



Recently, I attended a pastoral retreat in Asheville, North Carolina. Dr. Albert Mohler, president of the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, was the keynote speaker. The theme was: “Lord, to Whom Shall We Go? The Predicament of Preaching in a Post-Christian Age.” That question, “Lord, to Whom Shall We Go?”, was first asked by Peter after the feeding of the five thousand. Many who had been following Jesus turned back and no longer walked with him because they were offended by his message and refused to believe in him as the Bread of life. Jesus said to the twelve, “Do you also want to go?” Peter replied, “*Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life, and we have believed, and have come to know, that you are the Holy One of God*” (John 6:67-68).

As Christians, we’ve got nowhere else to go but to Christ. He is the bread of life. He has the words of eternal life. He came that we might have life and have it more abundantly (John 10:10). That’s why we proclaim, as Peter did, “Where else can we go, Lord? You have the words of eternal life.” Jesus declared, “It is written: ‘Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God’” (Matt 4:4).

If we truly believe this, then we will eat whatever God gives us, even if it’s not agreeable to our palate. I prefer hamburgers over vegetables, but I know that vegetables are good for me. Likewise, some truths in Scripture may not appeal to us at first. But if we trust the God who feeds us, we can ingest his word and even cultivate an appetite for that which was at first unappealing to us, especially as we experience its positive effects.

Such is the case with the Scripture passage we’ll be considering today: 1 Timothy 2:8-15:

<sup>8</sup> I desire then that in every place the men should pray, lifting holy hands without anger or quarreling; <sup>9</sup> 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, <sup>10</sup> but with what is proper for women who profess godliness — with good works. <sup>11</sup> Let a woman learn quietly with all submissiveness. <sup>12</sup> I do not permit a woman to teach or to exercise authority over a man; rather, she is to remain quiet. <sup>13</sup> For Adam was formed first, then Eve; <sup>14</sup> and Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and became a transgressor. <sup>15</sup> Yet she will be saved through childbearing — if they continue in faith and love and holiness, with self-control.

Our family lived in the Boston area when the “Big Dig” was going on – the largest underground highway construction project in American history. While the end result was a success, there were many problems along the way. The project was supposed to be completed in seven years, but it took nearly 17 years. It was supposed to cost \$2.8 billion, but it ended up costing five times that amount – \$14.6 billion (\$24 billion with interest). Worst of all, a lady lost her life when a concrete ceiling panel and debris weighing 26 tons fell on her car.

What caused the collapse? The bolts anchored into the tunnel's roof slab were too short, and the epoxy used to glue the bolts into the concrete was not up to standard. The epoxy cost \$1,287.60. The cost to redesign, inspect, and repair the tunnel was \$54 million.

I thought about the Big Dig as I began digging into the text we just read. It occurred to me that something that seems relatively minor – how men and women behave in church – carries major consequences. Consequences far more significant than the Big Dig.

We live in a society that increasingly seeks to eradicate the line between masculinity and femininity. In his book, *Strange New World*, Carl Trueman writes,

The sentence “I am a woman trapped in a man’s body” would have been nonsense to my grandfather. Had it been uttered by a patient to a doctor in the mid-twentieth century, the doctor would have almost certainly have responded that the patient had a psychiatric problem and that his mind needed to be treated so as to bring its feelings into line with his physical body. Today, the doctor is more likely to respond that the problem is such that the patient’s body needs to be brought into alignment with those inner feelings.<sup>1</sup>

If the doctor says otherwise, he may be subject to a lawsuit! Sex reassignment surgery is now called gender affirmation surgery. The genitals of men, women and even children are being mutilated under the guise of “gender-affirming care.”

