

Service - or Circus ? (1 Timothy 2)

Let all things be done decently and in order” (1 Cor. 14:40) is a basic principle for the conduct of the ministry of the church. Apparently, young Timothy was having some problems applying this principle to the assemblies in Ephesus. The public worship services were losing their order and effectiveness because both the men and the women members of the church were disobeying God’s Word.

“The church is an organism,” a pastor told me, “so we shouldn’t put too much emphasis on organization. We should allow the Spirit to have freedom.”

“But if an organism is disorganized,” I quickly reminded him, “it will die. Yes, I agree that we must permit the Spirit to have freedom, but even the Holy Spirit is not free to disobey the Word of God.”

Often, what we think is the “freedom of the Spirit” are the carnal ideas of some Christian who is not walking in the Spirit. Eventually this “freedom” becomes anarchy, and the Spirit grieves as a church gradually moves away from the standards of God’s Word.

To counteract this tendency, Paul exhorted the men and women in the church and reminded them of their spiritual responsibilities.

The Men—Praying (2:1–8)

The priority of prayer (v. 1a). “First of all” indicates that prayer is most important in the public worship of the church. It is sad to see how prayer has lost importance in many churches. “If I announce a banquet,” a pastor said, “people will come out of the woodwork to attend. But if I announce a prayer meeting, I’m lucky if the ushers show up!” Not only have the special meetings for prayer lost stature in most local churches, but even prayer in the public services is greatly minimized. Many pastors spend more time on the announcements than they do in prayer!

The late Peter Deyneka Sr., my good friend and founder of the Slavic Gospel Association, often reminded me, “Much prayer, much power! No prayer, no power!” Prayer was as much a part of the apostolic ministry as preaching the Word (Acts 6:4). Yet some pastors spend hours preparing their

sermons, but never prepare their public prayers. Consequently, their prayers are routine, humdrum, and repetitious. I am not suggesting that a pastor write out every word and read it, but that he think through what he will pray about. This will keep “the pastoral prayer” from becoming dull and a mere repetition of what was “prayed” the previous week.

But the church members also need to be prepared to pray. Our hearts must be right with God and with each other. We must really want to pray, and not pray simply to please people (as did the Pharisees, Matt. 6:5), or to fulfill a religious duty. When a local church ceases to depend on prayer, God ceases to bless its ministry.

The variety of prayer (v. 1b). There are at least seven different Greek nouns for “prayer,” and four of them are used here. Supplications carries the idea of “offering a request for a felt need.”

Prayers is the commonest term for this activity, and it emphasizes the sacredness of prayer. We are praying to God; prayer is an act of worship, not just an expression of our wants and needs. There should be reverence in our hearts as we pray to God.

Intercessions is best translated “petitions.” This same word is translated “prayer” in 1 Timothy 4:5, where it refers to blessing the food we eat. (It is rather obvious that we do not intercede for our food in the usual sense of that word.) The basic meaning is “to draw near to a person and converse confidently with him.” It suggests that we enjoy fellowship with God so that we have confidence in Him as we pray.

Giving of thanks is definitely a part of worship and prayer. We not only give thanks for answers to prayer, but for who God is and what He does for us in His grace. We should not simply add our thanksgiving to the end of a selfish prayer! Thanksgiving should be an important ingredient in all of our prayers. In fact, sometimes we need to imitate David and present to God only thanksgiving with no petitions at all (see Ps. 103)!

“Prayer and supplication [petition] with thanksgiving” are a part of Paul’s formula for God’s peace in our hearts (Phil. 4:6). It is worth noting that Daniel, the great prayer warrior, practiced this kind of praying (Dan. 6:10–11).

The objects of prayer (vv. 1c–2). “All men” makes it clear that no person on earth is outside the influence of believing prayer. (We have no examples of exhortations that say we should pray for the dead. If we should pray for the dead, Paul certainly had a

good opportunity to tell us in this section of his letter.) This means we should pray for the unsaved and the saved, for people near us and people far away, for enemies as well as friends. Unfortunately, the Pharisees did not have this universal outlook in their prayers, for they centered their attention primarily on Israel.

Paul urged the church to especially pray for those in authority. Godless Emperor Nero was on the throne at that time, and yet the believers were supposed to pray for him! Even when we cannot respect men or women in authority, we must respect their offices and pray for them. In fact, it is for our own good that we do so: “that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness” (1 Tim. 2:2b NIV). The early church was always subject to opposition and persecution, so it was wise to pray for those in authority. “Quiet” refers to circumstances around us, while “peaceful” refers to a calm attitude within us. The results should be lives that are godly and honorable.

To be sure, Paul has not named all the persons we can and should pray for, since “all men” covers the matter fully. We can’t pray for everybody in the world by name, but we certainly ought to pray for those we know and know about. Why? Because it’s a good thing to do and because it pleases God.

