



SPECIAL ISSUES

Sexual Distinction in the Church

NOTE: The section "Sexual Distinction in the Church" was skipped during the teaching time of Secret Church: Family, Marriage, Sex, and the Gospel due to time constraints. The following manuscript is from Pastor David's notes for this section.

Let's take a look at sexual distinction in the church. What I mean by that is how the roles and responsibilities of men and women, that we have already seen, play out in the church. What I mainly want to do is consider one passage of Scripture in the New Testament that often brings up a lot of questions about this issue, but also sheds a lot of light on this issue.

In 1 Timothy 2:11-15, Paul says, *"Let a woman learn quietly with all submissiveness. I do not permit a woman to teach or to exercise authority over a man; rather, she is to remain quiet. For Adam was formed first, then Eve; and Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and became a transgressor. Yet she will be saved through childbearing—if they continue in faith and love and holiness, with self-control."*

Now, as soon as we read this text, we need to remember that it does not stand alone. It is tied to what comes before it in 1 Timothy and what comes after it. We don't have time to do an exhaustive study of the context surrounding this passage, but suffice to say that, before this, in the first part of 1 Timothy 2, Paul is calling Timothy and the church at Ephesus to pray and to worship in light of God's desire for the salvation of all peoples.

So, in the first part of this chapter, we see who to pray for and what to pray for, and now, Paul is telling us who we need to be as we pray; we need to be men and women who bring glory to God in the church. So, that's what's before. Then, after this, in 1 Timothy 3, Paul talks about leadership in the church, specifically, elders who lead in the church. We're going to see in a minute why that's so important.

So, this text does not stand alone in this letter, and it also doesn't stand alone in history. For example, Paul is addressing some specific things that were going on in the church at Ephesus. We know from 1 Timothy 4 that there were teachers at Ephesus who were encouraging women and men not to marry. They were undercutting the beauty of marriage. In 1 Timothy 5, which we've looked at when we talked about widows, there was a group of younger, unmarried women who were not getting married, instead were spending all their time gossiping in the church. Then, you look over in 2 Timothy 3, we find out that there was a group of women who were giving into false teaching and living according to worldly passions. So, what you've got at Ephesus is some problem, likely a significant problem, with women who were undercutting godly doctrine, godly behavior, and godly leadership in the church.

Now, keep in mind that Paul's not just picking on women here. He spent all of 1 Timothy 1 railing against men in the church who were teaching false doctrine. So, Paul is addressing a variety of things when we come to this seemingly difficult passage in 1 Timothy 2:11-15.

Two Principles...

There are two principles that I want you to keep in mind here...that help us when we interpret any passage of Scripture...and they will help us as we understand this passage of Scripture.

The first principle is the principle of harmony: we interpret each Scripture in light of all Scripture. What I mean by that is what Paul says later in 2 Timothy, "*All Scripture is God-breathed.*" In other words, all Scripture has one ultimate author: God, and God does not contradict Himself. So, wherever we see one passage here and another passage somewhere else that seem to contradict, we look into the context of both of those passages under the conviction that ultimately, they are unified.

Think about...well, the Trinity. My 5-year-old has been asking about the Trinity, so we'll use that as an example. Deuteronomy 6 says there is one God, our Father. John 10 says that Jesus is God. Acts 5 says the Holy Spirit is God. How can one God be our Father and Jesus and the Holy Spirit? This is where we understand each of these truths/texts in light of the other. Yes, there is one God, and He is revealed in three persons...the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. So, we put all Scripture together to understand each Scripture. So, that's the first principle...the principle of harmony.

Then, the second principle I want us to think about is the principle of history: God has revealed Scriptural truth in the context of specific historical and cultural settings. This is what we've already talked about some. 1 Timothy didn't just appear in the Bible out of nowhere. This was a letter written from Paul to Timothy for the church at Ephesus in the first century.

