

The Role of Christian Women in the Church

1 Timothy 2:9-15

1 Timothy 2:9-15: *“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,¹⁰ but, which is proper for women professing godliness, with good works.¹¹ Let a woman learn in silence with all submission.¹² And I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man, but to be in silence.¹³ For Adam was formed first, then Eve.¹⁴ And Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived, fell into transgression.¹⁵ Nevertheless she will be saved in childbearing if they continue in faith, love, and holiness, with self-control.”*

Background Notes

The apostle Paul wrote this 1st century letter to guide and correct and encourage his young so-worker Timothy in establishing the church at Ephesus. The church was not to be set up “just any old way.” Paul communicated the divine pattern for the establishment and functioning of a “New Testament church.” Thus the theme of the epistle of 1 Timothy is “Church Order.”

We believe that in 1 Timothy teaches the divine pattern for the New Testament church of today, as well as for the churches of the 1st century. So if ever you’re involved in planting a church, or if you’re wondering about the biblical structure and function for the church, read 1 Timothy. Believers are not to structure a church any way they choose, or “whatever way works.” There is a divine order and pattern to follow.

In 1 Timothy 2 the distinctive roles of men and women in the church are discussed – for the 1st century church at Ephesus, and for biblically sound New Testament churches today. In the first half of the chapter, Paul taught that a man’s role in the church is public praying. In the second half of the chapter, the role of women in the church is taught.

Doctrinal Points

1. The role of women in the church is supportive and important.

If you’re a Christian feminist, you’ve already tuned me out because you don’t like the idea of women in a so-called “demeaning” supportive role. But this passage of Scripture clearly teaches that women should have more of a behind-the-scenes, supportive role in the church – and that’s a very important function and responsibility. The men are responsible before God to fulfill their leadership role properly, and in a godly manner.

Some theologians suggest that this teaching on the role of women was meant only for the women in the 1st century church at Ephesus. This position is extremely hard to defend, for two reasons: first, Paul’s argument from the immediate context, and second, the teaching of the rest of the New Testament. This doctrinal point has four sub-points:

a. The “dress code” of Christian women.

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.”*

Christian women should not to draw attention to themselves by their appearance. They should not be characterized by fashion, but by godliness and good works. Scripture teaches a moderate, modest, middle-of-the-road policy for women’s clothing. Women should not draw attention to themselves by flaunting outrageously expensive or conspicuous clothes – or by wearing excessively drab or old-fashioned clothes!

“Braided hair” also has to do with appearance. In the 1st century, some women would draw attention to themselves by weaving pearls or gold and silver strands into their elaborate hairstyles. This verse does not ban the braiding hair today, nor is it a ban on wearing gold or silver or pearls as jewelry today (as some have taught).

1 Peter 3:3-4 also teaches this principle: *“Don’t let your adornment be merely outward—arranging the hair, wearing gold, or putting on fine apparel. Rather let it be the hidden person of the heart, with the incorruptible beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is very precious in the sight of God.”* **A believing woman’s goal should be to bring glory to the Lord** - not to attract attention to herself.

b. The good works of Christian women.

Verse 10: *“But that which is proper for women professing godliness, with good works.”*

The good works of Christian women will reflect the beauty of their character. (Costly clothes and jewelry don’t accomplish this!) Dorcas, Lydia, and Phoebe are wonderful biblical examples of Christian women who were involved in good works. Acts 9:36 says that Dorcas *“abounded with deeds of kindness and charity.”* Acts 16 reveals that Lydia supported the church of Philippi, which met in her house. And Romans 16:1 says that Phoebe was a “servant of the church” in Cenchrea. These women were serving in important “support ministries.”

Don’t ever get the idea that “support ministry” only means serving coffee at church suppers! Without the support of the loving, kind, compassionate, behind-the-scenes work of Christian women, the church today would be in very bad shape.

c. The silence of Christian women.

Verses 11-14: *“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. For Adam was formed first, then Eve. And Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived, fell into transgression.”*

The word translated as “silence” (v11) doesn’t mean “not talking” - it means “not disrupting.” Thus, in public worship in the church, women are to learn quietly, without interrupting, and with a gentle and teachable spirit.

1 Timothy 2:12 says, *“And I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man, but to be in silence.”* This Scripture does **not** say that women don’t have the spiritual gift of teaching, and it does **not** say that Christian women can’t

use their gift of teaching! Remember Priscilla? With her husband, she taught Apollos (Acts 18). And in Titus 2 the older Christian women are instructed to teach the younger Christian women.

