

## Gender Roles In Worship

1 Timothy 2:8-12

“In every place of worship, I want men to pray with holy hands lifted up to God, free from anger and controversy. <sup>9</sup> And I want women to be modest in their appearance. They should wear decent and appropriate clothing and not draw attention to themselves by the way they fix their hair or by wearing gold or pearls or expensive clothes. <sup>10</sup> For women who claim to be devoted to God should make themselves attractive by the good things they do. <sup>11</sup> Women should learn quietly and submissively. <sup>12</sup> I do not let women teach men or have authority over them. Let them listen quietly.”

**In chapter one doctrine was the subject of consideration and his priority in chapter two is public worship.** And now Paul moves on to a discussion of the respective roles and appropriate behavior of men and women in worship. What we are going to touch on tonight is one of the hottest topics in the Church today – specifically what roles may women play in today’s church.

**We live in a day when there are two extreme positions relative to the place women should occupy in the local and visible church.** Both positions use this passage of Scripture to support their stand.

**One position permits women to occupy a place of prominence and leadership in all public services.** They have women preachers, choir directors, and officers. No position is withheld from them and, as a result, the women are not only prominent but we find that they become dominant in the church.

**The other extreme position on this issue is taken by those who do not allow women any place at all in their public worship services.** You never hear the voice of a woman in public in their meetings. I fear that they lose a great deal of talent and that the women could make a marvelous contribution if they were permitted to do so.

**Therefore, it would be a grave mistake to read this passage of Scripture as a barrier to all women's work and service within the Church, for we have too many instances of godly service by women in the Word of God.** May I remind you of Deborah, Queen Esther, Ruth, and others in the Old Testament? In the New Testament, it was Mary of Nazareth who bore and raised the child Jesus; it was Mary of Magdala who was the first to see the risen Lord; Priscilla labored with her husband Aquila to spread the gospel in Ephesus.

**As we study these very important verses of scripture, the conclusions we draw from these verses tonight depend largely on the principles we use to interpret them.** As we read these verses we have to decide what here is an *eternal* truth and what is a *cultural* expression of that truth.

**Again, there are two extreme positions here.** Rigid literalism looks at these verses and says: 1. Men should always raise their hands when they pray. 2. Women shall never braid their hair or wear jewelry. 3. Women may never under any circumstances teach men.

**The other position and says that Paul's words were written for a specific cultural problem in Ephesus at the time are now completely out of date and have no application to today's culture.** That is, they conclude these verses have nothing whatsoever to do with us today.

Therefore, our goal tonight is to look at this passage of scripture with some measure of balance and understanding.

**The first thing Paul draws our attention is *women's adornment.*** Look at what he says in verses 9-10, "In like manner also, that the women adorn themselves in modest apparel, with propriety and moderation, not with braided hair or gold or pearls or costly clothing, but, which is proper for women professing godliness, with good works." What caused Paul to deal with this subject in the first place? Well,

there really is an answer to why the Church at Ephesus was having some issues with that these Christian women were wearing.

In the Roman world the female principle was a part of *all* the heathen religions, and women occupied a prominent place. The worship of Aphrodite at Corinth was probably one of the most immoral in which prostitution was actually made into a religion. The thousand vestal virgins who were in the temple of Aphrodite was nothing more than prostitutes. They were characterized by very short and disarranged hair. Why? Because it was easy for them tidy up after each customer.

Also, in Ephesus where Timothy was at this time, was home to the ancient temple of Aphrodite, the Greek goddess of love, and, like the worship of Aphrodite, this temple employed hundreds of temple prostitutes. These prostitutes wore braided hair and gold as part of their working cloth. These prostitutes were infamous throughout the Roman world for their elaborate hairstyles and ornate gold jewelry, so much so that you could identify a prostitute of Aphrodite from a distance just by the way she dressed.

So what was the problem? The problem was that the Ephesian women lived in a culture of just “plain Jane” apparel. That is, women’s clothing was not much more than just “sackcloth” sewn into a straight-line covering. And when they saw all of the attention the prostitutes of Aphrodite were receiving, the how a little jewelry and a little “make-up” changed their appearance; they started dressing like those particular women. Thus, Paul addressed braided hair, gold, pearls and expensive clothing. Bible teacher John Stott says, “There is no biblical warrant in these verses to suggest that women should neglect their appearance or conceal their beauty or become drab... the question is how they should adorn themselves.”