So, there is a specific historical and cultural context here. Which means we have to ask the question, "What part of the text is cultural expression (which changes)?" Right before this passage, Paul says, "*Women should not wear braided hair and gold or pearls.*" Does that mean we need to start looking around for any women with braids in their hair at church? Post people at the door, saying, "Sorry, your hairdo is out of line. Go back home and fix it differently." "You, wearing pearls, gold earrings, necklaces? Drop them at the door. It will help our missions offering. We're getting radical." No, probably not.

Or, not even just our context...imagine, say, an African context...an African tribe where Christian women have preserved traditional hairstyles with intricate designs. They are traditional hairstyles. They are not expensive. They're not ostentatious. They have no sexual overtones. So, would it be wrong for them to wear braids in their hair according to their traditions, then? No.

In Ephesus, these things were used to draw attention to themselves and to their wealth in unhealthy ways. That may not be the case among the Dinka of central Africa, so that changes. However, we've also got to ask the question, "What part of the text is central revelation (which never changes)?" In that example, clearly, central revelation...what God has said to all people of all times in all cultures...is, "Don't adorn yourself with stuff that draws attention to yourself and your wealth in unhealthy ways. Dress and live in a way that draws attention to God." That principle never changes.

Now, we have to be really careful with this principle, because this is where people start irresponsibly throwing all kinds of things out of the Bible. We saw, people say, "Homosexuality is okay in the Bible. That was a problem then because they didn't know about science now, and how these desires are natural, and they can't be changed, but we know that now." Be very, very careful when the Bible addresses something clearly and

repeatedly not to discard that truth in order to accommodate your culture. All this to say, when we come to Scripture, we think through principles like these, both of which help us when it comes to 1 Timothy 2:11-15.

Two Reminders...

So, two principles; also two reminders that we saw earlier tonight. Number one: God created men and women with equal dignity. Second: God created men and women with complementary roles. When the Bible talks about different roles for men and women, it is not an issue of superiority or inferiority, not a difference in value or dignity, but a difference in role. We've seen how this applies in the home in passages like Ephesians 5. Now, in 1 Timothy 2:11-15, we're seeing how this applies in the church. This passage is about equal dignity and complementary roles in the church.

Two Prohibitions...

So, those are two principles and two reminders that now lead us in this text...into two prohibitions. Paul says in 1 Timothy 2:12, "I do not permit a woman to teach or to exercise authority over a man." Okay, there's so much here. We know...and we're going to talk in a minute...about how Paul actually encourages women to teach in some settings. Just two books later in your Bible, Titus 2:3, makes that clear. So, we know this is not a blanket statement, "Women should never teach. Beth Moore, you are in sin." That's not what the Bible is saying. Beth is a friend and good Bible teacher.

So, if Paul is not saying, "Women should never teach," what is he saying? This is where I think it's helpful, though these are two distinct prohibitions...do not lead and do not exercise authority over a man...I think it is helpful for us to understand them together. I think it's warranted by the context of 1 Timothy.

Right after this chapter, in 1 Timothy 3, Paul talks about elders/pastors with authority in the church. They express their authority by doing what? Teaching. 1 Timothy 3:2...that's a qualification for elder...you must be able to teach:

The saying is trustworthy: If anyone aspires to the office of overseer, he desires a noble task. Therefore an overseer must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, sober-minded, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, not a drunkard, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money. He must manage his own household well, with all dignity keeping his children submissive, for if someone does not know how to manage his own household, how will he care for God's church? He must not be a recent convert, or he may become puffed up with conceit and fall into the condemnation of the devil. Moreover, he must be well thought of by outsiders, so that he may not fall into disgrace, into a snare of the devil, (1 Timothy 3:1-7).

The same thing is in Titus 1:5-9.

This is why I left you in Crete, so that you might put what remained into order, and appoint elders in every town as I directed you—if anyone is above reproach, the husband of one wife, and his children are believers and not open to the charge of debauchery or insubordination. For an overseer, as God's steward, must be above reproach. He must not be arrogant or quick-tempered or a drunkard or violent or greedy for gain, but hospitable, a lover of good, self-controlled, upright, holy, and disciplined. He must hold firm to

the trustworthy word as taught, so that he may be able to give instruction in sound doctrine and also to rebuke those who contradict it.

