

Proposition: 1 Timothy 2:8-15 shows us the roles that God intends for men and women in the church.

- I. God gives men a special role in church (8).
 - A. Men are to make prayer a priority.
 - B. Men are to make prayer a priority in church.
- II. God gives women a special role in church (9-15).
 - A. He is concerned about dress (9-10).
 1. Certain things are appropriate (9a).
 2. Other things are inappropriate (9b).
 3. The goal is to promote godliness (10).
 - B. He is concerned about demeanor (11-12).
 1. God calls her to be a learner (11).
 2. God does not call her to be a leader (12).
 - C. He is concerned about design (13-15).
 1. The difference in roles goes back to creation (13).
 2. The difference in roles was ignored in the fall (14).
 3. The difference in roles has present implications (15).

Response: Two affirmations...

1. I believe that God is good.
2. I believe that what God says is good.

Tee-ballers are a blast. I had a lot of fun helping coach a tee-ball team a few years ago, and remember the joys and challenges of trying to help them play as a team. Before the game began and before assigning positions, you'd give a pep talk, "Listen, guys and gals, *every* position on the field is important. We need outfielders as well as first-basemen and pitchers. *Every* person is vital to the team. Do you understand?" "Sure coach!" would be the reply.

And then we'd get ready to take the field, and a dozen voices would scream, "I want to be the pitcher!" "No, let me!" "That's not fair! I never get to pitch!" So much for the pep talk on how each part contributes to the good of the team!

Just because roles differ doesn't mean that one role is better than another. Right? That's a tough lesson to teach to a 5-year-old tee-baller. Unfortunately, it's not much easier to grasp once we become adults.

The subject of roles is the basis for considerable debate in our society, particularly the roles of men and women. And indeed, the church is not immune from the controversy.

In his commentary on 1 Timothy, Pastor John MacArthur begins his discussion of the text we'll be considering today with this observation: "The role of women in the church is a topic that is hotly debated today. Unfortunately, the debate has left the pages of Scripture to find its resolution. The traditional doctrines are being swept away by the flood tides of evangelical feminism. Churches, schools, and seminaries are rapidly abandoning truths they have held since their inceptions. Dozens of books are being written defending the new 'truth' regarding the role of women. Ironically, some of the authors of those books formerly held to the traditional, biblical view. But under the pressure of feminism they have abandoned biblical accuracy in favor of the culture."

There are two convictions that influence the way I approach the Bible. One is that *God is good*. And the second is that *what God says is good*. In Psalm 119:68, the psalmist proclaimed to God, "You are good, and what you do is good."

***Note: This is an unedited manuscript of a message preached at Wheelersburg Baptist Church. It is provided to prompt your continued reflection on the practical truths of the Word of God.

When we read the Bible, we must see its words through those two lenses: God is good, and what God says is good. Do you believe that? Some people, indeed some who love Christ and profess to believe the Bible, don't seem to be so sure that what God says is good. They seem embarrassed by certain passages which run cross grain to the ideologies of secular society. Oh, they would say that *most* of the Bible is good, but there are *parts* that just don't seem to fit--so they either reinterpret them or simply ignore them altogether.

We come to one such text this morning in our continuing, expository series in 1 Timothy. It's a passage that deals with the roles of men and women in the church. It's a *good* text. How do I know? Because God is good, and what God says is good.

1 Timothy is a letter about church life. Paul wrote it to Timothy to deal with challenges in the established church at Ephesus. Paul plainly states his purpose for writing in 3:14-15, "Although I hope to come to you soon, I am writing you these instructions so that, if I am delayed, you will know how people ought to conduct themselves in God's household, which is the church of the living God."

One of the subjects he addressed pertained to church worship services (ch. 2). What's supposed to happen when a church meets for worship? That's what chapter 2 is all about. Verses 1-7 address the subject of *what*--what are churches to do in worship? The answer is to give priority to prayer.

But you can't talk about *what* without addressing the question of *who*. Which is what Paul addresses in verses 8-15, the subject of roles. *Who* is to do *what* in church worship services? 1 Timothy 2:8-15 shows us the special roles that God designed for men and women in the church.