The point of these verses is that in the public worship of the church, the authoritative preacher or teacher - the church-recognized teacher of doctrine - should be male. Thus, according to 1 Timothy 2, ordination of women for the pulpit is not a biblical practice.

In verses 13-14, Paul's reason for this teaching goes back to **creation**. Creation order was not just an illustration – it was the basis for the argument as to why the men should be the teaching authorities in the church. It's hard to argue that a teaching based on **creation** is for the 1st century only, or for that culture only! **Creation preceded culture!** Thus the directives given in 1 Timothy 2 are not just for the church at Ephesus in the 1st century. These directives should be normative for the church today.

The “Creation argument” is two-fold:

1. The order of Creation

Verse 13: *“For Adam was formed first, then Eve.”* This does not mean that Eve was inferior to Adam. Certainly not! She was equal to Adam, but as far as **family function** goes, God ordained that she should be “functionally subordinate” to Adam.

Subordination does not mean inferiority. Sadly, some folks never seem to understand this principle. Remember, the Lord Jesus was subject to God the Father while He was here on this earth, but He was **not inferior!** So subordination does **not** mean inferiority.

2. The Fall

Verse 14: *“Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived, fell into transgression.”* This does **not** mean that the Fall was entirely the woman's fault, and that “subordination to man” is her penalty. Romans 5 is clear that Adam was just as much at fault - in fact, Romans 5:14 refers to the Fall as *“the transgression of Adam.”* Eve was at least deceived when she sinned – but Adam sinned deliberately, with his eyes wide open.

God has designed an authority structure, or “team” structure, for the family and the church. Just as sports team members are assigned to play different roles and different responsibilities for a well-functioning team, so family and church members have different responsibilities. Men are to be the loving leaders and women the faithful supporters.

The point of this verse is that Eve stepped out of her God-given supportive role. When women, like Eve, step out of their role in the God-given structure for the family or the church, they become vulnerable to attack from the enemy. Eve took the lead in taking the forbidden fruit. She didn't talk her decision over with her husband. Thus she was vulnerable, and she was deceived. In general, women tend to be more compassionate and heart-oriented than most men (suggested in verse 15). This is an important strength, and it is a valuable complement or counterpart to the strengths God has given to men.

Scripture teaches that, for the proper functioning in the ministry of the church, men should serve the Lord in the leadership and doctrinal teaching positions, and women should serve the Lord in the equally important support role.

d. The promise to Christian women.

Verse 15: *“Nevertheless she will be saved in childbearing if they continue in faith, love, and holiness, with self-control.”*

What does this mean? There have been several interpretations of this verse, and this is reflected in various translations of this verse: “she will be saved” - “she will be kept safe” – “she will be preserved.”

What is the correct interpretation? It certainly can't refer to eternal salvation, because many believing women have never had children, and our eternal salvation is through trusting Christ. And it can't mean that Christian women will be “kept safe” in childbirth. Many godly women have suffered and even died in childbirth. Does it mean that her salvation is through “The Childbearing” - the birth of the Messiah? A number of Christians hold that interpretation. There are many other interpretations for this verse.

Most likely, in view of the context, the idea here is that the woman's God-intended role is saved or preserved through the raising of children. The word translated “childbearing” includes more than just the birth of children - it includes the raising of children as well.

So godly women who are raising children for the Lord make a tremendous and valuable contribution to the Christian community - and to the world as well. (And faithful Sunday school teachers would be included here, too!) Remember godly Hannah? She changed the course of the nation of Israel through the ministry of her son, Samuel. You may have heard the saying, “The hand that rocks the cradle rules the world.” That's not a biblical verse, but it's a biblical **principle**. It's been said that behind every godly man, you'll usually find a godly mother.

Notice the importance of the women continuing in steadfast faith, love, holiness, and self-control (v15). The role of women in the church is a support role - and it is equally as important as the role God has given to men.

Practical Application

Are you content to be a woman?

In view of the clear teaching of Scripture that the God-ordained position of women in the church is a support role - are you content to be a woman? If you're not content to serve God in this God-given role, I doubt you'll ever really be happy in your service for Him.

The godly attitude of the women in the church is very important. No church can really function well without the steadfast and faithful support of its women. And remember the words of 1 Peter 3:3-4: a woman's gentle and quiet spirit is **very precious in the sight of God!** Are you content - and happily content - to be a woman?