

The First Letter to Timothy

21

Morning Devotions

Select a passage in God's Word. Talk with the Lord as you read the passage, then go back and find one or two verses which the Lord has impressed on your heart and meditate on them.

Morning Study

Today we look at the second section of **1 Timothy**, which provides Timothy with practical instructions on proper order within the Ephesian church. This section can be divided into four subsections:

- Instructions on prayer (**2:1-7**).
- Instructions on men and women (**2:8-15**).
- Instructions on overseers (**3:1-7**).
- Instructions on deacons (**3:8-13**).

Before you read this section of **Timothy**, take a look first at **Insight: Women in Ministry**. Then read each subsection below, answering for yourself the questions associated with them. Type out your answers or jot them down on a piece of paper and file your answers with your morning study.

Read 1 Timothy 2:1-7

- What did Paul urge "first of all" should be done? (**2:1**).
- Who did Paul say the Ephesians should pray for and why? (**2:2**).
- What does God our Savior want? (**2:3-4**).
- Who is the one mediator between God and men? (**2:5-6**).
- For what purpose was Paul made an apostle? (**2:7**).

Read 1 Timothy 2:8-15

- What did Paul want men to do and what did he not want them to do? (**2:8**).
- What did Paul want women to do and not want them to do? (**2:9-14**).
- What did Paul instruct women should continue in? (**2:15**).

Read 1 Timothy 3:1-7

- List down the qualifications important in an overseer? (**3:1-7**).

Read 1 Timothy 3:8-13

- List down the qualifications important in a deacon? (**3:8-13**).

Insight

Women in Ministry

The passage that Paul writes in **1 Timothy 2:11-15** has caused much debate in the Church down through the generations. What was Paul actually saying? Was he saying that women should be totally silent in church meetings, or was he speaking of particular situations in which they should be silent?

What must be remembered, as we have already seen in our study of **1 Corinthians 11:3-16**, is Paul wrote many of his letters in response to specific problems that had arisen with the churches he had established. In this letter to Timothy, both Paul and Timothy knew exactly what Paul was meaning when he wrote:

“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.”

But unless we understand the problem that Paul was addressing, we could interpret Paul’s statement different from how Timothy read it. To understand how this works, let’s glance back a few verses to **1 Timothy 2:8** and look at another instruction that Paul gave, this time to men:

“I want men everywhere to lift up holy hands in prayer, without anger or disputing.”

It is fairly easy to determine what problem in the Ephesian church caused Paul to issue this instruction. There is no question that there was anger and disputing rife in the church (note **1:3-7,19-20; 3:3; 6:20-21**).

In the same way, we can easily determine the problem in the Ephesian church that caused Paul to issue the instruction of **1:9-10**. It is obvious that some women were dressing immodestly, importing the flamboyant trends of pagan Ephesus into the church.

But what was the problem in the Ephesian church that caused Paul to issue the instruction of **2:11-15**? It could only be one thing: that women were teaching in the Ephesian church. But what were they teaching and what was Paul curbing in this instruction? Was he saying that women should *never* teach or was he addressing a particular problem related to women who were teaching in Ephesus?

To understand the answer to this question, we need first to understand two things:

- The meaning of the Greek words that Paul uses in this passage
- The background of the Ephesian church in the first century

Grammatical background

The passage of **1 Timothy 2:10-12** is a difficult one to translate into English, for a number of reasons. In **verse 10**, the word Paul uses for *profess* in “profess to worship God” (NIV) and “professing godliness” (NKJV) is not a regular word used for “profess” or “confess.” It is an word that appears to apply specifically to these improperly dressed women (read also **1 Peter 3:1-6**).

Likewise, in **verse 12**, Paul uses a somewhat vulgar Greek word not used anywhere else in the New Testament. This word is translated “have authority” in the NIV and NKJV, and “usurp authority” in the KJV. Why, as many scholars have wondered, did Paul not use the more common Greek words for “to have authority”?

Again, in **verse 15**, it is difficult to know from the Greek whether Paul is talking about women in general being “saved” through childbirth or whether he is referring to Eve in particular. These problems in translation should signal that we are dealing with a passage which may present difficulties in interpretation.

Let’s take a closer look at some of the words that Paul uses:

- ☞ The word translated “quietness” in **2:11** and “silent” in **2:12** does not mean complete silence. It is used elsewhere in the New Testament to mean “settled down, undisturbed, not unruly” (see **Acts 22:2; 2 Thessalonians 3:12**).¹
- ☞ The word “have authority over” is a Greek word used often outside of the New Testament to mean “to do a thing one’s self or with one’s own hand.”² It thus has the meaning of “to act on one’s own authority, to exercise authority, to have mastery, to be an autocrat, to be dominating.”³

Remember that this letter is written to one person, Timothy, a man who had traveled with Paul for a number of years in ministry. Timothy understood the heartbeat of Paul and wouldn’t have been fazed in the slightest by Paul’s choice of words. The meaning of **2:11-15** would have been totally clear to Timothy.

