

1 Timothy 2

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We begin where we left off last week. With an early church not swimming triumphantly through the easy waters of a society in awe of its power and grace but of one which faces struggles from without and from within. A society which is not yet at all convinced of both the theology or the practice of the church lurches from love to hate in regard to it everywhere. Within it struggles with those who alternatively want the power the church seems to offer or, if not the power, then peace at any price including a much easier syncretism with either Roman/ Greek theology or, as is perhaps the case here, with the earlier Jewish theology.

Quiet simply this is not an easy place to be. Suspected from without and torn from within the early church lived for at least 350 years in an environment that did more to kill it than anything else. And Paul stands in the middle of this working not only to take the Gospel to places it hasn't been already but also to care, in some way, for all the little embryonic churches he has planted in his travels and for whom he cares so greatly.

²⁸And, besides other things, I am under daily pressure because of my anxiety for all the churches. ²⁹Who is weak, and I am not weak? Who is made to stumble, and I am not indignant? (2 Cor 11)

And Paul reminded us last week of the problems faced by the Ephesian Church. Problems which were clearly creating much ferment and discussion within the church and interfering with relationships. In summary these were at least threefold. False teachers have arisen who are teaching a salvation that includes abstinence from certain profane foods, from marriage and a general resurrection which has already occurred. In other words, these teachers are developing a new code of law like the OT law which is layered over and above the work of Christ. So where the Gospel preached a freedom from law because of what Jesus had achieved for us all by dying on the Cross some in Ephesus were saying that what Jesus had done wasn't enough and that to be saved involved also abstaining from certain food, from marriage and perhaps even a separation from those who were not saved.

So Paul writes to this young disciple to give some instructions about how a true church should order its life and he begins in 2 Timothy with these words on prayer.

¹First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for everyone, ²for kings and all who are in high positions, so that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and

dignity. ³This is right and is acceptable in the sight of God our Saviour, ⁴who desires everyone to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. (1 Tim 2)

Now I don't know about you but this seems, in the face of the specific problem at Ephesus, to be an interesting place to start considering Paul makes it clear that he is dealing with what is basically heretical teaching. After, wouldn't you consider it more reasonable for Paul to launch forth in an argument against the specific teaching and to lay out for Timothy the doctrinally correct approach to take? But no, Paul begins instead with prayer. Why is this? Why begin here with prayer when the problem seems to be a doctrinal one, an intellectual one? [Ideas?]

The answer, it seems to me, is quite simple. The problem may be framed as an intellectual one, one that concerns knowledge but in fact the root of the problem begins with the question of how we relate to a holy God. The Gospel says we relate to God through Jesus Christ and because of what Jesus did on the Cross. These false teachers in Ephesus say 'Yes but!' And the 'but' is the problem. They are wanting to add on some special activities which become the key to relationship with God to the work of Christ. We can't be saved without abstaining from some foods, without being celibate, without considering ourselves to have already been finally resurrected. But this is not the basis offered by the Gospel. We cannot add to what Jesus has done. We rely wholly on His work or there is no salvation. And we relate to this work, to Jesus Himself largely through prayer.

So Paul begins with the activity which is central to our life with Jesus – prayer. Begin, says Paul, by teaching them to go back to prayer and to seek God for just government and peaceful lives so that you can grow in faith without the worry of persecution and war. For it is through Christ the Mediator that we grow close to God and not through any special actions of our own. Now there is much to say here about prayer but this will have to wait for another time because I want to get on to the second major topic in this chapter which has caused much grief in the Church down through the ages and this is the passage on women. Paul describes how he wants men to behave in Church and then he goes on to pen these rather difficult lines...

⁸I desire, then, that in every place the men should pray, lifting up holy hands without anger or argument; ⁹also that the women should dress themselves modestly and decently in suitable clothing, not with their hair braided, or with gold, pearls, or expensive clothes, ¹⁰but with good works, as is proper for women who profess reverence for God. ¹¹Let a woman learn in silence with full submission. ¹²I permit no woman to teach or to have authority over a man; she is to keep silent. ¹³For Adam was formed first, then Eve; ¹⁴and Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and became a transgressor. ¹⁵Yet she will be saved through childbearing, provided they continue in faith and love and holiness, with modesty. (1 Tim 2)

The Church down through the years greatly marginalised women as both leaders and teachers except, perhaps in their own company where they were accepted as such. In more modern times the Church in New Zealand has begun to realise how much women were excluded from leadership and from teaching and largely based on this passage and perhaps one other. In the 80's the Presbyterian Church had an ongoing debate about this and eventually changed its policy and allowed women to become ordained ministers of Word and Sacrament. However the change in policy has been slow to make its way into the life of the church at every level and women still have to work very hard to gain the trust of parishes and regional structures. Now you may have your own opinion about this but I want this morning not to enter into a specific debate about women in leadership. Rather I want to concentrate on how we should interpret this passage itself.

