

Guidelines for the Gathered Church 1 Timothy 2:8-15

Today we will cover one of the most controversial passages in the New Testament, 1 Timothy 2:8-15. This passage is controversial because the Apostle Paul instructs women not to carry out certain roles in the church. Our culture defines equality in terms of equal opportunity. If you are equally qualified and competent, and you do not have equal opportunity to do what someone else can do, then whoever prevents you from doing so is either racist, sexist, or bigoted in some way. So the values of our culture directly clash with the teaching of today's passage.

This has caused many, even within the church, to come up with new interpretations that explain Paul's instructions in this passage in such a way that what Paul seems to be saying really means something entirely different. Christians and denominations differ greatly on what this passage means and how it is to be applied. Today I will supply you with an interpretation and applications that I think best account for all the Scriptural evidence. If at the end of the sermon you don't agree with me, that's okay. You don't have to.

I invite you to turn in your Bible to 1 Timothy 2:8-15. 1 Timothy is about three fourths of the way through the New Testament just before you get to the big book of Hebrews. 1 Timothy 2:8-15. I'll read the whole passage and then we will work our way through it. Read.

First let's review the context of this passage. 1 Timothy is Paul's letter to Timothy providing instructions to him on how to pastor the church at Ephesus. Chapter 2 began with instructions on prayer and continues with the men's prayer in verse 8 before giving instructions to the women. These instructions concern how the church is supposed to function when it gathers together.

Now, some have tried to say that this passage is strictly referring to worship services and does not apply to other meetings of the church like Sunday School, committee meetings etc. because the men are lifting holy hands in prayer and you do that in a worship service. They argue that women can teach men in other settings, just not the worship service. The problem with that argument is that it fails to take into account the historical context. Sunday School is a relatively modern invention. Sunday School began in the 1780's in Great Britain. It did not exist back in the first century. The early churches were house churches. People had to meet in homes because there were no church buildings. The dichotomy between worship service and other church meetings did not exist back then. These instructions were for when the Christians gathered together. As such they should be applied to any gathering of the church. They should not be applied outside of the church to government, business, education, or to various clubs and organizations.

In verse 8 Paul instructs the men to pray in peace and holiness. He wants men in every place to pray, lifting up holy hands without wrath or dissension. Every place most likely refers to churches around Ephesus. In other words, these are general guidelines to be applied to all churches not just the one in Ephesus.

The men are to lift holy hands. Holy hands is a figure of speech. They are to worship in a state of holiness, not just their hands but their hearts and their whole being. They are to do so without anger or arguing. They are to pray with an attitude of peace toward one another. Praying for certain rulers might cause arguments to break out just as they might break out today. I might not like how someone prays for a governing authority, feeling like they may be overlooking their wrongs or perhaps speaking too negatively about them in their prayer. We are not to allow our time of praying to cause offense and start arguments and quarrels over politics.

Paul turns to the women in verse 9. The verse begins with “likewise.” Just as the men are supposed to conduct themselves in a certain way in the assembly of the saints in every place, so also are the women. Paul provides two things the women are to do and two things not to do. First, they are to adorn themselves with proper clothing, modestly and discretely. All three of those Greek terms that are translated as “proper”, “modestly” and “discretely” imply the basic idea of respecting established order or boundaries. When you hear the word “modestly” you might be inclined to focus on physical modesty, not wearing dresses with plunging necklines or tight form fitting dresses. Although that would be included, that is not primarily what Paul is referring to. He is referring to economic modesty.

Note that Paul refers to braided hair and gold or pearls with costly garments. Evidently the custom of that day was to interweave gold, silver, and pearls in hair causing it to flash brilliantly in the light. Those women who did that would set themselves off from their poorer sisters and make a distinction based on wealth. Paul challenges that practice as the wrong kind of attention-getting behavior and something that would naturally produce disunity in the body.

Rather, the women were to adorn themselves with good works. What is truly beautiful is godly character. We are all too painfully aware that physical beauty diminishes with age but inner beauty can actually increase with age. Let me speak candidly to our teenage women. The guys who are attracted to godly character are the ones you want for a husband. I’m not devaluing the importance of looking your best, I’m simply saying to give more of your attention to developing your character, because those efforts will bring you much greater reward and happiness.

