

# Men and their prayers, women and their dress

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1 Tim 2:8-15

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- These are my rough preaching notes shared with you for the purpose of helping those who were not at the service to get the gist of the sermon, and for those who were to have a reminder of what was said. They are not corrected and polished for printable publication.
- If not done so already, questions for reflection and discussion as well as an audio recording of the sermon in MP3 format, will be posted on the webpage shortly.
- Making these resources available in this way is a new venture. If you do make use of any of them I would value your feed back and comment.

## Introduction

This is the fourth sermon in this series looking at Paul's first letter to his young protégé Timothy. In this pastoral letter we get a window of understanding into a matter that is of central importance to us at this time in our life as a church – namely discipleship.

So I am looking at this letter through that lens, and asking what insight and lessons do we learn, and what is God saying to us as we respond to Jesus' command to make disciple. This letter gives us a look into the discipling relationship between Paul and Timothy, as we see how the great apostle writes his young disciple whom he has left in charge of the church in Ephesus.

Tonight we look at what are some of the most discussed verses in the Pastoral letters. They have been the subject of much debate.

What I want to do as we look at these verses is demonstrate how we apply the principles of hermeneutics (the science of the interpretation of Scripture) so that we can understand verses like these and others.

What we want to do is get as close as we can to hearing them as their original hearers would have heard them. What was the message the original author

wanted to convey to his original hearers. Then we will be a position to hear what God is saying to us now in our context.

I want to high light two principles which are paramount in terms of doing that hermeneutical task.

### **The first is the principle of harmony.**

We believe the Bible to be the written word of God. We also believe that when God spoke he did not contradict himself. So while we acknowledge that Scripture has a rich diversity of both theological emphasis and literary style, we also expect it to have a foundational consistency and continuity.

So as we read these verses about the place of women in the church we should not isolate them from Scripture's fundamental assertion of the equal value and dignity of men and women.

*Gen 1:27 So God created human kind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.*

In Galatians Paul writes ...

*Gal 3:26 In Christ you are children of God through faith ...  
28 There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.*

In Acts 2 Luke records Peter addressing the crowds on the Day of Pentecost...

*Acts 2:17 "In the last days, God says, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your young men will see visions, your old men will dream dreams.  
18 Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days, and they will prophesy.*

There is no difference between the sexes either in the divine image we bear or in our status as children of God, through faith in Christ, or in the empowerment we receive for ministry. So any idea of gender superiority or inferiority is ruled out from the start.

### **Secondly we must apply the principle of history.**

God always spoke his word in a particular historical and cultural setting. God's word was never spoken into a cultural vacuum. Every word spoken in Scripture was spoken in a cultural context.

The incarnation (God becoming a human being in his Son Jesus) is fundamental to the character and nature of God. So God does not give us cold, clinical instructions free of human style and cultural setting.

The nature of the God is that he comes down and enters into our world. God speaks in a language that we understand and into the culture of which we are a part. When God speaks to us it is always relevant and applicable in our lives in our context. This is the wonderful grace of God. He comes to us where we are.

This means that when we look at Scripture, there is always a combination of an *eternal truth* which comes in a *cultural package*.

The cultural packaging is local and applies in a certain place and in certain times.

The eternal truth is universal.

**So for example** Jesus says at the end of the Passover meal (John 13)  
*14 Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another's feet.*

That is a very clear instruction. You should wash one another's feet.

Do we make a practice of washing each other's feet?

No. If it is done at all it is done in church as a symbolic gesture.

But have we thrown out this command and Jesus powerful example in this regard?

No. We recognise the cultural packaging. In a society where everyone wore sandals and walked on dusty roads, washing a person's feet as they arrived after a dusty journey was an act of hospitality and service, usually performed by a slave or servant.

To wash someone's feet was to perform a menial service, but it was also a task of tender care and loving hospitality.

That is what Jesus was on about. So we distinguish between the cultural packaging and eternal truth, and recognise that Jesus is instructing us to take on the lowliest task and be willing to serve one another in menial ways.

In our context it would be doing the washing up or cleaning the toilets, carrying a bag, waiting patiently for a visitor to arrive so we can attend to their needs.

**So as we study these verses** and seek to understand and then apply them in our context we need to apply

**the principle of harmony** – how do they fit into the whole witness of Scripture; and

**the principle of history** – what in them is cultural package and what is eternal truth?

In these verses Paul writes to Timothy about three things.

