

1 Timothy 2:9-15 (read vv.8-15; 3:15) “Women’s Responsibilities in Public Worship”

Intro. In this text of Scripture Paul is teaching how we are to conduct ourselves in the house of God, which is wherever the church gathers for worship. In v.8 he gave instructions concerning the men of the church. We men should take the lead in intercessory prayer, and when we pray, be sure that we are right with God and our fellow man before we intercede for others. Now in vv.9-15 he gives instructions concerning the women of the church. And the focus of instruction relates in particular to conduct in the worship service of the church.

I think it is important that I give some background explaining one reason why Paul addressed the subject. Timothy was ministering in the church at Ephesus. The city was known all over the world as the center of the worship of Diana, a fertility goddess, also known as Artemis. Her temple was one of the seven wonders of the ancient world. Women had a prominent role in the worship at that temple but were characterized by immodesty and immorality. So Paul wanted to ensure that there would be no similarity between how women worshiped in that temple and the way Christian women worshiped in church.

So let’s see what Paul says to the women of the church in this text of Scripture. First of all, let’s consider together the fact that women should:

I. DRESS PROPERLY FOR WORSHIP

I’m not talking about whether a woman should dress nicely or dress casually. Instead, listen to what Paul says in v.9, “in like manner also, that the women adorn themselves in modest apparel, with propriety and moderation....” The word translated “in like manner” (*hosautos*) shows that Paul is continuing his remarks about conduct in connection with public prayer and worship. Men are to pray, lifting up *holy* hands. Women are to pray in worship, mindful that they do so dressed appropriately. When we are worshipping in mixed company, women should not dress in such a way that men are distracted from focusing on God as they ought! So with that in mind, Paul says in v.9 that women are to:

A. Wear Appropriate Clothing - The Greek word for “modest” (*kosmios*) actually means “well arranged, orderly.” Thus, Paul is saying that women should *not* look odd, awkward, or queer but dress appropriately or seemly.

Then Paul uses two words to describe what is appropriate for Christian women. First, they would dress “with propriety.” This word (*aidos*; KJV “shamefacedness”) probably refers to dressing with modesty, reverence for God (see use in Hebrews 12:28), and with due respect for others. The other word (*sophrosune*) for proper dress is translated “moderation,” which actually refers to “good sense, soundness of mind, and self-control.” In other words, ladies should dress sensibly. Exercise good judgment and restraint. Don’t put on something that would cause your husband or father to exclaim, “Are you out of your mind? You are not going to wear *that* are you?” Furthermore, in v.10 Paul says that women should put on what “is proper” (*prepo*). What you wear should be seemly and fitting for a *Christian* woman.

Do you remember the time in the movie, *Gone with the Wind*, when Mammy said to Scarlet, “It ain’t fittin’... it ain’t fittin’. It jes’ ain’t fittin’....” She knew that what Scarlet was doing was unseemly.¹

So what kind of dress would be improper, unseemly and not sensible? Well, you can’t look to the world for guidance. Contemporary society has it all wrong, in my opinion. So one primary biblical principle that you should follow is this: I believe it is improper for a Christian woman to dress in a sexually attractive way that *provokes* lust in a man, especially at church. We’re supposed to be here for prayer and worship, not lusting. Of course, a man has a responsibility to refrain from lust. We have little control over the first look but we should control any additional looking for the purpose of lusting (Mt. 5:28; Job 31:1; cf. 2 Tim. 2:22). However, the woman has responsibility as well (Mt. 18:7). The more revealing and/or tight your clothing is, the more a man is going to be provoked to lust. So be sensible and think about how you should dress, especially when you come to church.

There was a time when men and women were separated during worship as an additional guard against impropriety during worship. Such a practice was quite common until about 100 years ago, including here at Skinquarter Baptist. Women entered and sat on one side and men entered and sat on the other side and even a short wall separated them! I suppose that while seated a man could not even make eye contact and wink at his girlfriend!