The second thing Paul tells the women to do is to keep learning quietly in all submissiveness. What exactly does that mean? The Greek word translated as “quietly” is *esuchia* which can mean either silent in the sense of no sound at all or it can mean quiet more in the sense of without disruption, disturbance, or confrontation. In 2 Thessalonians 3:12 Paul exhorts Christians to work in a quiet fashion and eat their own bread. The idea is not absolute silence but rather working in a peaceful, non-disruptive way. I believe that is the way Paul means the word here. Women are to listen to the public teaching of the word without being disruptive or contentious, but rather placing themselves voluntarily under the teaching ministry. It does not mean they cannot make suggestions or ask questions, but they are to show respect to those in teaching authority. We know that in the church in Corinth women were praying and prophesying aloud when the church gathered, so almost certainly *esuchia* does not mean silence, but what I have suggested.

Now we come to Paul’s two prohibitions in verse 12. Read. Women are not supposed to teach men in the gathered assembly and they are not supposed to exercise authority over men. What do these restrictions mean? If you do a word study on the verb, *didasko*, which is the verb for “teach” you will find that in general it refers to the teaching of doctrine or Christian truth and sometimes Christian behavior. It also usually refers to a public, often formal setting rather than to an informal or private setting. In addition we have to take into account some other Biblical evidence, such as the fact that the husband and wife team of Aquila and Priscilla took Apollos aside to more accurately explain to him the way of God (Acts 18:26). Priscilla was part of that teaching process. Therefore a woman privately instructing a man in the Scriptures is not a violation of Paul’s instructions.

We should understand teaching in this context as the public exposition of Scripture to men in the body of assembled saints. I would not include the following in the category of public exposition of Scripture: Giving a mission report or update, sharing what a Scripture has

personally meant to someone, teaching a skill such as how to lead a child to Christ. Today, we tend to use the word “teach” with a much broader category of meaning, but I’m trying to keep the definition to how I think it would have been understood in the first century.

Paul also does not permit a woman to exercise authority over a man in the church. The Greek verb that is translated as exercise authority occurs only here in the NT and it is fairly rare outside the NT. What indicates that a person has authority? From a Biblical perspective, a person in authority is someone whom God requires you to submit to. I believe that authority in the church is uniquely invested in the elders. In 1 Timothy 5:17-22 Paul gives instructions to Timothy and the church on how to relate to the elders and he refers to the elders in verse 17 as those who rule. In 1 Timothy 3:1 the elders are called by the title of overseer. In Titus 1:5 Paul instructed Titus to appoint elders in every city in Crete. Some of the authoritative functions of elders are to safeguard the doctrine of the church even to the point of removing teachers, to establish policy that governs the whole church, and to be the last court of appeal in church discipline before a case is presented to the congregation.

I believe we need to make a distinction between authority and leadership. A leader is a person who motivates and energizes a group of people to meet some goal or to accomplish some task. A leader will often have a team working with him or her to accomplish a ministry and the leader will give directions and provide instructions. I believe women can lead in ministry without violating Paul’s prohibition against exercising authority over men. That is why we have defined the elder position at Hope Fellowship as the one position of authority and why all other positions are open to women.

What are Paul’s reasons for these instructions? He provides them in verses 13-15. Notice that verse 13 begins with the word “for”. The word “for” provides further explanation. The first reason women are to function within the prescribed boundaries of verse 12 is because Adam was first created and then Eve. Now, at first glance that does not seem to be much of an explanation, but it requires us to go back to Genesis and review the order of creation in Genesis 1-2. Genesis 1 provides a broad overview of Creation and in Genesis 1 we learn that both male and female are created in the image of God and that both the man and the woman are given responsibility to multiply, to subdue the Earth and to rule over it. From Chapter 1 we may rightly conclude that men and women are of equal value and worth because the both bear the image of God and are both partners in the Divine mandate to wisely rule the Earth.

But then we get to chapter 2 and we find a startling disconnect between mankind and the rest of the living creatures. Adam and Eve are not created simultaneously like all the rest of the animal kingdom. Adam is created first and God places Adam in the Garden. There are some things that God only does with Adam. God gives Adam the instructions to cultivate the garden and then most significantly he gives Adam the instructions not to eat from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. As far as we know God never communicated that information to Eve. It was Adam’s responsibility to communicate it to her. He was to teach her. That’s the first category: teaching.

