1 Timothy

Lesson 2

**Introduction**

In 1 Timothy, Paul gave instructions to a younger church leader, Timothy, about how Ephesian believers should conduct themselves in church. Paul’s first instruction was for Timothy to confront and stop men teaching unhelpful materiel that was at best meaningless and at worse contrary to the gospel. This would require Timothy to follow in Paul’s footsteps by holding on to the apostolic gospel concerning Jesus. The rationale of this restriction was to keep the church’s teaching focused on spiritually productive and important matters: fostering genuine love for Christ and other believers, which comes from regularly renewed hearts, healthy consciences, and sincere faith.

With regard to church gatherings, Paul urged that gatherings include prayers for all types of peoples, including kings and other secular authorities. The rationale of this command was the hope for a social environment that allows the church to openly pursue the great commission, including outreach to all types of people.

Paul stated that the adult male believers in the various church meetings should unite their hearts in holy appeal to God through prayer without anger or contention.

**1 Timothy 2:9-15 Paul’s instructions concerning women**

1. **Modest dress.**

Paul says that Christian women should “adorn” themselves “modestly” or “honorably” with a state of mind of “honor” or “good conscience” and “decency” or “self-control,” NOT (1) braids, (2) gold, (3) pearls, or (4) costly clothes, BUT with what is fitting for women who profess reverence for God, which is good works. This is a complex thought, and the main point is that Paul wants Christian women to be more concerned about spiritual matters—being and doing that which pleases God—than material adornment that enhances one’s physical appearance or social status. But embedded within that main point are some comments on material adornment. The list of things that Paul says not to do fits the Greco-Roman stereotype of ways women used material adornment to flaunt wealth and/or sensuality. For example, conservative Roman writers around 100 A.D. lamented that the wealth provided by captive provinces during the first century had transformed many Roman women from hard-working and modest to shallow and luxury obsessed. They describe wealthy courtesans with elaborate braided hairstyles incorporating gold and jewelry such as pearls (so elaborate servants had to style them), and wearing gold jewelry and expensive clothes. Other passages indicate Paul was not prohibiting all jewelry nor was he saying women should not spend any time styling their hair. Paul expected women to have long hair (1 Cor. 11:14-15), and long hair necessarily requires some attention. Throughout the Bible, brides are portrayed wearing the best available clothes and jewelry on their wedding days. (Song of Solomon 1:10-11; Eph. 5:26-27; Rev. 19:8.) Paul expected women to have long hair. (1 Cor. 11:14-15.) So Paul is probably saying that there is a line between modest and immodest dress, jewelry, and hairstyles, and he wanted Christian women to stay on the modest or honorable side of that line. In my opinion, the location of that line varies from culture to culture, but it seems fair to say that all cultures draw the line somewhere. Our culture presents a challenge because it increasingly views intentionally immodest clothing and/or the flaunting of wealth as acceptable. But the Roman empire presented the same problem, so it is no more difficult to apply the verse today than it would have been in the first century.

The rationale for this command is embedded in Paul’s main point: he wanted believing women to find self-worth in pleasing God through good deeds rather than flaunting wealth or sensuality.

The primary context for this command was likely church meetings, but I see no reason to limit its application to church meetings.

1. **Learning in quietness and submission**

For Americans, the next command may be the most controversial in the NT. Paul says that he wants women to “learn in silence and in full submission.” Again, the context is church meetings and therefore is theological learning. (1 Tim. 3:14-15.) Paul is saying that believing women should learn from the theological discussions at the church meetings—an idea that not all males in Greco-Roman society would agree with—but in a submissive, quiet manner. Paul explains that he does not “permit” women to “teach” or “instruct” OR “exercise authority over” men but rather to be “in silence.” (See also 1 Cor. 14:34-35.)

Paul’s rationale is not that men are better teachers or better at exercising authority. Paul cites creation order: Adam was “formed” before Eve. This reference likely appeals to the entire passage of Gen. 2:7-25. Paul also cites the manner of the fall: that Adam was “not deceived,” but Eve “was deceived” and “fell into transgression.” (Gen. 3:13-17.) Paul’s argument seems to be that the order of creation and manner of the fall demonstrate the importance of adhering to the principle of male leadership inherent in creation order.

The next verse is clearly intended to present a positive or encouraging contrast, but approximately 2,000 years later Paul’s meaning is anything but clear. It is one of the hardest translation problems in the NT. Paul says, “but the woman will be saved” through or by or in spite of “the bearing of children” “if they continue in faith and love and holiness with self-restraint.” One critical issue is how to translate the preposition “dia” that connects being saved with childbearing. The most common meanings of that preposition would be “through” in the sense of during or, alternatively, by or because of. That would make the verse say either (1) women will be saved during childbearing if they continue in faith, etc. or (2) women will be saved by means of, or because of, childbearing if they continue in faith, etc.

