

## The Pillar (Part 4 of 4)

### What Men and Women Should Do (or Not Do) – Part 2

1 Timothy 2:8-15

Mark Vroegop

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*<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 (1 Tim. 2:8-15)*

Every church in every culture and in every time period has been comprised of men and women. That may seem like a very obvious statement, but is a good starting point because it identifies the importance of thinking through the roles of men and women in the church. Every church in every culture and in every time period has had to determine the roles of men and women because men and women have always been a part of the church.

The challenge, as we saw last week, is attempting determine the boundaries of continuity and discontinuity when it comes to the church in different cultures and different time periods. In other words, we have to determine when a biblical text contains universal commands verses when a biblical text contains cultural commands. When do we find truths that transcend culture and when do we have truths that are have cultural limitations? This is not an easy task, especially in light of the questions presented in verses 11-15. Let me list them for us:

- What does it mean for a woman to learn quietly with all submissiveness?
- What does it mean for a woman not to teach or have authority over a man?
- What is Paul saying when he refers to Adam being formed first?
- Is Paul saying that women are more easily deceived than men?
- What does it mean that women are saved through childbearing?

As you can see, these are important questions and they are not easily addressed. But my hope is to help you understand how I see this text, why I see it that way, and then draw some conclusions that I hope will be helpful.

## Reviewing Command and Context

Last week I gave you what I think is a helpful interpretive key or a way to look at these verses: command and context. When you are studying, the Bible it is important to realize that while there is a consistent harmony to it, there is also a history behind what was written and what was said. Often the text of the Bible is rather easily transferred to our present culture. However, there are other times when the Bible is addressing something that is culturally informed. In that case, there are certainly underlying principles, but the application of those principles would change depending on the culture.

As a framework for looking at this issue I suggested to you one should look at this text through a lens of command and context. For me, this is a helpful and consistent way to sort through the meaning of the passage. By command, I meant that there is a transferable principle. By context, I meant there is cultural application in the passage that might have a similar but different nuance in another time period.

In verse eight, the command / context paradigm looked like this for men:

- **Command:** men should pray without anger or quarreling
- **Context:** with lifted hands

In verses nine and ten, the command /context paradigm looked like this for women:

- **Command:** women should dress respectably, modestly, and with self-control
- **Context:** not with braided hair, gold, pearls, and costly attire

So it seems there are clearly some things that transfer and some that do not. Now verses 8-10 are much easier to deal with because the teaching is more straightforward and the cultural transferability is more obvious. However, this is significantly more challenging in verses 11-15.

### The Command / Context of 1 Timothy 2:11-12

Let's walk through this passage and see if we can distinguish between what is command and what is context here. Now some interpreters do not see any context in verses 11-12 leading them to see absolutely everything in the text as directly applicable. Others see everything in this passage in light of context making nothing directly transferable, limiting the meaning to the unique situation in Ephesus. I prefer a solution that carries the command / context model that Paul seems to be using into verses 11-12. This doesn't solve all the problems, but it seems to be a bit more interpretatively consistent.

Verse eleven begins with a command: **"let a woman learn."** This is an important command because in the Roman and Jewish world women were considered intellectually and academically inferior to men. Both the Babylonian and the Jerusalem Talmud make the following unfortunate but illustrative statements: "The men came to learn, the women came to hear...It would be better

for the words of Torah to be burned than that they should be entrusted to a woman.”<sup>1</sup> Paul clearly wants women to learn and to grow spiritually (implied in the word’s meaning), and he issues a command that is counter-cultural to the day and the time. Although there are hard things in this passage, Paul is elevating the cultural role and status of women beyond the cultural norm.

While the remaining parts of this passage do prescribe a difference in role and function, women are not viewed as spiritually or intellectually inferior. Men and women have a much in common. As I said last week, 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).

