

1 Timothy 2:9-15 Bible Study Guide – Women In The Church

I. The character of women in the church (9-10)

Cross-References

1 Peter 3:3-4 – Your beauty should not come from outward adornment, such as elaborate hairstyles and the wearing of gold jewelry or fine clothes.⁴ Rather, it should be that of your inner self, the unfading beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is of great worth in God's sight.

Proverbs 31:30 – Charm is deceitful, and beauty is vain, but a woman who fears the Lord is to be praised.

Ecclesiastes 3:11- He has made everything beautiful in its time. Also, he has put eternity into man's heart, yet so that he cannot find out what God has done from the beginning to the end.

Song of Solomon 4:7 – You are altogether beautiful, my love; there is no flaw in you.

1 Samuel 16:7 – But the Lord said to Samuel, “Do not look on his appearance or on the height of his stature, because I have rejected him. For the Lord sees not as man sees: man looks on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart.”

Proverbs 6:25 – Do not desire her beauty in your heart, and do not let her capture you with her eyelashes

Proverbs 27:4 – One thing have I asked of the Lord, that will I seek after: that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to gaze upon the beauty of the Lord and to inquire in his temple.

Proverbs 11:22 – Like a gold ring in a pig's snout is a beautiful woman without discretion.

Verse by Verse Commentary

1. I want women to dress modestly – If Paul was writing this nearly two thousand years ago, I wonder what he would be writing today? The world has gone downhill very quickly in regards to modesty.

Modesty definition – Behavior, manner, or appearance intended to avoid impropriety or indecency.

Remember that this passage is focused on believers. Godly women should be modest in their dress. Their goal should be to give glory to God by what they wear. God does not want us to cause others to stumble (Romans 14:13-23). Therefore women should dress in such a way that they will not draw undue attention toward themselves and tempt brothers. At the same time, God designed sex for within marriage. A wife should and can dress in such a way to seduce or arouse her husband when other people are not around. But dressing in a seductive way in public to “flaunt” what you've got, is not honoring to God.

This does not mean that all the burden of responsibility is on the woman. A woman can dress perfectly modestly and lustful men may still be tempted to think impurely toward her. Women could cover their entire bodies with ugly bags with only a slit hole for an eye and some men may still be stumbled. Therefore sisters should dress in such a way that does not flaunt their bodies or intentionally draw men's eyes to places they shouldn't go. The Bible does not give an exact definition or standard, and that is because the motivation is very important. It is an issue that is very difficult to draw an exact line on. Most godly sisters will want to stay far away from the line. Two key words of caution would be to “cover up” and “don't wear clothing that is too tight.”

Western society has virtually completely abandoned this idea of modesty. Young girls are paraded around like sex objects from a young age. Television, movies, celebrities, and advertisements just add to the problem and continuously lower standards. On social media many young women seek fame and attention by exposing themselves in various controversial ways. A key problem is that when a sister lowers herself in order to get attention (and perhaps find a boy friend), she is finding the wrong kind of attention.

Application: For women, dress modestly. If you are married ask your husband what he thinks about the various clothes you wear. Get his real opinion and be open to changing your wardrobe by throwing out immodest clothes. Do not dress in order to attract attention to yourselves. Instead dress to please your King.

For men, give money to your wives to buy new things. It may be very difficult to even find modest clothes, so she may have to spend more online. Don't get upset. Be patient. At the same time, do not let your eyes wander. When you see attractive women who wear too little don't stare. Let your eyes bounce off and set a habit to immediately take your thoughts to the Lord in prayer.

2. Dress discretely – Discrete means subtly, not openly or publicly. A godly woman should realize that there are some aspects of her physical beauty that is not for public consumption (Hebrews 13:4). Paul is not saying that a woman cannot look beautiful or should somehow cover her beauty.

A daughter told her father that she bought an iPhone. He suggested that she buy a cover for it. A cover would help it protect its value and keep it from being damaged, he told her. He went on to tell her that covering herself was an equally wise choice that would protect her from damage.

