

Diving Into 1 Timothy
Submission (1 Tim 2:9-15) & Compassion (1 Tim 3:11)

Paul was on his fourth missionary journey & heading to Macedonia. He instructed Timothy (a representative of the apostles) to care for the church in Ephesus, while he was gone. Word had gotten back to Paul that things were amiss in the Church in Ephesus, but unfortunately Paul was not going to be able to return right away to deal with it personally. He wrote a letter to Timothy encouraging him, and instructing him on how to deal with these issues. Ephesus was dealing with some major issues: there were heresies where people were defining (or combining) their own religious beliefs, they were departing from what Paul had taught them, reverting to their old ways. This isn't something new, and was evident in the Old Testament as well. When ever Israel had a strong godly leader, they fell in line. When ever that leader would leave for a time, or die, they would revert back into their old habits, until the leader (or a new leader) would return. But in that interim, they were doing what felt right, or made sense to them. We see that in Ephesus, when Paul has left.

Paul begins his letter by addressing this issue, and he instructs Timothy on how to reign things in. Paul instructs on praying, roles of men and women, church leaders, warnings about demonic influences, and then he gets into specific details on deacons, ministry instructions, caring for widows and elders, slaves and masters, warning against false doctrine and greed, encouraging Timothy to fight the good fight, instructing the wealthy, and closing it with the charge to guard & protect God's Word.

Paul's letter was a very specific letter, to a specific person, about specific issues, in a specific church. We must recognize this, because it is important in understanding the broader scope. This doesn't discount any of the directions in the letter as without value to other churches, historically, or even today. However, if we want to truly understand why Paul would speak differently about women in this letter, in contrast to his other references in the New Testament, we must understand the context of his letter.

The first time he addresses the women in the letter of 1 Timothy, Paul writes:

8 Therefore, I want the men in every place to pray, lifting up holy hands without anger or argument. 9 Also, the women are to dress themselves in modest clothing, with decency and good sense, not with elaborate hairstyles, gold, pearls, or expensive apparel, 10 but with good works, as is proper for women who affirm that they worship God. 11 A woman should learn in silence with full submission. 12 I do not allow a woman to teach or to have authority over a man; instead, she is to be silent. 13 For Adam was created first, then Eve. 14 And Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and transgressed. 15 But she will be saved through childbearing, if she continues [b] in faith, love, and holiness, with good judgment.

This portion of scripture as been abused, historically. You can easily read this at face value (without interpretation) as instructing women to dress plainly, be quiet, submit to our husbands about everything, and have children in order to be saved, because... frankly... it's all our fault. This misinterpretation of this scripture has led to mental and physical abuse in certain cultures or groups.

In more recent times, men and women have come to agree that this interpretation is wrong. However many still subscribe to it in a modified version. Dressing plainly, you can gently give your opinion, but the final decision is up to him, have children to bless him and God with, learn about God but don't question your teachers, they know more than you.

It is certainly a softer blow, but it doesn't understand the full scope of what Paul was trying to address. When you look in to the culture of Ephesus, you reveal a lot about the women there. The women, particularly those of wealth (or wanting to give the appearance of wealth), would intentionally dress in a way that get the attention of the men in the church. It wasn't about revealing clothing, as most who use the modesty argument would suggest, but instead Paul was commenting on their character, the condition of their heart. To be clothed with modesty was to be humble, letting your inner beauty and character shine through. The outward adornments were signs of status, a way to not only attract men's attention, but to show off in front of other women. Paul was also trying to shift the culture, changing the hearts of women, and to return men into their proper headship of the family unit.

This was because, the women in Ephesus were also often outspoken, and had no problem coming into an environment and taking charge. In the home and even in the temples. The temples were often operated by priestesses, it was more common for the women to have a larger role in the spiritual realm of the city, as well as politics. Paul was concerned about these women coming in and trying to exert this same authority over the churches. Many bible experts have come to agree that Paul was not saying that women could not teach, as a whole. Nor, limiting the teachers in this particular city to men only, indefinitely. Rather, they suggest that Paul was actually saying "no women teachers in Ephesus, for now".

While there is very little written theological documentation of women leading in the early church, there is a plethora of evidence in other forms. We have mosaics and inscriptions, grave markings and memorial markings in early churches, as well as letters, journals, and other written texts that reference women who served as leaders in their churches.

