

**SESSION 3: GETTING OUR PUBLIC WORSHIP RIGHT**  
**I TIMOTHY 2: 1-15**

*Instructions on Worship*

<sup>1</sup>I urge, then, first of all, that requests, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for everyone—<sup>2</sup>for kings and all those in authority, that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness. <sup>3</sup>This is good, and pleases God our Savior, <sup>4</sup>who wants all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth. <sup>5</sup>For there is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, <sup>6</sup>who gave himself as a ransom for all men—the testimony given in its proper time. <sup>7</sup>And for this purpose I was appointed a herald and an apostle—I am telling the truth, I am not lying—and a teacher of the true faith to the Gentiles.

<sup>8</sup>I want men everywhere to lift up holy hands in prayer, without anger or disputing.

<sup>9</sup>I also want women to dress modestly, with decency and propriety, not with braided hair or gold or pearls or expensive clothes, <sup>10</sup>but with good deeds, appropriate for women who profess to worship God.

<sup>11</sup>A woman should learn in quietness and full submission. <sup>12</sup>I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man; she must be silent. <sup>13</sup>For Adam was formed first, then Eve. <sup>14</sup>And Adam was not the one deceived; it was the woman who was deceived and became a sinner. <sup>15</sup>But women will be saved through childbearing—if they continue in faith, love and holiness with propriety.

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**OBSERVATION & INTERPRETATION**

1. Paul urges Timothy that ‘*first of all*’, that is, what is “most important”, ‘*requests, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for everyone*’ (v1). Christians are to understand that the church is primarily a house of prayer, that worship is its primary activity.
2. Paul addresses two aspects of public worship. First, he describes the **scope** of worship (v1-7); then he speaks of **gender roles** in the church (v8-15).

**Scope of Worship**

3. The scope of the church’s responsibility is **universal**. Christians should direct their prayers to God **for everyone**. This is in contrast to the elitist notions of the Gnostics that salvation was restricted to those who had been ‘initiated into’ special knowledge or ‘enlightened’.
4. This truth is emphasized 4 times:
  - Prayers are to be offered ‘*for everyone*’ (v1)

- God ‘wants all men to be saved...’ (v3-4)
- Christ Jesus ‘gave himself as a ransom for all men...’ (v6)
- Paul was ‘a teacher of the true faith to the Gentiles’ (v7), that is, to all the nations, or to everyone.

This repetition is deliberate. God’s desire and Christ’s death concerns everybody, so the church’s prayers and proclamation must be for everyone.

5. Paul describes 4 aspects of worship:

- Requests
- Prayers
- Intercession
- Thanksgiving

Most commentators agree that the first three are almost synonymous and cannot be distinguished from one another. Even John Calvin wrote, “I admit that I do not completely understand the difference between them.”

The broad categories we can group them into will be to describe ‘*prayers*’ as a general term of what we bring to God, while ‘*requests*’ and ‘*intercessions*’ are specific mentions. Some commentators add that ‘*requests*’ imply deep personal need, while ‘*intercession*’ corresponds to entering a king’s presence to submit a petition.

One scholar (G. W. Knight) sums it up best by suggesting that all 4 terms should characterize our prayers: we should be making *requests* for specific needs, bringing our *prayers* in view before God, appealing boldly or making *intercession* on their behalf, with *thankfulness* in our hearts.

What is more important is that the terms all converge on Paul’s emphasis on the scope of our worship activities that they should be **for everyone**.

6. In particular, Paul directed the church to pray ‘for kings and those in authority’ (v2a). This is remarkable as at that time, not only was there no Christian ruler anywhere, it was Emperor Nero who was on the Roman throne. Nero was one of the most cruel and despotic Roman emperors who relentlessly persecuted the early church.
7. The reason for praying for rulers is so ‘that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness’ (v2b). It is not a selfish prayer, but a desire for the creation of an ordered society in which the church can be free to fulfill its God given responsibilities without hindrance. Two of those responsibilities are mentioned: *godliness* and *holiness*. *Godliness* is a common term in the Pastorals that is synonymous with the worship of God (cf 2:10). *Holiness* means ‘moral earnestness’, an indication of high moral standards. When prayers for peace and quiet in the land are answered, then free worship and high moral standards are effectively possible.
8. A third benefit when the ensuing peace that comes in answer to our prayers is that the preaching of the gospel will be facilitated. These prayers are ‘good’

(v3) and *'pleases God our Savior who wants all men to be saved and come to a knowledge of the truth'* (v 3b-4) because peaceful conditions make it possible to propagate the gospel, which pleases God because it is His desire for all to be saved and come to the truth.