The next statement identifies that attitude and action with which a woman is to learn: **“quietly with all submissiveness.”** This is where I see the command / context dynamic to come into play again. Here’s how I understand this passage:

- **Command:** learn with a submissive spirit
- **Context:** quietly / silence

Paul calls for women to embrace “all submissiveness” in their learning. Submission means to line up under, to recognize the place of divinely given authority. The word is used throughout the New Testament and not just for women. It describes a believer’s relationship to authorities (Rom. 13:1-7), children to their parents (1 Tim. 3:4), slaves to their masters (1 Titus 2:9), and younger people to older (1 Pet. 5:5). Submission is commanded in multiple relationship scenarios. Yet submission is a particular command for women, and it seems that the spirit of submission is a theme for godly women. The instruction is given multiple times in multiple contexts:

- Titus 2:5 – women are to be submissive to their own husbands so that the word of God may not be blasphemed.
- Colossians 3:18 – wives are to submit to their husbands as is fitting in the Lord.
- Ephesians 5:22 – wives are to submit to their husbands as to the Lord.
- 1 Peter 3:1-6 – wives are to be submissive to their husbands, letting their beauty be a gentle and quiet spirit as holy women in history have given them an example.

No other group of people has this level of instruction on the subject of submissiveness. Therefore, my conclusion is that while all believers are called to submission, there is a particular place in God’s plan for divine function and order for women to embrace submission. It is to be a unique hallmark of their lives, a unique (not exclusive!) way for the expression of godliness. A woman is to have a submissive heart or attitude. I see this as a command or an over-arching principle.

That raises another question: What does that submission look like? This is an important question because “submission” may not look the same in every marriage, every culture, every era, and every

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<sup>1</sup> Philip Ryken, 1 Timothy – Reformed Expository Commentary, (Phillipsburg, New Jersey: P&R Publishing, 2007), 89

church. The principle is clear, but living it out is culturally and relationally informed. We are now into the contextual dynamic, and Paul expresses it here with the word quietly.

The word “quietly” literally means silence. It can mean total silence (Luke 14:4, Acts 11:18, 21:14, 22:2), and it can mean a quiet demeanor (1 Thess. 4:11, 2 Thess. 3:12, 1 Peter 3:4). Most contemporary translations opt for the “quiet demeanor” translation (ESV, NIV, NASB) rather than silence (KJV, NKJV, RSV, NRSV). I think this is the right decision for the following reasons:

1. Total silence for women was not the norm in worship services. 1 Corinthians 11:5 indicates that women were involved in prayers and prophecies.<sup>2</sup>
2. Paul uses nearly the same statement in 1 Corinthians 14:34-35: “the women should keep silent in the churches, for they are not permitted to speak.” This would directly contradict 1 Cor. 11:5 unless “silence” meant something less than total silence.
3. The same word was used in 1 Timothy 2:2 to indicate a quiet demeanor.

Therefore, my conclusion is that when Paul talks about “silence,” he is not referring to complete silence. Rather, he is referring to the kind of demeanor or behavior that would fit with the spirit of submission. How that quiet demeanor is expressed could change depending on the situation, who was involved, and what was being discussed.

Submission should be the undergirding principle, and a quiet demeanor might sometimes be complete silence or at other times she might be involved in public worship. Each woman will have to work out how to express this, and each situation will require discernment.

Now let’s examine verse twelve which says, **“I do not permit a woman to teach or to exercise authority over a man; rather she is to remain quiet.”** This verse is directly connected to what Paul just said in verse 11, and I think follows a parallelism in the text.

John Stott and William Mounce both suggest that the following structure in verses 11-12:

- “should learn quietly...not teach”
- “with all submissiveness...not exercising authority”

If this is correct (and I think it is), then it highlights yet again the command / context dynamic. Verse 12 could be summarized this way:

- **Command:** Not to exercise authority
- **Context:** Not teach...remain silent

As submission was expressed through culturally defined silence, respect for authority would be expressed with some level of teaching that was not permissible. In other words, the underlying principle is that men are to be the ultimate spiritual leaders, and that would be expressed in a culturally nuanced prohibition regarding some kind of teaching.

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<sup>2</sup> I take this to mean a word of exhortation.