- Firstly to men with regards to their prayers – vs 8.
- Secondly to women with regard to their dress – vs 9 & 10.
- And thirdly to women with regard their role in the church - vs 11 & 15.

### **(1) Men and their prayers**

*8 I want men everywhere to lift up holy hands in prayer, without anger or disputing.*

Here are three universal characteristics of public prayer. Or expressing them negatively, three hindrances to prayer: namely sin, anger and quarrelling.

The reference to holy hands reminds us of Psalm 24:4-6.

*4 Those who have clean hands and a pure heart, who do not put their trust in an idol or swear by a false god.*

*5 They will receive blessing from the LORD and vindication from God their Saviour.*

Here Paul uses a picture to convey an inward reality. The state of our hands is a picture of the state of our heart. So it is useless to spread out our hands to God in prayer if they are defiled, if they are dirty. It is also useless to come to God in prayer, full of anger and quarrelling with one another. It is obviously inappropriate to approach God in prayer if we are harbouring unforgiveness, resentment or bitterness against other people.

Jesus insisted that reconciliation must precede worship. (Matt 5:23-24).

*23 "Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother or sister has something against you,  
24 leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled; then come and offer your gift.*

So holiness, love and peace are indispensable to prayer.

In this context where the church was divided and Timothy had some serious issues to deal with as regards the false teachers, there could easily be a tendency to use public prayer to hit out at others. Where words used would be addressed more to the congregation than to God.

*Lord, you know that I am following your ways with all my heart, please show those who disagree with me the error of their ways and bring them repentance and accept that they have been misled by the enemy.*

I think it is worth commenting on the fact that this instruction is directed to the men. Men have a tendency to compete. They love a fight. To be able to watch 4 rugby matches this weekend is sheer delight!

But Paul is saying, Timothy watch that tendency amongst the men. There is a place for healthy competition, but anger, quarrelling and sin are not attitudes we carry into the prayer life of the church.

But what about lifting up our hands? Is this equally essential?

No. Bodily postures and gestures in prayer are cultural and a wide range of variations occur in Scripture. The normal posture while worshipping, for men at that time, was to stand.

When the Levites summoned the people to prayer they called them to ...

*Neh 9:5 ... stand up and praise the Lord your God.*

While standing before God it seems to have been common to either to lift the hands to him or spread them before him as an expression of dependence and faith – as many of us do today.

But standing was not the only way people prayed.

*Gen 17:3 ... Abram fell face down before God.*

*2 Sam 7:18... David sat before the Lord*

*Phil 2:9 ... at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth,*

So to sum up, although holiness, love and peace should always accompany our prayers, whether we stand, or sit, or bow down, or kneel, or fall on our face, or whether our hands are lifted or spread, or folded, or clasped, or clapping or waiving matters little.

The point is that we come to God with open hearts, with pure hearts, without quarrelling, without anger – and seeking to be free of sin.

But one recognises too that Scripture teaches that our prayers are not heard because we are holy and good. Our prayers are heard because of God's grace and mercy. So we do not earn the right to be heard, and we do not put off praying because we see ourselves as not good enough. We come to God seeking his pardon and forgiveness. We can't honestly be doing that if we are angry and holding a grudge or harbouring unforgiveness.

Is there anyone who you need to forgive ...  
 is there any sin you need to confess ...  
 is there any resentment or quarrel you need to lay down?  
 Do it, and then come and lift your hands in worship of God.

## **(2) Women and their dress**

*9 I also want women to dress modestly, with decency and propriety, not with braided hair or gold or pearls or expensive clothes, 10 but with good deeds, appropriate for women who profess to worship God.*

The word Paul uses for “dress” is *kosmew* (from which we get cosmetics). And the NASV translates it as “adorn”. In Greek the structure of the sentence is such that Paul says ...

*I want women to adorn themselves.*

It is important to note his positive desire before coming to the qualifications that he mentions. When a woman adorns herself, she is seeking to enhance her beauty. So Paul recognises both that women are beautiful and that they should seek to increase and exhibit their beauty. There is not biblical warrant in these verses for women to neglect their appearance, or to conceal their beauty in any way. The question is how they should adorn themselves.

There are three parts to Paul's instructions that follow.