The ultimate reason for our prayers for national leaders is that when they rule well, there will be peace, and consequently faith can be propagated, morality can flourish and worship can be enjoyed freely.

9. The way to salvation is through the mediator, Jesus: *'For there is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all men...'* (v5-6).

The contrast in v4-5 is between the *all men* God wants to be saved and the *one God* who desires that they should be. The reason He wants *all* to be saved is that there is no other as He is the *one God*. Because He is the *one*, it stands to reason that He deserves all our praise and honor, and the unreserved (*all*) commitment and devotion of our hearts. Paul repeats this in his writings: *'There is but one God, the Father from whom all things came...'* (I Cor.8:6); *'There is one God and Father of all'* (Eph.4:6). Because there is only one God, He is the God of the Jews and the Gentiles too (Rom. 3:29-30). It is this *exclusive* faith (*there is one God*, and no other) that leads necessarily to our *inclusive* mission (the one God wants all men to be saved).

10. Paul purports that the only way to salvation is through Jesus Christ, the only *one* mediator. A mediator is an intermediary, the person in the middle who brings about a reconciliation between two rival parties. It is used for an arbiter in legal disputes and for a negotiator of business deals. Jesus is the 'only go-between'.

Jesus is unique in that he is fully God and fully human. When Paul declared that *'Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners'* (1:15), he assumed a pre-existent purpose and decision, that is, Christ is God. Now, Paul adds that Jesus is also fully human: *'the man Christ Jesus'*. The positioning of the words in the Greek sentence is striking: *'...one mediator between God and men, man Christ Jesus'*. It echoes Job's longing, *'If only there were someone to arbitrate between us, to lay his hand upon us both'* (Job 9:33). Now, in Christ, that cry is answered. There is no parallel anywhere else.

The work of Christ, especially on the Cross is unique. He gave *'himself a ransom for all men'* (v6). Paul made a leap from the birth of Christ (*the man Christ Jesus*) to his death (*who gave himself*). In his mind, Christ was born to die. It was a voluntary death, for he *gave himself*. Jesus himself said, *'The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep'* (Jn.10:11).

Jesus gave his life *as a ransom*. *'The Son of Man (came)...to give his life as a ransom for many'* (Mk.10:45). A ransom is the price paid for the release of slaves or captives or hostages. The word implies we are in bondage to sin and

judgment, unable to save ourselves, and that the death of Christ in our place was the price paid for our deliverance. In our Lord's declaration in Mk.10:45 (above), the Greek rendition has '*a ransom **instead** of many*'. Here, Paul strengthens it, '*a substitute-ransom on behalf of all*'. Christ is the exchange price on behalf of, and in the place of, all, so that freedom may be given.

The 3 nouns about Christ here must be kept together: the man, the ransom, the mediator. Historically, they refer to the 3 major events in Christ's saving career. His **birth**, by which he became a *man*; his **death** in which he gave himself as a *ransom*; and his **exaltation** (resurrection and ascension) to the Father's right hand, where he acts as our *mediator* or advocate today. Theologically, they are identified as the doctrines of salvation/incarnation, the atonement and the heavenly mediation. It becomes obvious then why there is no other mediator other than Jesus Christ.

11. '*And for this purpose I was appointed a **herald** and an **apostle**...and a **teacher** of the true faith to the Gentiles*' (v7).

Paul was all three (herald, apostle and teacher) in ways we cannot be today. 'Apostles of Christ' were distinct from 'apostles of the churches' in that they were specifically a reference to the Twelve disciples, to whom Paul and James were added later. They were eye witnesses to Christ when he graced earth, and especially to his resurrection. They were the ones who were promised the special inspiration of the Holy Spirit, and were given authority to teach in Christ's name. Paul was especially appointed the 'apostle to the Gentiles', whose authority he defended against the false teachers' challenge when he blurted out, '*I am telling the truth – I am not lying*'(v7).