I. God gives men a special role in church (8).

Verse 8, "I want men everywhere to lift up holy hands in prayer, without anger or disputing." The Greek word for "men" here is not generic. It does not refer to mankind in general (as does the Greek word *anthropos*), but to the male gender (*andras*). It reveals that there's something that *men* are to do. What? Two things.

A. Men are to make prayer a priority. "I will, therefore, that men pray everywhere," the KJV puts it. Where specifically are men to pray?

B. Men are to make prayer a priority in church. The word "everywhere" is literally "in every place." Paul uses the phrase four times in his writings, each time it refers to the official assembly of the church (1 Cor. 1:2; 2 Cor. 2:14; 1 Thess. 1:8; MacArthur).

The context indicates that Paul's talking about what happens when the local church meets. Verse 1, "I urge, then, first of all, that requests, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for everyone." When churches meet what are they supposed to do? First of all, that is, of first importance, pray!

And who's supposed to make sure that happens? Don't miss the connection between verse 1 and verse 8. *Men* are to make prayer a priority in church.

Paul tells his associate Timothy, "Here's what I want to see happen in the church, Timothy. I want to see men praying." Do you see this men? When it comes to prayer in the church, God holds us responsible to take the lead. Men are to pray.

How are we to pray? The text continues, "I want men everywhere to lift up holy hands in prayer, without anger or disputing." The Bible presents many postures for praying: *standing* (Gen. 18:22; Matt. 6:5; Luke 18:11), *hands spread out or lifted heavenward* (Ex. 9:29; 17:11; Neh. 8:6; Ps. 63:4; Luke 24:50), *bowing the head* (Gen. 24:48; 2 Chron. 29:30; Luke 24:5), *lifting the eyes heavenward* (Ps. 25:15; Ps. 121:1;

Dan. 9:3; Acts 8:55), *kneeling* (2 Chron. 6:13; Ps. 95:6, Luke 22:41; Acts 20:36), *falling down with one's face on the ground* (Gen. 17:3; Num. 14:5; Deut. 9:18, 25, 26; Rev. 1:17), as well as *bowing with face between the knees* (1 Kgs. 18:42), and *standing and striking one's chest* (Luke 18:13). Interestingly, our present practice of closing our eyes and folding our hands is not to be found in the Bible, though there's nothing wrong with it.

Hands signify activity in life. *Holy* hands signify holy activity or holy lives. The point of the expression is not to endorse a particular posture in prayer, but to make it clear that a prerequisite for praying is holiness.

What's more, before praying men must get rid of "anger" ("wrath," AV) and "disputing" ("doubting," AV). A sure way to short circuit prayer is to have aught against a brother.

Men, are you setting the pace in this church when it comes to prayer? Verse 8 isn't talking just to pastors or deacons, but to *men*. Men, are you in tune with God? Do you have the kind of passion in prayer that caused John Knox to cry out, "Give me Scotland or I die"? Can you say as did George Whitefield, "O Lord, give me souls or take my soul"?

E. M. Bounds knew the importance of prayer. Though he ministered a century ago during Civil War days, his observations are timeless:

"It is much easier to send for a reputed evangelist to stir up revival than to pray fervently until revival happens. It is much easier to engineer a great religious movement by human forces than it is to break our hearts and humble ourselves in the dust before God that He may inaugurate a real religious movement. It is much easier to preach about saving the heathen than it is to place ourselves in their stead, as their substitutes before God, and plead with Him until He touches, overpowers, and influences all the springs of human and divine action...

"If every church would discard the entertainment business, cease making God's house a house of merchandise, make His house the house of prayer, and commit itself in penitent earnestness to prevailing prayer, our revival stream would run ocean floods and all our churches would be aflame with God's glory and resonant with His praises and the Lord would add daily to our churches thousands of the saved. Then the beauty of the Lord our God would be upon us."¹

Men, are you taking the lead when it comes to prayer in your family? Do you pray with your wife and children or grandchildren? Do your family members see you praying on a consistent basis? When Sunday or Wednesday comes, do you say, "We're going to church together to pray"? We are called to be spiritual leaders. It is our God-given role.

