

The Pillar (Part 3 of 4)

What Men and Women Should Do (or Not Do) – Part 1

1 Timothy 2:8-15

Mark Vroegop

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 Tim. 2:8-15)

One of the reasons that I think every person should take a Vision Trip – a cross cultural missions trip – is because of what it is like to worship in a service with people who are completely different than you in terms of country, language, and culture yet who share the same love for Jesus. There is something powerful in being able to see with your own eyes the global nature of the gospel. There is something moving when you feel a love in your heart for people whom you hardly know and can't even understand, but you know and sense that they love the same Jesus. It is life-changing, and I think everyone should have that experience.

Part of the beauty of what you discover is the continuity and discontinuity of body of Christ. By that I mean that there are some things that transcend culture, things that are remarkably similar no matter where you go in the world. And then there are things that are so different that you hardly even have a category for them. There are some dynamics that are static between cultures and there are other dynamics that radically change. In other words, there are some things that transcend culture and remain the same. There are other things that are unique in each location, people-group, or time period.

Let me give you a few examples from my own experience:

- In Slovakia I was sitting in a theologically conservative seminary hearing through an interpreter solid doctrine, but the pastors are partially supported by the government and the seminary was a part of secular, state-sponsored university.
- In India we were singing some of the same hymns and choruses that we would in West, yet men and women were seated on opposite sides of the sanctuary.
- In Togo, the Scripture reading was a familiar reading from the New Testament and the music was very active, including congregational “dancing,” yet every woman wore a dress.

- In Mango the missionaries were intent on planting a church, but they spent the first 4-5 years intentionally not aggressively evangelizing and simply living among the people.

Do you see the continuity / discontinuity issue? Part of the challenge of missions is knowing what is essential and what is flexible, what is biblical principle and what is cultural context.

However, the challenge is not just in regards to missions; this is also a challenge for us today.

Understanding the Bible

The challenge is the fact that the Bible was written in a completely different time period and in a completely different culture. Yet there are many things that transcend time and culture. And this presents a very important matter for us to think through, and one that we face head-on in our texts over the next two weeks.

The church of Jesus Christ has been and continues to be comprised of men and women – there's the continuity. But what men and women should or shouldn't do has changed culturally. And the critical question is this: How much change is appropriate?

Additionally, we need to ask another question: What principles, concepts, or ideals transcend culture and time? Candidly, this is one of the most difficult and important interpretive decisions that we make when studying the Bible, and one that we face in the text over the next two weeks.

Just think of all the questions in this text:

- Are men required to raise their hands in prayer?
- Is a woman doing her hair or wearing jewelry improper?
- What does it mean for a woman to learn quietly?
- What does it mean for a woman not to teach or have authority over a man?
- Are women more easily deceived than men?
- How are women saved through child-bearing?

Before we get into the specifics of this text, let me give you an overview of how to think about think about interpreting the Bible. John Stott, in his commentary on 1 Timothy¹, provides two helpful principles:

- 1) **The principle of harmony.** The Bible, as the written Word of God, has a unity to it such that God does not contradict himself. Although the Bible has a rich diversity to it, there is an underlying consistency to it which requires us to interpret each text in light of the total biblical context. This, incidentally, is one of the weaknesses of expositional preaching because we are looking so closely at one passage that we could see it in an isolated way. Therefore, it is important when we are looking at a text like this to see the bigger, consistent themes in the

¹ John R. W. Stott, *The Message of 1 Timothy and Titus*, (Downers Grove, Illinois: IVP, 1996), 73-88.

Bible of which this text is a part. Verses 8-15 taken independently would not seem to accurately portray the equality of men and women as it relates to being an image bearer or our status as God's children. A failure to understand the whole will cause a person to take this passage so literally that the wrong conclusions would be drawn or wrong behaviors justified. An example of this would be saying that 1 Corinthians 11 is a biblical mandate that all women should wear head coverings.