We live in a “strange new world” that is suffering the tremendous cost of moral collapse. The Lord Jesus has commissioned us to win this world to Christ. Carl Trueman notes, “The most powerful witness to the gospel is the church herself, simply going about the business of worship.”<sup>2</sup> “When it comes to public worship, the Holy Spirit does not hesitate to say that there are differences between men and women.”<sup>3</sup> These differences are reflected in God’s instructions to men and women. These gender-specific directives are the “epoxy and bolts” that keep the structure of the church and our witness to the world intact. To state the matter simply,

***How men and women behave in church  
impacts global evangelism.***

In 1 Timothy 2, Paul shows this connection. He begins the chapter by emphasizing the priority of prayer for the purpose of evangelism. In verse 4 he states, “[God] desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.” Then in verses 8-9 Paul says, “I desire then that in every place the men should pray ... likewise also that the women should adorn themselves in respectable apparel....” And so on and so forth.

---

<sup>1</sup> Carl R. Trueman, *Strange New World: How Thinkers and Activists Redefined Identity and Sparked the Sexual Revolution* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2022), 31.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 176.

<sup>3</sup> Philip Graham Ryken, *1 Timothy*, Reformed Expository Commentary, New Testament edited by Daniel M. Doriani, series editors Richard D. Phillips and Philip Graham Ryken (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2007), 74.

Paul's parallel language emphasizes the connection between our worship and witness. When an unbeliever shows up in our worship service, he "should be struck by the other-worldly holiness of what is going on."<sup>4</sup> This is part of God's design. In 1 Timothy 3:14-15, Paul says, "I am writing these things to you so that ... 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." The world is engulfed in the devil's lies, which is why God calls the church to put the truth on display. The truth about God and the truth about ourselves.

The account of creation in Genesis reveals that God created men and women equal but different. We have different roles and capacities to fulfill in the home and in the church. Kevin DeYoung writes,

If we are to think rightly and feel rightly and embrace rightly what it means to be male and female, we need to appreciate that God doesn't give arbitrary rules for men and women to follow. Whatever "rules" there are for men and women in the church are never mere rules; they reflect the sort of differentiated and complementary image bearers God designed us to be from the beginning. ... All good theology starts in Genesis, but it never stops there.<sup>5</sup>

That's why Paul issues gender-specific instructions in his letter to Timothy. The church is God's house, and every house has its rules. So, let's look at the guidelines listed here.

### **Men and Prayer (v. 8)**

"I desire then that in every place the men should pray, lifting holy hands without anger or quarreling" (v. 8). When Paul says, "I desire," he's not expressing a personal wish or opinion. He's speaking as an apostle of Jesus Christ. Paul's desire is God's directive.

The God who wants all men to be saved wants saved men in every place to pray. That's not to say that God doesn't want women to pray. He does, and they do. Paul specifically tells the men to pray, because clearly there was a problem in this area. Either the men were not stepping up to lead the church in prayer, or they were praying in church while fighting with one another. That kind of behavior renders prayer useless (see 1 Peter 3:7) and even detestable to God (see Prov. 28:9). When Jesus taught his disciples to pray, he also warned them against hypocritical prayer. James in his epistle describes the tongue as "a restless evil, full of deadly poison," saying, "With it we bless our Lord and Father, and with it we curse people who are in the likeness of God. From the same mouth come blessing and cursing. My brothers, these things ought not so to be" (James 3:8b-9).

When "prayer goes awry, ... worship is imperiled."<sup>6</sup> Sinful attitudes and words poison worship. So, Paul's primary concern is not with men's *posture* in prayer, but their *purity*. They are to be lifting "*holy hands*" (italics mine).

---

<sup>4</sup> Trueman, 176.

<sup>5</sup> Kevin DeYoung, *Men and Women in the Church: A Short, Biblical, Practical Introduction* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2021), 25.

<sup>6</sup> Robert W. Yarbrough, *The Letters to Timothy and Titus*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary, gen. ed. D. A. Carson (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2018), 163.

That's not to say that our posture is insignificant. Scripture describes several postures for prayer that express inward devotion.

