

God's High Calling for Women, Part 4

Scripture: 1 Timothy 2:12–15

Code: 54-17

INTRODUCTION

When Paul said farewell to the elders of the Ephesian church in Acts 20, he warned them that false teachers would arise within the church, as well as come in from outside (Acts 20:29-30). Tragically, Paul's fears for the Ephesian church were realized. Paul wrote his first letter to Timothy in part to deal with the false leaders who were plaguing the church at Ephesus.

One of the false teachings concerned the role of women--errant leaders were advocating an unbiblical role for women. In fact, it is possible that some of those leaders themselves were women. Paul makes six points in 1 Timothy 2:9-15 in setting forth the biblical role for women in the church.

REVIEW

I. THE APPEARANCE OF WOMEN (v. 9a, c)

II. THE ATTITUDE OF WOMEN (v. 9b)

III. THE TESTIMONY OF WOMEN (v. 10)

IV. THE ROLE OF WOMEN (vv. 11-12)

A. In the Old Testament

B. In the New Testament

C. In the Church

1. They are to learn in silence

2. They are to learn in subjection

LESSON

3. They are not to teach (v. 12a)

"I permit not a woman to teach."

"Permit" means to allow someone to do what he wants to do. By his choice of words, Paul implies that some women at Ephesus had the desire to lead the church, as some do today. There have always been women who sought leadership roles. In Genesis 3:15-16 we discover that part of the curse God brought upon man and woman after the Fall was that woman would desire to control man and he would have to rule over her. The conflict of the sexes was one of the results of the Fall. The Hebrew word translated "desire" in Genesis 3:16 is used only one other time in the Pentateuch, in Genesis 4:7. That verse talks about the desire of sin to control Cain. So we can conclude Genesis 3:16 says that women would desire to take control.

That is certainly true in the church. There are women who are not content with their God-given role, but seek a place of prominence by exercising authority over the men. Paul forbids women from taking the authoritative pastor-teacher role in the church, and indeed no woman is ever presented in any such office or role in the entire New Testament.

4. They are not to usurp authority (v. 12b)

"Nor to usurp authority over the man, but to be in silence."

a) What that means "Usurp authority" (Gk., *authentein*) is a word used only here in the New Testament. A study of that verb by Dr. George Knight in the journal *New Testament Studies* ("Authentein in Reference to Women in 1 Timothy 2:12" [1984, vol. 30], pp. 143-57) concluded

that the common meaning of *authentein* in extrabiblical literature is simply "to have authority over." He discovered no negative connotation such as abusing authority.

b) What that does not mean

(1) That women are not to take abusive authority Some people have reinterpreted *authentein* in 1 Timothy 2:12 to mean "abusive authority." They believe it is all right for a woman to teach and exercise authority over men as long as their authority does not become abusive. However *authentein* does not mean "abusive authority;" it simply means "authority." There's no justification for the addition to the text. If Paul were talking about abusive authority, he certainly wouldn't limit his warning to women, for the same would apply to men. Teaching and usurping authority are in contrast to silence and subjection. Women in the church are not to be in any position where men are subordinate to them.

(2) That women are not permitted to pray The phrase "be in silence" in verse 12 is not intended as a prohibition against women praying under any circumstances. It is teaching that just as women are not to function in the office of teacher or leader in the church, so also they are not to lead in the public prayer times of the church.

(3) That women are never to teach There is a time and place for women to instruct others. Under some circumstances a woman, along with her husband, could instruct another man. Priscilla and Aquila instructed Apollos (Acts 18:26). However such instruction wouldn't take place in the public worship service of the church.

(4) That women do not have spiritual gifts Women can have the same spiritual gifts men have, including the gifts of teaching, or leadership. The Lord will give them ample opportunity to use those gifts in a setting that doesn't violate His designed role for them. They can and do use those gifts in situations apart from the worship service of the church. A woman is in no way wronged in being limited to her God-ordained role in the church and not being permitted to usurp the role of a man. There's plenty of opportunity for women to exercise their gifts in a manner consistent with God's design.

(5) That women cannot serve as missionaries I thank God for the many faithful women who serve on the mission field. However I don't believe women on the mission field have the right to violate the Word of God. Paul himself was a missionary. If there was ever a need for leadership on the mission field, it was in his day. Paul could have compromised by using women in leadership roles, but he didn't. When there is a shortage of men on a mission field, the answer is not to violate biblical principles but to pray for the Lord of the harvest to send forth more workers (Matt. 9:38). Elisabeth Elliot, after the murder of her husband, Jim, and several other missionaries in Ecuador, was the only missionary left who could speak the language of the Auca Indians. Rather than violate the Word of God, she taught one of the Auca men the sermon each week, and he then preached it to the church.