That's how elders and pastors lead the church: through the teaching of God's Word. That's the only authority one has to lead in the church; a pastor's authority is tied to the teaching of the Word. You see the same exact thing in 1 Timothy 5:17 where Paul says, "*Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in preaching and teaching.*"

So, the picture here in the New Testament is clear: elders do what? Two primary things: they lead and they teach. They teach with the authority to lead. So, when Paul says, "I do not permit a woman to teach or to exercise authority over a man," he is pointing specifically to the two primary responsibilities of elders.

So, at the very least, Paul is prohibiting two things. Number one: women should not teach as elders, pastors or overseers in the church. That is clear. Now, it's important to realize, just as a side note, that men who don't have a gift of teaching, and men who don't have the qualifications of 1 Timothy 3:1-7, should also not be elders in the church. That's not what Paul is addressing in 1 Timothy 2, but he's making clear here that even a woman who has a gift of teaching is not intended by God to teach as an elder, pastor or overseer in the church.

Instead, Paul says that women listen willingly to the biblical instruction of elders. When it says, "*they should listen quietly,*" or "*remain quiet,*" this is not saying that once a woman steps into the gathering of the church, she should go mute. We know that, because at other points in the New Testament, we see women praying or prophesying at some points when Christians are together. So, this text is simply saying that a woman should listen attentively, with a teachable spirit to elders, God-ordained leaders in the church, when they are teaching the Word. In the spirit of Hebrews 13:7, "*Remember your leaders, those who spoke to you the word of God. Consider the outcome of their way of life, and imitate their faith.*"

At the same time, don't forget...and this is what we see in other parts of the New Testament, even in Paul's writings...women should teach in various settings of the church in accord with elder instruction. Meaning, that outside of elder leadership, there are all sorts of teaching possibilities for women. In Titus 2:3-5, Paul commanded the older women to teach the younger women. "*Older women likewise are to be reverent in behavior, not slanderers or slaves to much wine. They are to teach what is good, and so train the young women to love their husbands and children, to be self-controlled, pure, working at home, kind, and submissive to their own husbands, that the word of God may not be reviled.*"

On a personal level, Paul told Timothy in 2 Timothy 3:14-15, "*Remember who taught you the Word,*" and the answer was: his mother and his grandmother. "*But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it and how from childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.*" "I am reminded of your sincere faith, a faith that dwelt first in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice and now, I am sure, dwells in you as well," 2 Timothy 1:5.

Another example might be Priscilla and Aquila in Acts 18:24-28. She and her husband both taught Apollos the Word of God.

Now a Jew named Apollos, a native of Alexandria, came to Ephesus. He was an eloquent man, competent in the Scriptures. He had been instructed in the way of the Lord. And being fervent in spirit, he spoke and taught accurately the things concerning Jesus, though he knew only the baptism of John. He began to speak boldly in the synagogue, but when Priscilla and Aquila heard him, they took him aside and explained to him the way of God more accurately. And when he wished to cross to Achaia, the brothers encouraged him and wrote to the disciples to welcome him. When he arrived, he greatly helped those who through grace had believed, for he powerfully refuted the Jews in public, showing by the Scriptures that the Christ was Jesus.

Then, you've got an informal picture of teaching all over the Scriptures, applying to both men and women. Men and women both make disciples, which involves going, baptizing, and teaching people to obey everything Christ has commanded us. Paul said to the whole church in Colossians 3:16, *"Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom."* That wasn't just to men; that was to men and women together. As I mentioned, you've got women praying and prophesying in the New Testament as well. In Acts 2...sons and daughters...and then in 1 Corinthians 11. So, there is a sense in which, when it comes to disciple-making, all sisters, along with all brothers, in Christ are supposed to be teachers of the Word.

