

Instructions Concerning Church Life

Studies in 1 Timothy 2

Based on a verse by verse study of the book of 1st Timothy

Timothy was an elder serving the early church in the city of Ephesus on the west coast of Turkey. Ephesus was the city where the temple of Diana was located. Diana was the pagan goddess of fertility, and sexual immorality was a part of the worship liturgy practiced by many in the region. A Christian church was established in Ephesus, and Timothy was left in charge of the church there. In the epistle of 1 Timothy the older Apostle Paul was inspired to give instructions to the younger preacher, Timothy, about life in the church of Christ.

1. Regarding Various Forms of Prayer (2:1-8)

Although God is all powerful and can accomplish things without our help, He has chosen to let us participate in change through the avenue of prayer. How prayer works is a mystery to us because our minds are limited, but prayer is an activity that produces results. The setting (3:14-15) indicates that Paul speaks here especially of public gatherings of God's people.

In verses 1 and 2 (of chapter 2), we are exhorted that "supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks be made for all men; for kings, and for all that are in authority, that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty." One of our greatest duties toward our fellow human beings is to pray for them. The phrase "first of all" (2:1) carries with it the idea of special importance. A variety of words are used to describe prayer. Each word has its own shade of meaning.

"Supplications" speaks of earnest requests—appeals to God about needs which cause intense concern, needs which are keenly felt—an accident, an unsaved neighbor, a wayward child.

"Prayers" is the simple word for asking—conveys the thought of speaking to God with calm reverence. We are to pray about needs which are always present—more wisdom, deeper consecration, more love for fellow human beings.

"Intercessions" are prayers on behalf of others—it is the translation of a Greek word that conveys the idea of a conversation with God. If we have that sense of conversation with God, we should be in such close touch with Him that we can easily and quickly pray for others.

"Giving of thanks" refers to the spirit in which our prayers are to be offered. Philippians 4:6 says that "in everything, by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God."

We are to pray for "all men" (everyone)—not every last human being on the face of the earth, but every class of people—Jews and Gentiles, rich and poor, blacks and whites. The reference is not to all without exception, but to all without distinction. We should pray for prostitutes and thieves; for people who live

in filth where rats crawl out of sewers and the air is filled with stench; for people with syphilis and AIDS; for millions of people caught up in the pagan religious systems of the world.

The scope of our prayers should include “kings, and all that are in authority” (2:2). The responsibilities of kings, presidents, prime ministers, congressmen, and rulers—are very great—and they need the prayers of God’s people continually. Abraham Lincoln once said, “I have been driven to my knees many times by the overwhelming conviction that I have no where else to go; my own wisdom (and the wisdom of others around me) seemed insufficient for the day.” We have a clear mandate from God to pray for our government leaders. For any of us to speak of the president of our country as “the devil in the White House” (or with some similar epithet) is altogether out of place for God’s people. When God spoke through the Apostle Paul, mandating that we pray for kings, Nero was the Roman Emperor. It is our duty to pray for government leaders, no matter how unreasonable they are.

We are to pray for leaders “that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty” (2:2b). It is proper to pray for a life that is tranquil and undisturbed. Tertullian, an early church leader, often prayed for “a long life, a safe home, a faithful senate, a righteous people, and a world at peace.” And when our political leaders exercise good judgment, they make it possible for us to lead lives that are peaceful and godly. However, the ultimate purpose of prayer for national leaders is concern about the salvation of souls (2:4). Prayer for leaders is not to be done so that things will merely be pleasant for us.

The word “quiet” refers to freedom from outward disturbances. This could include prayer that government officials will not disrupt our worship services. The word “peaceable” refers to freedom from inward disharmonies. This could include conditions such as Lot experienced in Old Testament times, when he was vexed at the utter disregard for the laws of God which was evident in the community of Sodom. Prayer makes a difference in national affairs, and it can bring about conditions more favorable to the furtherance of the Gospel message. God is pleased with sincere prayer, and therefore we should strive to become more diligent in prayer (2:3).

There are various reasons why not all people will come to a knowledge of the truth, yet no one can fix the blame on God. Chapter 2, verse 4 says that God “will have all men to be saved, and to come to a knowledge of the truth.” God has made every provision for our salvation (John 3:16), yet multitudes reject His offer of love and as a result die without hope. The words of 2:4 are an expression of God’s wish, not His decree. God does not compel the salvation of all, but He desires the salvation of all. Of course—not all do come to salvation; Paul was not teaching universalism. Salvation has been provided for all, but only those who accept it are saved (John 1:12).