So what did Timothy know that we don’t know? There is only one way to find out. We must look at the historical background to the Ephesian church during the mid-first century.

Historical background

We know the reason why Paul left Timothy in Ephesus. It was “to command certain men not to teach false doctrines any longer nor to devote themselves to myths and endless genealogies” (**1:3-4**). The Greek word that Paul uses here is improperly translated “men.” It actually can refer to either men or women and should more properly be translated “some [people]” or “certain persons.”

According to **1:3-4**, these people were:

- ☞ Teaching false doctrines
- ☞ Devoting themselves to myths and endless genealogies
- ☞ Turning to meaningless talk

Paul may be referring to Judaizing teachers, but it is more likely that he is referring to nascent gnosticism that had already begun to manifest in the middle of the first century. These gnostics drew their heresies from a mixture of Jewish myths and the mystery religions of the pagan world. We see an echo of the Ephesian problem in Crete, when Paul writes his letter to Titus.

Read Titus 1:13-16

We see clear evidence of the intrusion of gnosticism into the Ephesian church in Paul's charge to Timothy at the end of his first letter:

“Timothy, guard what has been entrusted to your care. Turn away from godless chatter and *the opposing ideas of what is falsely called knowledge*, which some have professed and in so doing have wandered from the faith.”

The word gnosticism comes from the Greek word *gnosis*, which means “knowledge.” The gnostics believed they had a secret knowledge that only the “initiated” could receive and understand. Let's take a brief look at what they believed:

- Some gnostics believed that women were special mediators between God and men (note **2:5**).
- Some gnostics believed that they had received their secret *gnosis* from ancient Old Testament figures, such as Adam, Eve or Noah's wife, and supported their “myths” with extensive “genealogies” (note **1:4**).
- Some gnostics gave an exalted position to Eve as “the bringer of life” to Adam, which they drew from her name, which means “the mother of all living.” They said that when she ate of the tree of knowledge, she received the secret knowledge that God had hidden from them. Thus they regarded Eve's act not as sin but as something to be revered (note **2:13-14**).
- Some gnostics believed they held the secret to vanquishing “principalities and powers” which held sway over the heavens, and it is likely that much of Paul's teachings in **Ephesians 1:19-23** and **Colossians 1:15-19** were written to address this encroaching heresy. These gnostics loved to delve into “Satan's so-called deep secrets” (**Revelation 2:20**).

It appears that women played a significant role in the spread of gnostic heresy within the first century Church (note **1 Timothy 5:13-15**; **Revelation 2:20-24**). And it is likely that this is what Paul is addressing in **1 Timothy 2:12-14**.

The Context of Paul's Instruction

Remember that we must always look at any one verse in the context of the surrounding verses and of the entire letter. Let's recap on what Paul says in the rest of his first letter to Timothy:

- “...command certain [people] not to teach false doctrines any longer nor to devote themselves to myths and endless genealogies...” (**1:3-4**).

- ☞ “Some have wandered away from [a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith] and turned to meaningless talk. They want to be teachers of the law, but they do not know what they are talking about or what they so confidently affirm” (1:3-4).
- ☞ “We know that the law...is made not for the righteous but for lawbreakers and rebels...and for whatever else is contrary to the sound doctrine that conforms to the glorious gospel of the blessed God, which he entrusted to me” (1:8-11).
- ☞ “...fight the good fight, holding on to faith and a good conscience. Some have rejected these and so have shipwrecked their faith. Among them are Hymenaeus and Alexander, whom I have handed over to Satan to be taught not to blaspheme” (1:18-20).
- ☞ “Deacons...must keep hold of the deep truths of the faith with a clear conscience. They must first be tested; and then if there is nothing against them, let them serve as deacons” (3:8-10).
- ☞ “The Spirit clearly says that in later times some will abandon the faith and follow deceiving spirits and things taught by demons. Such teachings come through hypocritical liars, whose consciences have been seared as with a hot iron” (4:1-2).
- ☞ “Have nothing to do with godless myths and old wives’ tales...” (4:7).
- ☞ “Command and teach these things...Until I come, devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to preaching and teaching” (4:11,13).
- ☞ “Watch your life and doctrine closely. Persevere in them, because if you do, you will save both yourself and your hearers” (4:16).
- ☞ “Do not be hasty in the laying on of hands [to install an elder or deacon in ministry], and do not share in the sins of others. Keep yourself pure” (5:22).
- ☞ “If anyone teaches false doctrines and does not agree to the sound instruction of our Lord Jesus Christ and to godly teaching, he is conceited and understands nothing...” (6:3-4).
- ☞ “...Turn away from godless chatter and the opposing ideas of what is falsely called knowledge, which some have professed and in so doing have wandered from the faith” (6:20-21).