So Paul deals with this matter two ways: First, he says that women should have a *balance* in their style of dressing. That is, they should understand the balance between *style* and *modesty*. Modesty

is simply not dressing in a way that calls attention to yourself, either through *seduction* or *extravagance*. In other words, Paul is saying to the women at Ephesus, “Just be yourself. You really do not have to dress lie, or look like someone else to express your beauty.” This really is a “no brainier.” Paul is not saying that it is right or wrong to wear beautiful cloth and jewelry, but if they really want their beauty to shine, they should adorn themselves with good works, which are consistent with their claim to belong to Christ. This should not be a theological issue.

In verses 11-12 Paul talks about the woman’s place in the church and this is where it gets a little tricky. He says, “Let a woman learn in silence with all submission. And I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man, but to be in silence.” I guess these two verses have probably caused more issues and misunderstanding than any that Paul has written. And I must confess that I was taught in a very conservative school of theology and I have struggled with some of these issues. So what is Paul really saying right here?

There are many ultra conservative theological thinkers believe, based on Paul’s writings, that women have little or no place in ministry, and they certainly would never ordain a woman as pastor. And I certainly understand that concept very well. And yet, Paul himself says in Galatians 3:26-29, “For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you are Christ’s, then you are Abraham’s seed, and heirs according to the promise.” Having said that, Paul goes on to describe the criteria for church leadership (pastors) in such male terms, as seen in 1 Tim 3:1-7, “This is a faithful saying: If a man desires the position of a bishop, he desires a good work. A bishop then must be blameless, the husband of one wife, temperate, sober-minded, of good behavior, hospitable, able to teach; not given to wine, not violent, not greedy for money, but gentle, not quarrelsome, not covetous; one who rules his own house well, having his children in submission with all reverence (for if a

man does not know how to rule his own house, how will he take care of the church of God?); not a novice, lest being puffed up with pride he fall into the same condemnation as the devil. Moreover he must have a good testimony among those who are outside, lest he fall into reproach and the snare of the devil.” **After reading that passage of Scripture, it would certainly seem that *no female* could ever qualify to be a pastor or teacher!**

But a careful study of Scripture reveals this in Titus 2:3-5, “The older women likewise, that they be reverent in behavior, not slanderers, not given to much wine, teachers of good things - that they admonish the young women to love their husbands, to love their children, to be discreet, chaste, home-makers, good, obedient to their own husbands, that the word of God may not be blasphemed.” **So this is not an absolute prohibition against women teaching!** In addition, Acts 18:26 reminds us that Aquila and his wife Priscilla took Apollos aside and instructed him further in the doctrine of Jesus, “When Aquila and Priscilla heard him, they took him aside and explained to him the way of God more accurately.” **So this is not an absolute prohibition against women teaching men.**

**So what is Paul trying to tell us?** First, the key to this passage found in verse 12 where he uses the word translated “to have authority over.” It governs both the teaching and attitude that is to characterize these women. It means “to domineer or to usurp authority.” **Paul is not saying that women should never to teach but that women are not to take over in a church and become the final authoritative teachers. Does this mean then that women are not to be the Senior Pastor?** Yes, I believe that it does. And we will look more closely at this issue in our next study.

Second, when Paul says in verse 11, “Let a woman learn in silence with all submission,” he uses a unique word that is translated “silent.” **It is the same word he uses in verse 2 of that same chapter, but as an adjective.** In verse 2 he says that we are to pray for “kings and all who are in authority, that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life.” **The word**

**“peaceable”** is the same word translated **“silent”** in verse 11. Paul says this in 2 Thessalonians 3:12, “Now those who are such we command and exhort through our Lord Jesus Christ that they work in quietness and eat their own bread.” Here Paul uses the same word but it is translated **“quietness.”** **But Paul certainly is not telling those workers to work and eat in silence.** Paul is simply telling the believers to work peacefully and to not make a big to-do about it.

**Therefore, it would seem that some of the women in the church at Ephesus were causing some problems in the church by trying to “run” the church.** So it is obvious the overall aim of these verses of Scripture was to restore peace in the worship service by placing certain limits on the role of women. A careful to this and other scripture verses leads us to believe that, as a result of the influence of the false teaching, some women had assumed the role of trying to take over the leadership of the church and teach an erroneous doctrine. And that is what Paul is trying to correct, not simply to silence women in church.

**Let me close tonight’s study with this personal observation.** I am convinced that without the work and leadership of women, many, many churches would have already closed their doors and gone **“out of business.”** I am thankful for the teachers and workers that God has placed in my life here at Mountain Grove.