Unfortunately the misunderstanding and poor interpretation of the scriptures had led to many generations that have oppressed women's role within the church itself. Coupled with cultural and political oppression, women were acknowledged for their domesticated gifts. They were relegated into positions of caring for children, making meals for the sick and elderly, and secretarial aspects within the church. We have become so far removed from the early church, that we have forgotten the value and spiritual gifts of the women in our churches and how they can be used. We have forgotten the women who helped form the early church and influenced the church ever since.

When we look at the various letters Paul wrote, he was addressing very real issues for those individual towns. These letters are ones we can draw from when we see the same issues arising in our churches today. Not every church will face the same issues as Ephesus, but if you are a Pastor reading the scriptures and Ephesus sounds and awful lot like what is happening in your church or local community... you can then glean from the instruction Paul gave to Timothy. His letters to Philippi and Galatia were not identical in content, because these cities had different issues to contend with.

In the understanding of the scriptures in 1 Timothy 2:9-15, it is also imperative that we understand who Paul wrote the letter to, why he wrote the letter, and his exact instructions are integral to interpreting what this means to us today. It doesn't contradict other areas of scriptures where Paul acknowledged women in service or leadership within the church, but rather identifies the problem in this particular city and instructs Timothy on the best way to handle it. Paul has the intention of eventually returning to Ephesus to deal with it directly, but due to his delay in returning to Ephesus, he realized he couldn't allow these behaviors to go unchecked. This was a temporary solution, until he could return and deal with it directly.

In Ephesus there were a lot of heart issues to deal with. Women were flaunting their wealth and status, and Paul wanted to reshape the women to have an exterior that reflected their inner beauty and godly character. Paul instructed the women toward “quiet study”; too often it's the word “quiet” that is emphasized, and the call to study is overlooked. Paul wanted the women to study the word, he trusted that they were capable of this task. In the quiet spirit of study, a woman finds herself sitting with the scriptures or leaders and soaking in His Word. Just like Paul didn't want the women flaunting their wealth and status, he didn't want them to draw public attention to their studies. We are not to flaunt our knowledge at others, to raise ourselves above others. Paul also didn't want the women running around teaching something they were not educated in, which is careless and reckless. It was a heart issue, Paul was shaping the character of women to include eventually having the spiritual maturity to lead. However, they must be students first. Paul was reshaping the way the women interacted with their husbands, as he called the women to not exercise authority over them, which was counter culture to Ephesus. Paul was reordering the community to reflect not just the original creation design, but also the relationship of Christ and His Church. Women were to submit to their husbands, as the church submits to Christ. And men were to love women, as Christ loved the church and was willing to die for it. Paul knew that to make these changes, he had to start with the heart, changing the character.

This was not about pride or dominion, or devaluing women as capable image bearers. Paul was attempting to reorder the family unit and the community into God's original design. Submission is not legalistic, but an issue of the heart. While the verses in 1 Timothy are in reference to corporate worship, they parallel the marriage structure found throughout the scriptures.

Paul's instructions actually create the foundation for women's ministry.

- Our leaders are to have an outward appearance that reflects our inner godly character.
- Our leaders are to be serious students of the scriptures, teachable and humble spirits ready to listen and learn.
- Our ministry should be supportive (and submissive) to the greater church vision vs. competitive or divisive.

What 1 Timothy doesn't do is call women to submit to false teaching. If we are students of the word, we will recognize false teaching and stand against it. It also doesn't address male leadership in areas outside of the church and home. There is nothing in the scriptures that indicates a woman can't have a leadership position or position of authority within politics, the marketplace, or in academia. Women are instructed to submit to the body of elders/deacons as a whole, not to one in particular. Creating safety from any one elder taking advantage of his authority. Nor, are the women expected to submit to mean spirited, controlling, or domineering men. It is by no accident that after Paul would instruct the women on their character, he would address the men and elders.

1 Timothy calls women to put the gospel above their own self interests. And Paul ends this portion of the scripture with encouragement for women in their role as life givers, not just through physical birthing of children... but in their roles as giving new life to those with whom they share the gospel. We are called to be in submission to God, and if we can't manage to submit to the authority of our husbands or church leaders... how then can we submit to the authority of God?