So what should be your goal in how you dress? Paul says in v.10 that you should dress in a way that “is proper for women professing godliness, with good works.” The word “professing” (*epaggello*) has the root-meaning of “to convey a message loudly,² clearly; hence, to proclaim.” So we should profess our faith in the way we dress. How you dress should not contradict your profession of Christ and inner character but confirm it. But if you dress hardly better than a prostitute, what does that say about your faith, or lack thereof?

Then Paul says you should:

B. Avoid Improper Adornment – In the last of v.9 Paul says that women should “adorn themselves ... not with braided hair or gold or pearls or costly clothing.” The combination of the word “braids” with “gold or pearls or costly clothing” should suffice to inform us that the apostle is thinking of the sin of extravagance in outward adornment, a prideful display that calls attention to oneself. Gold, and especially pearls, were very costly in Paul’s day, way beyond the purchasing power of the average church-member. Godly women should not crave such costly outer wear. So Paul is saying that there should be no showy display of wealth. By the way, James 3:2-3 mentions a *man* coming into church with such a display of wealth, and the improper favoritism shown toward him.³ Ephesus was a prosperous city and there were evidently some well-to-do Gentile women who were attracted to the Christian faith (cf. Acts 16:15; 17:4, 12). They were the ones who would be able to flaunt their wealth by wearing “gold or pearls or costly clothing.” I do not believe this is intended to be a blanket and total prohibition here, especially outside of church for special occasions. I believe I can say this based on the following considerations:

First, in the context the *main* point is that Christian women should be known for their godliness and good works, not by their flashy appearance. This is similar to what Peter says in 1 Pet. 3:3-4, “Do not let your adornment be merely outward—arranging the hair, wearing gold, or

¹ “It’s talking ‘bout Mr. Ashley Wilkes. He’ll be comin’ to Atlanta when he gets his leave, and you sittin’ there waitin’ for him, just like a spider. He belongs to Miss Melanie....” I’m sure she dressed up to meet Wilkes!

² The prepositional prefix intensifies the verb.

³ “For if there should come into your assembly a man with gold rings, in fine apparel...and you pay attention to the one wearing the fine clothes and say to him, ‘You sit here in a good place.’”

putting on [fine] apparel—rather let it be the hidden person of the heart, with the incorruptible beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is very precious in the sight of God.” There, it is clear that Peter is making a contrast between outer, artificial beauty, and inner beauty, which is what counts the most.⁴

And let me throw this in, young ladies. If you want to attract a good *Christian* man, be sure to focus on your inner beauty. Have a passion for God. Be filled with the Holy Spirit and the joy of the Lord. Cultivate godliness and good works and you will have a kind of attractiveness that is uncommon in this old world today.

Secondly, it may help to understand “braids” in Paul’s day. For some women, no expense was spared to make them elaborate and dazzling. They actually sparkled. The braids were fastened by jeweled tortoise-shell combs, or by pins of ivory or silver, the heads of which often consisted of miniature images. *Such* braiding of hair was a luxury in Paul’s day.

Now I will concede that this part of v.9 may have been driven more by cultural propriety than as a timeless truth for all generations and cultures. In both Jewish and Greek cultures, extravagance in dress and adornment was viewed negatively, and Paul did not want Christian women to do anything that would hinder the gospel among such Jews and Greeks (see Titus 2:4-10). Concern for the spread of the gospel is certainly reflected in the first part of this chapter. How can you pray for the salvation of an unbeliever and then turn around and do something that would hinder them from coming to Christ?

God made beautiful flowers and I hope these verses do not prohibit a woman from dressing nicely and enhancing their beauty in moderation. Furthermore, I believe there is a place for a woman or young lady to dress in an attractive way, such as going out on a date or some other special occasion, as long as you maintain modesty. But in the *church*, we need to be careful about our motives in dress and be mindful about what is appropriate. Do not dress seductively or extravagantly.