There are three words that are very important to understand. There is an enormous amount of literature on these words. Let me summarize for you what I take them to mean:

- **Do not permit** – The word means to not allow someone to do what they want to do. Paul is offering a correction here of a problem that had emerged in Ephesus (see 1 Tim. 5:13).
- **To teach** – the word simply means to instruct, and as such it sounds like Paul is saying that women should never teach anything. However, that cannot be the case because 1) older women are told to teach younger women (Titus 2:3-4), 2) Timothy was instructed by his mother and grandmother (2 Tim. 1:5, 3:15), and 3) Priscilla, along with her husband, taught Apollos (Acts 18:26). So clearly all teaching is not forbidden. The solution comes in the next word.
- **Not to have authority** – this word, taken plainly, means to have rule over or to have authority over another. Some take it to mean “abusive authority” but I am not convinced that the data supports that conclusion.

Unfortunately the meaning of the words does not solve all the problems. We don’t know what Paul means by teaching or authority. He doesn’t specifically spell out what kind of authority he has in mind here but I think that there is a huge clue given the fact that immediately following this text, Paul jumps into the qualifications for Elders (1 Tim. 3:1-7).

Therefore, I think a right understanding of this text would be to see this passage as a prohibition of women serving in a position of ultimate spiritual authority. Specifically, I see this text identifying that Eldership – the role of authoritative teaching for a community of believers – as a God-ordained role for qualified men. Keep in mind, however, that not all men can serve. Eldership is not a wide-open office; most men aren’t qualified either.

At the same time, I don’t think that this command prohibits women from all teaching. There are many scenarios where women could and should be actively involved in instruction while not violating the spirit of these verses.

On a regular basis our Elders have a study session and discussion on a variety of theological topics. About a year ago we took up this issue, examined it carefully, and had some wonderful dialogue. At College Park our Elders have defined “ultimate spiritual authority” as being biblically vested in the Elder Council, and therefore we believe that the Bible prescribes this council to be comprised of qualified men. We believe that there is a mandate for men to embrace their spiritual leadership role. When men fail to spiritually lead the home or the church, they are out of step with God’s plan and design. Godly, qualified men should lead the church through Eldership.

Now that doesn’t mean that a woman can never teach. In a mixed group setting, when a woman is under the covering of an Elder, depending on the context, and with a spirit of humility, she may be actively involved in teaching. Now we haven’t thought through every conceivable scenario, but let me give you a few from my own experience:

- I have personally benefited from the writings of Nancy Leigh DeMoss, Kay Arthur, and Beth Moore.
- I would not have a problem with a woman being involved in the instruction and training of pastors.
- I have often sought advice and counsel from women on our staff and in our church on a wide-range of subjects.
- I could see scenarios in Adult Bible Fellowship or Small Groups where women are used in a temporary teaching role.
- There has been and are women involved in high-level, non-Elder leadership roles, (e.g., Pastoral Search Teams, Children’s Ministry, Women’s Ministry, Missions, First Hand, Youth Ministry) and I’d like to see even more.

For me this nuance of command / context helps me because the principle of ultimate spiritual authority is preserved, and yet there are culturally flexible expressions of what it means to not teach.

In summary, I see 1 Timothy 2:11-12 as teaching:

1. Women are to embrace a God-honoring spirit of submission and respect for the God-ordained calling of qualified male spiritual leadership.
2. The expression of these principles will take on a cultural dynamic as it relates to what personally entails a “quiet demeanor” and what it means congregationally “to teach.”

### **The Basis of this Teaching**

An obvious question arises when you understand this text this way: Where is this coming from? In verses 13-14 Paul gives us an answer to that question. Here is what he says:

*“For Adam was formed first, then Eve; and Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and became a transgressor.”*

Paul now lays out two reasons for what he has just said in the previous verses. He appeals back to creation to provide context for what he has just said.

First, Paul says **“Adam was formed first, the Eve.”** He appeals to the order of human creation as the basis of male leadership, headship, and spiritual authority. Paul appeals to the very foundation of how the world as we know it came to be. In other words, this authority principle is something that God established in the essence of creation. By appealing back to creation, Paul is removing the male-as-ultimate-authority-holder from a cultural context and planting it firmly on the ground of the creative intention of God. This was and is God’s plan.