II. God gives women a special role in church (9-15).

Verse 9 begins, "I also want women to..." Or, "In like manner, that women... (AV)." Please realize Paul is not merely stating a personal opinion. The verb *boulomai* could be translated "I command," or "I purpose." Remember, as an apostle Paul's words carry divine authority. He is revealing what God says concerning the special role He's designed for women in church worship services.

I realize that opinions fly when it comes to this subject. Even the commentators seem to raise more questions than they answer. But God is good, and what He says is good. So let's give careful attention to what He actually says here.

¹taken from *Prayer and Revival*, by E. M. Bounds

Furthermore, remember that what we're about to read came out of a historic context. On the one hand, it was written against a *Jewish background*. In Jewish law, a woman was not a person but a thing. She was entirely at the disposal of her father or her husband. She was forbidden to learn the Law. Women had no part in the synagogue service. A man came to the synagogue to *learn*, but a woman merely came to *hear* (Barclay). Women were not allowed to read Scripture in the synagogue. They were not even allowed to teach the children there. Women, slaves, and children were classed together. It was said of woman: "Her work is to send her children to the synagogue; to attend to domestic concerns; to leave her husband free to study in the schools; to keep house for him until he returns (Barclay)."

In addition, there was a *Greek background* that made things doubly difficult. In the city of Ephesus was the Temple of Diana which had hundreds of priestesses--temple prostitutes--who every evening plied their trade on the city streets. Barclay observed, "The respectable Greek woman led a very confined life. She lived in her own quarters into which no one but her husband came. She did not even appear at meals. She never at any time appeared on the street alone; she never went to any public assembly." Such was the backdrop of Paul's statements in 1 Timothy.

Keep in mind that this passage is talking about roles that pertain to public worship services, to prayer meetings. The instruction addresses the role of women *at church*. According to Paul, God is concerned about three things as pertaining to women in the church.

A. He is concerned about dress (9-10). "I 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."

Sometimes we'll hear people say, "What I wear to church isn't important. It's what's in my heart that matters." That's not entirely true. The fact is, God is concerned about our attire, and He speaks rather pointedly to the matter in this text. He doesn't give us a dress code, but three principles concerning what women are to wear to public worship.

1. *Certain things are appropriate (9a)*. Like what? Verse 9 indicates that women are to adorn themselves in "modest" apparel, with "godly fear" ("decency" in the NIV) and "sobriety" ("propriety," NIV).

The old KJV uses the term "shamefacedness" ("decency" in NIV). A woman who possesses this quality is ashamed to go beyond the bounds of what is decent and proper. The term "propriety" ("sobriety" in the AV) at its root refers to self-control, especially over sexual passions. It's a rare word, but it indicates that in dress women are to exercise control, as one commentator observed, "so that neither their passions nor anyone else's are excited (MacArthur)."

It's interesting that the verb "dress" (or "adorn") is from the Greek word *kosmeo*. We get our English word "cosmetic" from it. It means "to arrange, to put in order, to make ready." God does care about appearance, in this case what women wear to church. Coming to church should be a big deal for which we prepare ourselves. Certain things are appropriate.

2. *Other things are inappropriate (9b)*. Verse 9 continues, "Not with braided hair or gold or pearls or expensive clothes." Ephesus was a wealthy, commercial city, and some women there competed against each other for popularity.

The term "braided hair" can refer to "hair styles." Paul's not telling women to be indifferent to what their hair looks like (he just said to prepare oneself). He's confronting gaudy, conspicuous hairdos that would distract attention from the Lord.

In that day women would weave gold or pearls or other jewelry into their hair to call attention to themselves and their wealth. There's nothing wrong with wearing jewelry. Solomon's bride wore gold and silver jewelry, according to Song of Songs 1:10-11; 4:9. So did Rebekah (Gen. 24:53). But jewelry was (and still can be) a way to flaunt wealth or call attention to oneself in a way that is inappropriate in the house of worship.

Why is that? Because what is the reason for coming to a worship service? To be impressed by what people are wearing? No. To be impressed by God!

Paul mentions "expensive clothes," too. That was another way secular women in his day flaunted their wealth. The dresses worn by wealthy women would often cost as much as 7,000 denarii, with the dresses of common women going at the rate of 500 to 800 denarii. To put that into perspective, a denarius was the average daily wage of a common laborer. Because of that most women probably owned only two or three nice dresses in their lives. You can begin to imagine, then, the potential distraction that would result if a wealthy woman came to church wearing an expensive dress.