3. Not with braided hair or gold or pearls or expensive clothes – Paul singles out several things that many women in the first century were doing to draw undue attention to themselves. Braiding hair for example, seems like a very harmless and “nice” thing for girls to do. But the problem was that some women would spend hours to weave and construct their hair into complicated and splendid patterns. Their focus and attention was on external things instead of internal things. The internal should be given a much higher priority. A woman who spends four hours staring at the mirror braiding her hair or five days a week at the beauty salon is wasting her life on things that have no eternal value.

The universal principle is that a woman should place her priority and value on things that God values. While most scholars agree that these verses are not to be taken 100% literally (and therefore even gold wedding rings be tossed out), this nonetheless does not lessen the point. Interestingly, many other things then that are not mentioned in this passage would also be inappropriate. Buying hundreds of pairs of shoes, spending twenty thousand dollars on a luxury purse, wearing thousands of dollars of platinum jewelry, spending huge amounts of money on face lifts, and many more extravagant practices should be avoided as a waste of time and money and an incorrect focus of one's attention.

It should be noted that the same principle applies to guys. Men should place their priority on God rather than on gadgets. Some guys may spend huge sums of money on electronic gadgets or clothing, when this could be better spent on building God's kingdom.

Extravagant weddings with the married couple going into debt to spend on clothes and things they will use once is an example of focusing on the wrong things. Rather than spending huge amounts of money to turn heads and impress people, the focus should be on honoring God and turning attention to Him with this celebration.

Application: Before you buy something, ask yourself, “Does buying this give glory to God? If I buy this am I good steward of the resources God has given me?” Whether you eat or drink, whatever you do, do all for the glory of God.

3. But with good deeds – In the Bible it is a common literary device to substitute something bad or inferior for something better (John 6:27, 1 Timothy 4:8). The misplaced focus on exterior things to draw attention to oneself would be far better spent on doing good deeds. This really should not be controversial or hard to understand. Some people spend huge amounts of time on Facebook or Twitter shooting selfies of themselves in the latest outfits and trying to strike the perfect pose. Tens of hours are spent trying to gain “likes” and “retweets.” Does anyone think this is a better use of time than visiting an orphanage? Than volunteering at a hospital? Than serving in Sunday School?

God wants His people to focus on things that are important, things that have eternal value!

Ephesians 5:16 – Redeeming the time, because the days are evil.

Redeeming the time was important in the first century. There are way more distractions now than then. It is also even easier to waste time than ever before.

Here are couple of quotes from John Piper’s book, “Don’t waste your life.”

“Desire that your life count for something great! Long for your life to have eternal significance. Want this! Don’t coast through life without a passion.”

“I am wired by nature to love the same toys that the world loves. I start to fit in. I start to love what others love. I start to call earth “home.” Before you know it, I am calling luxuries “needs” and using my money just the way unbelievers do. I begin to forget the war. I don’t think much about people perishing. Missions and unreached people drop out of my mind. I stop dreaming about the triumphs of grace. I sink into a secular mind-set that looks first to what man can do, not what God can do. It is a terrible sickness. And I thank God for those who have forced me again and again toward a wartime mind-set.”

Application: What do you spend your time on? If you could count up your eyes would you find more time spent on the internet, television, social media, or building God’s kingdom? What are some good deeds that you can do this week to serve the Lord?

Discussion Questions

- Why does Paul say “likewise” here? What is the connection between this passage and the previous?
- What is the key instruction given to women in verse 9?
- What is modest clothing? What is immodest clothing?
- What is discreet clothing?
- In light of this passage, is it OK for a woman to braid her hair and wear jewelry? Why or why not?
- What is the universal principle behind these instructions?
- How can a godly young lady apply them today?
- What should a godly woman focus on rather than outward beauty?
- How can a lady discern whether too much time and money is spent on apparel and beauty? What is too much?

II. The role of women in the church (11-15)

Cross-References

1 Corinthians 14:34-35 – Women should remain silent in the churches. They are not allowed to speak, but must be in submission, as the law says. If they want to inquire about something, they should ask their own husbands at home; for it is disgraceful for a woman to speak in the church.

Titus 2:3-4 – Likewise, teach the older women to be reverent in the way they live, not to be slanderers or addicted to much wine, but to teach what is good. 4 Then they can urge the younger women to love their husbands and children.