- 2) **The principle of history.** The Bible was not written in a cultural vacuum but was given to people in particular historical and cultural settings. Every text has a cultural context such that God's word has incredible relevance to the issues in the lives of his people. God didn't simply issue culture-free maxims, he stooped to our level and addressed our issues. Therefore, the Bible is incredibly relevant, and it was written with practical application in mind. However, that poses a unique interpretive challenge in that one has to determine the transferability of the cultural commands to our present day context. This is hard work because you have to not only understand what was happening when the Bible was written, but also know how to link it to today. A failure to do this well could result in wrongly prescribing something the Bible intended to have limited application or in a person using the culture in which the Bible was written to minimize important truths. An example of this would be saying that homosexuality should be viewed differently in 2012 than it was in the Bible because our culture has changed.

The challenge here is significant and important. The interpreter of the Bible has to take cultural and historical background, biblical theology, comparative analysis of other passages, exegetical work, the meaning of words, and the intent of the author all into consideration as we consider difficult texts like these. It is hard work.

I hope that you value difficult texts like these. They are in the Bible for a reason. They not only have important truths; they serve to humble us as we seek to know God and his will for our lives.

So as we approach our specific text today, it is important to distinguish between the things in the text that are directly transferable and those things that are contextual. In other words, we have to ask ourselves what things are principles that transcend culture and what things need to be seen in light of the culture of the church and might be applied differently today. It seems to me that verses 8-15 contain both. There are things that transcend culture, and there are things that are entirely cultural and therefore limited. This week we'll examine verses 8-10 and next week we'll look at verses 11-15.

Instructions for Men and Women

Let's turn our attention to what Paul specifically says about men and women in the church. It might seem rather obvious, but it is important to note that the participants of the church are always the same: men and women. Culture and time may change, but the church has always been comprised of two genders: men and women.

Remember that this entire chapter is about the way that the church should conduct itself in its worship. There were certain things that Paul wanted to emphasize in light of some of the

challenges that the church was facing. Therefore, Paul gives some gender-specific instructions to men and women.

Now there are many things that men and women share in common. For instance, both men and women are made in the image of God (Gen. 1:26-27), both genders fell into sin (Gen. 3), both receive forgiveness through Christ (Gal. 3:28), and both are spiritually gifted and filled with the Spirit (Gal. 5:21-22). It is important to start here because in the Roman and Jewish world, women were considered intellectually second-class citizens. The Bible clearly elevates the spiritual value of women.

At the same time, the Bible also identifies and maintains a clear and important uniqueness between men and women. In the same way that there is equality of essence but differences in personality, role, and function with the triune God, there is equality and uniqueness between men and women. This is part of the divine design of men and women, and it is part of the created order. There is a complementary uniqueness – a difference that benefits and enhances both.

As a result, men and women are given different commands regarding marriage (see 1 Peter 3:1-7), and there is a different aspect of accountability before God (see 1 Cor. 11:3 and Gen. 3:9) and different consequences of failure (Gen. 3:15-19). Men and women have different roles, and they also have unique challenges or struggles.

Sometimes pastors must provide general instructions for everyone – both men and women. And then there are times when it is appropriate to speak the specific challenges or issues that men and women face independently of each other. Sometimes it is worth the risk of over-generalizations to address relevant and unique challenges that each gender faces, and I believe that is what Paul is doing here.

In the midst of all the commonality and continuity between men and women, he identifies two messages or focal points for men and women to consider as they come to worship.

Men: Pray with Conviction not Friction (v 8)

Paul begins his instruction by speaking to men about prayer. This follows what he had previously said in verses 1-7 regarding the priority of prayer, especially externally-focused prayer, in the life of the church. Paul is giving some pastoral caution for how men ought to conduct themselves in worship.

First, notice that the apostle gives this church some clear indication of what he wants to happen in the context of the church. The word “desire” is a word that indicates an authoritative command. This is more than just a suggestion; this reflects the heart of what Paul believes should characterize men in worship. This is what church should be like.

Secondly, he longs for this to be the case everywhere or “in every place.” Given the context of what was just said in 2:1-7, the desire here is not just for the city of Ephesus. Paul certainly wanted

it applied there, but his focus is broader. Paul wants the church to be filled with prayer, and he specifically wants men to be sure that they are praying the right way.