A third principle about what to wear to public worship. Remember...

3. *The goal is to promote godliness (10).* "But with good deeds, appropriate for women who profess to worship God."

Someone has said that a woman's dress is a mirror of her mind. A woman's goal in choosing her attire (a man's too, for that matter) should be to dress in such a way as to show that godliness is important to her. The point of this text isn't to say that we shouldn't spend time thinking about how we look on Sunday morning. We should. But if it's important to make sure our hair is attractive, how much more important it is to make sure our lifestyle is making the gospel attractive. Which leads to a second subject...

B. He is concerned about demeanor (11-12). Verses 9-10 speak about what you to wear to church. Verses 11-12 speak about what you do once you get there.

There are two extreme positions which people promote at this point. One says that women can do anything and everything in the church. Galatians 3:28 is cited, "There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus." Proponents believe this grants women the right to be preachers and officers in the church.

Another extreme is taken by those who do not allow women to participate in any significant way in the church. They believe that women are to be seen, but not heard (and not seen to much either). Even singing is out.

J. Vernon McGee tells the facetious story of a very prominent maiden that lived in a Midwest town. Everyone agreed that she would have made some man a wonderful wife, but she had never been asked and eventually died an old maid. The society editor for the newspaper who normally covered such stories was out of town, so the sport's editor was asked to write a little notice of this lady's death. He concluded the article with these words:

"Here lie the bones of Nancy Jones: For her, life held no terrors.

She lived an old maid, she died an old maid: No hits, no runs, no errors."

Many churches miss the fact that God has equipped women to make a valuable contribution to the work of the gospel.

What does God say concerning a woman's demeanor at church? Listen to verses 11-12, "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."

Some would accuse Paul of sounding unfriendly to women here. That's not the case at all. In Romans 16 he greets 8 women by name. Indeed, he entrusted the delivery of the letter of Romans to Phebe, a valuable servant in her local church (Rom. 16:1). Elsewhere

we're told that Paul valued the ministries of Lydia (Acts 16:14), Priscilla (Acts 18:1-3), and Eudia and Syntyche whom he calls "fellow workers" (Phil. 4:2). Women can make a valuable contribution to the ministry.

But she must realize this. God has given her a special role. He has equipped her for that role. She will find great fulfillment as she accepts that role. What is that role?

1. *God calls her to be a learner (11).* "Let the woman learn." It might seem obvious to us that women should be entitled to learn God's Word, but it wasn't in the first century. Most rabbis refused to teach women, considering it as casting pearls before swine. Not so in the church. God's truth is for everyone (see Titus 2 where Titus was explicitly told to teach the older women).

But apparently in the Ephesian church, some women overreacted to their new-found privilege of learning. They went too far and began asserting themselves as teachers in the public assembly. It's to correct that confusion over roles that Paul writes here. He starts by asserting #2, God invites a woman to learn in the assembly, but #2...

2. *God does not call her to be a leader (12).* "I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man; she must be silent."

Remember, the restrictions here pertain to public worship services within the church. When it comes to spiritual status, there is equality between the sexes. The gospel is for all. Jesus is for all. Access to God is available to all who will believe in Christ.

But spiritual equality does not do away with differences in roles. Women did not serve as priests in the OT. There were no queens in either Israel or Judah (Athaliah was a usurper). None of the authors of the OT books were women.

The point is that spiritual equality does not eliminate differing roles. In position, there's equality. In function, there's a God-designed difference.

Wiersbe suggests that "silence" is an unfortunate translation because it gives the impression that believing women are never to open their mouths in the assembly. That's not it.

The truth is, women are permitted to teach. Older women are to teach the younger women (Tit. 2:4). Grandmothers and mothers are to teach their offspring--Paul commended Lois and Eunice for helping shape Timothy's life (2 Tim. 1:5). But in public church meetings, God has given women the role of learning, not leading.²

Can a godly woman ever teach a man? Certainly. Priscilla taught Apollos (Acts 18:26), but it happened in private, not in the public worship of the church.