- Psalm 95 says, "Oh come, let us worship and *bow down*; let us *kneel* before the LORD, our Maker!" (v. 6). Daniel got on his knees three times a day to pray and give thanks to God (Dan. 6:10). Such a posture shows humility and reverence.
- Other men *fell flat on the ground* when they were overwhelmed by the troubles of life or by the glory of God. Such was the case with Job (1:20) and Ezekiel (1:28).
- *Standing* was the typical posture for corporate prayer in the Old Testament (e.g., 2 Chr. 6:3, 13; 20:5; Neh. 9:5), and this became the practice of the early church.<sup>7</sup>
- The same was true when it came to *lifting hands*. In Psalm 63, David testified to the Lord, "I will bless you as long as I live; in your name I will lift up my hands." In Psalm 28, David prayed, "To you, O LORD, I call.... Hear the voice of my pleas for mercy, when I cry to you for help, when I lift up my hands..." (vv. 1a, 2). This practice of lifting hands is confirmed by early Christian documents and artwork. "The murals in the Roman catacombs depict believers raising their hands in praise."<sup>8</sup> Sometimes believers would spread their hands in worship as an expression of their dependence on the Lord as they looked to him to supply all their needs.

So, Paul tells men to pray, lifting up "holy hands" as an expression of a holy life. That is to say, we should not be lifting our hands to the Lord when we are angry and arguing with others. Jesus said, "when you are praying, first forgive anyone you are holding a grudge against, so that your Father in heaven will forgive your sins, too" (Mark 11:25 NLT). In fact, Jesus went so far as to say that if you enter the place of worship and are about to make an offering and then remember that someone has something against you, you should leave your offering, go make things right with that person, and then come back and then come back and present your offering to God (Matt. 5:23-24).

Angry, argumentative men make lousy intercessors. So do passive men who are listless in worship. God wants his church filled with men who are proactive in prayer, expressive in prayer, pure in their walk with God, and at peace in their relationship with others.

Although the bulk of this passage is directed to women, Paul starts with the men. The main thrust of this passage and Scripture as a whole is not "Women, sit down," but "men, stand up."<sup>9</sup>

Thank God for women who pray! But if they're the only ones praying, then the church is only running at half-throttle. Scripture says, "the earnest prayer of a righteous person has great power and produces wonderful results" (James 5:16b NLT). Men, your prayers matter! They fuel the church's worship and witness! So, pray fervently and faithfully "with holy hands lifted up to God, free from anger and controversy" (1 Tim. 2:8 NLT).

---

<sup>7</sup> Samuel Miller, *Thoughts on Public Prayer* (Philadelphia, 1849; repr. Harrisonburg, VA: Sprinkle, 1985), 122-125. Cited by Ryken, 77.

<sup>8</sup> Ryken, 77.

<sup>9</sup> DeYoung, 98.

## Women and Propriety (vv. 9-15)

Dictionary.com defines *propriety* as “conformity to established standards of good or proper behavior....” This is precisely Paul’s concern with women as it pertains to their dress, their deeds, and their demeanor in the corporate worship of the church.

### Their Dress (v. 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” (v. 9). Compare Paul’s standard with today’s most popular fashion magazines, and you’ll see that the contrast could not be more striking. Philip Ryken writes,

If this verse seems to be out of touch with contemporary culture, that is all the more reason to listen to what it says. Which is more likely: that the Bible is out of date or that our culture is out of line? God’s Word critiques every culture. Often the Scripture that most shocks and surprises us, or even angers and offends us, is the Scripture we most need to hear.<sup>10</sup>

Verse 9 begins with the word “likewise,” which is significant because it sets the context. Paul is still addressing the matter of public worship. He wants to make sure the women are adequately prepared. The word “adorn” translates the Greek word *kosmeo*, from which we get our English word cosmetics. It literally means “to arrange, to put in order, to make ready.” Paul wants women to dress properly as they prepare for worship.