The first meaning does not make sense because a multitude of Christian women have died during childbirth throughout church history. Childbearing, although a natural and expected part of life, represented a huge health risk in the first-century. If Christianity promised safety during childbirth, it is hard to imagine why that would only appear in one verse in the NT. Such a promise would be contrary to the more prevalent idea that NT believers should expect hardship and suffering. It also seems contrary to the curse in Gen. 3:16.

The second meaning does not make sense because many faithful women throughout church history have not gone through childbirth. Nor does any other NT verse suggest that salvation depends on a physical act—which isn’t even under a woman’s control—such as child birth. To the contrary, Paul expressly taught that it was fine for single women to stay single. (1 Cor. 7:8.) One common sense principle of biblical interpretation is that, when dealing with a unique and difficult verse that has a range of possible meanings, don’t pick a meaning that contradicts a multitude of other clear verses. Some commentators try to salvage this view by suggesting that Paul is referring to the promise in Gen. 3:15 that eventually an offspring of Eve would destroy Satan, and thus is saying Jesus’s birth is the means of salvation. But Paul switches from singular verbs in verse 14 to plural future verbs in verse 15, so limiting verse 15 to the single and past event of Jesus’s birth is not very satisfying. In fairness, however, there is no completely satisfying solution.

Paul may be using “dia” in a more unusual sense called “attendant circumstance” that could be translated as “despite” childbearing, in which case Paul is saying that women will be saved, despite the difficulties associated with childbirth, if they continue in faith, love, etc. This view assumes that since Paul has referred to the fall, he is also thinking of the results of the fall, which included great difficulty for women during childbirth. (Gen. 3:16.) Paul is saying that women can experience salvation, despite the consequences of Eve’s sin, which women experience whenever they go through childbirth, if they have faith. In my opinion some nuance of this last view seems to best fit the immediate context as well as the rest of the NT.

But all we can say for certain about 2:15 is that Paul meant to affirm that, despite woman’s role in the fall and certain limitations on teaching/leadership roles in the church, women experience the same salvation in the same manner as men—by continuing in faith, love, and holiness with self-control. (See Gal. 3:28.)

Another very difficult issue is the scope of the limitation intended by Paul. Timothy had the advantage of working with Paul for many years and thus being able to personally observe how Paul structured churches. We do not have that advantage. But we can and should consider what else Paul and other NT writers said about the role of women in church settings.

Here are some ministry activities Paul and the NT say women can do and/or portray women doing:

* Teach/disciple other women (Titus 2:3-5);
* Prophesy with head covered in a church meeting (1 Cor. 11:5; Acts 21:9);
* Pray out loud with head covered in a church meeting (1 Cor. 11:5, 13-15);
* Host church meetings in their home, like Mary (Acts 12:12);
* Financially support missions work, like Lydia (Acts 12:15);
* Ask theological questions/have theological discussions in their own home (1 Cor. 14:34-35);
* Be an important part of a ministry team such as Priscilla, who appears to have ministered alongside her husband Aquila as well as Paul. Paul described them “as my fellow workers in Christ Jesus. They risked their lives for me. Not only I but all the churches of the Gentiles are grateful to them.” A church met at their house. (Rom 16:3-5; 1 Cor. 16:19.) On five occasions, Priscilla is mentioned first, which often has some significance in the NT. (Acts 18:18,19, 26; Rom. 16:3; 2 Tim. 4:19.) Paul said two women, Tryphena and Tryphosa, “work hard in the Lord.” (Rom 16:12.) A third woman, Persis, “worked very hard in the Lord.” (Rom. 16:12.) Euodia and Synteche had “contended at [Paul’s] side in the cause of the gospel.” (Phil. 4:3.) Other female Christian women in the NT church significant enough to be mentioned include: Mary (Rom. 16:6); Julia (Rom. 16:15); Nereus’s sister (Rom. 16:15); Nympha (Col. 4:15); Claudius (2 Tim 4:21); Apphia (Philemon 2)
* Help explain theological doctrine to a learned church leader in private, as Priscilla and Aquila did with Apollos. (Acts 18:24-27.)
* Aquila and Priscilla owned/ran a tentmaking business and Paul agreed to work for them. (Acts 18:1-3)
* Devoting themselves to all kinds of good deeds (such as rearing children; showing hospitality; washing the feet of believers; helping those in trouble) (1 Tim. 5:10);
* Managing their households (1 Tim. 5:14);
* Taking care of extended family, including material assistance (1 Tim. 5:4,16);

Here are some ministry roles that the NT does not portray women doing:

* Being appointed by Jesus as one of the 12 Disciples (Mark 3:14-19);
* Being appointed as a replacement or additional apostle in Acts (Matthias, Acts 1:21-26; Paul, 1 Cor. 15:7-10, Paul)
* Holding the office of elder (1 Tim. 3:1-7; Titus 1:5-9)

This indicates Paul does not mean that women must be quiet throughout entire church services, nor does he mean that they cannot have significant ministry responsibility, but the language of 1 Timothy indicates there are certain roles related to teaching doctrine and church leadership Paul expected men to fill. The appeal to creation order as well as the fall indicates that Paul’s view was not just an attempt to conform to societal expectations of his time. But Paul’s statements on this subject are so brief, and our knowledge of how women functioned in the NT church so limited, that there is room for evangelical to disagree on what roles are limited to men.