Ephesians 5:22-23 – Wives, submit yourselves to your own husbands as you do to the Lord.²³ For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the Savior.

Galatians 3:28 – There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.

Genesis 2:18 – Then the Lord God said, “It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him.

1 Corinthians 11:3 – But I want you to understand that the head of every man is Christ, the head of a wife is her husband, and the head of Christ is God.

1 Timothy 3:2 – Therefore an overseer must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, sober-minded, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach.

Verse by Verse Commentary

For a more detailed look at this passage please see my paper on “Should women be leaders in the church?”

1. Paul did not just follow culture, he wanted the women to learn – Throughout the Bible women are given a much higher position than was common in society at that time. Paul’s first instruction that the women were to “learn” (1 Timothy 2:11 NIV) was radical in itself. Learning and receiving an education was considered unfit for women. Yet Paul specifically allows them to join church activities and receive instruction on an equal basis as the men. In Ephesians Paul commands husbands to “love [their] wives, just as Christ loved the church” (Ephesians 5:25 NASB). Again, in that society it would have been almost unheard of that a husband needed to love, respect, and take care of his wife to this extent. Extra-biblical literature written at that time period contains virtually no such injunctions. Paul also pronounced that women and men were equal in the body of Christ (Galatians 3:28), a concept totally foreign to the culture of his day! Jesus went against culture by forgiving the adulteress and letting her go free. In addition several of His closer-in followers were women, like Mary Magdalene, **Martha**, and Mary (sister of Martha). His resurrection was first made known to women, who were to spread the good news (showing that it is proper for women to spread the gospel).

All of the disciples were considered virtual rebels by leaders of their respective cultures. Eleven of the twelve died for their un-orthodox teachings. These men were not afraid to go against culture. They were even said to have “turned the world upside down” (Acts 17:6 NKJV). Therefore Paul’s teachings on women’s roles were not based on the culture’s influence on him. They were based on the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. He supported a high role and position for women, one that was equal to that of men, but not exactly the same.

2. Is this command cultural? – Many argue that these instructions were cultural, intended only for the church at Ephesus. In verse thirteen of chapter two, however, Paul explicitly gives God’s creation order as the basis for this commandment. If he gave this instruction because of a unique situation at Ephesus, he almost surely would have given that as the reason for his prohibition against women teachers, not creation! Verse fourteen clarifies this even further. He shows that the fall is a direct result of God’s natural order being reversed.

Critics often point to two possibly cultural commands in the preceding verses to demonstrate that the prohibition against women teachers was also cultural. Those two commands were for men to lift “up holy hands” (verse 8) and for women to not braid their hair or wear gold and pearls (verse 9). It is true that those

commands were probably related to culture. However, for both commands a universal principle was given that transcends all cultures. For prayer and lifting up hands the principle was to do so without “wrath and disention” (verse 9). Therefore the attitude of worship was the key point, not the outward style, which differs from time to time. In reference to clothing and style Paul lays out the universal principle of exercising proper behavior and godliness that should guide women’s actions, as opposed to concern for beauty. But there is no other universal principle mentioned in regards to women teachers. It is the universal principle, and that is shown by Paul’s reference to Creation. If it was merely cultural it would stand to reason that some lasting principle can be derived from that command besides prohibition against women teachers in the church. However, none can be found. Based on the immediate context there is no convincing reason not to take the command at face value. One would have to expend great effort in order to explain it away.

Having said that no author writes in a vacuum, Paul did not either. Though the exact situation is unknown to us almost two thousand years later it is probable that some situation in Ephesus and Corinth triggered Paul to lay down God’s codes for church leadership. Perhaps women were usurping authority in the churches and God directed to Paul to instruct the churches more properly. Whatever the original stimulus there is no reason to conclude Paul’s command in this area was only applicable to that culture. Indeed, if Paul were still alive to see the present situation in churches around the world, where the feminism movement so popular in today’s culture has made huge inroads into the church and taken it away from God’s Biblical design, it seems sure that he would once again feel it necessary to give similar commands against women usurping spiritual authority.