Can you get the general feel of the letter Paul is writing to Timothy? If one could sum up the entire letter in one phrase it would be this:

“Command them to stop teaching heresy!”

This is the context in which Paul writes 2:12-14. Both men and women were responsible for teaching gnostic heresy, but it appears that women may have been the strongest force in its spread.

Paul's answer to gnostic teachers

Paul's solution to this problem of women spreading gnostic teaching could be paraphrased in this way:

“Let the women learn properly! I will *not* permit a woman to dominate and exercise spiritual authority over a man through her gnostic teaching.”

What is often missed in all the debate about this passage is just how liberating Paul's command for women actually is when compared to Jewish tradition. Rabbinical law forbade women from learning the Torah, yet Paul states that they should learn in quietness (not being unruly) and full submission – just as a man should!

The Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ is revolutionary. It is totally liberating for both men and women (**Galatians 3:26-29**), but that liberty is found in the proper order of submission before God. Throughout the New Testament we find women liberated from the strictures of legalistic suppression:

- ☞ Mary sat at the feet of Jesus, learning from him in “quietness” as one of the disciples. Jesus told Martha that Mary had “chosen what is better and it will not be taken away from her” (**Luke 10:39-42**).
- ☞ The Holy Spirit fell on both men and women, and they both spoke in tongues and prophesied (**Acts 1:14; 2:1-4,16-18**).
- ☞ Women were allowed by Paul to pray and prophesy (**1 Corinthians 11:5**).
- ☞ Phoebe was a deaconess in the church of Cenchrea and a great help to Paul in his ministry (**Romans 16:1-2**).
- ☞ Priscilla and Aquila, a husband-and-wife team, were counted among Paul's fellow-workers (**Romans 16:3; Acts 18:1-2**).
- ☞ Andronicus and Junias (a feminine name) are counted “outstanding among the apostles” (**Romans 16:7**).

Did Paul forbid women from teaching? No, but just as Paul did not forbid speaking in tongues (**1 Corinthians 14:39-40**), he wrote:

“But everything should be done in a fitting and orderly way.”

¹ John F. Walvoord & Roy B. Zuck, *The Bible Knowledge Commentary, New Testament Edition* (Victor Books), excerpted from QuickVerse 5.0.

² Marvin R. Vincent, *Vincent's Word Studies, Vol. 4*, excerpted from QuickVerse 5.0.

³ Fritz Rienecker & Cleon Rogers, *Linguistic Key to the Greek New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1980), p.615.

Much material for this study was gleaned from Charles Trombley, *Who Said Women Can't Teach?* (NJ: Bridge Publishing, 1985). If you would like to study this subject further, please refer to this book.

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Memory Verse

I urge, then, first of all, that requests, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for everyone – for kings and all those in authority, that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness.

1 Timothy 2:1-2

Here are a few suggestions that may help you to memorize your memory verse:

- ➡ Ask the Lord to help you remember his Word (see [John 14:26](#)).
- ➡ Use the version of the Bible you are most familiar with. What you normally read in your Bible is what you need to be memorizing.
- ➡ Don't just memorize the contents of the verse; memorize its "address" (the verse reference) as well. You can do this by following this pattern: Step 1: **reference**; Step 2: **verse content**; Step 3: **reference**. Then repeat steps 1-3. Note that you are quoting the reference twice as many times as you quote the actual verse content. This gives the verse a clear "reference tag."
- ➡ After you have read your memory verse out aloud several times, try going through your memory verse *without* reading your computer screen.
- ➡ Look up your memory verse in your Bible. Look at its immediate context and read the verses that come before and after your memory verse.
- ➡ Print out your memory verse or jot it down on a piece of paper. Take this paper with you when you go to work or do other daily activities. Meditate on the meaning of the verse throughout the day.
- ➡ During your noon appointment with the Lord, take out your memory verse and go over it again. Talk to the Lord about what this verse means to you personally.
- ➡ In the evening (at either your evening study or your evening devotions), see if you can quote your memory verse from memory. Then, without looking at the memory verse itself, see if you can find it in your Bible.
- ➡ The next day, before you begin committing a new verse to memory, rehearse your previous day's memory verse and see if you can remember it (without cheating!).
- ➡ Finally, at the end of the week (possibly on the Sunday), collect all your week's memory verses, rehearse them and see if you can recall them without reading them. Spend a little extra time on any verses you have difficulty recalling.
- ➡ Remember: Don't just memorize a verse. Put it into practice ([James 1:22](#)). It is not being able to quote a verse from memory that counts. It is His Word *abiding* in your heart that counts ([John 15:7](#)). When you actually apply a verse consistently to your daily life, that is when you *truly* know that verse!