



1 Timothy 2:1-15
 House Rules: 1 Timothy
 “Worship Rules”

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This morning we continue our series on 1 Timothy. This is Paul’s letter to Timothy at the church in Ephesus, where Timothy is the primary leader of the church there after Paul started it. And today we dive into a section of 1 Timothy that has completely divided the Church. It starts part way into chapter 2, and continues into chapter 3, which we will look at next week. So, let’s dive in to **1 Timothy, chapter 2.**

Now, in case you’ve forgotten, in the verses immediately prior to this, that ended last week’s reading, Paul mentions that some people have rejected the faith, and yet still have been teaching in the church, and so Paul says he “handed them over to Satan” so as to be taught not to blaspheme. It’s a strong statement. Clearly, the two guys that he names in those verses have been teaching some things that have been in direct contradiction to the gospel.

And then Paul continues on to urge that petitions, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings, be made for all people. I think that includes those Paul had just mentioned who had bad theology. He then specifically says to pray for kings and those in authority, that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness. There’s clearly a political element here, as well as a theological one. So, let me ask you: **Do you pray for people who disagree with you politically and theologically?** If we do, perhaps our prayers are kind similar to the point made in the story about the mother was preparing pancakes for her son Kevin, and his younger brother Ryan. The boys began to argue over who would get the first pancake. The mother said to them, “If Jesus were sitting here, He would say, ‘Let my brother have the first pancake. I can wait.’” Kevin turned to his younger brother and said, “Ryan, you be Jesus!”

Sometimes our praying for our political or theological adversaries is kind of like that: we really only want our will to be done, and not God’s will. Or we are overly confident that our will is aligned with God’s will – that they’re even one and the same. We forget that it’s possible that the other person feels

exactly the same way! This is why prayer is so much more about what God is doing in our own lives than in someone else's.

And the main thing to be focused on in our prayers is that people would know Jesus, because **“God our Savior wants all people to be saved and come to a knowledge of the truth: that there is one God and one mediator between us and God, and that mediator is Jesus Christ, who gave himself as a ransom for all people” (1 Timothy 2:4-6).**

And yes, when Paul says, “all people” that means the guys he mentioned at the end of chapter one, and the kings who ruled over them. It means God wants to save people with different theological views – Buddhists, Hindus, New Ageists, Agnostics, Atheists, and so forth, and then people of differing political views: the president, the governor, mayors, and our city council members...and on down the line. God saves them through Jesus Christ.

Then Paul gets to verse 8 where he reinforces that he wants all men to pray. Look, women should be praying, too. I think we can agree that men are not the only ones to pray. But he addresses them in particular. And he says they should do so with holy hands lifted up, and without anger or disputing.

You know, sometimes in the church today, you'll hear people say, or you'll read church value statements that will say something like, “I/we just want to be like the 1st Century Church.” And they've got this idealized and romanticized vision of what that looks like: that there was perfect harmony and agreement on everything in the church and that they lived in this constant state of spiritual bliss. And yet: **Paul is telling them here to pray without anger or disputing! Clearly, they had challenges in the church.** If that's not enough: From 1 and 2 Corinthians, we know that church had a lot of conflict. In Philippians, Paul tells Euodia and Syntyche to settle their conflict. And I'd be willing to bet that some of the conflict stemmed from political, as well as cultural, differences. So, what is your prayer life like in regards to those who disagree with you – whether it's theological or political or something else – and are you praying for them without anger or disputing residing in your heart? Are we praying that they would know Jesus? And are we open to being a part of God's answer to that prayer?

Paul then turns to a topic that clearly was causing some disruption in the church there in Ephesus, and is still a disruption in the Church today: The role of women in the church. There are definitely different thoughts on this, because the Bible has different things to say. And we have to decide: which verses are “normative” and the standard to which we aspire, and which ones are an “exception” because of something specific in that moment in time?

There are three things we have to consider with this passage and the principals behind these considerations really apply to any other passage we look at – so this is just sort of basic (or nearly basic) Bible Study stuff to consider on any topic/passage. **First, we have to consider what the rest of Scripture says on gender roles (in this instance) and differences in the church and even more foundationally: in Creation.** So, passages like the creation of Adam and Even in Genesis, the roles that women played throughout Israelite history, and in Jesus’ ministry, and in the early church including with Paul himself, all have to be factored in. Quite frankly, there is much more in the Bible that shows women as equal partners with men, in leadership positions, ministering to people just like the guys are...there’s much more of that than there are verses that put restrictions on women. If you’re going to see verses like today’s as the norm, you have a lot more explaining to do of other passages where women are ministry leaders.