The reasons for prayer (vv. 3–4). The word good is a key word in Paul’s Pastoral Epistles (1 Tim. 1:8, 18; 2:3; 3:1, 7, 13; 4:4, 6; 5:4, 10, 25; 6:12–13, 18–19; 2 Tim. 1:14; 2:3; 4:7; Titus 2:7, 14; 3:8, 14). The Greek word emphasizes the idea of something being intrinsically good, not just good in its effects. “Fair” and “beautiful” are synonyms. Certainly prayer of itself is a goodly practice and brings with it many good benefits.

But prayer is also pleasing to the Lord. It pleases the Father when His children pray as He has commanded them to. The Pharisees prayed in order to be praised by men (Matt. 6:5) or to impress other worshippers (Luke 18:9–14). True Christians pray in order to please God. This suggests that we must pray in the will of God, because it certainly does not please the Father when we pray selfishly (James 4:1–10; 1 John 5:14–15). It’s often said that the purpose of prayer is not to get man’s will done in heaven, but to get God’s will done on earth.

What is God’s will? The salvation of lost souls, for one thing. We can pray for “all men” because it is God’s will that “all men” come to the knowledge of salvation through faith in Jesus Christ.

God loved the world (John 3:16) and Christ died for the whole world (1 John 2:2; 4:14). Jesus died on the cross that He might draw “all men” to salvation (John 12:32). This does not mean all people without exception, for certainly the whole world is not going to be saved. It means all people without distinction—Jews and Gentiles, rich and poor, religious and pagan.

If God doesn’t want anyone to perish, then why are so many lost? God is longsuffering with lost sinners, even delaying His judgment that they might come to Christ (2 Peter 3:9). But salvation depends on a “knowledge of the truth” (1 Tim. 2:4). Not everyone has heard the truth of the gospel, and many who have heard have rejected it. We cannot explain the mystery of God’s sovereignty and man’s responsibility (see John 6:37), but realize that both are taught in the Bible and are harmonized in God’s great plan of salvation. We do know that prayer is an important part of God’s program for reaching a lost world. We have the responsibility of praying for lost souls (Rom. 10:1) and making ourselves available to share the gospel with others.

The basis for prayer (vv. 5–7). Many believers do not realize that prayer is based on the work of Jesus Christ as Savior and Mediator. As the God-Man, Jesus Christ is the perfect Mediator between the holy God and His failing children. One of Job’s complaints had to do with the absence of a mediator who could take his message to the throne of God. “There is no umpire between us, who may lay his hand upon us both” (Job 9:33 NASB).

Since there is only one God, there is need for only one Mediator, and that Mediator is Jesus Christ. No other person can qualify. Jesus Christ is both God and man, and therefore, can be the “umpire” between God and man. In His perfect life and substitutionary death, He met the just demands of God’s holy law. He was the “ransom for all.” The word ransom means “a price paid to free a slave.” His death was “on behalf of all.” Though the death of Christ is efficient only for those who trust Him, it is sufficient for the sins of the whole world. Jesus said that He came “to give his life a ransom for many” (Matt. 20:28).

Christ died for “all men,” and God is willing for “all men to be saved.” How does this good news get out to a sinful world? God calls and ordains messengers who take the gospel to lost sinners. Paul was such a messenger: He was a preacher (the herald of the King), an apostle (one sent with a special commission), and a teacher. The same God who

ordains the end (the salvation of the lost) also ordains the means to the end: prayer and preaching of the Word. This good news is not for the Jews only, but also for the Gentiles.

If the basis for prayer is the sacrificial work of Jesus Christ on the cross, then prayer is a most important activity in a church. Not to pray is to slight the cross! To pray only for ourselves is to deny the worldwide outreach of the cross. To ignore lost souls is to ignore the cross. “All men” [people] is the key to this paragraph: We pray for “all” because Christ died for “all” and it is God’s will that “all” be saved. We must give ourselves to God to be a part of His worldwide program to reach people before it is too late.

The attitude in prayer (v. 8). Paul stated definitely that “men” should pray in the local assembly. Both men and women prayed in the early church (1 Cor. 11:4–5), but the emphasis here is on the men. It is common to find women’s prayer meetings, but not often do we find men’s prayer meetings. If the men do not pray, the local church will not have dedicated leaders to oversee its ministry.

It was customary for Jewish men to pray with their arms extended and their hands open to heaven. Our traditional posture of bowing the head, folding the hands, and closing the eyes is nowhere found or commanded in Scripture. Actually, there are many prayer postures found in the Bible: standing with outstretched hands (1 Kings 8:22); kneeling (Dan. 6:10); standing (Luke 18:11); sitting (2 Sam. 7:18); bowing the head (Gen. 24:26); lifting the eyes (John 17:1); falling on the ground (Gen. 17:3). The important thing is not the posture of the body but the posture of the heart.