Then, you have some women, like some men, who have gifts in teaching, and those gifts should be used for the building up of the church. *"Every man who prays or prophesies with his head covered dishonors his head, but every wife who prays or prophesies with her head uncovered dishonors her head, since it is the same as if her head were shaven,"* 1 Corinthians 11:4-5. *"On the next day we departed and came to Caesarea, and we entered the house of Philip the evangelist, who was one of the seven, and stayed with him. He had four unmarried daughters, who prophesied,"* Acts 21:8-9.

"Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God," Colossians 3:16. *"Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you,"* Matthew 28:19-20.

However, not for women as an elder in the church...and I put in your notes, "in accord with elder instruction," simply to remind us that a woman who is teaching in the church should not be teaching that which is contrary to what the elders of the church teach, but that applies to any men, or any women, who are teaching in the church.

So, the first prohibition is that women should not teach as elders, pastors or overseers in the church. Then, the second prohibition: women should not lead as elders, pastors or overseers in the church. *"She is not to exercise authority, but she is to learn quietly with all submissiveness."* Meaning, that women submit gladly to the servant leadership of elders. Now, I emphasize "servant leadership" because elders and pastors lead by serving the body of Christ. As this happens, Paul says, that women...as well as other men who are not elders, for that matter...gladly submit to such servant leadership, in the spirit of Hebrews 13:17, *"Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls, as those who will have to give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with groaning, for that would be of no advantage to you."*

They don't rebel against the leadership of qualified, Christ-like men in the church. Does that mean, then, that a woman can never be in any type of leadership position in the church? I

don't think that's what Paul is saying at all. Much like the situation with teaching, based on the rest of the New Testament, and again what Paul says in other places in the New Testament, women should lead in various positions of the church under authority of elder leadership. In other words, with submission to elders, women are free to lead in a variety of different positions.

Women are intended by God to thrive in ministry across the church. You look throughout the New Testament...I've got examples listed here...and you see women prophesying, helping, serving, equipping, teaching, and spreading the gospel. As one person said, "the fields of opportunity are endless" for "the entire church to be mobilized in ministry, male and female. Nobody is to be at home watching soaps and reruns while the world burns. God intends to equip and mobilize [all] the saints [under the leadership of] a company of [qualified] men who take primary responsibility for leadership and teaching in the church." Yes! Don't tell Lottie Moon or Amy Carmichael or Elisabeth Elliot or Kay Arthur that women are sidelined in the church. All of these are women who have embraced exactly what Scripture has just outlined and have thrived for the glory of God through ministry in the church.

I commend to you our sister Phoebe, a servant of the church at Cenchreae, that you may welcome her in the Lord in a way worthy of the saints, and help her in whatever she may need from you, for she has been a patron of many and of myself as well. Greet Priscilla and Aquila, my fellow workers in Christ Jesus, who risked their necks for my life, to whom not only I give thanks but all the churches of the Gentiles give thanks as well. Greet also the church in their house. Greet my beloved Epaphroditus, who was the first convert to Christ in Asia. Greet Mary, who has worked hard for you," (Romans 16:1-6).

"Deacons likewise must be dignified, not double-tongued, not addicted to much wine, not greedy for dishonest gain. They must hold the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience. And let them also be tested first; then let them serve as deacons if they prove themselves blameless. Their wives likewise must be dignified, not slanderers, but sober-minded, faithful in all things," (1 Timothy 3:8-11).

Now there was in Joppa a disciple named Tabitha, which, translated, means Dorcas. She was full of good works and acts of charity. In those days she became ill and died, and when they had washed her, they laid her in an upper room. Since Lydda was near Joppa, the disciples, hearing that Peter was there, sent two men to him, urging him, "Please come to us without delay." So Peter rose and went with them. And when he arrived, they took him to the upper room. All the widows stood beside him weeping and showing tunics and other garments that Dorcas made while she was with them. But Peter put them all outside, and knelt down and prayed; and turning to the body he said, "Tabitha, arise." And she opened her eyes, and when she saw Peter she sat up. And he gave her his hand and raised her up. Then calling the saints and widows, he presented her alive. (Acts 9:36-41)

"I entreat Euodia and I entreat Syntyche to agree in the Lord. Yes, I ask you also, true companion, help these women, who have labored side by side with me in the gospel together with Clement and the rest of my fellow workers, whose names are in the book of life," (Philippians 4:2-3).