Second, we have to distinguish between passages that only describe events or practices at the time compared to those that clearly teach principles designed for universal and timeless application. For instance, there’s a lot of stuff in the Old Testament that we don’t take as prescriptive for us today. Even things that Jesus did are oftentimes not still done today. For instance, Jesus turned water into wine, but that is no indication that we are called to do the same, even though we might like to, especially in a pandemic. 😊 Also, Jesus once walked on water, and commanded Peter to join him: but that doesn’t mean we should all go down to lake Washington and jump off the dock today; If you want to, I’ll gladly join you and hand you your towel when you get out. 😊 Or how about Jesus’ 40 day fast? Taking that as a normative example to follow could actually be dangerous to your health. Now, it may not always be easy to decide whether a given passage

was intended as a narrative description or teaching of principles to be carried out for all time, but the question must be considered.

Third, we have to consider the passage within its cultural, social, and historical setting. Yes, this one we have to be careful with, lest we say everything in it is cultural and therefore not relevant today. But we Christians consider this question all the time with other passages; in fact, it's a basic process to good Bible study, and so there's no reason not to with these verses. For instance, even churches that limit women's roles in the church based on these verses, let go of a command in this very passage: most of those churches don't ask their men to lift up their hands in prayer. Why? Because of culture: they lifted their hands in prayer 2,000 years ago, but we fold them in our laps.

So, how does all this help us approach verses 9-15? Well: **Verses 9-10 are clearly about how women appeared: their clothes, their hair, their jewelry, etc.** Why would this be a big deal? Because women in the Christian faith experienced incredible liberation and freedom compared to how they had been treated. The roots of this go back into the Old Testament, although the ideal set for there was not usually lived out in every day life very well in Jewish culture. Proverbs 31 describes what a godly woman is like and it describes a woman who is strong and courageous, making business deals, managing the house, and out in the community, and who reveres the Lord.

But in practice, Jewish women were not esteemed. A wife was considered property. An ancient Jewish prayer, prayed by men, thanked God for not making him a woman. Of course, in the context of Ephesus, there were a lot of non-Jews. And on the Greek side of things, the situation was no better. Women weren't out in public, they were considered property, and so forth. Culturally, both were pretty similar in how women were treated.

But: Jesus treated women differently. He spoke to them in public. He let them minister to him. He debated with one woman – and lost the debate! And: it's women who find the empty tomb! They're the ones God worked through to carry out that message to the Disciples. Which, by the way, serves as proof that the resurrection really happened, and isn't a fabrication of

someone to rally people to a cause, because no first century Jewish or Greek author would *ever* consider putting women in such a key role as that – it would ruin the integrity of the story. Women were considered liars – their testimony wasn’t admissible in a court of law!

But with Jesus, as I said, everything was different. It’s the same with Paul and his ministry. **He preached to women; he brought a slave girl out of slavery; he lifts women up and praises them as co-workers in Christ using the same language to describe them as he does the others.** In one place he calls a woman a deacon. Not deaconess, by the way – the Bible never uses the word “deaconess” – but deacon, the same word to describe men in the same kind of ministry. So, women in their day had this new-found freedom, and they just went over the top with it. They wanted to show their new-found worth in how they dressed – which is something that every single one of us has done, so don’t judge – and they went too far. So, Paul gives some teaching here about that.

In verses 11 and 12, it really is much the same, with this new-found freedom and new knowledge leading them to overstep their bounds. Maybe this will help to think about this one: **Have you ever been in a conversation with someone who learned something new, and the light bulb goes on in their head, and all of a sudden they think they’re an expert in the subject at hand?** I’m sure you’ve never done this yourself...so let’s just say it’s “other people” which makes it much easier to consider. ☺ You see it in Middle School and High School kids all the time – not that I would have any personal experience in my house with that or anything. A kid skis a few black diamond runs on the mountain, and all of a sudden they think they’re a better skier than dad. Whatever.

And for these Christian women, all of them had previously been taught that in worship they couldn’t speak, couldn’t read Scripture, couldn’t teach, etc., and all of a sudden they’re valued, and there’s this new freedom to be more participatory. As Paul writes in Galatians, **“There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male and female, for all are one in Christ Jesus” (Galatians 3:28).** And that kind of teaching gave them incredible freedom, because the playing field had been leveled. And so, with that freedom, and

the things they were learning in church, all of a sudden it was like teenagers who get their first computer programming lesson and they think they should now be running Microsoft. And Paul is saying here, “No. Wait. You need to learn. Sit and listen.”

