

07. 1 Timothy 2:8 - 3:13



1 Timothy 2:8

I desire, then, that in every place the men should pray, lifting up holy hands without anger or argument

Paul continues his instructions concerning prayer in the Christian assembly. Paul's instructions to both men and women are quite specific. We can only assume that the problems he was addressing were also quite specific and that he is laying down principles of behaviour *for them* (he is not writing for every congregation for the rest of time!) and as a support to Timothy, who is to assert his authority to bring better order into the public assemblies.

He speaks first of all about the men. The hands which they raise in prayer are to be 'holy' (ἅγιος). In other words, their prayer must be an expression of their life in which their actions (their 'hands') demonstrate the respect for the sacred which their lips proclaim when they pray.

In view of Paul's concern about the divisions in the community that are being caused by teachers who 'promote speculations' (1:4) and indulge in 'meaningless talk' (1:6), we are not surprised that Paul highlights the problem of anger and argument. He is calling for an end to empty disputes and for reconciliation of differences by a focus on 'love that comes from a pure heart, a good conscience, and sincere faith' (1:5). Did not Jesus say: 'Whenever you stand praying, forgive, if you have anything against anyone' (Mark 11:25)? And again: 'If you are offering your gift at the altar, and there remember that your brother or sister has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother or sister, and then come and offer your gift' (Matthew 5:23-24).

1 Timothy 2:9-10

I desire that the women should dress themselves modestly and decently in suitable clothing, not with their hair braided, or with gold, pearls, or expensive clothes, but with good works, as is proper for women who profess reverence for God.

We would understand Paul's words to the women better if we knew how the erroneous teaching was affecting them. It seems as though the more well-off were flaunting their position and missing the point of the freedom which membership of the Christian community gave them. Paul's point is that if they are looking for adornments, they should find them in 'good works'. As he says in his letter to the Ephesians; 'We are what he has made us, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand to be our way of life' (Ephesians 2:20).

1 Timothy 2:11-12

Let a woman learn in silence with full submission. I permit no woman to teach or to have authority over a man; she is to keep silent.

Our lack of information concerning the situation which Paul is addressing makes it difficult to give a confident interpretation of Paul's words here. There may be some parallels in 1Corinthians 14:33-35, but that text is itself quite problematic. It appears to represent a point of view with which Paul disagrees.

Paul's understanding of the relative roles of men and women in the order of creation, as well as the assumptions that lay behind his position find expression in 1Corinthians 11:2-16. It is against this background that we should read his words here.

Let a woman learn in silence with full submission.

Paul is instructing the women to listen quietly and attentively to the person who is doing the teaching in the assembly. The ‘**submission**’ (ὑποταγή) which Paul is requiring is submission to the teacher. He has already insisted that the men avoid ‘argument’ (2:8). We can assume that he addresses this particular injunction to the women because of the disruption being caused by some women in the churches. He has found it necessary to insist on the excommunication of two of the male leaders of the heterodox camp (1:20). If the women who are pushing themselves forward as teachers are those who have been swayed by heterodox teaching (and there are indications in the text that this is the case, as we shall note shortly), he hopes that the practical measure of instructing the women not to teach will settle things down, and that order in the assembly will be restored.

I permit no woman to teach or to have authority over a man; she is to keep silent.

What does Paul mean by saying: ‘I permit no woman to have authority over (αὐθεντέω) a man’? The nuance conveyed by αὐθεντέω is much disputed. In the context, Paul could well be focusing precisely on the assembly and on the role of authoritative teaching. It may be that those women who are teaching are flaunting their new-found freedom, are pushing themselves forward, and, furthermore, are teaching error. They may be laying down the law and refusing to learn. Our ignorance of the situation which Paul is addressing should at least warn us not to generalise from what he is saying here. Paul would have written differently about the women who were competent and giving ‘sound teaching that conforms to the gospel which God entrusted to me’ (1:11).

1 Timothy 2:13

For Adam was formed first, then Eve

Paul supports his instruction by referring to the relationship between Adam and Eve as found in the book of Genesis. Since they are the first man and woman, he sees them as archetypes of an unchanging divine design.

His first argument is that ‘Adam was formed first, then Eve’ (see Genesis 2:22-23). He used this same point in his First Letter to the Corinthians 11:8, with the same purpose of illustrating what he understands as the divinely-willed subordination of woman to man.

1 Timothy 2:14

Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and became a transgressor.

Paul's second argument is based on the story of the first sin as narrated in the book of Genesis. Paul notes that the serpent deceived Eve, not Adam (see Genesis 3:1-6,13). He referred to this deceiving of Eve by the serpent also in 2 Corinthians 11:3. Paul is not claiming to give the meaning of the Genesis account. Following the practice of his day, he takes one aspect of the text, and uses it to illustrate his argument. That Paul makes a point of stressing the fact that Eve was deceived is an indication that he is addressing women teachers who have themselves been deceived into teaching 'different doctrine' (1:3). Since Eve was deceived and transgressed the commandment of God, she had to live with the consequences which include: 'your desire shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you' (Genesis 3:16).

