

THE WOMEN OF THE CHURCH

1 TIMOTHY 02:09–15

Introduction

This is a vibrant passage of Scripture, a passage that stirs both men and women to sit up and listen. It even arouses emotions and reactions from some, in particular within societies where women's rights have become a heated issue. The subject is women in the church: the place of women in public, in the church, and in the home or in childbearing.

- I. In public, women are to dress modestly (v. 9-10).
- II. In church, women are to learn in quietness and submissiveness (v. 11-14).
- III. In church, women are not to teach nor to have authority over men (v. 12-14).
- IV. In the home, that is, in childbearing, women are to be saved if they continue to live and walk in the Lord (v. 15).

I. *1 Timothy 02:09–10 Women's Dress*

In public women are to dress in modest clothing. The words “dress modestly” (*kosmein*) refer to the dress, ornaments, and arrangement of clothing upon the body. But to dress modestly also refers to behaviour and demeanour, that is, the way a woman carries herself, walks, moves and behaves in public. Remember: this passage is being written to genuine Christian women — women who truly believe in the Lord and wish to honour the Lord and to have a strong testimony for Him. The Christian woman wants to guard her clothing and to dress modestly: she wants to watch the way she dresses, walks, moves and behaves in public. She wants to bring honour to the Lord and to build a strong testimony — a testimony that she loves the Lord and has committed her life...

- to help people, not to seduce them.
- to serve people, not to destroy them.
- to point people to Jesus, not to attract them to herself.
- to teach people righteous behaviour, not fleshly and worldly behaviour.

Scripture covers three things about the adorning or dress of a true Christian woman. All three are revealing. They demonstrate exactly where a woman stands — regardless of profession: either with Christ or with the world.

1. The Christian woman is to dress and behave modestly and to keep herself under control at all times.
 - => She is to dress modestly, with decency; that is, in public she is to dress and act modestly, somewhat reserved and shy.
 - => She is to dress modestly, with propriety; that is, she is to dress and act appropriately, sensibly, controlled, soberly, calmly, quietly and seriously.
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2. The Christian woman is not to dress to attract attention. This is the point of these negative commands. She is not to dress herself...
- with braided hair: elaborate hair-styles — hair styles that are so different that they break away from acceptable customs and attract attention to herself.
 - with gold, or pearls, or expensive clothing: elaborate jewellery and clothing that is extravagant, ostentatious, flamboyant and that attracts attention to herself.

Donald Guthrie says that a woman's mind is mirrored by her dress (*The Pastoral Epistles*. "Tyndale New Testament Commentaries," p. 74). How true this is! How a woman dresses shows whether she lives in prayer and devotion to God or has deep feelings and desires for the world and the gaping and lustful attention of men.

3. The Christian woman is to dress herself with good works or deeds. Note exactly what this verse says: "Women *profess to worship God*." Their worship of God means that they reverence and fear God and are devoted to Him. These are the women who are committed and concerned with good works. As stated earlier, their minds are upon helping, saving and teaching people, not upon attracting, seducing and destroying them through lustful and immoral thoughts and sexual behaviour.

Now, note a significant fact that is often ignored and sometimes tragically unknown. True beauty is inward, not outward. Think for a moment: a woman who is focused upon Christ and good deeds is at peace with herself. She is filled with assurance and confidence and she has strong self-image and esteem. She has purpose, meaning and significance in life and knows that she is perfectly secure and looked after by Christ. Picture such a woman:

=> her smile — which arises from a joy filling her whole body.

=> her walk — which has a spring in each step.

=> her dignity, calmness, serenity, confidence, security and purposefulness.

Picture her beauty. No matter what her facial features are — no matter how modest her clothing is — she is beautiful. Just how true this is can be easily seen in the opposite picture. Picture the woman who lives in and of the world, concerned about her looks and dress and appearance. Picture...

- her smile — which arises from an emptiness and reveals a dissatisfaction with life.
- her walk and movements — which reveal an insecurity, loneliness and fear of not being accepted for what she is within and the need to *fit in* with her peers.
- her behaviour of looseness, restlessness and her lack of purpose, meaning and significance.