"Let a widow be enrolled if she is not less than sixty years of age, having been the wife of one husband, and having a reputation for good works: if she has brought up children, has shown hospitality, has washed the feet of the saints, has cared for the afflicted, and has devoted herself to every good work," (1 Timothy 5:9-10).

"If any believing woman has relatives who are widows, let her care for them. Let the church not be burdened, so that it may care for those who are truly widows," (1 Timothy 5:16).

Two Questions...

Some might ask, "Well, apart from an elder, then, are there any other positions that a woman should not lead in?" "What about a small group?" "What about teaching theology in a class or at a seminary?" "What about doing this or that?" There are so many different scenarios and possibilities, each of which, I believe, needs to be approached by leaders and elders of a church with care and consideration, but I think there are two questions that should guide a church, and elders, when it comes to those possibilities.

The first question: as a woman teaches or leads, is she reflecting God's pattern in Scripture? Meaning, we see women doing many different things in the New Testament, and where we see that happening in healthy ways in the New Testament church, we can be encouraged to see the same thing happen in the contemporary church. For example, you see older women commanded to teach younger women in the New Testament church, so that needs to happen in our church. You also see women teaching children, and so it is good for us to foster teaching and leadership roles for women among children. Though, I will say that our children also need to see prominent men leading them in the church, as well.

That's certainly the picture God has designed for the home, which leads to the second question I would ask: as a woman teaches or leads, is she reinforcing God's priorities in the home? Meaning, God has set up similar roles of leadership and submission in the home, which we have talked about; wives submit to husbands; husbands, lead your wives by loving them and serving them. This is God's design in the home, and we want to be careful not to undercut God's priorities in the home with the way we lead in the church. We want to display, at every opportunity, especially in our day, we want to display Godly, humble, loving, sacrificial leadership of men in the church in a way that models that kind of leadership for men in their homes. We want to display at every opportunity, glad, willing, godly submission of women in the church that models that kind of leadership for women in their homes.

Now, I'm not saying that both of these questions just make everything easy and cut and dry, but I do believe they are helpful in considering what teaching or leadership roles a woman might have, apart from an elder. Scripture is clear on the prohibitions against teaching and leading as an elder; beyond this, it's not quite as clear. So, we want to be clear where Scripture is clear, and we want to be wise where Scripture is not as clear.

Two Reasons...

Two reasons for all of this. Paul says, *"For Adam was formed first, then Eve; and Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and became a transgressor,"* 1 Timothy 2:13-14. Reason number one: God's design in creation is that God gives authority to man. *"Adam was formed first, then Eve."* This is how we know that what Paul is saying here is not just cultural expression; this is central revelation. Paul's basis in 1 Timothy 2 goes all the way back to Genesis 1-2 when God created man before woman. Paul's not just basing this setup on human opinion (which changes), but on divine revelation (which never changes).

Paul points to God's design in creation, and then he points to Satan's distortion of creation: man abdicates authority to woman. When Paul says in verse 14 that Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived, he's not saying, "Women shouldn't lead because they're more easily duped." No, he's pointing back, again, to what we saw earlier, that the whole picture of sin entering the world in Genesis 3 started when Satan subverted God's design, when he approached Eve instead of Adam, and undercut Adam's responsibility as the leader of his home. In turn, Adam sat back and did nothing. God's design was distorted, and sin entered the world when man abdicated his God-given responsibility to lead. He didn't step up with godly, gracious leadership.