The next thing Paul says about women in worship is this:

II. MANIFEST A SUBMISSIVE ATTITUDE IN WORSHIP

Again, we would do well to remember that Paul mainly has in mind public worship, when the whole church gathers for prayer, praise, and preaching. In v.11 Paul writes, “Let a woman learn in silence with all submission.” The word translated “let ... learn” is actually a command in the Greek text (third person imperative). Of first importance is the fact that women, as well as men, should learn biblical truths when you come to church! After all, in our Lord’s Great Commission He commanded us to “make disciples, teaching them... (Mt. 28:19). I believe that teaching is to be an important part of public worship (cf. Acts 2:42). In fact, if you look down to 3:2 you will see that the one functional qualification of a pastor is that he be “able to teach.”⁵ So this is one reason I practice expository preaching, because there is a teaching element in my preaching, and you should learn something every time you come to one of our services. If you are not paying attention and learning when you come to church, you are not following God’s will. The *submissiveness* mentioned here includes a willingness to be taught and conform your life to the teaching of God’s Word (Rom. 12:2).

Now what does he mean that a woman should learn “in silence with all submission”? (Cf. 1 Cor. 14:34-35). I believe that must be understood in light of what follows in v.12. There Paul says,

⁴ Likewise, Paul says in the last of v.12, “godliness, with good works” is what matters the most.

⁵ Also, Eph. 4:11 refers to Christ giving His church “pastor-teachers,” based on the Granville-Sharp rule of Greek grammar.

“And I do not permit⁶ a woman to teach or to have authority over a man, but to be in silence.” The same word translated “silence” is used again. It seems evident from this text that God has ordained that men should do the preaching and teaching in the setting of public worship. So when Paul says that women are “to be in silence,” one thing he is prohibiting here is a woman interrupting the preacher’s teaching.⁷

Furthermore, he was prohibiting a woman from trying to take over the role of the teaching pastor. That is indicated by the fact that Paul says women should not “have authority over a man.” The original language is rather strong, based on a word that is only used here in the New Testament.⁸ The word can refer to one who asserts their own authority, in this case, to take over the pastor’s teaching role. Jews typically wrote using parallel thoughts, so v.12 must be speaking about women teaching from a position of authority, such as a pastor, or for Jews, a Rabbi. Indeed, in the Old Testament the priesthood was limited to men. All of the apostles chosen by Jesus were men. This verse is one basis for our Southern Baptist practice of not having women serve as pastors of our churches. Notice in 5:17 that Paul refers to “the elders ... who labor in the word and doctrine.” Yes, the elders or pastors were the ones that carried out that role. There is a heavy emphasis in this letter on proper doctrine (1:10; 4:6, 13, 16; 6:1, 3), and Paul wanted to ensure that only God-called and gifted (3:2) men of God instructed the church during worship.⁹

So Paul gives some reasons for his instructions here. And notice that the reasons are not based on historical conditions, culture or circumstances, but based on two facts from Scripture that have relevance for all time. Notice the following reasons:

1. The Man’s Leadership Role as Seen in Creation – In v.13 Paul said what we all know, “For Adam was formed first, then Eve.” Paul is saying, “Do you want to be the pastor and teacher of the church and be equal to men in *every* respect? Creation itself shows you that God intended men to lead.¹⁰ Again, v.13 says that “Adam was formed first, then Eve.” Eve was made to be his helper and not to take over his leadership. This argument from the order of creation is similar to the leadership role of the firstborn. They take the lead among their siblings just because they were born *first* (cf. Dt. 21:15-17).

Another reason women should not serve as the lead teaching pastor is because of:

2. The Deception and Sin of Eve – In v.14 Paul said, “And Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived,¹¹ fell into transgression.” Eve’s fall occurred when she ignored her divinely ordained position. What would have happened if she had talked it over with Adam before

⁶ The present tense of the verb indicates the normative practice of the apostle Paul. It is clear that all intended for Timothy to follow the same practice.