So, as the ladies are sifting through their closets, wondering what to wear, Paul wants to make sure they choose “respectable apparel” that reflects “modesty” and “self-control.”

Dr. Stephen Baugh, Professor of New Testament at Westminster Seminary California, has shown in his definitive study of first-century Ephesus that the women’s style of dress reflected the excessive luxury and licentiousness of the Roman courtesans, or escorts. Baugh says that the equivalent today would be telling Christians not to imitate “styles set by promiscuous pop singers or actresses.”<sup>11</sup> Church is no place for a fashion show. Phil Ryken writes, “A woman who loves to be noticed must remember with whom she is competing. God is the one who ought to receive all our attentions and affections....”<sup>12</sup>

Scripture isn’t telling women to make sure they’re always out of style! The Bible doesn’t forbid women from having a nice hairdo or jewelry or up-to-date clothes, but using these things to draw attention to yourself. “The issue is not *whether* a woman should seek to display beauty, but *how* they do it.”<sup>13</sup>

---

<sup>10</sup> Ryken, 81.

<sup>11</sup> S. M. Baugh, “A Foreign World: Ephesus in the First Century,” in *Women in the Church*, edited by Andreas J. Kostenberger, Thomas R. Schreiner, and H. Scott Baldwin (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1995), 47-48.

<sup>12</sup> Ryken, 83.

<sup>13</sup> Robert W. Yarbrough, “1-2 Timothy,” NIV Zondervan Study Bible, gen. ed. D. A. Carson (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2015), 2462.

## Their Deeds (v. 10)

In verse 10 Paul says that “women who profess to worship God ... make themselves attractive by the good things they do” (NLT, NIV). One commentator writes, “The way to become more attractive is through godliness, not gaudiness. A woman is made beautiful by what she does, not what she wears.”<sup>14</sup> John Stott rightly says,

The church should be a veritable beauty parlour, because it encourages its women members to adorn themselves with good deeds. Women need to remember that if nature has made them plain, grace can make them beautiful, and if nature has made them beautiful, good deeds can add to their beauty. Moreover, men can facilitate this process by recognizing and applauding in women the beauty of Christlikeness.<sup>15</sup>

## Their Demeanor (vv. 11-15)

Paul gives the *regulation* in verses 11-12, the reasons for it in verses 13-14, and the resolution of the whole matter in verse 15.

### 1. The regulation (vv. 11-12)

“Let a woman learn quietly with all submissiveness” (1 Tim. 2:11). When reading this verse, we tend to focus immediately on the negative instead of the positive. But Paul’s first four words, “Let a woman learn,” were revolutionary, because in the Roman world, women were considered academically inferior. The educational system was designed primarily for men, not women. Jewish rabbis were even more chauvinistic. According to the Jerusalem Talmud, it would be better for the words of the Torah to be burned than to be entrusted to a woman.<sup>16</sup> The status of women in Greek society was pretty pathetic, too. William Barclay writes,

The respectable Greek woman led a very confined life. She lived in her own quarters into which no one but her husband came. She did not even appear at meals. She never at any time appeared on the street alone; she never went to any public assembly.<sup>17</sup>

But Paul says, no, that’s not right. That’s not appropriate. That’s not honoring to the Lord. “Let a woman learn.” But let her do so “quietly with all submissiveness.” The word “quietly” refers not to total silence but to a calm demeanor. Paul uses the same word (*hesuchia*) in 2 Thessalonians 3:12 where he commands Christians are to “do their work quietly” – to settle down – “and to earn their own living.”

The Greek word translated “submissiveness” (*hupotage*) means “to line up under.” In the context of corporate worship, women are to be content to be in the role of the learner.

<sup>14</sup> Ryken, 85.

<sup>15</sup> John R. W. Stott, *The Message of 1 Timothy and Titus: Guard the Truth, The Bible Speaks Today*, NT series editor John R. W. Stott (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1996), 84-85.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 85.

