

September 18, 2016

I Timothy 2:1-15: “Right Relationships”

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Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Our appointed epistle lesson for this morning is like trying to eat an elephant in 20 or so minutes. I suppose that one could say that this could be the case for just about any section of the Bible if we really choose to plunge into the depths of interpretation and application. Still, over the years of teaching, I have found that the passages which require the most explanation are the ones considered to be highly controversial. That is the case here. While we will not eat the elephant, maybe we can take a few bites.

In trying to tackle our text in such a short sermon, perhaps the best way to do it is to break it down into smaller pieces, and then explain it as concisely as possible. The apostle Paul writes: *“First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all people, for kings and all who are in high positions, that we may lead a peaceful and quiet life, godly and dignified in every way. This is good, and it is pleasing in the sight of God our Savior, who desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth (1 Tim. 2:1-4).”*

“All people” means everyone, and Paul includes government. With the way things are in the political arena, as we consider how much we pay in taxes, it might be hard to pray for anyone who is in a high position. Still, we pray that they would know the truth, hold to it, and do the duty that God has given them to do for the good. As Paul writes in Romans 13, “there is no authority that has not been established by God . . . he is the avenger who carries out God’s wrath on the wrongdoer . . . Pay to all what is owed to them: taxes . . . revenue . . . respect . . . honor.” And with these words I would add another point: if we are commanded to stop teaching the name of Jesus: “We must obey God rather than man (Acts 5:29).”

God desires all people to be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth. It is no wonder then that we must keep teaching when we are told to “shut up!” People have the power to reject God and turn their hatred toward Christians. When we pray for those who are in high positions, we are asking God to fill them with his truth, righteousness, and justice. When he grants our request, this paves the way for the Gospel to be freely preached. It is one of the greatest obstacles imaginable to have those in high positions opposed to God’s Word. We have had a great blessing in this country with “freedom of speech and religion.” Those days are coming to an end as we are now being socially and legally pressured into keeping quiet.

But, we have a powerful message that stands eternal. As Paul continues in our epistle lesson: *“For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all, which is the testimony given at the proper time (1 Tim. 2:5-6).”* Whoever believes in Jesus will not keep quiet, for they know the truth, and the truth has set them free from the guilt of sin and the punishment of death and hell. Christians should not be quarrelsome or harsh, nor should they smack lions in the nose, but rather they hope that God would lead many to repentance and to a growing knowledge of the truth. They have been sent to boldly declare the truth, whether publicly in the church as a pastor, or privately outside the church as the priesthood of all believers (Acts 4:27-31).

As sent by Christ, the apostle Paul then says, *“I desire then that in every place the men should pray, lifting holy hands without anger or quarreling; (1 Timothy 2:8-10).”* Please do not get caught up in the

thinking that Paul is commanding that all prayer must be with lifted hands. This was one of a few ways to pray. What is striking is that the men should pray lifting *holy hands*, which means that males are given the responsibility by God to actively manage public worship in the church with holiness. This does not mean that women are not to pray or worship collectively with the men. In order to understand all that Paul is saying, one must understand a basic, foundational principle. Some of you have heard it before.

When God made human beings male and female, he made them to be a physical picture of what he wants to have with us forever in heaven. The male was designed to be a physical representation of God, and the female was designed to be a representation of all humanity in relation to God. Since truth comes from God to humanity, males are given the responsibility by God to manage public worship in the church where, in the means of grace, God makes all of us holy through his one and only Son. This is illustrated in the Garden of Eden. When God speaks his first message about the trees to Adam, Adam later gives the message to the woman to abide in holiness and avoid death.

It was God who gave and preserved life and holiness to Adam and the woman, and as God ultimately gives and keeps a human being in life and holiness, so does he illustrate this truth by giving this responsibility to the male since woman is from his side. Men are to give up themselves as servants, and do everything in their power to keep women in life and holiness and free from sin and death. Adam failed to do this in the Garden, but Jesus became a man and succeeded in his holy life and death, and thereby proved that he is our perfect man. As the church should never resent what her Savior Jesus Christ has done for her life and holiness, so every female in faith rejoices in whatever a male does for her to keep her in life and holiness as she and he are to be presented before the face of their mutual spouse, Jesus Christ.

Paul adds, *“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.”* Because goodness or holiness is valued above all other things, a woman of faith adorns herself and is beautiful in good works. This is the way the church is to see herself before her Savior. Such truths naturally effect what a woman of faith wears, how she makes herself up, as well as the jewelry she puts on. Paul is not saying here that a woman cannot do her hair, wear jewelry, and put on nice clothing. If that’s the case, then Esther was way out of line when she underwent preparations for the king. Paul is talking about a proper attire in modesty and self-control that is reflective of a godly woman and all she does. One doesn’t need to be bogged down by strange rules and regulations in this matter, for one generally knows the difference between modesty and self-control, and what is assuming, indecent, arrogant, without restraint, and excessive. As the church adorns herself with Christ, so does a Christian woman make it her priority to strive for holiness and good works as her beauty.

Paul closes our section with saying: *“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 (1 Timothy 2:11-15).”* First, Paul is not saying that a woman can’t sing, play the organ, confess her sins or faith, teach Sunday School, or attend to the needs of the church, etc. Rather, it means

that she joyfully allows the man, who represents God, to fulfill his God-given responsibility to serve and do everything to maintain her life and holiness through the means of grace. And she realizes that if a Christian male doesn't strive to do this, he will be blamed for her sins and defilement, just as Adam was blamed for the fall, even though it was the woman who ate the forbidden fruit first. To be silent means not to object, but to receive what is given.

Here is a very simplistic example: when a truly Christian male opens a door for a woman, it is not as if he thinks to himself that she is incapable of opening a door on her own. Rather, he wishes to say to her by such action, or any other action for that matter, I am your servant and I am here for your life and to maintain your holiness before our true head, who is Christ, until we are all with him forever. Now, she could give him an earful and tell him that she can take care of herself, or she could receive the fact that he makes himself a servant to her. The church can do the same.

Submissiveness is the willingness to embrace the service and truth that comes from God, who by his authority and command, gives it through men publicly. God has not given to the woman the duty to teach publicly in the church, or to exercise authority over a man, because it takes away a man's responsibility before God to serve woman as Christ served the church. Woman is exalted, since through child birth she was the vehicle by which the Savior came! The church still holds up the birth of Jesus. And, as Christ became a servant unto death, it is the duty of the man to serve woman and for her to receive such service. And what exactly is problematic if both male and female are in complete submission to God's love and holiness? Only the rebellious do not submit to such truths.

It doesn't make sense for the Christian man not to sacrifice having been touched by Christ. And it doesn't make sense for a Christian woman or the church not to submissively receive what has been so graciously given. As Paul says in another place concerning these matters, "If anyone is inclined to be contentious, we have no such practice, nor do the churches of God (1 Corinthians 11:16)." In other words, if we can't handle these truths about male and female relationships, which is a mutual submission to Jesus, who lived a holy life for us and died for our sins, then we inevitably wipe out the Gospel. God forbid!

Amen.

Pastor Brock Abbott