It was the task of apostles to formulate, defend and commend the gospel. The heralds proclaimed the gospel while the teachers gave systematic instructions in doctrines and ethics.

They are to proclaim and teach Christ, the God-Man, the ransom and the mediator. They are to minister '*to the Gentiles*', meaning to all people of all nations.

They are to do it '*in faith and truth*' (NRSV). The NIV translates it '*of the true faith*' alluding to the content of the message. However, in context, it is more appropriate that 'faith' and 'truth' describe the characteristics rather than the content of the teaching. This means that heralds proclaim and teachers instruct with *conviction* and *sincerity*.

## **Gender Roles in Public Worship**

12. How we understand the second half of this chapter depends on the hermeneutical principles we bring to interpret the text.

### **a) Principle of Harmony**

If we believe the Bible to be the written Word of God, then we would believe that when God spoke, He did not contradict Himself. Although there is much

diversity in theological emphases and literary styles, there is also an underlying consistency in Scriptures. This means we interpret each text within the total biblical context.

Therefore we understand this passage in light of Scripture's fundamental assertion of the equal value and dignity of men and women by creation and redemption (Gen. 1:26ff; Gal. 3:28). There is no disparity between the sexes in the divine image we bear or in our status as God's children through faith in Christ. We reject any notion of gender superiority or inferiority in any shape or form.

### **b) Principle of History**

When God spoke, he always spoke in particular historical and cultural settings. In the OT, it was the ancient Near East; in the Gospels, it was in the context of Palestinian Judaism; and in the NT, it was in the Graeco-Roman world. No word of God was spoken in a vacuum; every word was spoken in a cultural context. There were no culture-free maxims in God's Word. In every instance, God entered human history, assumed their culture and spoke their language. Because of this, Scripture is a mixture of substance and form, of eternal truth and transient cultural presentation. Of course, one is universal and normative while the other is local and changeable. Our problem lies in distinguishing the cultural from the normative. This could be said of our text before us too.

#### ***Literalism***

One approach is to invest all cultural forms in scripture with the same normative authority that is attributed to the truth they express. The reasoning goes that because the expressions are in the scriptures, we are not to dismantle or tamper with the Word of God. A rigid literalism is adopted, considering all other approaches as evasions of 'what the Bible plainly teaches'.

In approaching our text, they will have to insist that men must always lift up their hands when they pray (v8); women must never plait their hair or wear jewellery (v9); and in no situations may women teach men (v11-12).

#### ***Liberalism***

There are others who go the opposite extreme. They dismiss both the eternal truth and cultural applicability. Instead of imbuing cultural expressions with eternal truth, they degrade eternal truth to the level of cultural expressions. Instead of investing both with divine authority, authority is denied to both. They assert that since God's word is expressed in such deep cultural forms, it may have spoken to ancient peoples, but it is totally irrelevant today.

So, it makes no difference today what Paul instructed about men's prayers or women's adornment and submission. Everything is cultural; nothing is eternal.

A.T. Hanson writes, “Just as the first half of this chapter showed us the author at his best, so the second half seems to show him at his worst. Christians are under no obligation to accept his teaching on women.”

William Barclay adds, “All the things in this chapter are mere temporary regulations to meet a given situation.”

Gordon Fee, whom many evangelicals trust, argues that because of the *ad hoc* historically particular character of Paul’s teaching here, he could not have intended it “as a rule in all churches at all times.” Fee draws attention to Ephesus as the center of the cult of the goddess Diana/Artemis and her foul rites, and to the success which false teachers were having among “weak-willed women” (2 Tim. 3:6; cf I Tim. 5:6,11). Thus, to Fee, Paul’s statement in our text makes sense because it is “specifically related to the problem at Ephesus. He obviously did not take this position about women in general.”

In *Gospel and Spirit: Issues in New Testament Hermeneutics* (1991), Fee distinguishes between different categories of NT teaching. Some are intended by the authors to have general, eternal and universal application, while other parts are meant to be particular, transient and local. So once we know which is which, we can accept the former, but are free to reject the latter.