⁷ It seems worship in the early church was less structured. Various speakers would arise to teach, exhort, and prophesy (1 Cor. 14:26-31). So there was opportunity for abuse. Haven’t you been in a situation where someone is teaching in a class and a certain person takes over the discussion? Well, that kind of situation could happen when the whole church gathered together, especially in one of the smaller gatherings, such as a “house church” (Rom. 16:5; 1 Cor. 16:19; Col 4:15; Phm. 1:2).

⁸ He could have used the verb *exousiazō*, as in Luke 22:25 and 1 Cor. 7:4. The word *authenteō* is related to *authades*, which can mean self-willed, which according to Titus 1:7 a bishop must not be. 2 Pet. 2:10 indicates false teachers are self-willed.

⁹ Furthermore, the command to be in silence may be a prohibition against meddling in other people’s business. That’s how the word is used in 2 Thessalonians 3:11-12, “For we hear that there are some who walk among you in a disorderly manner, not working at all, but are busybodies. Now those who are such we command and exhort through our Lord Jesus Christ that they work in quietness and eat their own bread.”

¹⁰ Likewise, Paul said in 1 Cor. 11:8-10, “For man is not from woman, but woman from man. Nor was man created for the woman, but woman for the man. For this reason the woman ought to have [a symbol of] authority on [her] head, because of the angels.”

¹¹ Likewise, Paul said in 2 Cor. 11:3, “But I fear, lest somehow, as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, so your minds may be corrupted....” As Paul indicates here, men are subject to deception as well.

eating that fruit? Evidently he wasn't given the opportunity to remind Eve of God's command.¹² So instead of following her husband, she chose to lead by eating first. Then *she* instructed her husband; he listened to her and followed her example and look what happened! So in addition to taking the lead and acting independently of her husband, the other problem was the way she was deceived. The word for "deceived" in the last of v.14 is intensive. Eve was thoroughly deceived. Paul was concerned about deceptive false teachers in the church. He does warn in chapter 4, v.1 "that in latter times some will depart from the faith, giving heed to deceiving spirits...." He had previously warned this same Ephesian church about being "carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting" (Eph. 4:14). So what Paul says here seems to suggest that one reason men should be pastors is that they *may* be less prone to being deceived by Satan than women,¹³ especially if women do not equally participate in learning the Scriptures (v.11).¹⁴ Could we also say that men are more likely to fail when a woman takes a leadership role in his life? Adam loved Eve and wanted to please her, and was all too willing to partake of the forbidden fruit. So Paul's teaching here could have been intended for the protection of both men and women!

In spite of this teaching in Scripture, a number of churches have decided to follow the world and ordain women to serve as teaching pastors. But I believe that we should remain faithful to follow Scripture. Though there are legitimate adjustments we can make to contemporary culture, we must not violate any principles of God's Word that are timeless, and not just given to address a cultural situation.

Now I want to make it clear that Paul is not saying that women cannot speak or teach in other capacities or settings. The early church was amazingly progressive in teaching that men and women were one in Christ (Gal. 3:28) with equal standing before God. We have seen that we have equal responsibilities to be educated in the Scriptures (v.11). Furthermore, we have a number of examples of women who had active roles in the early church. The unmarried daughters of Philip the evangelists were prophetesses in some sense of the word (Acts 21:8-9). In 1 Cor. 11:5 Paul referred to women praying or prophesying, evidently in public worship for they did so with their heads covered, symbolizing their submission to authority. The remarkable woman, Priscilla, even had some part in the instruction of Apollos, a preacher (Acts 18:26; Rom. 16:3; 1 Cor. 16:19; 2 Tim. 4:19), but evidently only within the home and with her husband. Timothy was taught the Word of God by his mother and grandmother (2 Tim. 1:5; 3:15). Titus 2:3-5 says that the older women are to teach the younger women. In the epistles Paul acknowledged women who were fellow workers (Php. 4:1-3; Rom. 16:1). Then in church history women such as Susanna Wesley and Lottie Moon have had great impact for Christ. But even though women had a vital role in the early church, they were to remain submissive to proper authority (v.12). This is the complementarian view of the role of women, especially in church and the home.