The pagan nations believed in many gods (polytheism), but the Christian faith holds to monotheism (one God). There is one true and living God (2:5). And there is only one Mediator between God and man, the man Christ Jesus (2:5). A “mediator” is one who intervenes in order to bring two parties together. Jesus is the only Person in all the universe who is appointed to reconcile sinful human beings to a holy God. Every human being is separated from God by sin, and only one person can stand between us and bring us together again. To come to the one true God, there is no need for angels or saints or the Virgin Mary

to assist us. We need only the Lord Jesus Christ who is the only Person able to bring humans and God together.

It was the death of Jesus on Calvary that paid the ransom-debt for man's sin. The wages of sin is death (Romans 6:23), but the debt was paid by the shedding of Jesus' blood (Hebrews 9:22). The words "for all" (2:6) speak of substitution. The phrase can be translated "instead of" us. Thus, even though the word substitution is not in the Bible, the concept is there. The Greek preposition "for" all, indicates "the exchange of one person for another." Jesus died in our place.

Paul was ordained to declare the message about Christ's death as a ransom for sinners (2:7). Paul was a "preacher"—one who lifts up his voice and announces the truth. He was also an "apostle"—one sent forth with authority to convey a message. Paul, in addition, was a "teacher"—one who instructs others in the way of righteousness. There were some in the early church who disputed Paul's call to the ministry, but he was so certain of his divine calling that he declares emphatically that he is speaking the truth in Christ.

The great unseen force behind the work of a successful ministry is prayer (2:8), and so Christians are called upon to lift their hands to God in earnest supplication for the souls of men and women everywhere. "Lifting up holy hands" during a worship service is common in some circles. The phrase "lifting up" is in participial form; it is not in the imperative mood. It is proper to lift up the hands (as in an entreaty) when praying, but the real emphasis in the statement is on the word "holy"—which is made clear by the words "without wrath and doubting." The emphasis here is not so much on the physical act of raising the hands, but upon the condition of the heart. If there is unconfessed sin, or if we are harboring bitterness toward another person, there is no promise that our prayers will get through to God. (See Psalm 66:18). If we harbor bitterness and enmity toward another person, we cannot have power in prayer. If we are unwilling to take God at His word, our prayers will be hindered. Our emotions must be free from anger and our minds must be free from unbelief if our prayers are to be effective. There must be no "wrath" or "doubting."

The Lord urges us to pray. Not all can preach effectively, nor sing, nor go to some field overseas—but all can pray. However, we cannot pray effectively unless our lives are clean and committed.

2. Regarding Women in the Church (2:9-15)

Christianity has done more to elevate and liberate women than any of the world's religions have ever done. In lands where Christianity has not made an impact, women are poorly treated. First Timothy 2:9-10 gives instructions for Christian women: "In like manner also, that women adorn themselves in modest apparel, with shamefacedness and sobriety; not with broided hair, or gold, or pearls, or costly array; but (which becometh women professing godliness) with good works." And verses 11-14 give further counsel for Christian women: "Let the woman learn in silence with all subjection. But I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man, but to be in silence. For Adam was first formed, then Eve. And Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived was in the transgression."

a) A Christian woman is to dress and conduct herself modestly and sensibly (2:9-10). She should be conspicuous—not by displaying her physical charms—but by her kindness and her good works. Christian women and girls should be careful not to entice men and boys to lustful thinking by the way they dress and conduct themselves. There is something like “body language.” The Greek word translated “adorn” refers to proper conduct as well as proper attire. Modest apparel refers to clothing that appropriately covers the body, rather than exposing and advertising it. Modest apparel means that tight form-fitting garments, low necklines, and uncovered knees are not acceptable for faithful Christian women. We must be careful not to let a pagan culture set our standards for outward appearance. Modesty is extremely important because modesty is the guardian of chastity.