Please don't be swayed by the rhetoric. The Bible is not anti-women. It was a woman who bore and trained Jesus, the Messiah. It was Mary of Magdala who was the first to see the risen Lord. At the cross were four women. Acts 1:14 specifically says that women were a part of the 120 that eventually became the church.

The issue in 1 Timothy is that of roles, not worth. The role of the elder as evangelist or pastor-teacher is only for men. In fact, the infinitive "to teach" in verse 12 is present tense, not aorist, which could be translated "to be a teacher."³ MacArthur observes, "By using the present infinitive instead of the aorist, Paul does not forbid women to teach under appropriate conditions and circumstances, but to fill the office and role of the pastor or teacher in the life of the church."

Why do we have different roles anyway? The answer is one word: *design*.

²Wiersbe's comment is helpful, "Submission is not subjugation. Submission is recognizing God's order in the home and the church, and joyfully obeying it."

³MacArthur cites grammarians Dana and Mantey; see p. 86.

C. He is concerned about design (13-15). To support the distinction in roles, Paul goes back to Genesis in verses 13-15, from which we learn three insights.

1. *The difference in roles goes back to creation (13).* "For Adam was formed first, then Eve." A popular view in our day says that the subordinate role of women is a result of sin, and since the effects of the fall are reversed by Christ, male and female roles should be abolished.

Not so, according to Paul. Role distinctions precede the fall. God made woman after man and gave her a special role--she was to be his helper (Gen. 2:18). Men and women are different by divine design.

Commentator William Hendriksen discusses the implications, "Let a woman not enter a sphere of activity for which by dint of her very creation she is not suited. Let not a bird try to dwell under water. Let not a fish try to live on land. Let not a woman yearn to exercise authority over a man by lecturing him in public worship. For the sake both of herself and of the spiritual welfare of the church such unholy tampering with divine authority is forbidden." A second insight...

2. *The difference in roles was ignored in the fall (14).* "And Adam was not the one deceived; it was the woman who was deceived and became a sinner." Please don't misunderstand. Paul's not saying that Adam wasn't responsible for his actions (Rom. 5:12 stresses he was). Nor is Paul insinuating that Eve was more defective than Adam.

The point is that part of the reason sin entered this world was because the first man and woman ignored their God-given roles. Check out Genesis 3 and you'll see. Eve stepped out from under the protection and leadership of her husband and fell. And Adam abdicated his leadership role and followed Eve. And the world has never been the same.

3. *The difference in roles has present implications (15).* "But women will be saved through childbearing--if they continue in faith, love and holiness with propriety." What's that mean? Interpretations are many. Some suggest that this refers to Mary, the mother of Jesus.

I prefer to take it at face value. The word "save" is broad and can be used in a non-redemptive sense, translated "rescue" or "preserve." Paul's not saying that women can save themselves by having children, for salvation is by grace, not works (Eph. 2:8).

There's actually a shift in pronouns which the KJV picks up, from the singular "she" (referring to Eve) to the plural "they" (referring to women in general). There's something that women can do to remove the stigma of Eve's fateful decision. Whereas Eve led the human race into sin, women can bring up a righteous seed through "childbearing."

It's a perfect counter, as MacArthur explains, "Women are far from being second-class citizens because they have primary responsibility for rearing godly children. Mothers spend far more time with their children than do their fathers, and thus have the greater influence. Fathers cannot know the intimate relationship with their children that their mother establishes from pregnancy, birth, infancy, and early childhood. Paul's point is that while a woman may have led the race into sin, women have the privilege of leading the race out of sin to godliness."

That doesn't mean God wants all women to bear children. For some, it's not even His will to marry (1 Cor. 7:25-40). Paul's speaking in general terms. Whereas pain in childbirth was part of the curse for woman's sin (Gen. 3:16), the privilege of rearing godly children delivers women from the stigma of that sin.

Are roles important? They are. Is your life in submission to the role God has established for you? If not, you can't straighten things out on your own. That's why God sent His Son, Jesus. By trusting in Him--in His death and resurrection--He makes us new. He enables us to fulfill the role for which we were created.

Response: A fitting response to this study would be to make two affirmations...

1. *I believe that God is good.*
2. *I believe that what God says is good.*