This is not the only place where the creation argument is made. Paul does the same thing in 1 Corinthians 11:8-12 –

<sup>8</sup>For man was not made from woman, but woman from man. <sup>9</sup>Neither was man created for woman, but woman for man. <sup>10</sup>That is why a wife ought to have a symbol of authority on her head, because of the angels. <sup>11</sup>Nevertheless, in the Lord woman is not independent of man nor man of woman; <sup>12</sup>for as woman was made from man, so man is now born of woman. And all things are from God.

Paul uses Genesis 2 in 1 Timothy and 1 Corinthians to define the role relationship between men and women while still maintaining a clear level of interdependency or a complementary relationship. His basis for the teaching of verses 11-12 is the divine order.

Secondly, Paul refers to the deception of Eve: **“and Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and became a transgressor.”** Some suggest that women should not be in authority because they cannot be trusted or because they are more easily deceived. However, history has clearly shown that both men and women cannot be trusted.

The key to understanding this passage is in the meaning of “deceived,” and to look at this passage as not what it says about Eve – but Adam. Eve became a transgressor by deception, but Adam by willful intent. And when God comes to the Garden after the fall, who does he call for? Adam! Why? Because Adam was ultimately responsible, and even though he tried to shift the blame on Eve and God (Gen. 3:12).

Paul raises this issue not because of Eve’s weakness but because of Adam’s role as spiritual representative of the entire human race (1 Cor. 15:21-22). Therefore, the basis of this command on authority is both creation and the fall. Each shows us the divine plan for order – one by creation, the other by consequences.

### **The Hope of God-Ordained Roles**

Finally, we come to the final verse that says, **“Yet she will be saved through childbearing—if they continue in faith and love and holiness, with self-control.”** What does this text mean?

Since this short section has been about roles of men and women, it makes sense that Paul would carry that theme through to the end. In other words, Paul is still talking about roles. This is why, in my view, he uses the clearest example of the distinction between men and women: childbearing. To bear a child is clearly a part of the created design of life. It is how God intended things to be. After talking about the role of men in spiritual leadership – one that Paul has linked to creation – he now turns to women and talks about their role. Men have a role – illustrated in creation and the fall. Women have a role – illustrated through childbearing.

To say that a woman will be “saved” through childbearing doesn’t mean 1) that any woman is saved by her works or 2) that single or non-child bearing women are saved. The word “saved” can mean more than just salvation; it can refer to the totality of one’s spiritual life or the consummation of redemption (Rom. 13:11, Phil. 2:12, 1 Peter 2:2). To be “saved” can refer to spiritual wholeness, godliness, and practical righteousness.

This meaning seems to be further justified by the list of faith, love, holiness, and self-control set in a conditional statement (“if they continue...”). Paul is not talking about a works-based righteousness or the possibility of losing one’s salvation.

Rather, he is speaking against the controversies in this church in which women saw their God-given role as less spiritual, less meaningful, and hopeless. As he does in 1 Timothy 5:14, he wants these women to see the spiritual significance of their role – even if it doesn’t involve ultimate spiritual leadership.

The hope for women is not in a radical alteration of the divinely given role, but a celebration of what God has designed and the roles he has given men and women. The hope is to see men and women as complementary participants in the body of Christ.

### **Pastoral Conclusions**

Thank you for patiently laboring with me through this text. I hope that I’ve been helpful in providing my understanding of this passage. I’m sure that I’ve not answered all your questions, but I hope that I’ve answered some.

Let me close with two pastoral conclusions from this passage related to command and context:

1. Men and women are equal before God as image bearers, guilty parties, and children of God. Yet there are differences that should be recognized, guarded, and celebrated. Both men and women have God-given roles, and we both ought to embrace the full ramifications of what that means.
2. Thinking carefully and considerately though how we live this out is very important, since we would never want to communicate that men are somehow superior and women inferior. While we believe that Eldership is a divinely given role for men, it is equally important to think through what significant, valuable, and meaningful roles and responsibilities women should be given.

The church of Jesus Christ has always been comprised of men and women. But more than just being made up of men and women, the church needs both men and women serving in every way that God intended.

The church needs – College Park Church needs – men and women faithfully and joyfully serving one another and the church of Jesus Christ. Together and in complementary ways we must guard the truth that leads to life.

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