"And to Adam He said, "Because you have listened to the voice of your wife and have eaten of the tree of which I commanded you, 'You shall not eat of it,' cursed is the ground because of you; in pain you shall eat of it all the days of your life..." Genesis 3:17.

So, Paul points back to this and says to the church, "God's design is good." Good in the home and also in the church. God's design for qualified men to lead as elders is good, just as God's design for godly men to lead as husbands is good.

Two things we don't know for sure...

All of that then leads us to the zinger: 1 Timothy 2:15, "*Yet she will be saved through childbearing—if they continue in faith and love and holiness, with self-control.*" What does that mean? Only God knows. That's my answer. Here's the deal: there are two things we don't know for sure. "*Yet she will be saved through childbearing—if they continue in faith and love and holiness, with self-control,*" 1 Timothy 2:15. Out of all the plausible interpretations of this verse, two really stand out as closest possibilities.

Number one...people wonder, "Is 1 Timothy 2:15 talking about salvation through the offspring of Eve?" Basically, there's the idea that this is a deliberate reference here to how, even though the woman ate the fruit first, and sin entered the world through her, the promise was the Savior would enter the world through her. Through her line a child would be born, Genesis 3:15 says, that would trample the serpent one day. John Stott espouses this view, and he writes:

Earlier in this chapter the one mediator between God and men has been identified as the man Christ Jesus, who of course became a human being by being born of a woman. Further, in the context of Paul's references to the creation and fall, recalling Genesis 2 and 3, a further reference to the coming redemption through the woman's seed, recalling Genesis 3:15, would be most apt. The serpent had deceived her; her posterity would defeat him. So then, even if certain roles are not open to women, and even if they are tempted to resent their position, they and we must never forget what we [all] owe to a woman. If Mary had not given birth to the Christ child, there would have been no salvation for anybody. No greater honor has ever been given to woman than in the calling of Mary to be the mother of the Savior of the world.

So, that's one possibility.

Another possibility: is 1 Timothy 2:15 talking about the significance of women nurturing children? In light of the ways that women's roles in the home, in marriage and in bearing children were being undercut by false teachers, could it be that Paul is simply taking the one facet that without question, no one can deny, only women can do...bear children? A culture, even our own, can do everything possible to minimize the differences between males and females, but one distinction will still remain: no guys are giving birth. So, Paul is saying,

"God has created women uniquely, and their responsibilities are uniquely good...in the church, in marriage, and in bearing children, all of which should be embraced in faith and love and holiness."

Those are the two most plausible interpretations. Clearly, this passage is not saying that a woman must bear a child in order to be saved. If Paul believed that, he would not, over in 1 Corinthians 7, encourage some women to stay single. He'd say, "Get married and have a kid...fast. Your eternity depends on it."

Two things we do know for sure...

So, there are a lot of things we know he's not saying, and some questions about what he is saying. There are some things we don't know for sure, but here are two things we do know for sure. Number one: women are sanctified as they glorify God in the distinct roles and responsibilities He has entrusted to them in the home and in the church. God has created you as a woman (or as a man), and there is meaning and significance behind that. Distinct meaning and distinct significance in who God has made you to be. And sisters in Christ, you are working out your salvation not just as a generic person, but as a woman of God. With inherent beauty and value, with distinct giftings and opportunities...so thrive in them. As a wife, as a mom, as a woman...thrive, and know that women are saved, not through the birth of a child, but through the death of Christ.

But God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Since, therefore, we have now been justified by His blood, much more shall we be saved by Him from the wrath of God. For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of His Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by His life. More than that, we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation (Romans 5:8-11).

For that matter, women and men are saved through the death of Christ. Sin has disordered this world that we live in, and Satan has distorted God's design for our manhood, our womanhood, our marriages, our families, the church, and the culture, but Christ has come, and He has conquered sin, and He has trampled the devil, and in Him, we can all thrive as the men and the women God has created us to be...in our lives, in our families, and in the church...for our good and for God's glory. That's sexual distinction in the church.

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