While we accept there are apparently two levels of teaching in the NT, one being the eternal word of God and the other being the surface cultural expression, we need to discern *not* between texts (some normative, others disposable), but *within* each text. The eternal substance in the text we are obliged to accept as normative while we transpose the cultural expressions into our contemporary forms.

We need to ask if our text before us has anything normative to say to us about relations between men and women; about ‘authority’ and ‘submission’. Is there an order God has designed for human society? For order to become reality, submission is required, for to submit is to “recognize your place within the God-given order of society, and to act appropriately to that place, by accepting the authority of those to whom God has entrusted it.”

If certain portions of scripture have only local and transient validity, would we run into the danger of declaring those portions irrelevant to us, and hence not the word of God to us today? Would the command ‘to be subject to rulers and authorities’ (Tit.3:1) apply to us today since it was addressed to Cretans whose rebellious spirit was proverbial (Tit.1:12)? What about Paul’s other injunctions and instructions about homosexual practices and other topics? Would they have no authority over us today?

### ***Cultural Transposition***

This involves discerning in scripture between what is God’s essential revelation (which is timeless) and what are cultural expressions (which are changeable). Those cultural expressions we will have to transpose into

contemporary forms that keep the essence and spirit of the original injunctions but make sense to us now.

For instance, in response to Jesus' command to us to wash one another's feet, we do not go around literally washing people's feet, nor do we dismiss the passage as irrelevant. We discern what is intrinsic, which is that no service is too menial if we love one another; then we transpose it into the realities of today, which may mean that we will wash dishes or clean the toilet for those we love.

13. *'I want men everywhere to lift up holy hands in prayer, without anger or disputing...'* (v8)

We will attempt to use this approach to understand the 3 topics addressed in this passage: men's prayers (v8); women's adornment (v9-10); and women's submission (v11-12).

Bodily postures in prayer vary from culture to culture. This would include standing, kneeling, sitting, clapping hands or raising hands. The normal posture in the OT is to stand in prayer, evidenced when the Levites summoned the people to *'stand up and praise the LORD your God'* (Neh.9:5; cf Gen. 18:22; I Sam.1:26). And, while standing, it seems to have been common either to 'lift' the hands to him, or to 'spread' them before him, as an expression of dependence and faith. So we read, *'I lift my hands towards your Most High Place'* (Psa.28:2) and *'Let us lift up our hearts and our hands to God in heaven...'* (Lam.3:41). With hands lifted up, the eyes could also be lifted up in expectation (Psa.25:15; 121:1; 123:1-2) or else be cast down in humble penitence (Lk.18:13).

But, there were other prayer postures in scriptures too. David *'sat before the Lord'* (2Sam.7:18). In times of humiliation, anguish or confession, people kneeled or bowed down before God (Gen.17:3; 34:26; Ex.12:27; IKi.8:54; 2Chr.29:30). Other times, God's people prostrated themselves with their faces to the ground, especially after a vision of God's majesty, to express their awe in God's presence.

But, what are indispensable to prayer are holiness (*holy hands*), love (*without anger*) and peace (*without disputing*). These also indicate that what hinders prayer are sin, anger and quarrelling. *'Holy hands'* point to Psalm 24 which indicates that those who intend to ascend the hill of the Lord and stand in his holy place must have *'clean hands and a pure heart'*. John Calvin says that Paul's *holy hands* are *'the outward sign for the inward reality, for our hands indicate a pure heart'*.

Our posture in prayer has to be appropriate to our culture and genuinely expresses our inward devotion.

14. *'I also want women to dress modestly, with decency and propriety, not with braided hair or gold or pearls or expensive clothes, but with good deeds, appropriate for women who profess to worship God'* (v9-10).

Two important observations:

- The Greek sentence begins with the word ‘Likewise...’, indicating a similarity in Paul’s mind. Some commentators have suggested that we should read, ‘*In the same way I want women to pray...*’ And, certainly Paul expected women to engage in public prayer (1Cor.11:5).
- In the original, the sentence is ‘*I want women...to adorn themselves...*’ Paul is affirming that women are beautiful and that they should increase and exhibit their beauty; which is what a woman does when she adorns herself. There is nothing in the Bible to warrant women to neglect their appearances, conceal their beauty or become dowdy and frumpish. The question is *how* they adorn themselves.