So I believe that under the direction of a pastor a woman can share a testimony or sing in worship. I believe women can teach in other settings, especially to women and children. On the other hand, in *this* church only men teach coed adult classes. Only men serve as deacons. Some may not agree with that. But look what happens when a church has women assume key leadership roles in the church. Men tend to back off. I believe a male-led church will do better at attracting

¹² Though many translations of Genesis 3:6 imply that Adam was with her during the temptation, the Hebrew is not clear on this point. Even if he was with her there is no indication she discussed the matter with him before eating.

¹³ In 2 Tim. 3:6-7 Paul was concerned about false teachers "who creep into households and make captives of gullible women loaded down with sins, led away by various lusts, always learning and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth."

¹⁴ In Jewish society women were not encouraged to learn with men in the synagogue though they were permitted to attend.

other men to the church. Ladies, don't you want the men in your family to come with you to church?

Some will object that this teaching diminishes the significance of women in the church and society. So based on how Paul concludes this text, I want to encourage the young women to:

III. EMBRACE ONE OF THE MOST SIGNIFICANT ROLES OF WOMEN

Paul says in v.15, "Nevertheless she will be saved in childbearing..." Pain in childbirth was a curse placed upon women after the fall. But Paul shows here that childbirth is intended to turn out to be a great blessing. What kind of salvation or deliverance did Paul have in mind here? Based on the clear teachings of other Scriptures, Paul would *not* have in mind salvation from sin here. That would be a very odd form of justification by works. Nor is he saying that godly women have a special promise of salvation from death during childbirth.¹⁵ Instead, based on the context, it is best to take this to mean salvation from insignificance and uselessness by becoming a mother and raising children. Later in the same epistle Paul says that young widows, instead of being idle (5:13), should "... marry, bear children¹⁶, manage the house, give no opportunity to the adversary to speak reproachfully" (5:14). Women have the sole privilege of giving birth to human life made in the image of God. What could be more significant!

You see, one major source of depression in women is low self-esteem. And there are two major sources of low self-esteem: a lack of feeling loved, and secondly, a lack of significance. But for women who are married¹⁷ and able to have children, both needs can and should be met through Christian motherhood. Her husband and children should greatly love her for the sacrifices she makes. Husbands, are you showing love and appreciation to the mother of your children? Are you showing love to your mom? And as she fulfills the role of a godly mother, she should realize what lasting significance she will have in the lives of her children. The career of wife and mother may lack attractiveness to our contemporary culture, but God values such roles greatly.

If I am interpreting this verse correctly, then this has a great bearing especially in our day. According to a recent Pew Research Center survey, 64% of women ages 18–49 who don't have children say they don't *want* children!¹⁸

My mother graduated from H.S. and attended business school. She was advancing in a career with the GA Highway Dept. Then she married my dad, and shortly thereafter started having children, and became a dedicated full-time mother and homemaker. She did not stay long enough to accomplish anything in the business world. She did not do much in the civic world. She was a dedicated S.S. teacher and member of the church choir. But her greatest and most significant work in life, in my opinion, was raising 3 children. All 3 graduated from college. All 3 married and had children. My brother is a leader in his church, his community, and was a leader in the banking business. He and his wife have 3 fine sons, one of whom has served as a missionary in Southeast Asia. My sister raised 2 fine children and worked part-time in the school system. I'm the youngest, and to everyone's surprise I became a preacher of the Gospel. I have touched many lives for Christ. Cheryl dedicated herself to raising two sons. One son was the top math student the year he graduated from Liberty University. And my dear mother had a vital role in all that her children and

¹⁵ Some point out the fact that the word "childbearing" (*teknogonia*) has the definite article and could point to the most significant childbearing of all, i.e. the birth of Jesus. The promised seed of the woman who would crush the head of the serpent is mentioned before the curse of pain and childbirth in Genesis 3:15-16. Yet salvation comes from the *death* of Christ not His birth. And such an interpretation doesn't fit well with the rest of the verse.