Here is where we come to an interpretive fork in the road. With each command there is a broad principle or command and there is a contextual expression. I think that it looks like this:

- **Command:** men should pray without friction
- **Context:** lifting hands

The point of Paul's command here is the heart of the men who are praying. The posture is secondary and cultural. The command is for men not to be caught in the trap of praying in the corporate gathering of God's people while also being involved in anger and quarrelling. Paul is concerned about actions that would be hypocritical and inconsistent.

The problem was the attitude. The sin of dissension and quarreling about controversies was a central reason why he wrote 1 Timothy in the first place. 1 Timothy 1:4 warned about unhelpful speculations while 1 Timothy 6:5 tells us that the false teachers created "constant friction." Therefore, Paul calls the men to not pray with angry and quarreling hearts.

The statement "lifting holy hands" was a cultural expression of how they prayed, not an apostolic command that this is the right way to pray. The men would not be off the hook if they prayed with angry hearts but kept their hands down. That would miss the point!

Paul is addressing an issue that, while not exclusive to men, is certainly more prevalent in men. He is warning them that their anger, contentions, or friction can affect their prayers. This is not the only place that men are given a command like this. 1 Peter 3:7 says that husbands are to live with their wives in an understanding way (not harsh, not filled with contention)... "so that your prayers may not be hindered." Colossians 3:19 says "husbands, love your wives, and do not be harsh with them." Further, Elders are not to be self-controlled, not violent but gentle, and not quarrelsome (1 Tim. 3:3).

Men, let me speak frankly with you. Anger, harshness, over-directness, and general grumpiness in dealing with people come from a desire to get what we want. As I understand James 1:20, it does not produce the righteousness that God requires, and it is an attempt to be in control. Anger, in all its active and passive forms, is an attempt to be God. Now women are also called to not be angry, but this verse is particularly focused on men.

Spiritual leadership and an angry spirit do not go together. And I believe that one of the ways that the enemy loves to keep men from fulfilling their God-given role as a spiritual leader is to trap them in disqualifying and discrediting anger. Do you respect someone who is constantly angry? Do you trust a person who is regularly involved in contention? Do you want to open up to someone who cannot rule his spirit? Paul wants men to pray with conviction not with friction.

Women: Be Known for Good Works not Just Good Looks (vv 9-10)

The second issue that Paul takes up is related to women and their appearance. It seems that there were some women who were conducting themselves in a way that was proving to be distracting or perhaps even destructive to the church. Therefore, Paul issues some pastoral instructions as to how women ought to think about their participation in worship services.

First, it is interesting that Paul transitions into verse nine with the word “likewise.” In the same manner that there is a particular caution for men, Paul now offers a particular caution for women.

Once again we see the pattern of command and context in this text. He lays down a broad principle and then gets culturally specific:

- **Command:** women should adorn themselves in respectable apparel with modesty and self-control
- **Context:** not with braided hair, gold, pearls or costly attire

Paul’s command reflects the guiding principle that women should choose their clothing and make their appearance such that it reflects respectable, modest, and self-controlled behavior. Keep in mind that this instruction has a worship service in mind. Apparently there were women who were coming to worship services, and they were dressed in such a way that attracted attention or attracted temptation.

There are three words here that are worth noting:

- **Respectable** – This word means that which is appropriate, and in this context it means appropriate in light of a worship service. It means that a woman should dress in such a way that reflects the focus is on God and not herself.
- **Modesty** – The meaning with this word is more specific. It is used for discretion when it comes to not dressing in a way that is seductive or suggestive. It can also mean shameful or disgraceful; the kind of appearance that, frankly, is embarrassing to oneself and others.
- **Self-control** – A woman’s appearance is to communicate that she has prudence, discretion, and that her morals are in control. Dressing in a fashion to intentionally attract attention, especially sexual attention, is not fitting or right, especially when it comes to worship.

These women were becoming a distraction by their appearance and it was causing a problem – a needless issue of the wrong focus in worship services.

Now Paul takes these principles and gets very specific. He does this because often distracting, divisive, or inappropriately dressed people need specifics since they often don’t think that such commands apply to them. Paul lists the following: braided hair, gold, pearls, and costly attire. Why these?