<sup>17</sup> William Barclay, *The Letters to Timothy, Titus, and Philemon*, revised edition (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1975), 67.

Paul's reiteration of this regulation in verse 12 interprets the meaning of verse 11. In verse 12 Paul says, "I do not permit a woman to teach or to exercise authority over a man; rather, she is to remain quiet." Do you see how this verse interprets the meaning of verse 11? A woman is not to teach (respecting the command for quietness) "or to exercise authority over a man (respecting the command for all submissiveness)."<sup>18</sup>

Paul is not prohibiting all vocal participation in the worship service. Women can sing, pray, read Scripture, share testimonies, etc., but they are to respect "the authoritative teaching and governing rule assigned to the leaders of the church (v. 12)."<sup>19</sup> Women who are gifted to teach and lead should use their gifts to build up the church, but not in the role of pastor/elder. Rather, women should lead and serve in other various positions of the church under the authority of the elder leadership.

## 2. The reasons (vv. 13-14)

"For Adam was formed first, then Eve; and Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and became a transgressor" (1 Tim. 2:13-14).

The first reason why women are not to teach or to exercise authority in the corporate worship assembly of the church is based on the order of human creation. Adam was formed first, then Eve. God made Eve after Adam to be his suitable helper. That's not an inferior position, it's just a different role, as part of God's good complementary design for men and women. Paul doesn't base the regulation for women in worship on the culture of the day or on the curse after humanity fell into sin, but on the order of creation itself. Therefore, God's regulations for worship transcend all cultures for all times.

The second reason why women are not to teach or to exercise authority over men in the corporate worship of the church is because Eve was deceived. Humanity's catastrophic fall into sin occurred when the roles of men and women were reversed. After the serpent deceived Eve and she took the fruit of the forbidden tree and ate it, the text says, "and she also gave some to her husband *who was with her*, and he ate" (Gen. 3:6). Adam was supposed to be the loving, protective leader. But he stood passively by as the serpent tempted his wife. Then he followed her lead by sinning. John MacArthur writes,

When [Eve] stepped out from under the protection and leadership of Adam, she [became] highly vulnerable and fell. And, of course, when Adam violated his leadership role and followed Eve..., the perversion of God's order was complete. The Fall resulted, then, not simply from disobedience to God's command, but from violating God's appointed roles for the sexes. ... As the head of their relationship, [Adam] bore ultimate responsibility. That is why the New Testament relates the Fall to Adam's sin, not Eve's (Rom. 5:12-21; 1 Cor. 15:21-22). Headship by the man, then, was part of God's design from the beginning, and he bears the responsibility for its success or failure. The tragic experience of the garden encounter with the serpent confirmed the wisdom of that design.<sup>20</sup>

<sup>18</sup>

<sup>19</sup> The Reformation Study Bible, gen. ed. R. C. Sproul (Orlando: Ligonier Ministries, 2005), 1754.

<sup>20</sup> John MacArthur, Jr., *1 Timothy*, The MacArthur New Testament Commentary (Chicago: Moody, 1995), 88-89.

### 3. The resolution (v. 15)

“Yet she will be saved through childbearing – if they continue in faith and love and holiness, with self-control” (1 Tim. 2:15). This verse is usually understood in one of three ways. Some see verse 15 as a reference to Mary. Through the virgin birth, the Messiah entered the world and saved both men and women. Paul, having already alluded to the Fall in Genesis 3, could be thinking of Genesis 3:15, which prophesied that the seed of the woman would crush the head of the serpent, Satan. In the original text of 1 Timothy 2:15, the definite article (“the”) appears before childbearing, in which case women are saved not through childbearing, but through *the* childbearing, i.e., the birth of Jesus.