(6) That women are inferior That women are not to function as leaders of the church does not imply they are in any way inferior. They simply have a different role. Many people have believed the lie that the only place of power and influence in society is leadership--that it is more fulfilling to lead than to follow. People in humbler roles can actually be very influential. Besides, a leader carries a heavy load of responsibility. Such responsibility is not always desirable (James 3:1). The role of subordination and subjection often brings the greatest peace, happiness, and contentment. The idea that the greatest experience in life is to be on top of the pile and control everything is an illusion. I advise any woman who seeks to do that to stay where you are under the loving care and protection of your husband and the leaders of the church. It's a much happier place to be; the burden is significantly lighter. Subjection is not a punishment; it is a privilege.

V. THE DESIGN OF WOMEN (vv. 13-14)

A. Established by the Creation (v. 13)

"For Adam was first formed, then Eve."

Woman's subordinate role was ordained in the order of the creation. Adam was created first, then Eve. In 1 Corinthians 11:8-9 Paul writes, "The man is not of the woman, but the woman of the man. Neither was the man created for the woman, but the woman for the man." She was made to be his helper (Gen. 2:18). She is to follow his lead, live on his provisions, find safety in his strength, and

protection through his courage. The tendency to follow was built into Eve, but with the Fall came conflict.

The subordinate role of women is not a cultural issue. It cannot be explained away as mere bias on Paul's part, because it is based on the order of creation. Adam was first formed, then Eve.

B. Confirmed by the Fall (v. 14)

"Adam was not deceived, but the woman, being deceived, was in the transgression."

When we think about the Fall, we usually think of it in connection with Adam. Romans 5:12-21 speaks repeatedly of the one man (Adam) who brought sin and death into the world. Adam bears responsibility for the Fall since he is the head of the human race. But we have to keep in mind that he didn't fall first--Eve did. When Eve got out from under the protection of Adam's leadership and attempted to deal independently with the enemy, she was deceived. That reinforces the truth that women were designed with the need for a leader.

Eve showed by the fact she was deceived that she was unable to lead effectively. She met her match in Satan. The Greek word translated "deceived" (exapata[ma]o) in verse 14 is a very strong term. It is stronger than the common Greek word for "deceived" (apata[ma]o). It refers to being thoroughly deceived. And so we conclude that when a woman leaves the shelter of her protector she has a certain amount of vulnerability.

The Fall was the result not only of disobeying God's command, but also of violating the divinely appointed role of the sexes. Eve acted independently and assumed the role of leadership. Adam violated his role by abdicating his leadership position and following Eve's lead. Nevertheless it is important to note that women are not more defective than men. Just as women need men, so men need women. We're all vulnerable in different ways.

We affirm the leadership of men because it is established by the creation, and confirmed by the Fall. And no daughter of Eve should follow her path and enter into the forbidden territory of rulership that was intended for men.

VI. THE CONTRIBUTION OF WOMEN (v. 15)

"Notwithstanding, she shall be saved in childbearing, if they continue in faith and love and holiness with sobriety."

In verse 14 we read of woman being in sin. In contrast verse 15 speaks of woman being saved through childbearing. The salvation spoken of here is not salvation from sin. It cannot @refer to Eve since the future tense is used ("she shall be saved"). Furthermore the use of the plural pronoun "they" indicates that more than one woman is in view. Some think this verse refers to Mary's being saved by bearing Christ, but that is foreign to the context. The use of the plural pronoun clearly indicates that all women are in view here.

A. Women's Salvation Defined

The Greek word translated "saved" (s[ma]oz[ma]o) can refer to being saved from things other than sin. This verse is saying that through childbearing all women are delivered from the stigma of a woman's having caused the Fall. A woman led the human race into sin, yet women benefit mankind by replenishing it. They have the opportunity to lead the race to godliness through their influence on children.

B. Women's Significance Delineated

The godliness and virtue of a mother has a profound impact on the life of her children. The raising of children gives woman back her dignity. Her great contribution comes in motherhood. However she must continue in faith, love, and holiness; only a godly mother can raise godly children.