At First Evangelical Free Church, we have had all-male elder boards and senior pastors. We have had female ministry staff (women’s ministry), female administrative staff, and female volunteers in a host of important roles, including managing Sunday School, the nursery, the library, the Christmas musical, and food ministries; serving on search and missions committees; welcoming and greeting people; and probably many more that I don’t know about. We have also financially supported female missionaries.

While we often focus on the impact of this passage on women, it is important to remember that this means men have a responsibility to fill these roles. American men have not done well in this area. Some denominations have changed their view on this issue in part because men were not willing to serve, and women were.

**1 Timothy 3:1-13 Elders and Deacons**

Paul commends the saying that, if anyone aspires to the role of “overseer” or “bishop” (episkopos), he seeks a noble task. It is not known how this saying started, but Paul seems to be quoting it to encourage men to aspire to be qualified for this office and willing to serve if called upon. Paul will later use the term “presbuteros,” (1 Tim. 5:17) which literally means “elder,” and appears synonymous with the first terms, so some translations use “elder” for both terms. Paul uses it to refer to the men who served on the leadership councils who oversaw local churches, and oversight is inherent in the term “episkopos.” Shepherding is another term applied to this role. Acts 20:28.

The list of qualifications is:

* Above reproach (be anepilaympton)—a term describing one’s general character, and meaning that there is not an area of one’s character in which one is objectively failing, i.e., someone could bring a valid charge that the elder’s character is lacking;
* A man of one woman (mias gunaikos andra); In first-century Greco-Roman society, multiple marriages were generally not permitted or at least disapproved, but a double-standard existed; wives were expected to be completely faithful to their husbands, while husbands were not subject to disapproval for sleeping with prostitutes, single female slave, or even unmarried free women; this phrase likely set a higher bar than Greco-Roman society expected and required married elders to be faithful to their wives; most commentators do not think it is meant to prohibit single men or widowers from serving as elders, since Paul taught that it was fine not to get married and he was single (1 Cor. 7:1, 8-9.)
* Sober (nyphalion)—this term emphasizes self-control and good judgment
* Self-controlled/prudent (sophron)—this term emphasizes self-control and prudent or thoughtful
* Respectable (kosmios)—this term also means well-behaved or virtuous
* Hospitable (philaxnos)—being open and caring
* Able to teach (didatikos)—the parallel in Titus 1:9 is being able to encourage others with sound doctrine and refute false ideas; there is no reason to think that Paul is picturing classroom, lecture style teaching; this could happen one-on-one;
* Not addicted to wine (not paroinon)—as we discussed earlier, wine was part of Roman culture, but Paul wants believers to be controlled by the Holy Spirit, not any addictive substance;
* Not combative, but gentle (not playktays, but epiaykay)—gentleness is one of the fruits of the spirit, including for men
* Peaceful (hamaxas)—continues theme of not being contentious
* Not greedy or loving money (aphilarguron)—Paul will talk later in the letter about the importance of not focusing one’s desires on material wealth; Jesus of course said that if people allow money to be their master, they cannot serve God;
* Manages his household well; his children are in submission to and respectful of his authority—In Roman society, one of the father’s duties was to make sure children in his household observed societal norms; Paul adds the rationale that a man who is not able to manage a household will not be able to manage a church;
* Not a new convert (not neophutas)—the term literally mean newly planted; the rationale is that giving this responsibility to a new convert may lead to the conceited pride that lead to Satan’s downfall; Paul thus seems to accept the idea that Satan was an extremely high-ranking angel who rebelled against God due to pride;
* Good testimony from those outside (marturian kalayn exein apo tone exothen)—This means a good reputation with nonbelievers; this item suggests that Paul believed nonChristians would view elders in particular as representatives of Christianity; Paul undoubtedly knew there would be times when outsiders would persecute or slander Christians even when they did not deserve it, but he wanted elders to be people respected for their integrity and consistency even by outsiders; it is not clear whether Paul is concerned that if the elder was someone outsiders were eager to attack, those attacks could be used by the devil to provoke an inappropriate reaction from the elder or that an elder subject to attack would bring dishonor to the entire church or both;

Paul says nothing about characteristics that often matter in secular affairs. Nothing is said about the elders’ physical appearance, wealth, social status, raw intelligence, or success in the business world. The focus is on the fruit of the spirit and other traits demonstrating spiritual maturity. Commentators agree that no one perfectly lives out these qualifications and elder should strive to keep growing, as Paul acknowledged in Phil. 3:12-15. The book “Church Elders” does a great job applying these principles to modern churches.

At First Evangelical Free Church Sioux Falls, we have a 7-person elder board that includes the senior pastor and 6 volunteers. The volunteers serve 4-year terms. Replacements are chosen by a nominating committee including multiple church members with input from current elders and staff. People who agree to serve as elders are presented for approval by the membership at a church business meeting. Our church strives to nominate people who fit the biblical qualifications.