The words “shamefacedness and sobriety” (2:9) speak of attire that is in harmony with good taste, and free from anything that suggests impurity. Clothing should be neat and tidy, but not gaudy and form-fitted. The phrase “broided (braided) hair” refers to elaborate hairdos, fastened with ribbons and bows, and decorated with shiny trinkets. The prohibition against “gold, pearls, and costly array” (2:9) is an instruction not to decorate the body with jewelry (no matter how symbolic it might be), and a caution against spending lots of money to keep up with the latest fads in clothing. God doesn’t expect our clothing to look like the front page of the latest fashion magazine. Instead, in “God’s book of style,” it is Christian character that counts. A godly woman’s character can be demonstrated by the unselfish devotion of a mother in the home, her friendship among the needy in the church, and being an example of reserve and dignity in society.

b) Women are not to assume leadership offices in the assembly of believers (2:11-15). Though men and women are one in Christ— and neither is superior to the other—they have differing functions in God’s plan. At first, the words of 2:11-12 sound a bit unfriendly and even unfair, but in reality, they are the very opposite. We are told here that the woman should not enter a sphere of activity for which, by the very nature of creation, she is not best suited. The tendency to follow was embedded in Eve’s very soul when she came forth from the hand of her Creator. The female’s chromosomes and hormones and physical structure make it natural for her to respond, to follow, to submit. Why should she be encouraged to do things in the church that are contrary to her nature? The ruling offices in the congregation are not open to women, nor are they open to all men. They are only open to those who meet the qualifications of 1 Timothy 3:1-7.

The instruction in 2:12 does not mean that a woman cannot ever do any kind of teaching. Older women are to teach younger women (Titus 2:3-5), and Timothy’s mother is commended for the way she taught the Scriptures to her son (2 Timothy 3:14-15). But in the assembly (the gathered church) the woman is not to teach men. The phrase “usurp authority” (1 Timothy 2:12) is better translated “have authority.” The woman is not to take upon herself an executive position of authority within the church—pastoring a congregation, moderating the business meeting, leading a male study group. These positions should be filled by men. The reasons are given in 2:13-14. (Sometimes men neglect to assume leadership roles, and as a result women are almost forced to take responsible positions of authority because no one else does it. That is a sad commentary on the lack of commitment on the part of men in the church.)

The two reasons for the limitations placed on women's leadership are explained in 1 Timothy 2:13-14. **Verse 13 mentions the order of creation.** Adam was formed first at the time of creation, and that order is to be respected in the church. From the very beginning, God had arranged that the woman should be a helper. She was created, not to lead, but to assist. **Verse 14 mentions the history of the fall.** The woman (Eve) was deceived in the Garden of Eden; the man (Adam) was not. The woman did not **deceive** the man; she **persuaded** him. Eve was beguiled and deceived by a flashy half-truth, whereas Adam sinned with his eyes wide open. Adam was persuaded by the tie of affection. And Adam was wrong—more wrong than Eve was—because he disobeyed when all the while he knew better; and in the New Testament (Romans 5:12), the entry of sin into the world is attributed to Adam, not to Eve; Eve isn't even mentioned, even though she was the first to listen to the devil. Both the man and the woman were guilty of disobeying God, but it is still true that Eve was more easily led astray. The woman proved by her trusting nature to be more easily led astray than the man, and therefore she should not be a teacher of Christian truth at the head of a congregation.

The Bible simply states that a woman may not teach or hold authority over a man in the gathered assembly. Where does the Bible clearly and specifically say that she may teach men, or hold authority over men? The simple answer is that the Bible does not say anywhere that she may. Why take obscure and unclear passages to try and deny what is so clearly set forth in Scripture?

The last verse of 1 Timothy 2 speaks of the woman being "saved in childbearing." Note the words: "Notwithstanding she shall be saved in childbearing, if they continue in faith and charity and holiness with sobriety." Paul does not want to imply (in the preceding verses) that the woman cannot be saved. The word "saved" (in 2:15) may refer to the matter of eternal salvation, or it may refer to salvation from a life of uselessness.

God used a woman to bring sin into the world, but God also used a woman to bring the Savior into the world. The reference can be understood to refer to one specific childbearing—the birth of Jesus, through whom salvation has come to the world. Jesus was "born of a woman" (Galatians 4:4).

The other possible interpretation is that through childbearing the woman is saved from a life of uselessness. It may mean that a woman's most noble fulfillment is found in motherhood and in training children in the home. This stands in contrast to the public teaching, which in God's order of things, is closed to her. The woman's true dignity is not in leadership in the church, but in being the queen in the home (Titus 2:4-5).

The Apostle Paul cannot honestly be accused of being a woman-hater. He gratefully acknowledged some women among his own fellow-laborers—including Priscilla (Romans 16:3-5), and Euodias and Syntyche (Philippians 4:2-3). The harmony and growth and success of any local church will be strengthened by the presence of godly women who conduct themselves after God's plan.

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