

## **Tough Topics: The Anatomy of a Tough Passage—1 Timothy 2:8-3:1**

### **The Text (ESV):**

*I desire then that in every place the men should pray, lifting holy hands without anger or quarreling; likewise also that women should adorn themselves in respectable apparel, with modesty and self-control, not with braided hair and gold or pearls or costly attire, but with what is proper for women who profess godliness—with good works. Let a woman learn quietly with all submissiveness. I do not permit a woman to teach or to exercise authority over a man; rather, she is to remain quiet. For Adam was formed first, then Eve; and Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and became a transgressor. Yet she will be saved through childbearing—if they continue in faith and love and holiness, with self-control. This saying is trustworthy.*

### **The Text (My Translation from the Greek):**

*Therefore I desire that the **men/husbands** to pray in every place by lifting holy hands apart from wrath and dispute. Likewise also **women/wives**, in appropriate attire with modesty and prudence to adorn themselves...not in braids and gold jewelry or pearls or costly clothing, **BUT** in what is appropriate for a **woman/wife** laying claim to godliness—with good works. Let a **woman/wife** learn in all submissiveness. And I do not permit a **woman/wife** to teach nor to have authority over a **man/husband**, **BUT** to be in quietness. For Adam was molded first, then Eve. And Adam was not deceived, but the **wife**, falling in deception, she was in transgression. Now she will be saved through the act of childbearing, if they remain in faith and in love and with prudence (self-control). This is a faithful saying.*

The issues abound! First things first...

### **I. The Context**

**Of the letter**—Paul is writing to his protégé Timothy, a pastor. It is likely that Timothy is now in Ephesus but had lately been in Corinth with Paul (this is important for our later discussion). What Paul says is for the “ears of the whole church” but he is addressing *specific pastoral concerns*.

**Of the chapter**—Paul is writing topically in chapter two. The first topic is that of prayer (1-4). The next is a hymn of Jesus (vs. 5-6). Then Paul reasserts his apostolic authority and mission (verse 7). Then our topics.

**Of the verses**—the concern and context is that of *worship and teaching the faith*. Paul talks of men “lifting holy hands in every place...”. This is worship. What follows is that women/wives should learn the faith within the created order between men and women.

### **II. Just a Little Vocabulary Consideration**

While it may be confusing to us, in both the Hebrew and Greek languages, **the standard words for man and woman (when speaking of biological sex and not universal mankind) is also the same word for husband and wife.**

Whenever Paul uses *both* these terms for man and woman in the *same context*, the *husband and wife relationship is in view*. That is why in my translation I’ve rendered

these words **woman/wife** and **man/husband**. It is to capture the reality of created order being expressed here. As well, the appearance of Adam and Eve should clue us in(!).

*Please be aware...whenever anyone born after the 1920s reads these types of passages, we bring along with us our own biases, world view, and accepted conventions. As best we can, we strive to be aware of them and **lay them aside**. For instance, we have all been shaped by a culture that has been informed by the **women's liberation movement** and **the sexual revolution of the 1960s** and beyond. Know this. Now set it aside.*

### **III. The Meaning/Argument/Interpretation**

What is Paul actually arguing for and against?

1. **Verse 8**—He is arguing that men/husbands are to worship (pray) by “raising holy hands”. Not because “posture” is important, but the concern is of **harmony and order in worship**. Paul desires **the manner of prayer be devoid of wrath and dispute**.

See 1 Corinthians 14:36-40 (ESV):

*Or was it from you that the word of God came? Or are you the only ones it has reached? If anyone thinks that he is a prophet, or spiritual, he should acknowledge that the things I am writing to you are a command of the Lord. If anyone does not recognize this, he is not recognized. So, my brothers, earnestly desire to prophesy, and do not forbid speaking in tongues. **But all things should be done decently and in order.***

The topic-du-jour in 1 Corinthians 14 is that of “speaking in tongues”. But what Paul deems important is that all things are **done decently and in good order** that the Church **be built up** (see verses 5, 12, 17, 26, 40). **Men who quarrel in worship disrupt order and the building up of the Body of Christ.**

2. **Verses 9-10**—Following the above exhortation, Paul says likewise that women/wives should be adorned in modesty and good works. Again, 1 Corinthians 11:13-16 is instructive:

*Judge for yourselves: is it proper for a wife to pray to God with her head uncovered? Does not nature itself teach you that if a man wears long hair it is a disgrace for him, but if a woman has long hair, it is her glory? For her hair is given to her for a covering. **If anyone is inclined to be contentious, we have no such practice, nor do the churches of God.***

(Note: “head covered” likely refers not to “hats” but to “hairstyles”)

Note the concern that the different biological sexes are to comport in different ways in “prayer” with the goal being 1) a lack of contention and 2) good order.

**Women are to worship in a manner appropriate, modest, and not causing undo attention to their appearance.** The practice in ancient Corinth seems to have been that women/wives would use their hairstyle to point to their wealth. By wearing the hair “up” (=braided) and putting in gold jewelry and pearls in the coiffure, women would cause class distinction and contention. Paul warns against this practice! Instead, they are to be adorned with good works, that which is fitting to a godly woman.