15. There are 3 parts to Paul’s dress code for women:

Dress modestly; With decency; With propriety.

While it is difficult to clearly distinguish the terms, it is clear that women are to be discreet and modest in their dress, not dressing to kill or to seduce.

16. Hairstyles, jewellery and clothing have different meaning in different cultures.

If the glorified church is portrayed in Revelation as ‘*prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband*’ (Rev.21:2), it makes sense that material adornment is not forbidden.

However, Paul is instructing Christian women in Ephesus not to dress in ways similar to the hundreds of prostitutes who were employed in the great goddess Diana’s temple. Chrysostom cried out, “Imitate not the courtesans for by such a dress they allure their many lovers.”

Paul is referring to the elaborate hairstyles fashionable among the wealthy but also worn by courtesans. Period sculptures and literature indicate that “women often wore their hair in enormously elaborate arrangements with braids and curls interwoven, or piled high like towers and decorated with gems and/or gold and/or pearls.” It makes sense when we understand Paul was saying that Christian women should adorn themselves as appropriate in their culture in ways that are not extravagant, modest not vain, and chaste not suggestive.

More important than physical beauty, Paul says there is moral beauty and beauty of character. The church should be a beauty parlor where women adorn themselves with good deeds. If nature has made some women plain, good deeds can add to their beauty. The apostle Peter contrasted ‘*braided hair and the wearing of gold, jewellery and fine clothes*’ with ‘*the unfading beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit which is of great worth in God’s sight*’ (1Pet.3:3-4).

17. ‘*A woman should learn in quietness and full submission. I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man; she must be silent. For Adam was formed first, then Eve. And Adam was not the one deceived; it was the woman who was deceived and became a sinner*’ (v11-14).

Many attempts have been made, both exegetically and linguistically, to soften the apparent harshness of these apostolic instructions, by limiting their application. Here are 4 such options:

- Paul was expressing his personal opinion, not authoritative command. *'I want men everywhere...'* (v8) and *'I do not permit a woman to teach...'* (v12) are expressions of his personal wishes as JB Phillips translates it, *'Personally I don't allow...'*. The contention is that this has no universal application. However, there are other scholars who see that its three occurrences in the Pastorals refer to 'ordering by apostolic authority' (Kittel's *Theological Dictionary of the NT*). In I Corinthians 14:34, 37 Paul identifies his permission as both the teaching of 'the Law' and 'the Lord's command'.
- Paul's instructions apply only to wives, not to women in general. They are to regulate the private relations between wives and their husbands, not the public role of women in the church. Martin Luther seems to have held this view. The reference to Adam and Eve gives plausibility to this position. And, *gyne* (v11-12) can mean either 'woman' or 'wife', while *aner* (v12) can refer to 'man' or 'husband'. But, the context of the passage is public worship, making it apparent that Paul was not just speaking about relations within a marriage.
- Paul was directing against noisy disturbances and interruptions by women. Some scholars have pointed out that the abundance of fertility cults in Ephesus drew women to these female deities, and one consequence was a group of powerful women who were emboldened by their association to the fertility goddess to be abusive towards men. The view here is that this instruction is longer valid.
- Paul was forbidding the woman to 'domineer' over a man. *'To have authority over a man...'* (v12): the verb *authenteo* occurs only here in the NT, which some scholars suggest refers to 'instigating violence', as was used in Greek literature of the time. Other scholars think this means that a woman must not proclaim herself the 'author' or 'originator' of man, the way Gnostic myths teach that woman was responsible for both the creation and enlightenment of man. Hence, Paul's references to Adam's priority (v13) and Eve's deception (v14).

John Stott suggests that Paul indeed teaches that female submission to male 'headship' is the biblical universal principle, while its cultural expressions may change. He argues from the priority of Adam's creation, and seen in the light of primogeniture, the legal rights and privileges are accorded to the firstborn. Eve was created out of him and for him, to be a helper suitable for him and corresponding to him (Gen.3:18). While some scholars dismiss this as Paul's 'tortuous Rabbinic exegesis', others find it difficult to simply disregard apostolic teaching.