1 Timothy 2:15

Yet she will be saved through childbearing

Later in the letter, Paul mentions that one of the errors of the false teachers is that they 'forbid marriage' (4:3). It is likely that the women teachers were using this text to instruct other women that in the new creation which they have entered as Christians they should avoid child-bearing. This would explain Paul's insistence here on the value for a Christian woman of motherhood and the rearing of children.

1 Timothy 2:15

provided they continue in faith and love and holiness

He concludes his remarks by focusing, once again, on the central importance of **‘faith and love’** (see 1:5,14), to which he adds ‘holiness’ (ἁγιασμός, ‘sanctification’). As he wrote to the Thessalonians: ‘God chose you as the first fruits for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and through belief in the truth’ (2 Thessalonians 2:13); and to the Romans: ‘Now that you have been freed from sin and enslaved to God, the advantage you get is sanctification. The goal is eternal life’ (Romans 6:22).

1 Timothy 2:15

with sound teaching.

Finally, he stresses the importance of thinking in a way that is based on sound teaching (σωφροσύνη). They are to have ‘the mind of Christ’ (Philippians 2:5).

Paul refers to Eve's being deceived and sinning in a precise context of false teaching that is being promoted by certain women and is disrupting the assemblies. He cannot be blamed for those who, with little of Paul's intelligence or love and little understanding of his way of using scripture, have taken his words out of context and used his authority to present woman as the weaker partner, more easily seduced by Satan. Paul's words have been used as an instrument for the denigration and subjugation of woman in a way that would have horrified Paul.

He was concerned to respect divine order as he saw it, and to see that measures were taken in a particular context to re-establish order in the Christian assembly. His writings, and his practice as far as we know it, indicate that he himself had nothing but the most profound respect and gratitude for women in ministry.

Paul was concerned that both woman and man share in the fullness of Christ's life and express their Spirit-given gifts in a way that build up the community and serve the gospel to the praise and glory of God.

In our day, in the light of the gospel, we see the authority relationship between man and woman in a different way. Fidelity to the gospel as Paul preached and lived it requires that we follow his key insights: that we are all one in Christ, and that what matters is faith that finds expression in love; and that we work for liberation of man and woman together in love. To refuse to do so, and worse still to quote Paul outside the context of his own thinking to support our refusal, is to demonstrate our unwillingness to listen to the gospel which was entrusted to him (1:11) and of which he was 'a herald and apostle in faith and truth' (2:7).

1 Timothy 3:1

The saying is sure: whoever aspires to the office of bishop desires a noble task.

It is not clear why Paul feels the need to stress in such a solemn way (compare 1:15) the excellence of the ministry exercised by those who are responsible for supervising the life of the local church. Since one of their central roles is teaching, and since there are obvious problems in Ephesus due to erroneous teaching, it may be that some have abused or misused their position as an **overseer/supervisor/bishop** (ἐπίσκοπος) and given the occupation a bad name. In any case, Paul takes the occasion to highlight the kinds of qualities that are needed in those called to this ministry.

1 Timothy 3:2

Now a bishop must be above reproach, married only once

The office of **overseeing** (ἐπίσκοπος) is a public position. It is especially important that the bishop's behaviour be such that people cannot establish a case of wrongdoing against him and thus bring the community into disrepute.

Being '**above reproach**' is the equivalent of the first quality which Paul required of a bishop in his letter to Titus, when he stated that the bishop must be 'blameless (Titus 1:6,7). There, too, he required that he be '**married only once**' (see Titus 1:6). This may have been required of him as a witness to the mutual fidelity between Jesus and the community.

A bishop must be temperate, sensible, respectable

Being ‘**temperate**’ was something which Paul in his letter to Titus expected of older men (see Titus 2:2). There the focus seems to have been on the problem of excessive drinking. It may be the same here, though the repetition of this idea in verse three suggests that Paul has a more general moderation in mind. ‘**Sensible**’ translates *σώφρων*. It refers to a person’s thinking and requires that it be ‘sane’, in the sense of ‘healed’. For a Christian, it is to have ‘the mind of Christ’ (Philippians 2:4). The bishop is to be ‘**respectable**’, a word Paul has already used in relation to the way women dress in the assembly (see 2:9).

A bishop must be hospitable, an apt teacher

The bishop is to behave in a way that is appropriate to his position and that will evoke admiration in others, rather than disapproval. In his letter to Titus, Paul also stressed the importance of hospitality (Titus 1:8). He has a special responsibility to see that guests, including travelling missionaries, are received well, and, as this letter continues to insist, being ‘an apt teacher’ of sound doctrine is essential for a healthy Christian community.

1 Timothy 3:3

not a drunkard, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, and not a lover of money.

Drunkenness and **violence** (also Titus 1:7) are particularly inappropriate in one who is responsible for hospitality and teaching, as is being **'quarrelsome'** (see Titus 3:2) and being **'a lover of money'** (the equivalent of 'greedy for gain' in Titus 1:7).

On the contrary, he is to be 'gentle' (see Titus 3:2), with the 'gentleness of the Messiah' (2 Corinthians 10:1).