God declares that it is not good for Adam to be alone so he will make a helper who corresponds to him. God creates Eve to help Adam fulfill his God-given assignment. She comes to assist him. She brings things that he lacks and needs to fulfill his assignment, but the order is clear: Adam has been given the primary position.

Then God has Adam name all the animals. Naming something in that culture was an act of authority. Adam exercises his authority over the animals, but Eve is not part of that process.

The second category in 1 Timothy 2 is the exercising of authority. Adam created first in Genesis 2 pictures him as the teacher and the one exercising authority.

Finally, in Genesis 2:24 God says that a man shall leave his father and mother and cleave to his wife. The initiative for entering the marriage covenant lies with the man. He is the one to exercise authority in the marriage relationship.

We readily and rightly see Adam and Eve as the illustration of marriage, but I would suggest to you that they are also the illustration of the church, because at that point they were the people of God. In time marriage and God's people become separate institutions especially as nonbelievers appear on the scene, but at the beginning the two institutions are one and the same.

Paul essentially argues that his instructions reveal God's divine order for man and woman in God's household which God established at the beginning of the human race.

The second reason is more difficult to understand. Adam was not deceived by Satan in the Garden of Eden but Eve was. But women will be saved or preserved through childbearing if they continue in faith and love and sanctity with self-restraint. What in the world does that mean?

First, notice that verse 15 and verse 14 are connected by the word "but." That means that verse 15 somehow contrasts with verse 14. That leads us to understand what women are saved from or preserved from. What was the problem in verse 14? It was deception, specifically Satanic or demonic deception. Verse 15 explains how women can be saved from deception. We're not talking about salvation from Hell because that is not the immediate problem being addressed.

Childbearing in some way saves women from demonic deception. It's not likely we are talking about literal childbearing because how in the world does having a baby keep a person from being deceived and what about women who never have a baby. Are they doomed to being deceived? That answer makes no sense.

Some commentators take childbearing to mean "the childbearing" and as a reference to Jesus' birth. They take salvation to mean spiritual salvation is now available to women because of Jesus' incarnation. But that birth enables both men and women to be saved, not just women, and why does that fact have any relevance to Paul's main argument in this passage and why is it necessary for women to continue in faith and love and sanctity with self-restraint because of Jesus' birth?

I suggest to you that childbearing is a figure of speech, a metonymy where one part represents the whole. Childbearing is the most obvious aspect of a woman's unique God-given role. It is clearly something that God has solely given women to do. Paul's point is that when women are protected from demonic deception when they stay within their God-given role. They are to continue in that role in faith that God has called them to do this, with love for God as the motive for doing it, with sanctity or holiness as they do it, and by showing self-restraint when tempted to leave that role.

Now go back to the story of the temptation of Eve. Satan carries on this conversation with her and convinces her to eat of the fruit of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. What was her mistake? She carried on this conversation about disobeying God without ever consulting her husband, without ever asking him to deal with the serpent. The text in Genesis 3 says that Adam was with her, but the Hebrew preposition is just as vague in meaning as the English word. We don't know if Adam was with her in the sense of being nearby but out of earshot or whether he was standing right next to her. We do know she had the conversation and she made the decision without consulting her husband.

I can't tell you why Adam ate the fruit, whether he figured that if Eve was going to die, so he was going to die as well or whether he deliberately chose to disobey God. Paul is clear though that Adam was not deceived and if Eve had consulted him about the Serpent's offer he could have told her that the Serpent was deceiving her. The Bible actually holds Adam responsible for the Fall of Mankind, not Eve, I think because as the head of his family Adam had to answer to God for whatever happened and was held responsible for the sin.

Whenever anyone disobeys or ignores God-given authority, they become susceptible to demonic deception. That is true for both men and women. In 1 Samuel 15:23 Samuel tells King Saul that rebellion is as the sin of divination and insubordination is as iniquity and idolatry. Divination and idolatry are occultic practices often associated with demons. Samuel's point is that whenever you rebel against God-given authority, whether God or someone he has placed in authority, then you open yourself up to demonic activity.