Picture this woman's behaviour. Every man — even if he has known hundreds of women — knows that this woman lacks beauty, no matter how attractive her facial and body features may be. In the eyes of so many in the world, she is good for only one thing: to be used to satisfy the world's greed for money and lust for pleasure.

As stated, beauty is not in looks; beauty is from within. If a woman is beautiful within — if she is really godly and given over to good works — God floods her with a beauty that far surpasses any beauty of the flesh or clothing.

Thought 1. Christian women must be focused upon Christ and upon helping the desperate who are in the communities and cities of the world. Christian women must be focused upon godliness — fearing and reverencing God — and upon good deeds — the good deeds that are so desperately needed by the lost and poor within our communities and cities.

Rom 6:13 *Do not offer the parts of your body to sin, as instruments of wickedness, but rather offer yourselves to God, as those who have been brought from death to life; and offer the parts of your body to him as instruments of righteousness.*

1 Tim 2:9-10 *I also want women to dress modestly, with decency and propriety, not with braided hair or gold or pearls or expensive clothes, but with good deeds, appropriate for women who profess to worship God.*

1 Pet 3:3-5 *Your beauty should not come from outward adornment, such as braided hair and the wearing of gold jewellery and fine clothes. Instead, it should be that of your inner self, the unfading beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is of great worth in God's sight. For this is the way the holy women of the past who put their hope in God used to make themselves beautiful. They were submissive to their own husbands.*

II. 1 Timothy 02: 11–14 Behaviour in Church

In church women are to learn in silence and submissiveness. Two striking points are given in these verses. Remember: this passage is being written to genuine Christian women, women who truly love and wish to honour the Lord and to have a strong testimony for Him. The woman who is a true Christian wants to guard her behaviour in church as well as in public.

The Christian woman is a follower of Christ, a true believer; therefore, she is to learn all she can about Christ. She is to attend church and read, listen and study. She is to show and demonstrate her love for the Lord by learning all she can about Him. And note the spirit in which she is to learn. She is to learn...

- in a spirit of “quietness” (hesuchia).
- in a spirit of “submission.”

Thought 1. There is no difference between men and women in learning about Christ. Therefore, this verse could apply to men as well as to women. Everyone is to learn about Christ; therefore, everyone is to approach the Lord and the church in a spirit of quietness and submissiveness. This is true of any student, whether in a public school, university or church. A student cannot learn if he is always questioning, contradicting, refuting, arguing and differing with the teacher. A student who sits under a teacher in a spirit of arrogance, pride and rebellion seldom learns anything. A student can learn only if he comes in a spirit of quietness and submissiveness, a willingness to listen, read and study under his teacher. In fact, the quieter and more submissive he is to the authority of the professor, the more he is likely to learn.

Therefore, Christian women are to learn of Christ, learn in a spirit of quietness and submissiveness. They are not to be disruptive, arguing, differing, contradicting, grumbling, griping and complaining in church. They are to learn of Christ in church, and they are to learn in a spirit of quietness and submissiveness.

2 Tim 2:15 Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a workman who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth.

1 Pet 2:2-3 Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation, now that you have tasted that the Lord is good.

III. 1 Timothy 02:12–14 Women Teaching in the Church

The Christian woman is not to teach in church nor to have authority over a man. Ears perk up and eyes focus when this statement is read, and in some cases emotions are aroused, especially in societies where the struggle for women's rights are being fought. What does Scripture mean? Scripture is brief and factual. A simple statement is made: "I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man." But note: a woman is not forbidden to teach nor forbidden to hold authority. She is only forbidden to teach and to hold authority over a man. Why? Why is she allowed to teach and manage other women and children but not men?

1. Because God created in an organized and orderly fashion; He created everything to have its own order and function. In relation to human beings, God created man first, then woman. God created man...
 - to be the driving force of creation.
 - to take the lead.
 - to oversee the family and its welfare.
 - to plough the way.
 - to be the initiator.

The woman was created not as a competitor but as a counterpart. She is just as unique a creation as the man and her function is just as important as the man's, but her function upon earth is not the same as man's. In the plan of God's creation, each supports,

complements and works *along the side* of the other. Therefore, within the church the teaching and administrative leadership of the church is to be headed up by the man.