¹⁶ This is the verb form of the same word found in 2:15.

¹⁷ In 1 Corinthians 7:32-40 Paul commends singleness as a means of greater devotion of service to the Lord.

¹⁸ <https://www.pewresearch.org/social-trends/2024/07/25/the-experiences-of-u-s-adults-who-dont-have-children/>

grandchildren have accomplished. When she died, I believe she was able to look back on her life with deep satisfaction.

So Paul is pointing out that a woman's significance is not to be achieved by holding the office of pastor/teacher, but by bearing and raising children. This corresponds with his warning in chapter 4 of false teachers who would forbid marriage (v.3), among other things. It is God's will that woman should influence mankind "from the bottom up" (that is, by way of the child), not "from the top down" (that is, not by way of the man). We have heard it said, "The hand that rocks the cradle is the hand that rules the world." She must choose to do that for which by God's creation-ordinance she is naturally equipped, both physically and spiritually. A man, even one who identifies as a woman, can never bear a child! Nor are men equipped to nourish babies with the best nutrition that only mothers can give. Generally speaking, we are not as good at nurturing and caregiving. Who is it that is going to be first to hear the cry of the baby? Women are just better equipped by God's design. So Paul's words are a good reminder that the deepest satisfaction for women is to be found in the life of a Christian home.

I know it has to be tough to be a wife and mother. It is not just a full-time job. It is also being on call 24/7. At times you don't feel appreciated. At times you may just want to quit and bail out. So Paul adds the condition of such a salvation from insignificance in the last of v.15, "if they continue in faith, love, and holiness, with self-control." All the joys, significance and blessings of Christian motherhood will be granted only if she "continues in faith," etc. Faith comes first. She must continue, and not give up and quit her important assignment.

Conclusion: I wonder how many wives and mothers will outshine their husbands in eternity when God grants us our rewards? I suspect no small number.

So as you prepare to come to church, dress appropriately, and come prepared to learn God's Word so you can grow in your faith and serve the Lord and your family effectively. Will you renew your commitment to these objectives? For some here today, the beginning point to establishing a Christian home is to trust Christ as your Savior and make a commitment to marry only within the Christian faith. Instead of following the world, I encourage you to embrace these values!

Sources: William Barclay, *The Daily Study Bible Series: The Letters to Timothy, Titus, & Philemon* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1975); Stephen Felker, *Devotional & Explanatory Notes on the Entire Bible* (Col. Hghts, VA: Published by Author), 2024; Donald Guthrie, *Tyndale New Testament Commentaries: The Pastoral Epistles* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1957); William Hendriksen, *New Testament Commentary: 1-II Timothy, Titus* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1957); H. A. Ironside, *Addresses on the First and Second Epistles of Timothy* (Neptune, NJ: Loizeaux Brothers, 1947); Thomas D. Lea, *New American Commentary: 1, 2 Timothy* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1992); Walter L. Liefeld, *The NIV Application Commentary: 1 & 2 Timothy, Titus* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1999); John MacArthur, Jr., *God's High Calling for Women: Study Notes on 1 Timothy 2:9-15* (Panorama City, CA: Word of Grace Communications, 1987); Larry Pierce, *Online Bible* [Ver. 5:80] (Ontario: onlinebible.net, 2021); Donald A. Ward, *Commentary on 1 & 2 Timothy, Titus* (Waco: Word Books, 1974). Other sources listed in the footnotes. Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from *The New King James Version* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1982).

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