Probably many of you know that elsewhere Paul says that everything should be done decently and in order. It’s the Presbyterian motto. We love worship that is in order, and our church structure and organization, etc. That is not what they were experiencing in church. They needed some worship rules. Keep quiet in worship, listen and learn. Ask questions later. Frankly, his teaching about learning in quietness is good advice for women *and* men. How else does learning take place, regardless of gender? Are you really going to learn from a teacher while talking with your neighbor, or playing candy crush on your phone? This principal is true from preschool through PhD level classes. Yes, there’s a time for discussion and learning through experimentation, and so forth...but sometimes we need to just sit and listen. When you think of it as applied to men and women alike, it makes sense. And so, I am convinced that these verses did not sound to them the way they sound to us, because of the context of their worship. It’s simply sound advice for how to learn, and the women were in this new place of freedom and empowerment where they needed to learn before they started speaking up in worship on matters of faith, or stepped in to other roles.

And then lastly, verses 13-15 are some of the most perplexing in all of Scripture – particularly verse 15. I don’t think Paul intended verses 13 and 14 to be communicate that men are somehow superior to women because of the creation order given to us in Genesis – though if he did, it’s just reflecting the cultural views of the day. But he may have it here for the simple fact that Eve was formed second, out of Adam, and therefore had to learn stuff that he already had learned...and he’s using that as an example from Scripture that models their own experience: the women are being brought to the party after the men had already been there for a while. There’s a learning curve for them. And so he’s using the Creation story as an analogy.

And then there’s verse 15 that might be the most perplexing verse in all of Scripture. Literally, it reads, “**But *she* will be saved/preserved through**

childbearing if *they* continue in faith and love and sanctity with self-restraint” (1 Timothy 2:15). First, the word for “saved,” which we usually think of as a spiritual thing that Jesus does, can also be “preserved” – not like canned peaches, but in the sense of health or wholeness. It is used in this way sometimes in the gospels in regards to Jesus healing people. It makes sense to think of it like that here, because otherwise no male could be saved. No woman who never had children could be saved. And to say that childbirth saves is completely contrary to everything Jesus teaches about being saved, and that Paul says about the saving work that Jesus does – even in the verses earlier in this very passage! That “saving” is done by Jesus only.

Second, the “she” is definitely singular, but the “they” a moment later is definitely plural. So, is “she” continuing the Adam and Eve theme? That Eve will be saved or preserved through childbearing? And is that her own childbearing, or is Paul pointing then to Jesus and Mary’s birth of him? And then who is “they”? All women? Someone else? What about men – don’t we guys need faith, love, sanctity, and self-restraint? This is pretty close to some of the fruit of the Spirit that all believers live into, not just women. There’s so much in this verse that is so perplexing. But that’s something I love about this verse, because: **This verse reminds us that our faith is not dependent upon full intellectual comprehension.** God is bigger and more complex than my ability to understand everything about him and what it means to be in relationship with him. We are invited to have *faith* in Jesus – which means stepping into something unknown, at least at some level. Yes, knowledge is a part of it, but it’s not the totality. Faith goes beyond knowledge. And God uses this 15th verse in exactly that way because there is not a single scholar or pastor who can definitively say, “this is what is meant by these words.” That’s not just me saying that, that’s others who are more scholarly than me.

So, we’re all created in the image of God. This whole topic starts there. Together, we are image bearers of our Creator. We are all invited by Jesus to follow him, worship him, and serve with the gifts and abilities he’s given us.

I want to close with some words from the late 17th and early 18th Century English commentator, Matthew Henry. I remind you, the time in which he lived was only marginally improved for women from when Paul wrote. And

here are some words he about the Creation of humankind that I think help us to understand this well: “[Eve] was not made out of his head to rule over him, nor out of his feet to be trampled upon by him, but out of his side to be equal with him, under his arm to be protected, and near his heart to be loved.”¹ Scripture supports this – from Genesis to Jesus to Paul’s ministry. In Ephesus, there were some particular challenges that Paul felt needed to be addressed so he gives these instructions for them to help navigate through them; but it doesn’t negate the overarching message of Scripture: that men and women are both created in God’s image, with the range of Spiritual gifts to be used for his glory; the Spiritual gifts are never said to be for men only, or only certain ones for men. So, may we all learn from these words, so that each of us might worship God with all of our heart, soul, mind, and strength. Let’s pray...Amen.

¹ <https://www.biblegateway.com/resources/matthew-henry/Gen.2.21-Gen.2.25>