**Firstly**, he tells women ...  
*to dress modestly, with decency and with propriety.*

It's not possible to distinguish these words from one another in a clear cut way. But the general impression is clear, that women are to be discreet and modest in their dress and not to dress in a way that is deliberately suggestive or seductive.

**Secondly**, Paul tells women not ...

*to adorn themselves with braided hair, or gold, or pearls, or expensive clothes.*

Unlike the first part of this verse, this is surely not an absolute ban on all hairstyles in which the hair is plaited, or jewellery which incorporates gold or pearls, and all clothing which is expensive or elegant.

If the glorified church in Revelation (21:2) is portrayed as ...

*... as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband ...*

... it is evident that not all material adornment is frowned upon.

No. Hairstyle, jewellery, clothing have different meanings in different cultures. Paul's concern was that Christian women in Ephesus had to make sure that the way they dressed themselves was in no way like the hundreds of prostitutes that were employed in the Temple of Artemis, nor should they display themselves like the elite matrons Ephesian society with over indulgence in all things material.

The point was that these women, some of whom were converts from that way of life, needed to display a new beginning, a new way of life. It started with the way they dressed.

The way we dress creates a first impression. Whether we like it or not our outward appearance conveys a message.

So for those women who had left their former way of life and were now followers of Jesus, they needed to display this new beginning in the way they dressed.

**Application:**

The challenge for us is to ask the question – what message do you want to convey by the way you dress. You will convey a message. What do you want to say?

When I was ordained ... (story about colour of clerical shirts) ... make sure you cause offence about something worth while.

So for those women who had left their former way of life and were now followers of Jesus, they needed to display this new beginning in the way they dressed.

But they also needed ...

**Thirdly**, to adorn themselves (vs 10)  
*with good deeds, appropriate for women who profess to worship God.*

Paul is instructing Timothy to remind the women (and note that he describes them as worshipers of God) that there are two kinds of beauty - the beauty of body and the beauty of character.

The Apostle Peter also contrasted braided hair and the wearing of gold jewellery and fine clothes with the “unfading beauty of a gentle, quiet spirit which is of great worth in God's sight. (1 Peter 3:3-4)

### **Application:**

In an age where so much emphasis is placed on outward appearance and exorbitant amounts of money is spend on fashion and grooming for both women and men, this is message we need to hear.

How much are you spending on fashion and grooming?  
 God's grace shines more beautifully than anything else.

We need to recognise and encourage this. In the complex dynamics of relationships between men and women there is a point here for us to take note of and apply in the way we view others and ourselves.

The application of the truth conveyed in the cultural packaging of these verses is that we can make choices. Just as we make choices about what clothes we will put on, we can make choices about what we will look for and admire and encourage in others.

We (and this includes men and women) can choose to admire and esteem and applaud the beauty of good deeds, or we can choose to admire and go after physical beauty and set it above the beauty of a grace filled life style.

We can choose to affirm and encourage the beauty of generous acts of kindness. We can choose to compliment a peaceful gentle spirit. We can choose to admire and be inspired by goodness and faithfulness.

We can show what choice we have made by the way we view and think or and speak about one another.

As I read these verses I see them as in some ways more of a challenge to men than to women.

What will we choose to esteem and value in others? What will we, as followers of Jesus, set as values and priorities, in the way we use our resources and choose to spend our time and our money.

### ***(3) Women and their role in the church***

*11 A woman should learn in quietness and full submission.*

*12 I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man; she must be silent.*

*13 For Adam was formed first, then Eve.*

*14 And Adam was not the one deceived; it was the woman who was deceived and became a sinner.*

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

Applying the principle of history we need to remember the cultural context into which these instructions are given.

Ephesus had a large Jewish population, and the false teachers that were causing Paul concern had a strongly Jewish Christian orientation. It involved a

**misinterpretation of the Law.** This included speculative interpretations of biblical genealogies and stories, turning them into “myths”. This speculation had created controversy and disunity in the church. Finding hidden truths in Jewish Law was distracting the church from its mission to Gentiles, which Paul strongly reaffirms. Some women in the church had proved particularly vulnerable to this teaching. That was the one issue.

Another was inappropriate living: Food laws were being reintroduced and marriage was forbidden. There was an **imposition of an unhealthy ascetic life style** on the church by leaders who were indulging themselves in excess, particularly in financial greed.

Then there was the temple of Artemis, which seems by the time Paul visited Ephesus to have had a female priesthood with sexual activity part of the worship. The fact that the Artemis cult dominated the economy and culture of the society was huge challenge to the church.