Paul stated three essentials for effective prayer, and the first was “holy hands.” Obviously this means a holy life. “Clean hands” was symbolic of a blameless life (2 Sam. 22:21; Ps. 24:4). If we have sin in our lives, we cannot pray and expect God to answer (Ps. 66:18).

“Without wrath” is the second essential and requires that we be on good terms with one another. “Without anger” might be a better translation. A person who is constantly having trouble with other believers, who is a troublemaker rather than a peacemaker, cannot pray and get answers from God.

“Doubting” suggests that we must pray in faith, but the word really means “disputing.” When

we have anger in the heart, we often have open disagreements with others. Christians should learn to disagree without being disagreeable. We should “do all things without murmurings and disputings” (Phil. 2:14).

Effective praying, then, demands that I be in a right relationship with God (“holy hands”) and with my fellow believers (“without murmurings and disputings”). Jesus taught the same truth (Mark 11:24–26). If we spent more time preparing to pray and getting our hearts right before God, our prayers would be more effective.

The Women—Submitting (2:9–15)

Because of its oppressive connotations, the word submission makes some people see red. Some well-meaning writers have even accused Paul of being a “crusty old bachelor” who was anti-women. Those of us who hold to the inspiration and authority of the Word of God know that Paul’s teachings came from God and not from himself. If we have a problem with what the Bible says about women in the church, the issue is not with Paul (or Peter, see 1 Peter 3:1–7), but with the Lord who gave the Word (2 Tim. 3:16–17).

The word translated “subjection” in 1 Timothy 2:11 is translated “submitting” and “submit” in Ephesians 5:21–22 and Colossians 3:18. It literally means “to rank under.” Anyone who has served in the armed forces knows that “rank” has to do with order and authority, not with value or ability. A colonel is higher in rank than a private, but that does not necessarily mean that the colonel is a better man than the private. It only means that the colonel has a higher rank and, therefore, more authority.

“Let all things be done decently and in order” (1 Cor. 14:40) is a principle God follows in His creation. Just as an army would be in confusion if there were no levels of authority, so society would be in chaos without submission. Children should submit to their parents because God has given parents the authority to train their children and discipline them in love. Employees should submit to employers and obey them (Eph. 6:5–8, where the immediate reference is to household slaves, but the application can be made to workers today). Citizens should submit to government authorities, even if the authorities are not Christians (Rom. 13; 1 Peter 2:13–20).

Submission is not subjugation. Submission is recognizing God's order in the home and the church and joyfully obeying it. When a Christian wife joyfully submits to the Lord and to her own husband, it should bring out the best in her. (For this to happen, the husband must love his wife and use God's order as a tool to build with, not a weapon to fight with, Eph. 5:18–33.) Submission is the key to spiritual growth and ministry: Husbands should be submitted to the Lord, Christians should submit to each other (Eph. 5:21), and wives should be submitted to the Lord and to their husbands.

The emphasis in this section (1 Tim. 2:9–15) is on the place of women in the local church. Paul admonished these believing women to give evidence of their submission in several ways.

Modest dress (v. 9). The contrast here is between the artificial glamour of the world and the true beauty of a godly life. Paul did not forbid the use of jewelry or lovely clothes, but rather the excessive use of them as substitutes for the true beauty of “a meek and quiet spirit” (see 1 Peter 3:1–6). A woman who depends only on externals will soon run out of ammunition! She may attract attention, but she will not win lasting affection. Perhaps the latest fashion fads were tempting the women in the church at Ephesus, and Paul had to remind Timothy to warn the women not to get trapped.

The word translated “modest” (1 Tim. 2:9) simply means “decent and orderly.” It is related to the Greek word from which we get the English word “cosmetic.” A woman's clothing should be decent, orderly, and in good taste. “Shamefacedness” literally means “modesty, the avoidance of extremes.” A woman who possesses this quality is ashamed to go beyond the bounds of what is decent and proper. “Sobriety” comes from a Greek word that means “having a sound mind and good sense.” It describes an inner self-control—a spiritual “radar” that tells a person what is good and proper.

Ephesus was a wealthy commercial city, and some women there competed against each other for attention and popularity. In that day expensive hairdos arrayed with costly jewelry were an accepted way to get to the top socially. Paul admonished the Christian women to major on the “inner person,” the true beauty that only Christ can give. He did not forbid the use of nice clothing or ornaments. He urged balance and propriety, with the emphasis on modesty and holy character.

“It's getting harder and harder for a Christian woman to find the right kind of clothes!” a church member complained to me one summer. “I refuse to wear the kind of swimsuits they're selling! I simply won't go swimming. Whatever happened to old-fashioned modesty?”