3. What does it mean to “be silent”? – The Greek word that is used here for “silence” or “quietness” (depending on the translation) is “hesychia” and does not denote a complete silence or absence of any talking. It is also used in Acts 22:2 and 2 Thessalonians 3:12 and in both instances means “settled down, undisturbed, or unruly”¹⁹. This is what one would expect it to mean based on the English. Thus, the command is not for women to never speak in church, but that she should be subdued and maintain an attitude of submissiveness, while not attempting to control the situation. “Didasko” is the Greek word used for “to teach”, and refers to a condition or process. This word is closely related to “didaskalos”, which is translated “to be a teacher” and is used consistently to refer to an office of a teacher in the church.

Therefore, based on this word and its use in other passages (cf. Ephesians 4:11), Paul is forbidding women to exercise the same role of teaching in a church that belonged to the church leaders who held that office. “The Greek word for ‘permit’ is used in the NT to refer to allowing someone to do what he desires”. The implication is that although women at that time, and indeed until now, may desire authority in the church and the right to teach men, Paul was prohibiting them from it. The Greek words used in this passage leave little wiggle room and strengthen the complementary position of taking the text literally and straightforwardly.

4. The Bible teaches clear gender role distinctions, but places equal value on man and woman – This and other passages like it clearly support a difference in gender roles. God designed the church to be led by men. The same is true of the family. At the same time every person, male and female has equal value in God’s sight. Men are not better. Women are not inferior. They are different.

A basketball point guard is not necessarily better than the center just because he controls the ball more. In the church and the family God has designed it that each person should use their gift as part of a team for the common good of all (1 Corinthians 12.) Men should use their position of authority in the church to humbly serve those they are shepherding, and never to marginalize, exploit, or abuse women in any way. It is shameful to hear stories of pastors or leaders who have abused this God given responsibility by behaving like a wolf in sheep’s clothing. Their stories should remind us to be alert. At the same time we should remember that Satan always desires to twist what God intends for good, to harm. The solution is not to toss out God’s standards, it is to endeavor by His grace to properly live up to them.

5. One reason given for male headship in the church is God's creation order – Paul goes all the way back to creation to defend the position he teaches. In other words, this is not a cultural thing. It relates to the very way God designed people. The world today says, "There is no difference between men and women. You can be whatever you want." This attitude is in a word, "nonsense." God has made us different. Male and female are different. But there are many other differences. Each person has his own gifting. We are each one like a work of art. God is the artist and we are His paintings. The differences should be celebrated! How much admiration would an artist get who makes six billion exact reproductions of one painting?

6. Another reason given for male headship is the fact that Eve was deceived – Men and women have different strengths and weaknesses. For example, my wife is far more compassionate and merciful than I am. This is good because she can encourage and challenge me when I am too extreme. Together we are better than by ourselves. It is a fact few people would dispute that women tend to be more emotional. And emotions can sometimes cloud judgment. Paul says that this is one reason for male leadership in the church. Who are we to argue with God's natural design?

7. Women will be saved through childbearing – Women are not powerless! Paul is saying that in some aspects they have more power or "say" than any man. Behind every single powerful man in world history is his mother. Mothers generally spend much more time with their kids than the father. Years are spent training and shaping the next generation. Mozart, Abraham Lincoln, Bill Clinton, and Napoleon each had a mother. Some may have done better jobs than others! A mother who does an amazing job raising her children can have a huge influence on the world. John and Charles Wesley's mother told them the gospel from a young age.

Application: Women should not feel that their role is less important than a man's. Each person has a unique and important role in God's kingdom. A woman should ask, "How can I use my unique gifts and resources to serve God and build His kingdom?"

Discussion Questions

- How would you summarize the key theme in verses 11-15?
- Is this based on the culture of that time or not? Why or why not?
- What key attitude is the woman to display?
- What key role is the woman to have in the church?
- Does this apply outside the church? Why or why not?
- In a day and age of feminism and equal rights for all, how can we understand why God's prescription for women and the church is so different?
- What then should a woman not do in church?
- How can a godly woman still minister for and serve God?
- Does God view woman as less valuable in some way? Defend your answer.
- What would you say to a person who says this passage is "sexist?"
- What does the statement mean in verse 15 "but women will be preserved through the bearing of children?"