Then there was the “New Women” movement which was making a huge impact on Roman culture in this period. The “new women” flouted traditional rules concerning dress code in public and in particular sexual behaviour. Roman men had always exercised the right to promiscuity. This movement was insisting on the same rights for women.

It is against this historical background that we view these last verses.

The core of the problem for Paul was the false teaching in the church, to which some women had proved vulnerable. He refers to this later in chapter 5 verse 15.

In that culture women were not usually provided with the same level of education as men. A rabbi of that time said wrote that it would be better to burn the law than teach it to a woman.

But Paul instructs Timothy to permit a woman to learn.

*11 A woman should learn in quietness and full submission.*

Like all disciples we should learn in submission to those who have God given authority and responsibility. That applies to men and women.

In verse 12 he forbids women to teach and assume authority over men, and he uses a rare word which probably implies abuse of authority. His concern is that he does not want Christian women to seem like the priestesses of Artemis.

He quotes Genesis to support this instruction. Using the hermeneutical principle of harmony this reference to Genesis must be interpreted in context to apply in this situation. There are many passages in Scripture which refer to the significant role women played in the Early Church.

It was Mary of Nazareth who accepted the call and gave birth to Jesus.

It was Mary of Magadala who was the first to see the risen Lord.

It was four women of all the disciples who stood at the cross.

Priscilla with her husband Aquilla was a valued teacher in the early church who disciplined Apollos (Acts 18:26) and lead a church (1 Cor 16:19).

Euodia and Syntyche, in spite of their quarrel, were women who laboured in the gospel (Phil 4:2,3)

Paul held Lois and Eunice (Timothy's mother and grandmother) in highest regard (2 Tim 1:5).

In Romans 16 there many women who are held in honour for their hard work

So against the historic back ground spelled out already, and holding to the principle of harmony with the rest of Scripture, my conclusion is that this was not a universal instruction for all time, but Paul addressing a local situation that needed a particular solution to address the issues in the community at that time.

In like manner the reference to a **woman being saved through child bearing** is a bit mystifying.

Do we take it face value and say it means that women come to salvation through giving birth to a child! That would be something quite contrary to the rest of scripture. It is suggested no where else. We are saved by faith.

Some have suggested that it means that women are delivered through the pain and peril of labour. But there are faithful women for whom that is not true.

Most commentators suggest that it is a reference to Mary giving birth to Jesus the Messiah and Saviour of the world.

Here is another possibility. Maybe in contrast to what was happening in Ephesian culture, and in the temple of Artemis in particular, where the sexual act was not preformed with children in mind, and where in the church some were forbidding marriage and thus sexual relations between husband and wife that would lead to procreation, Paul was encouraging normal sexual relations between husband and wife that lead to the birth of children and continuation of the family and community.

I don't know – suggestion on a postcard!

### **Application:**

But lets leave speculation aside and ask what this means for us now in our context. I see here a huge challenge for us as we seek to be followers of Jesus and as we seek to make disciples and nurture them in their walk with Jesus.

The challenge for us in reading these verses is, are we willing to submit and surrender what we see as our rights and privileges, for the sake of the health and growth of the Body of Christ?

Am I prepared to forego what is rightfully mine and what I am entitled to, for the sake of over all health and witness of the body of Christ?

Paul teaches in 1 Cor 12 about the beauty of the church being like a body with many parts. Some need special care and are treated with special modesty. Other parts don't need that as much. Some parts are weak and seem indispensable, but they are essential and need special care. If one part suffers all suffer. If one part is honoured, every part rejoices with it.

There are times when we surrender our rights and needs for the greater good of the church.

In this context in this station, given the complex cultural context Paul deemed it right that the women needed not to take a leading role in public worship.

No one should abuse authority ever. That was rife in their society at that time so particular care needed to be taken. Some women had proved vulnerable to false teachers. The solution was that women should be taught – radical departure from the cultural norm – but be involved in teaching men.

Some times we will be required to submit to things in the church which we do not find easy. Some times things may be required of us which sit uncomfortably. The decision is not one with which we would necessarily agree. It is made by those place in positions of leadership and responsibility in the church.

Are you willing to learn the lessons of submission and obedience?

**Illustration:** Requiem Mass for Mrs Patlele.

What are you not willing to surrender? What freedom does God want you to know?