2. God created man and woman with different natures. Women were created with more of an open and receptive, trusting and intuitive, tender and bearing nature. Because of her receptive and trusting nature, she tends to believe things and to follow along more easily than man. Therefore, she is more easily deceived than man. This is what happened with Adam and Eve when they fell into sin. Eve was deceived and followed along with the temptation, but not Adam. He knew exactly what he was doing. He sinned because he loved the woman and wanted to know the pleasure of sin with her. He knew exactly what he was doing; therefore, he was in the greater wrong.

The point is this: by nature, men are built more to take the lead in teaching and administration; whereas women are built more to receive and follow.

1 Cor 11:3 Now I want you to realize that the head of every man is Christ, and the head of the woman is man, and the head of Christ is God.

1 Cor 14:34-35 Women should remain silent in the churches. They are not allowed to speak, but must be in submission, as the Law says. If they want to inquire about something, they should ask their own husbands at home; for it is disgraceful for a woman to speak in the church.

Eph 5:22-25 Wives, submit to your husbands as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the Saviour. Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything. Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her.

1 Tim 2:11-12 A woman should learn in quietness and full submission. I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man; she must be silent.

1 Pet 3:1 Wives, in the same way be submissive to your husbands so that, if any of them do not believe the word, they may be won over without words by the behaviour of their wives.

1 Pet 3:5 For this is the way the holy women of the past who put their hope in God used to make themselves beautiful. They were submissive to their own husbands.

Thought 1. Note an important question: Does this mean that a woman is never to teach or hold authority over a man?

The New Testament gives example after example of women who held a phenomenal position and ministry in the early days of Christianity.

=> Mary of Nazareth was chosen by God to bear and rear and teach God's very own Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, while He was on earth (Lk. 1:26-38).

- => Anna, a prophetess, was chosen by God to predict the future of the baby Jesus (Lk. 2:36-38).
- => It was four women who demonstrated raw courage by standing at the foot of Jesus' cross when all the disciples had fled for their lives (Mk. 15:40).
- => Joanna and Susanna supported the work of Christ (Lk. 8:3).
- => Martha and Mary opened their home to Jesus time and again (Lk. 10:38-39; Jn. 11:5).
- => Mary Magdalene, because of her great love and devotion for Christ, was chosen by God to be the first to witness the Lord's resurrection (Mt. 16:9; Jn. 20:11-18).
- => Tabitha or Dorcas helped the poor of her city by clothing them (Acts 9:36-43).
- => Mary, the mother of John Mark, allowed the early believers to meet in her home (Acts 12:12).
- => Lydia courageously stepped forth and became the very first convert to Christ in Europe (Acts 16:13).
- => Priscilla, along with her husband Aquila, taught the truth of Christ to the young preacher, Apollos (Acts 18:26).
- => Philip the evangelist had four daughters who were prophetesses (Acts 21:9).
- => Phoebe served the church at Cenchrea, probably as a deaconess (see Rom. 16:1-2).
- => Mary of Rome ministered to Paul and his companions (Rom. 16:6).
- => Tryphena and Tryphosa were two ladies who laboured in the Lord (Rom. 16:12).
- => The mother of Rufus became a mother to Paul (Rom. 16:13).
- => Euodia and Syntyche were two women who laboured in the gospel (Ph. 4:2-3).
- => The mother and grandmother of Timothy, Lois and Eunice, taught the Scriptures to Timothy from his earliest childhood (2 Tim. 1:5).
- => The aged women were to teach the young women (Tit. 2.3).

These Scriptures clearly show that women were chosen and gifted by God to hold a significant position and ministry in the early days of Christianity. But it also has to be noted that there is no clear record of a woman serving in the capacity of the head teacher or head authority in the New Testament church (pastor, overseer, or elder). Does this mean that God never raises up a woman to teach all Christians, men and women, or to hold authority on a church wide or world wide ministry? In answer to this question, we have to go before the Lord humbly and openly seek the answer for ourselves. But we must always confess that God is God; therefore, He can do what He wills in order to meet a special need. If He needs to raise up a woman to meet some special teaching or administrative need in the church, He can do it.

Thought 2. Some commentators say that this passage is to be interpreted only in the context of its day. William Barclay's comment gives an example of this position.