The science of uncovering what was meant to be conveyed by a certain piece of scripture is called 'exegesis' from the Greek work '*exegeisthai*' meaning to 'draw out from' or to be guided from what comes out of something. Two basic principles control exegesis and these are internal and external consistency. In other words the exegete looks for clues that confirm the meaning of a text both within the passage itself and outside the passage either in other parts of the Bible or even from extra-biblical material. All these factors allow us to avoid the great curse of exegesis which is to insert or overlay a meaning onto the passage which is completely foreign to it. Common mistakes then are to 1. Take a passage in isolation and apply it generally [Go up and join this chariot] 2. To take a passage designed to speak to a certain situation and apply it to a different situation [Take nothing for the journey] 3. To simply mistranslate a word or a section 4. To interpret a passage through the eyes of a situation or culture that is completely foreign to the original intention of the passage. [Much kissing between men in OT and NT – doesn't imply a lot of homosexuality but a culture where this was much more common than our own.]

When we apply these rules to this section in Timothy we come up against some inconsistencies which make a huge difference to how we are to interpret the passage. Let's begin with Jesus.

David Scholer in analysing the impact of Jesus' example on the status of women during His day lists 5 things Jesus did to change the cultural prejudice of His day against women. **i.)** He challenged the gender based bias against women by denying the easy way men could divorce their wives and by exposing the root of lust in men's view of women. **ii.)** He accepted women who were despised and rejected included the women who had a problem with bleeding and the women who anointed Him with oil. **iii.)** Jesus included women in His group of disciples. The women who followed Jesus were included in His teaching sessions even though it was not appropriate for women to be taught by a male teacher and He explained deep theological concepts to women such as the Samaritan women He met at the well. **iv.)** Jesus valued women for more than their biological function. He said 'Whoever does God's will is my brother, sister and mother.' **v.)** Jesus included women among those who proclaimed the Gospel. Indeed women were the first to proclaim his resurrection which is remarkable given that a woman's testimony was not even accepted in court in His day.

So from a consistency point of view if we were to take these words as a continuation of the cultural marginalisation of women and a blanket exclusion of women from teaching or leadership then we would have to say this was not consistent with Jesus' point of view. We then move to the Early Church and ask ourselves what was considered normative for women in terms of their role in that Church? And we glean this from the scriptures.

- (i.) In Acts we see the Holy Spirit pouring out gifts on **all flesh** – on men and on women. And this is consistent with the OT prophecy of Joel. ²⁸“Then afterward I will pour out my spirit on all flesh; your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, and your young men shall see visions. ²⁹Even on the male and female slaves, in those days, I will pour out my spirit. (Joel 2)”
- (ii.) 1 Corinthians 4 teaches that Christian marriage is to be a relationship of mutuality **and** reciprocal authority. “likewise the husband does not have authority over his own body, but the wife does.” (1 Cor 4v7b)
- (iii.) 1 Corinthians 11 teaches the interdependence of male and female. ¹¹“Nevertheless, in the Lord woman is not independent of man or man independent of woman. ¹²For just as woman came from man, so man comes through woman; but all things come from God.”
- (iv.) Philippians 4v3,2 describes two female ‘co-workers’ with Paul. This word co-workers in Greek is a common description of those involved in ministry. This is the same word Paul uses of his male colleagues in ministry., Timothy, Barnabas, Apollos, Luke etc. All are leaders and teachers and he uses the same word of these two women.
- (v.) Romans 16 lists 10 women who clearly serve in a variety of leadership roles in the church there. These roles include deacon/minister, teacher, church leader, apostle and diligent workers.
- (vi.) 1 Timothy 3v11 gives qualifications specific to female deacons.
- (vii.) One further glaring example concerns the establishment of the Ephesian church. The Book of Acts records that Paul started this church near the end of his second missionary journey when he lived in the home of Priscilla and Aquila for a whole year. It seems clear from the way Paul refers to these two that it was Priscilla who had the more pronounced leadership and teaching gifts. Her name is always mentioned first and it is clear that she was involved in teaching Apollos more accurately about the Christian way.

So what can we say here. Christ Himself taught women some of His most profound truths. He did not consider it a waste of time to do this. He included women in His group of disciples contravening one of the strongest cultural taboos of the day. Paul himself lists and praises both women teachers and even women Apostles and he gives clear instructions to female deacons who are leaders in the church. It seems clear that what he is referring to here in 1 Timothy 2 is a special case which had arisen because some teachers had arisen who taught a doctrine which was particularly attractive to women but which completely denied the Gospel. Perhaps these were even women themselves. Whatever the case Paul wanted to prohibit in this case women

claiming some special right to laud it over men or their husbands. This is not a general injunction against women in ministry or women teachers.

Women have endured a somewhat silent prejudice for years in the Christian church. Christ's model for men and women in the church is not hierarchical but mutual. We need to accept one another's strengths and allow those strengths to be used freely as the Spirit leads. Can I say to the women in particular, please forgive this prejudice and help us as a church to obey the Holy Spirit and allow you to offer your gifts in whatever way God would have you be used.

AMEN