On the other hand, verse 15 could mean that women are saved in a different way. The Greek word for “save,” *sozo*, can also mean “to rescue, to set free, to deliver from.” It appears a number of times in the New Testament without reference to eternal salvation. What women are rescued from in this case is the stigma of having led the human race into sin. They are delivered from this mark of disgrace when they give birth and raise godly children. “The hand that rocks the cradle rules the world.” Kevin DeYoung writes, “Understandably, some women will not have children because of medical reasons or singleness, but in so far as it is possible, childbearing is one of the unique ways in which a woman can accept, in obedience, her God-given design.”<sup>21</sup> As Christian women “continue in faith and love and holiness, with self-control,” they prove the genuineness of their faith. In her book, *Women’s Ministry in the Local Church*, Susan Hunt introduces her comments on this section in 1 Timothy 2 by saying,

I am awestruck that Paul’s polemic on submission is preceded by a tender assurance of God’s sovereign love. “For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all” (1 Timothy 2:5-6). The God-man who paid the ransom for my soul is the One who tells me how life is to be ordered in His Kingdom. Gratitude for such grace compels me to trust and obey.<sup>22</sup>

## Concluding Counsel

### 1. Align yourself with Scripture, not culture.

The local church “was meant to be a counterculture, a set-apart community embodying a radically different vision for human flourishing.”<sup>23</sup> Martyn Lloyd-Jones said, “The glory of the gospel is that when the church is absolutely different from the world, she invariably attracts it.”<sup>24</sup> *How men and women behave in church impacts global evangelism.*

### 2. Beware of compromise and excessive cushion.

---

<sup>21</sup> DeYoung, 87.

<sup>22</sup> J. Ligon Duncan and Susan Hunt, *Women’s Ministry in the Local Church* (Wheaton: Good News Publishers, 2006), 71.

<sup>23</sup> Brett McCracken, “The Local Church as a Counterculture,” *9Marks*, 17 April 2018 [online]. Retrieved on 18 November 2023 from <https://www.9marks.org/article/the-local-church-as-a-counterculture/>.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*



Kevin DeYoung writes, “The principle of 1 Timothy 2:12 is clear enough, but the application takes a lot of wisdom and wrestling, and even complementarians may apply the principle differently. It would be nice if there were no areas of biblical obedience, but there are.”<sup>25</sup> As we seek to apply the principles of 1 Timothy 2 on a practical level in the life of the church, let’s be sure we don’t compromise God’s word.

We can be tempted to do this if we see it as a boundary instead of a blessing. Jonathan Leeman asks, “Do you love and trust God’s plans for the teaching of the church as outlined in 1 Timothy 2:12, or are you tempted to apologize for it and get as close to the line as you can?”<sup>26</sup>

At the same time, we want to make sure that we don’t swing the pendulum the other way and “cushion” Scripture by adding our own regulations to what God has already put in place. Jesus condemned the religious leaders of his day, saying, “In vain do they worship me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men” (Mark 7:7). Let’s do our best to be as narrow as God’s word is and as broad as it is as we seek to apply the truth in our own context of ministry.

### 3. Celebrate the complementary contributions of both sexes to the body of Christ.

Nancy Pearcey provides a beautiful musical analogy of this principle, saying, “Men and women exercising their gifts are like a violin and a cello playing a duet, blending in harmony while retaining their unique, individual tones.”<sup>27</sup> I like the sound of that, don’t you? Let’s pray that the Holy Spirit would help us to do that for the sake of our worship and our witness, so that the name of our Lord Jesus may be glorified in us (2 Thess. 1:12).

---

<sup>25</sup> DeYoung, 96.

<sup>26</sup> Jonathan Leeman, “Criteria for When a Woman Can Teach Among Christians,” *Christ Over All*, 22 March 2023 [online]. Retrieved on 18 November 2023 from <https://christoverall.com/article/longform/criteria-for-when-a-woman-can-teach-among-christians/>.

<sup>27</sup> Nancy R. Pearcey, *The Toxic War on Masculinity*, Kindle version (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2023), 31.