

"Words for Pastor and People" (Part 4)

I'm continuing this series of sermons on 1st Timothy, the Apostle Paul's letter to Timothy, a young pastor and coworker of Paul. Last week we looked at the first 7 verses in chapter 2, where it says we are to lift up prayers for *all* people. Now there are further words about prayer and public worship.

1 Timothy 2:8 says, "I desire, then, that in every place the men pray, lifting up without anger or argument." Everywhere the church exists, *men* should pray. The early church adopted the Jewish posture in prayer: standing, arms stretched out, palms facing upward. Men are to lift up *holy* hands, *without anger or quarreling*. Timothy was in Ephesus, and the church was being disrupted by false teaching. Anger and quarreling are certainly hindrances to our prayers.

Paul says *men* should pray. Does this mean women shouldn't pray? Of course not. But perhaps he is suggesting that men take a leadership role in praying. That's good advice for the church in *any generation*!

Then Paul goes on to say some things about women and their role in the church, and in public worship. These verses are among the most controversial verses in the Bible! They seem to put down women, and ban them from certain roles in the church. Women today may read these verses and get upset and angry, perhaps feeling that Paul was just a male chauvinist. Or that it proves the Bible is way behind the times. Verses like these have disrupted denominations, and led to denominational splits! On June 12th of this year, at the Southern Baptist Convention, a proposal to ban women from serving as pastors almost passed. It didn't get the 2/3 yes vote (67%) but **61%** of the delegates voted in favor of *banning women clergy*. I read recently that the conservative branch of the Episcopal Church is struggling with this same issue also.

At its worst, women have said, "If what Paul wrote represents Christianity, I don't want any parts of it!" To reject the whole Christian message about Jesus because of verses like these is really, really sad! So, let's look at these verses!

Just a heads up here: this is not the easiest sermon to preach or understand! These passages are difficult. I'll try to summarize and simplify what Bible scholars say! Also, as we look at these verses, it's important to keep in mind certain principles whenever we interpret the Bible. First, it's important to ask: *what is the historical context for the Scripture verses?* In this case, what was happening that caused Paul to write what he did? What was Paul saying to the people in that situation, and why? Second, *how do these particular verses compare to all of Scripture?* You always need to compare Scripture with Scripture. If you isolate a verse or passage of Scripture from *the rest of the Bible*, you can make the Bible say just about anything!

So, let's get started. "I desire, then, that in every place the men should pray, lifting up holy hands without anger or argument, also that the women should dress themselves in moderate clothing with reverence and self-control, not with their hair braided or with gold, pearls, or expensive clothes, but with good works, as is proper for women who profess reverence for God."

(1 Timothy 2:8-10)

Paul is talking about the situation in the church in *Ephesus*. Apparently, some wealthy women were showing up for worship in *expensive clothes* that drew attention to themselves. Some were going overboard with elaborate hairstyles and costly gemstones or jewelry.

It helps if we can understand certain things happening in Ephesus at that time which probably came into play. Ephesus was the center of the cult of Artemis, the Greek goddess of chastity and childbirth. This cult gave rise to the idea that since Artemis was superior to men, her followers were too! This cult of the goddess Artemis was so prominent in Ephesus that the Book of Acts reports a riot breaking out in the city over the fear that Paul's message of the gospel would discredit Artemis (Acts 19:23-40).

In addition to the worship of the goddess Artemis, Ephesus was a province of Rome. Ephesus was greatly influenced by Roman culture. At that time there was a movement among women called "the new Roman woman". The "new Roman woman" was a kind of "sexual revolution" among Roman women. Even though in traditional Greek and Roman society women weren't allowed to exercise authority in the public arena, this new feminist movement started to change things! Roman women had more freedom. This was especially true for *wealthy women!* Wearing elaborate hairstyles, gold, pearls, and expensive clothing (as Paul mentions in verse 9) were fashions of this "new Roman woman" trend.

Apparently, some of the wealthy Christian women were affected by this, and were following the trends of society, and coming to worship in a way that flaunted their wealth, and made them seem superior and prideful. So, when Paul says women should dress "modestly", Paul is urging wealthy Christian women not to pridefully display their wealth, but to have a modest view of themselves, and to present themselves "with good works, as is proper for women who profess reverence for God" (1 Timothy 2:10).

Verse 11 says, "Let a woman learn in silence with full submission." What do you think of that, ladies? You can see how this may not go over well with the female segment of the population! But, the phrase "learn in *silence*" is a poor translation. The Greek suggests that a woman learn *with a quiet spirit, showing attentiveness to what is taught*. Apparently some of the women were being taken in by false teaching, and were not willing to learn in a quiet, attentive manner. The solution is for these women to be humbly listen to sound teaching, and *submit to that truth* (not submit to the men)! Here again, Paul is addressing that particular situation – not making a general rule for all churches, all women, for all time!

Verse 12 tells us: "I permit no woman to teach or to have authority over a man; she is to keep silent. Okay – now this seems to be even worse – that a woman cannot teach, or have any authority over a man! That would rule out women clergy, right? What about ladies teaching a Sunday School class? Or women leading a seminar, or conference, or small group?

Here is where it is so important to compare *this* Scripture with *all of* Scripture! Are there other places in the Bible where women teach, or preach, or have authority over men? Absolutely!

There are many, many references to women providing spiritual leadership! There is *Anna*, who was a prophet (Luke 2:36). The *four daughters of Philip* who also prophesied (Acts 21:9). (A “prophet” in the biblical sense, is one who speaks for God. That includes preaching). *Junia*, who the Bible describes, not only as an apostle, but an *outstanding* one (Romans 16:7). *Priscilla*, along with her husband, took the eloquent preacher Apollos into their home and “explained the Way of God more accurately” (Acts 18:26). Is that not teaching, and having some authority over a man?