That's Paul's second reason why women should not teach or exercise authority over men in the church, because it will open her up to demonic deception. Don't ask me how that works. I don't know. It all happens in the spiritual realm.

Many people look for a different interpretation of this passage that allows women to teach and exercise authority in the church. The most common approach is to postulate that there was some kind of unique situation in Ephesus that caused Paul to write this to Timothy but that Paul did not intend for it to be applied outside of Ephesus.

The problems of that approach are multiple. First it fails to address the fact that Paul does not give as his reasons anything to do with the church at Ephesus but rather refers to the order of creation and the events in the Fall, which are outside of culture. Second, the way he speaks about wanting men in every place to pray with holy hands and his statement, I do not allow women to teach or exercise authority sounds like he is describing his personal practice for all the churches, not something unique to Ephesus. Third, if there was a group of women misbehaving in Ephesus, why arbitrarily prohibit the whole category of women from teaching instead of dealing directly with the troublemakers? That approach seems unreasonable. Finally, there have been a myriad of suggestions as to what the so-called Ephesian problem was, simply because no one can establish with any certainty any one solution, suggesting there may not be a solution.

I want to provide you with a theory of gender because you are probably asking yourself why there even has to be roles for men and women? I'm labeling this as theory. I'm suggesting to you a way to pull together certain facts about gender in the Bible that makes sense why God has said what he has said.

First, we know that God is spirit and technically neither male nor female because he does not have a body. What we perceive as masculinity and femininity are both encompassed in God. We also know that God has consistently revealed himself as masculine throughout the Bible. He is the Father. Male pronouns are always used of him. Jesus was male. The masculine pronoun is used for the Holy Spirit. It is clear-cut that God presents himself as male in his relationship with mankind. He is Israel's husband and Israel is his wife. Jesus is the husband and the church is his bride. In his dealings with man God is always masculine and mankind is always in the feminine role. I believe that is entirely deliberate.

My theory is that God uses gender to communicate some key truths to us about his relationship with us. God is always initiator and we are always responder in our relationship with God. We never initiate with God. He always moves first and we respond. If we think we are initiating, we are not. God placed the thought or desire in our hearts. God has designed the man to be the one who always initiates the marriage relationship because God is the one who

initiates creating the church and he is the one who always initiates a personal relationship with us. Anatomically even our sex organs also are designed for the man to be the initiator and the woman to be the receiver or responder.

I don't want to overstate the case. I'm not saying that women can't initiate and men can't respond. I'm simply stating that the man is supposed to initiate the marriage and he should be taking the initiative to lead his family. In the church the initiative lies with those who have authority, the elders. God has prescribed roles for men and women in the church and in the home in order to maintain a permanent picture of how God relates to us. That's my theory for what it's worth.

Consistently applying this passage in today's modern church is difficult because of the changes that have occurred between our culture and the first century culture. First, the policy at Hope Fellowship is that only men can be elders and that only men can preach in the worship service or teach in the Adult Bible Fellowships. All other positions are available to both men and women. You can see the full policy statement on your sermon outline.

How do we define man versus boy? In ancient Jewish culture adulthood usually began with puberty somewhere around 12. People married early because they didn't live long. Most boys learned the farm or the trade from their father and could start supporting themselves much earlier than today. In ancient Greece a boy went into the military at 18 and after two years returned and was considered a man. The age of manhood is a culturally determined age and varies among different cultures. Although our culture doesn't have a clearly defined rite of passage into manhood, probably most would say that once a boy finishes High School and either goes to College or gets a full-time job, he has become a man, so probably around the age of 18. I know some mature later than others, but I think that is a pretty good guideline.

How do we deal with parachurch organizations such as Seminaries, Conference Speakers, Christian College organizations, and the whole slew of Parachurch organizations? Can women teach men in those settings? Can they exercise authority in those settings? This is tricky, but I'm going to say that those organizations are not churches, even though they do ministry, so I think Paul's restrictions do not apply in those settings.

I feel pretty confident about the interpretation I have shared with you because I believe it explains all the details of the passage and shows how Genesis 2 & 3 relate to Paul's restrictions. The best interpretation is the one that best explains all the evidence, both here in 1 Timothy 2 as well as in the rest of the Bible. If you choose a different interpretation, make sure it really addresses all the Biblical evidence. Let's pray.