Obviously God doesn't want all women to be mothers. Some of them He doesn't even want to be married, since according to 1 Corinthians 7 some have the gift of singleness. Others He allows to be barren for His own purposes. But as a general rule, motherhood is the greatest contribution a woman can make to the human race. The pain of childbearing was the punishment for her sin, but bearing

children delivers her from the stigma of that sin.

CONCLUSION

Paul, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, says women are to accept their God-given role. They must not seek the leadership role in the church, but are to raise godly children. How tragic that so many women feel their lives are unfulfilled because they can't function in the same roles as men. God has given them the unique privilege of raising a godly generation of children, of having an intimate relationship with them that no father can know.

Portrait of a Godly Mother

Susanna Wesley was the wife of a pastor and mother of nineteen children, about half of which survived infancy. Two of her sons were John and Charles Wesley. She's gone down in Christian history as one of the greatest mothers. Here are some of the rules she had in her home (Susanna, Mother of the Wesleys by Rebecca Lamar Harmon [N.Y.: Abingdon, 1968], pp. 57-62):

1. No child was to be given something because he cried for it. If a child wanted to cry but avoid punishment, he was to cry softly. Rarely were loud cries heard in her house.
 2. No eating or drinking between meals was permitted except in the case of sickness.
 3. Sleeping was regulated. When very small, a child was given a three- hour nap in the morning and again in the afternoon. That was shortened until no sleeping was allowed during the daytime.
 4. At 7 P.M. each child was gotten ready for bed. By 8 P.M. she left the room. She never allowed herself or a maid to sit by the bed until the children went to sleep.
 5. The younger children had their own table near the main table. When they could handle a knife and fork they were promoted to the family table.
 6. Each child was required to eat and drink everything put before him.
 7. The children were required to address each other as "sister" and "brother."
 8. She never allowed her anger to show when disciplining the children. She would always explain the reason for their punishment to them.
 9. She spent one hour each day alone with God in her room, praying for each of her children. Two of her sons helped bring revival to England while France was bathed in a bloody revolution.
-

Focusing on the Facts

1. What was one of the reasons Paul wrote 1 Timothy?
2. What was one of the teachings the false leaders were advocating?
3. The conflict of the sexes was one of the results of _____ .
4. True or False: No woman is ever seen in the role of pastor-teacher in the New Testament.
5. True or False: The Greek word authentein is used frequently in the New Testament to refer to abusive authority.
6. What restrictions are placed on a woman's use of her spiritual gifts?
7. What should be done on the mission field when there is a shortage of men?
8. True or False: Women are not to function in leadership roles because they are inferior to men.
9. Subjection is not a _____; it's a _____ .
10. Why can't Paul's teaching on the subordination of women be dismissed as a cultural bias on his part?
11. In what sense is a woman saved in childbearing?
12. Why can't 1 Timothy 2:15 refer to Eve or Mary? Whom does it refer to?
14. True or False: God wants all women to be mothers.

Pondering the Principles

1. There is a disturbing tendency among Christians today to compromise biblical teaching and standards. Under pressure from the feminist movement, some Christians have reinterpreted the Bible's teaching on the role of women. Others have reinterpreted the first few chapters of Genesis in a futile attempt to harmonize the biblical account of creation with the pseudo-science of evolution. Some insist that the Bible alone does not have all the answers to life's problems, but needs to be supplemented with humanistic psychology. The faith "once for all delivered to the saints" (Jude 3, NASB) has too often become like a weather vane--shifting with each passing wind of change. What is the ultimate source of authority in your life? When faced with a conflict between biblical teaching and a contemporary idea, what do you do? Do you reinterpret the Bible, or reject the idea? Are you willing to take a stand for God's Word? Study Psalm 19:7-11 to see how God describes His Word, and determine to uphold it your whole life long.
2. Husbands, how well are you performing your role as your wife's protector? Do you protect her from physical and emotional harm, or do you physically or emotionally abuse her--or let your kids do so? Do you do everything in your power to protect her holiness and purity, or do you allow her to be exposed to compromising situations? Do you lead by being a sacrificial servant, or a despotic dictator? Do you make your wife's submission to you a heavy burden for her to bear? Examine the quality of your love for your wife by comparing it with the way Christ loves the church. You might wish to start by meditating on Ephesians 5:25-29.

Available online at: <http://www.gty.org>

COPYRIGHT (C) 2026 Grace to You

You may reproduce this Grace to You content for non-commercial purposes in accordance with Grace to You's Copyright Policy (<https://www.gty.org/about#copyright>).