“The Christian Church did not lay down these regulations as in any sense permanent regulations, but as things which were necessary in the situation in which the early Church found itself...All the things in this chapter are mere temporary regulations laid down to meet a given situation. If we want Paul’s real and permanent view on this matter, we get it in Galatians 3:28. ‘There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus.’ In Christ the differences of place and honour and prestige and function within the Church were all wiped out....We must not read this passage as a barrier to all women’s work and service within the Church; we must read it in the light of its Jewish background and in the light of the situation in a Greek city. And we must look for Paul’s permanent views in the passage which tells us that the differences are wiped out, and that men and women, slaves and freemen, Jews and Gentiles, are all eligible to serve Christ” (The Letters to Timothy, Titus and Philemon, p. 78).

But note: this position is most unlikely because of the universal reference to Adam and Eve. Scripture is drawing a universal application from the creation of Adam and Eve. It is because God created in an organized and orderly way and gave specific functions to both man and woman that man is to take the lead in blazing the path through life for his family and the church.

Thought 3. There is another possible reason why God has forbidden women to stand before men in a position of teaching and authority, a reason that has perhaps been neglected in discussion. By nature men and women are attracted to each other by looking, but man by nature is the more dominant pursuer. Therefore, by nature he is probably more attracted by looking than the woman is. If a man looks at a woman long enough, he will begin to notice any feature of attractiveness about her. *This is natural and normal*, the way God made man and woman. However, when a woman *stands before* a man for a long time and the man is forced to continue looking at her, the situation becomes ready-made for temptation to attack his mind with suggestive thoughts. This is not to say that every man who sits under the teaching of a woman and who is forced to look at her is thinking immoral thoughts. It only means that when a man is forced to look and look at a woman, the temptation is more likely to happen.

IV. 1 Timothy 02:15 Women’s Role in the Home

In the home, that is, in childbearing, the woman will be saved if she continues in faith, love, holiness and self-control or propriety. This is a glorious promise to the true Christian woman. But what does it mean? Women still suffer pain in childbearing and some women, even Christian women, die when giving birth to a child. The verse refers back to Eve and her sin. The judgment upon her sin was that she would suffer pain in childbearing (Gen. 3:16). The promise seems to mean one of three things.

1. When the promise is kept within the context of this passage, it seems to mean that the woman does not find her salvation and fulfilment through holding positions of teaching and authority but through childbearing (v. 12-14). The very nature of a woman's being, the primary function of a woman's nature and call upon earth, is to carry on the human race. Therefore, the woman's salvation — that is, her ultimate fulfilment, satisfaction and completeness in life — comes through bearing and rearing children. Her salvation and completeness in life does not come from competing with men to see who blazes the paths and builds the roads through the jungles of this earth. She can do these things, but her salvation — her ultimate fulfilment and satisfaction — does not come by doing these things. Contrariwise, the woman will be saved and totally fulfilled if she...
 - will continue in faith: continue believing and trusting.
 - will continue in love: loving the Lord, her husband, believers, and the lost of the world.
 - will continue in holiness: living a life totally set apart to Christ and His purpose.
 - will continue in self-control or propriety: disciplining and controlling her life to follow Christ in all things.
2. A second possible meaning of the verse is this: the sentence of pain in childbearing (the penalty of her sin) does not prohibit a woman's salvation. She shall be saved if she continues in faith, love, holiness and self-control.
3. There is one other possible meaning of this passage that needs to be considered. The definite article (the) is in the Greek before the word "childbearing." That is, the verse reads: "[She] will be saved through childbearing." Some commentators feel that "the childbearing" refers to *the seed* of the woman, that is, to the *greatest childbearing* that has ever taken place which is the birth of Christ Himself. Therefore, the meaning is this: despite the judgment upon the woman (suffering pain in childbearing), the woman will be saved in *the supreme childbearing*, that is, in Christ.

Whatever a person's interpretation, note the condition. The promise is based upon the woman...

- already having faith in Christ.
- already knowing the love of God.
- already living a holy life.
- already controlling her life and following Christ.

John 6:28-29 Then they asked him, "What must we do to do the works God requires?" Jesus answered, "The work of God is this: to believe in the one he has sent."

Heb 11:6 And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him.

1 John 3:23 And this is his command: to believe in the name of his Son, Jesus Christ, and to love one another as he commanded us. ■