This kind of style was indicative of something more. It could be symbol of flaunting one's wealth or one's moral looseness. In both cases the common denominator was the purpose of drawing attention to oneself – to “turn their heads.” It seems that in this culture women would make a fancy show of their hair, weaving gems and jewels into it, and then put on expensive clothes. The unusual display was meant to attract attention. Sometimes this kind of fashion was used to flaunt luxury by the wealthy. At other times it was used by prostitutes to flaunt their sexuality.

We understand this, don't we? It is unfortunate but true that often fashion and style are driven by people whose lives, morals, and standards are light-years away from godliness. It is crazy that people who want to flaunt their wealth or their seductiveness can drive how we look. Just think about that for a moment. The famous people or immoral people who set the trends for our culture often have very tragic and messed up lives. Think about who you are seeking to look like. Think of the implications of dressing up or not having enough on such that you look like a prostitute. And the reason that a person goes there is because in some dark place in all of our hearts we want to be noticed, to be treated special, to receive the attention that we crave.

Let me speak candidly and frankly to our young people. Young men, be sure that you define what is “attractive” carefully. Many a man has fallen for a seductive woman only to discover the emptiness that comes with it. Young women, be sure that you define “beauty” carefully. While men are responsible for guarding their eyes and heart, you are just as responsible for what you flaunt and reveal. The issue here is not braided hair, gold, pearls or costly clothing. The issue here is what those things represent. And in each period of history and in each culture, one needs wisdom to know what is respectable, modest, and self-controlled.

The tragedy of this text is that these women had become a distraction to what worship was supposed to be all about. It is no wonder that Paul speaks so candidly and honestly.

Respectability, modesty, and self-control are the principles that should guide the conduct and appearance of women. Now Paul is not suggesting that a woman be entirely out of touch with what is fashionable and contemporary. Skip ahead to verse ten and you'll see what Paul ultimately wants: “but with what is proper for women who profess godliness – with good works.”

Here is where Paul reaches the ultimate point and the definition of what true beauty is: **godliness**. Listen to how Peter echoes this truth in 1 Peter 3:3-4.

Do not let your adorning be external—the braiding of hair and the putting on of gold jewelry, or the clothing you wear—⁴but let your adorning be the hidden person of the heart with the imperishable beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which in God's sight is very precious (1 Peter 3:3-4)

In other words, women are to be known for their good works, not just their good looks. Does that characterize you? What are you known for? What do you want to be known for? What do your Facebook pictures say about you? What goes through your head when you stand in the closet, especially on Sunday morning?

God wants men who will pray with conviction, and he wants women to be known for good works. Friction hinders prayer, and seeking attention through appearances leads to distraction and even moral disaster.

Pastoral Reflections and Implications

Now that we've look at this text, let me give you four conclusions from this passage and our study today:

1. We should be grateful that the Bible speaks so specifically and in a manner that is so relevant to our lives. It never ceases to amaze me how relevant this book is to our lives even though it was written so many years ago. I love the Bible; it is a precious gift.
2. Looking at hard passages like these is humbling and hard work but it is worth it. Don't let difficult passages discourage you. Work hard to determine the meaning of the text in light of its biblical and cultural context.
3. Men and women have always been a part of the church of God, and they are wonderful complements to one another. The church needs both men and women, and there are beautiful spiritual similarities in many ways.
4. There are unique differences between men and women as well – differences that do not make one superior than the other. Men and women face unique challenges, and before God both have to do their part to walk in godliness and self-control. For men that sounds like praying with conviction not friction. For women that sounds like being known for good works not just good looks.

Finally, what do the next verses mean?

Let 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 (1Tim. 2:11-13).

Well, for the answer to that question, you are going to have to come back next week!

© College Park Church

Permissions: You are permitted and encouraged to reproduce this material in any format provided that you do not alter the content in any way and do not charge a fee beyond the cost of reproduction. Please include the following statement on any distributed copy: by Mark Vroegop. © College Park Church - Indianapolis, Indiana. www.yourchurch.com

Scriptural Citations: Unless otherwise noted, all Biblical quotations are from the English Standard Version.