This is predicated on the biblical understanding of 'submission' and 'headship'. Paul models the husband's position as 'head' of his wife on Christ being the 'head' of the church. In Ephesians 5, headship is seen as a caring, not a crushing role. Biblical headship is about self sacrifice, not self assertion;

love not pride; liberating not enslaving. It is *not* incompatible with sexual equality in the same way that ‘the head of Christ is God’ (ICor.11:3) is not incompatible with the unity of the Father and the Son in the Godhead.

So, as men should pray in holiness, love and peace, but not necessarily lift up their hands while they do so; and as women should adorn themselves with modesty, decency and good works, but not necessarily abstain from all hair-plaiting, gold and pearls; so women should submit to the headship of men, but not necessarily refrain from teaching them.

18. *‘But women will be saved through childbearing – if they continue in faith, love and holiness with propriety’* (v15).

John Calvin considers this closing verse to be Paul’s ‘consolation’ to women. There are 3 ways to understand this verse:

- Women ‘will come safely through childbirth’ (JB Phillips). Women will be safe despite the pain and peril of childbirth, which were part of God’s judgment on Eve. Obviously, this is empirically untrue as many godly women have died in childbirth. Also, ‘salvation’ in the Pastorals appear to refer to deliverance from sin, not from danger.
- Women ‘will be saved through motherhood’ (NEB) or ‘Salvation for the woman will be in the bearing of children’ (REB). This may be a retort to false teachers who forbid marriage (4:3). But, to Paul, he has already made it clear that salvation is by grace alone.
- The most likely interpretation is: women ‘will be saved through the Birth of the Child’, referring to Christ. The definite article before ‘childbearing’ in Greek leans towards this translation. This makes good sense when we consider that Paul, earlier in this chapter, identifies the ‘one mediator between God and man’ as ‘the man Christ Jesus’ (v5), who became a human being by being ‘born of a woman’ (Gal.4:4). It also follows Paul’s reference to the creation and Fall to point to the coming redemption through the woman’s seed (Gen.3:15). While the serpent had deceived Eve, her posterity would defeat him.

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## APPLICATION

1. Many of our churches limit our intercession to Christian politicians and authorities. *The Book of Common Prayer* (1662) asks God to ‘save and defend all Christian kings, princes and governors’.  
But, Paul wants us to pray for ‘*all...in authority*’.  
There is OT precedence. Jeremiah told the exiles to pray for Babylon’s peace and prosperity (Jer. 29:7). The edict of Cyrus, the Persian king who ordered the rebuilding of the Jerusalem temple, included a request to the Jews to ‘pray for the well-being of the king and his sons.’ (Ezr.6:10).  
Clement of Rome, towards the end of the 1<sup>st</sup> C, included a prayer in his first letter to the Corinthian church for rulers and governors: ‘Grant them, Lord,

health, peace, harmony and stability, so that they may give no offence in administering the government you have given them.'

Tertullian, too, in his *Apology*, (c.AD200) wrote, 'We pray for the emperors, for their ministers and those in power, that their reign may continue, that the state may be at peace, and that the end of the world may be postponed.'

2. God wants all to be saved. '*He is patient...not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance*' (2Pet.3:9).  
To reflect God's desire is to pull down walls of discriminations. If we despise those who are not like us we forfeit our privilege or any opportunity to share Christ with them. We also demonstrate that God's grace cannot reach some groups of people.
3. The exclusivity of Christ is a sore point for many. If God wants to save all, why is Christ the only way? If Christ died for all; if *he gave himself a ransom for all* (v6); if he is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world (Jn.1:29), is atonement universal or 'limited'? Is this a paradox or an antinomy?
4. J.I. Packer proposes that we should "theologize reciprocity, spiritual equality, freedom for ministry, and mutual submission and respect between men and women... It is important that the cause of *not* imposing on women restrictions which Scripture does not impose should not be confused with...minimizing the distinctness of the sexes...and of diminishing the male's inalienable responsibilities in man-woman relationships..." How does cultural perspective color our understanding of scripture?