**So, is Paul forbidding the use of jewelry or braiding of hair? Certainly not! What he is forbidding is using wealth as a way to divide the congregation.**

3. **Verse 11**—Moving on to a slightly new topic, Paul says that a woman/wife is to learn “in quietness”.

\*At this point, take a breath. Be aware of your own “cultural biases” and read Paul fairly.

**The first thing Paul says is that “a woman/wife is to learn”.** This was a radical notion and practice! Jewish women were not typically taught the faith, *but only the men*. While women were involved in the religious observances of the community, most Jewish females were not given catechesis (instruction). So, what Paul says is very counter-cultural! He endorses that the wife also “learn”.

Again, it is the manner of the thing that is in question. Women are to learn “in quietness”. Does this denote **silence**? No! Women were to “pray” and “prophesy” (1 Corinthians 11:5). What is likely going on is the same issue raised in 1 Corinthians 14:33-35 (ESV):

*For God is not a God of confusion but of peace. As in all the churches of the saints, the women should keep silent in the churches. For they are not permitted to speak, but should be in submission, as the Law also says. If there is anything they desire to learn, let them ask their husbands at home. For it is shameful for a woman to speak in church.*

Remember the vocabulary discussion above in part II? This near context refers to wives (primarily) and helps illumine our discussion. The wives are to “keep silent”, that is, **not be disruptive!** Paul refers to the same issue in *1 Corinthians*, that women should learn (the faith) without disrupting the natural order between the sexes as seen chiefly between husbands and wives.

The picture might be something like this—*a wife was interrupting or disrupting her husband in public worship, or undermining his authority. This would cause strife and turmoil, the very thing Paul warns against.*

Note well—both passages are the strongest Scriptural arguments **against women ordination!** Not based on capability, but **on the way God arranged the creation**. The wife is to “submit” to the husband and the husband is to love the wife as Christ loves the Church (Ephesians 5:22ff)! In this arrangement, wives/women do not serve as the “head” of a congregation, church, denomination, etc. Positively, all throughout Paul’s writings and *Acts*, women played a **demonstratively important role in the Church**. Paul is “pro-woman”! He is simply *advocating an appropriateness in accordance with God’s design.*

4. **Verse 12**—With the above in mind, Paul is very clear—**he does not permit a woman/wife to teach OR have authority over a man/husband.**

Again, the context of worship, the ministry and the teaching of the faith is in view. What is likely NOT being asserted is that women can’t be schoolteachers or college professors. The word for “teaching” is most certainly tied to **teaching the faith** (the word for “disciple” is derived from the Greek verb used here). The Greek verb for “have authority” is **only used here in the NT**. It means something like “tell a husband what to do”. Remember the context and the created order! This is what Paul has in view.

The admonition to “remain quiet” is again, to not disrupt or cause contention. This does not mean silence as in “never speaking” or participating. It just doesn’t.

5. **Verses 13-15**—Finally, Paul brings things to a close by *directly connecting* to the narrative of creation and the fall. This is very instructive. It tells us that what’s been in view all along is:

1. The order of creation
2. The relationship between husbands and wives

While what Paul says relates to men and women in general, the order/arrangement between husband and wife is the paradigm for all human relationships between man and woman, as Adam and Eve are paradigmatic for men and women...as Christ and His bride the Church are the ultimate “antitype” for husbands and wives.

Check the translations on verse 15!

ESV: *Yet **she** will be saved through childbearing—if **they** continue in faith and love and holiness, with self-control.*

NIV: *But **women** will be saved through childbearing—if **they** continue in faith, love and holiness with propriety.*

KJV: *Notwithstanding **she** shall be saved in childbearing, if **they** continue in faith and charity and holiness with sobriety.*

NASB: *But **women** will be preserved through the bearing of children if **they** continue in faith and love and sanctity with self-restraint.*

NRSV: *Yet **she** will be saved through childbearing, provided **they** continue in faith and love and holiness, with modesty.*

Lexham: *But **she** will be saved through the bearing of children, if **she** continues in faith and love and holiness with self-control.*

CEV: *But **women** will be saved by having children, if **they** stay faithful, loving, holy, and modest.*

ASV: *but **she** shall be saved through her child-bearing, if **they** continue in faith and love and sanctification with sobriety.*

Quite a variety of renderings!

Again, here it is literally from the Greek: *And/but she will be saved through childbearing, if they remain in faith and in love and in holiness with self-control/prudence.*

I think it’s straightforward.

She=Eve

They=Adam and Eve

While Eve was the “transgressor”, Paul holds Adam responsible for it (see Romans 5:13)! But Eve also received the promise of the “offspring”, the proto-evangelion. In this way, she is “saved”...and all of humanity who believe in Jesus. It is through the line of the promise (through childbirth) that the Messiah and Savior is born of a virgin, Son of David, Son of God.

The “they” extends to all husbands and wives, and men and women in the faith living in their created roles. In Christ, we are redeemed and sanctified to live in accordance with God’s plan for male and female.

6. Finally, I believe that 3:1 (*this saying is faithful/trustworthy*) is actually referring back to 2:15 and not ahead to 3:2. There is precedent in Paul’s pastorals to see this saying as referring to *what precedes*. See 1 Timothy 4:9 and Titus 3:8. Paul does move on to the qualifications for a pastor, which fits with 2:8-15.