1 Timothy 3:4-5

He must manage his own household well, keeping his children submissive and respectful in every way – for if someone does not know how to manage his own household, how can he take care of God's church?

In his letter to Titus also, Paul stressed the importance of his being able to **'manage his own household well'** (see Titus 1:6), in the sense of being outstanding in his care for the family, in such a way that his family follows his lead. The bishop is to be **'respectful'** (σεμνότης, 'aware of the sacred', see Titus 2:2). As Paul explains, if he cannot do this for his own household, how can he do it for 'the household of God' (Ephesians 2:19) which is God's church?

1 Timothy 3:6

He must not be a recent convert, or he may be puffed up with conceit and fall into the condemnation of the devil.

The requirement that a bishop ‘**not be a recent convert**’ (νεόφυτος, ‘neophyte’) cannot function as a general rule, for it presumes a church like Ephesus, that has been established for some time. We do not find it listed in Paul’s instructions to the less established church in Crete. However, Paul is concerned that a person in whom the faith has only just been planted (see the image in 1 Corinthians 3:6-9) may be carried away by the power of his position, fall into the same trap as the devil (pride) and suffer the same condemnation.

1 Timothy 3:7

Moreover, he must be well thought of by outsiders, so that he may not fall into disgrace and the snare of the devil.

The mission of the church, which is always foremost in Paul's consciousness, requires that outsiders are attracted by the members of the Christian community, and in a special way by the one responsible for overall supervision. Paul could have added, as he did in writing to the Corinthians: 'just as I try to please everyone in everything I do, not seeking my own advantage, but that of many, so that they may be saved' (1 Corinthians 10:32).

While our word ‘bishop’ comes from ἐπίσκοπος, we should not imagine a bishop then as exercising his ministry in the manner typical of a bishop today. The essence of the ministry is the same. It is a coordinating, managerial role which is of central importance in fostering the unity of the community. However, many historical factors have influenced the development of the ministry over the centuries. Paul is writing about a married man whose function was to supervise the organisational running of a small local Christian community. The authority exercised by Paul himself, or by his delegate – in this case Timothy – would have set limits on the authority exercised by the bishop.

Also, the bishop's leadership, being a gift of the Spirit, was to be exercised with respect to the direction given the community by the apostles, prophets, and evangelists (see Ephesians 4:11). It is after Paul's death that we see developing the ministry of the bishop as we find it at the beginning of the second century in, for example, the letters of Ignatius of Antioch. Many other historical influences account for the way in which the ministry has been exercised over the centuries.

1 Timothy 3:8

Deacons likewise must be serious, not double-tongued, not indulging in much wine, not greedy for money

This section is also directed to those who are responsible for carrying out certain public ministries in the church. Deacons (διάκονος) were mentioned alongside bishops in the address of Paul's Letter to the Philippians (Philippians 1:1). The διακονία referred to ministry as a delegate in a religious setting. Paul is a delegate from Jesus. Are these ministers called 'deacons' because they are delegates of the bishop in the church of God? The description of the qualities required by deacons makes this likely.

Interestingly, they are not mentioned in the Letter to Titus. Is this because their role emerged only in the more established churches in which the bishop required assistants whom he could delegate to carry out certain of his organisational responsibilities?

1 Timothy 3:8

Deacons likewise must be serious, not double-tongued, not indulging in much wine, not greedy for money

Like the bishops (see 3:4), the deacons must be ‘**serious**’ (σεμνός, sensitive to the sacred). In carrying out the instructions of the bishop or in teaching as his delegate, he must be direct and sincere, not saying one thing and meaning another. Again matters of excessive drinking and handling of money are mentioned (see 3:3).

1 Timothy 3:9-10

they must hold fast to the **mystery of the faith** with a pure conscience. And let them first be tested; then, if they prove themselves blameless, let them serve as deacons.

In a church troubled by erroneous teaching, Paul underlines the central importance of ‘**the mystery of the faith**’. The word ‘mystery’ takes us to the heart of the gospel as Paul sees it, for it speaks of the revelation of God’s love and God’s plan of salvation as seen in the self-giving of Jesus on the cross.

This is the third time Paul has linked ‘**faith**’ with ‘**conscience**’ (see 1:5,19). He is concerned that their faith be expressed in their conduct which is to be ‘**pure**’, and so characterised by love. They are to be ‘**tested**’ and prove ‘**blameless**’ before being allowed to ‘**serve as deacons**’.

1 Timothy 3:11

Women likewise must be serious, not slanderers, but temperate, faithful in all things.

It is difficult to know to whom Paul is referring in verse eleven. If it is to the wives of deacons, one is left wondering why he should select them out, having said nothing about the wives of bishops. If it is to female deacons, one wonders why he goes straight back to speak of the men in verse twelve.

1 Timothy 3:12-13

Let deacons be men of one wife, and let them manage their children and their households well; for those who serve well as deacons gain a good standing for themselves and great boldness in the faith that is in the Messiah Jesus.

Like bishops, deacons are to be ‘men of one wife’. Again like bishops, deacons are to be able to ‘manage their own households well’ (see 3:4-5).