sin to godliness. This took place through the birth of Christ.

Conclusion

Therefore, having analyzed 1 Timothy 2:8-15, let us behave in a way that honors the Lord and his word.

In the past fifty years, we have seen churches capitulate to the pressure of the culture and have no distinctions between men and women. However, churches that have done so have not grown but declined.

Let us remain faithful to God’s word about men and women in public worship – even if it means that we are out of step with our culture today. Amen.

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*To bring people to Jesus Christ
and membership in his church family,
develop them to Christlike maturity,
equip them for their ministry in the church
and life mission in the world,
in order to magnify God's name.*

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