Godly works (v. 10). Paul did not suggest that good works are a substitute for clothing! Rather, he was contrasting the “cheapness” of expensive clothes and jewelry with the true values of godly character and Christian service. “Godliness” is another key word in Paul's pastoral letters (1 Tim. 2:2, 10; 3:16; 4:7–8; 6:3, 5–6, 11; 2 Tim. 3:5; Titus 1:1). Glamour can be partially applied on the outside, but godliness must come from within.

We must never underestimate the important place that godly women played in the ministry of the church. The gospel message had a tremendous impact on them because it affirmed their value before God and their equality in the body of Christ (Gal. 3:28). Women had a low place in the Roman world, but the gospel changed that.

There were devoted women who ministered to Jesus in the days of His earthly ministry (Luke 8:1–3). They were present at His crucifixion and burial, and it was a woman who first heralded the glorious news of His resurrection. In the book of Acts we meet Dorcas (Acts 9:36ff.), Lydia (Acts 16:14ff.), Priscilla (Acts 18:1–3), and godly women in the Berean and Thessalonian churches (Acts 17:4, 12). Paul greeted at least eight women in Romans 16; and Phebe, who carried the Roman epistle to its destination, was a deaconess in a local church (Rom. 16:1). Many believing women won their husbands to the Lord and then opened their homes for Christian ministry.

Quiet learning (v. 11). “Silence” is an unfortunate translation because it gives the impression that believing women were never to open their mouths in the assembly. This is the same word that is translated “peaceable” in 1 Timothy 2:2. Some of the women abused their newfound freedom in Christ and created disturbances in the services by interrupting. It is this problem that Paul addressed in this admonition. It appears that women were in danger of upsetting the church by trying to “enjoy” their freedom. Paul wrote a similar admonition to the church in Corinth (1 Cor. 14:34), though this admonition may apply primarily to speaking in tongues.

Respecting authority (vv. 12–15). Women are permitted to teach. Older women should teach the younger women (Titus 2:3–4). Timothy was taught at home by his mother and grandmother (2 Tim. 1:5; 3:15). But in their teaching ministry, they must not “lord it over” men. There is nothing wrong with a godly woman instructing a man in private (Acts 18:24–28), but she must not assume authority in the church and try to take the place of a man. She should exercise “quietness” and help keep order in the church.

Paul gave several arguments to back up this admonition that the Christian men in the church should be the spiritual leaders. The first is an argument from creation: Adam was formed first, and then Eve (1 Tim. 2:12–13). (Paul used this same argument in 1 Cor. 11:1–10.) We must keep in mind that priority does not mean superiority. Man and woman were both created by God and in God’s image. The issue is only authority: Man was created first.

The second argument has to do with man’s fall into sin. Satan deceived the woman into sinning (Gen. 3:1-7.; 2 Cor. 11:3); the man sinned with his eyes wide open. Because Adam rejected the God-given order, he listened to his wife, disobeyed God, and brought sin and death into the world. The submission of wives to their own husbands is a part of the original creation. The disorder we have in society today results from a violation of that God-given order.

I do not think Paul suggested that women are more gullible than men and thus more easily deceived, for experience proves that both men and women are deceived by Satan. On one occasion, Abraham listened to his wife and got into trouble (Gen. 16). Later on, she gave him counsel and God told him to obey it (Gen. 21). In my own pastoral ministry, I have benefited greatly from the encouragement and counsel of godly women, but I have tried not to let them usurp authority in the church. In fact, the godly women I have known have no desire to “run” things in the church.

The creation of humans and their fall both seem to put the woman in an inferior position, but she does have a ministry from God (1 Tim. 2:15). There was probably a close relationship in Paul’s mind between what he wrote here and what Moses wrote in Genesis 3:16—the promise of the Savior who would be “made of a woman” (Gal. 4:4). It was through a woman that the Savior came into the world. (Keep in

mind that Jesus had an earthly mother but not an earthly father, Matt. 1:18; Luke 1:34–35.)

But Paul taught a practical lesson (1 Tim. 2:15). He promised that the woman would “be saved through childbearing” (NIV) if “they” (both husband and wife) continued in sincere dedication to the Lord.

Does this mean that Christian mothers will never die in childbirth? History and experience both tell us that they do. God has His purposes, and His ways are far above our thoughts (Isa. 55:8–9). Paul laid down a general principle that encouraged the believing women of that day. Their ministry was not to run the church, but to care for the home and bear children to the glory of God (1 Tim. 5:14). Their home congregation would give them abundant opportunities for teaching the Word and ministering to the saints (see Rom. 16:1–6).

Godly women do have an important ministry in the local assembly, even though they are not called to be teachers of the Word in a pastoral sense. If all is done “decently and in order,” then God will bless.

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