Three women are known as leaders of house churches (the only type of church there was in the first century!): *Chloe* (1 Corinthians 1:11), *Nympha* (Colossians 4:15) and *Apphia* (Philemon 2). Paul’s letters mention twelve women by name who were *coworkers* with him in the gospel ministry. It’s unreasonable to think that these women did not speak or preach as part of their ministry!

There were women prophets and leaders in the Old Testament period! *Miriam* was the very first person in Hebrew scripture to be named a prophet (Exodus 15:20). Not the first *woman* named as a prophet. She was the first prophet. Period. *Deborah*, for example, is named in the Hebrew scriptures as *both* prophetess and judge. The people come to her for words from God; she leads, directs, and guides them, and no one seems to object based on her gender. *Huldah* was a prophet (2 Kings 22:11-20). King Josiah’s men were cleaning out the temple when they discovered a scroll of the Book of Law given by Moses. Josiah asked several men, including the high priest, to go inquire of the Lord about the contents of the scroll. Who did all those important men seek go to for answers from God? *Huldah*! (Note here, there were male prophets around at that time – Jeremiah, Zephaniah, Nahum – but they went to her!).

This is just *some of the women* named as leaders of Israel or leaders in the church! By the way, in verse 12, where Paul says he doesn't allow any woman to have “authority” over a man, the Greek word is *authentain*. This is the only place this is used in the New Testament. The use of that word outside the New Testament meant “*abusive* authority”. Women are not permitted to exercise *abusive* authority over men. (The Bible also forbids that kind of authority on the part of men!).

When you see this body of evidence authenticating the ministry of women, and when you try to understand why Paul wrote what he did about some unique situations (like in Ephesus) – I just don't see how you can say the Bible forbids women to serve as ordained ministers.

We're not quite done yet...hang on! “For Adam was formed first, then Eve, and Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and became a transgressor” (verses 13-14). A reason Paul uses for forbidding women from teaching or having authority over men *in the church in Ephesus* is to go back to creation – Adam and Eve. Adam was formed first, then Eve. And Adam wasn't deceived, the woman was! It's like the woman was *second* on the scene, but *first* in leading the man into sin!

So is Paul now using *the creation accounts* to show that men are #1 and women are in second

place? Is this another argument pushing for men to dominate? I don't think so. Elsewhere, in Paul's letter to those in the Ephesians church, when talking about marriage, he talks about *mutual subjection* between husbands and wives, "Be subject to *one another* out of reverence for Christ" (Ephesians 5:21). I think he's using Eve as an example of a woman being deceived by Satan, and urging Timothy to warn the women in Ephesus not to be sucked into false teaching. (1 Timothy 5:15 refers to women who have already turned away to follow Satan).

There's not time to go into it now, but if we really examine the creation stories in the Book of Genesis, man and woman are created as co-equals! Even a classic conservative commentary like the Matthew Henry commentary says, "Eve's being made after Adam, and out of him, puts an honor upon that sex, as the glory of man...if man is the head, she is the crown...(she was) not made out of his head to rule over him, nor out of his feet to be trampled upon by him, but out of his side to be *equal* with him."

Elizabeth Achtemeier was an Old Testament scholar, a professor of mine at Lancaster Seminary. In one of her books she the relationship between men and women this way. It is only in the Fall (Genesis 3) that the battle between the sexes begins. The joyful unity and companionship between men, women and God has been destroyed by our sinning. The result of sin carried over throughout the Old Testament, where woman's role is one of subordination to father or husband. That's the way Israel constructed her society *in their sin*.

But the New Testament witnesses to God's redemption of the world through Jesus Christ, and this has profound effects on the relation of men and women, male and female. Jesus was God's act of redemption for the world, and we see in His actions and words a revolutionary bolt of hope for first century Jewish women.

Jesus broke the rules by talking to a woman by the well of Samaria. In Mary and Martha's home He allowed Mary to sit at his feet and listen to His teaching. Luke 8 and Mark 15 says there were women who followed Jesus and provided for Him out of their own means, and women who "ministered to Him". Through Christ, women are restored to their full equality with men. In Christ there is no difference of status or worth between men and women.

The same Paul who curbed what women should do because of the problem situation in Ephesus, wrote to the Galatians: "There is no longer male and female, for all of you are one in Christ Jesus" (Galatians 3:28).

I realize this hasn't been the easiest sermon to follow. Hopefully you've seen that to truly understand God's Word you need to look at the historical context, delve into the meaning of the original Greek, and compare any particular verse or verses with the rest of Scripture.

So, should churches permit women to be pastors, preachers, teachers? You can quote some of the verses we've looked at, and a few others, and decide "no". But when you go *deeper into these texts*, and look at *all of Scripture*, I hope you can see in both the Old Testament and the New Testament, women are called by God to positions of spiritual leadership!

A brief comment about one more verse: "Yet she will be saved through childbearing, provided they continue in faith and love and holiness, with modesty" (1 Timothy 2:15). This is another difficult verse! What in the world is Paul saying? That women are saved if they bear children?

One pertinent point is that the Greek text says, "she will be saved through *the* childbirth". "The" is in the Greek! In other words, women are not just saved by bearing children! But through the birth of *the Child* – Jesus!

In the story of Adam and Eve, the Lord told the serpent there would be One from the woman's seed who would bruise the serpent's head. Jesus fulfilled that prophecy! He is the one who gives us victory over Satan!

Harry L. Kaufhold, Jr.
Community United Methodist Church
July 7, 2024