What does this mean for women's ministry? If we are to be apart of the church's vision, submitting to our Pastors and elders who are leading the church... how do we do this, and how do we get their support?

It begins with the recognition that this is a ministry under the authority of the church and should be overseen by the church. Our Pastors can no longer sit on the sidelines and allow women's ministry to just “do it's own thing”. They need to step in and be a part of shaping that ministry. If you have an existing ministry, you need your Pastor to not just allow the ministry to exist... but be vested in the development and shaping of the ministry. If you are in a church, without a women's ministry ... and possibly with a male leadership that doesn't support the idea, we approach them with humbleness and a spirit of submission. We share our calling, we share the value it adds to the church, and we humbly request not only their permission but also their guidance.

A great problem in Women's Ministry is that we have been working independently of the church for too long. We have our own agenda, our own ideas, without any input from our Pastors and elders. We are not our own separate ministry, but a ministry that supports the vision that God has put forth on our church. Every event, every activity, every study, and every program should be about forwarding that vision. We need our Pastors and elders to be invested in us, advising and guiding us, involved in the ministry not just allowing it to exist, but shaping it... and we need to let them do so, in humble submission to their authority.

As our hearts change toward submission to the authority of the church, we can embrace one of our most innate gifts as a woman... compassion.

When Paul continues his letter, we read in 1 Timothy 3:3-13 about the qualifications he lays out for “Church Leaders”. What is interesting is that the internal character that Paul is indicating as requirements for leadership by men, are really not that far removed from the expectations of women. It is also interesting to note that Paul points out the responsibility of a man's involvement in rearing his children, and managing his household. In modern societies this has been deemed “womans work” but in the ancient church men were just as responsible for these duties. It was a team effort. Eve was given to Adam as a companion and helper, not an employee or slave. There are scriptures, like Proverbs 31 where we see a woman who is wise, compassionate, a good steward, manager of the home, and has a profitable business of her own.

1 Timothy 3:3-13:

3 This saying is trustworthy:[a] “If anyone aspires to be an overseer, he desires a noble work.” 2 An overseer; therefore, must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, self-controlled, sensible, respectable, hospitable, an able teacher,[b] 3 not addicted to wine, not a bully but gentle, not quarrelsome, not greedy— 4 one who manages his own household competently, having his children under control with all dignity. 5 (If anyone does not know how to manage his own household, how will he take care of God's church?) 6 He must not be a new convert, or he might become conceited and fall into the condemnation of the Devil. 7 Furthermore, he must have a good reputation among outsiders, so that he does not fall into disgrace and the Devil's trap.

8 Deacons, likewise, should be worthy of respect, not hypocritical, not drinking a lot of wine, not greedy for money, 9 holding the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience. 10 And they must also be tested first; if they prove blameless, then they can serve as deacons. 11 Wives, too, must be worthy of respect, not slanderers, self-controlled, faithful in everything. 12 Deacons must be husbands of one wife, managing their children and their own households competently. 13 For those who have served well as deacons acquire a good standing for themselves, and great boldness in the faith that is in Christ Jesus.

I'd like to point out two important notes about this address of church leaders. First, Paul begins by saying "if anyone aspires" to be an overseer. He could have been very specific and said "any man", but he didn't. While some might argue using the wording "he desires a noble work" implies that Paul was referring to a man, we must understand that from a literary standpoint this isn't necessarily so. It's only in more modern alliteration that authors use "he or she" being mindful to include both genders. In most ancient and historical documents it was very common to use "he" in cases where both genders were included. If you were uncertain about the gender the author was referencing, one would look at the entire context of the written work. In this portion of scripture, as well as within the scope of 1 Timothy, we recognize that Paul speaks of both men and women. This was not a letter just addressing one or the other. Additionally as Paul begins this specific section with the words "anyone" it is safe to infer that men and women were included.

Which brings me to the second notation, I wanted to address. If you were to read the entirety of this portion of scripture and there was no mention of women, you could argue that this particular address was for men only. However, Paul interjects a quick address to women... right in the middle of it.

11 Wives, too, must be worthy of respect, not slanderers, self-controlled, faithful in everything.

If a person is opposed to female leadership, this might be quickly dismissed. Their argument would be that in order to be a man in a position of leadership, you must not only have your own character in order... but your wife must as well. From an alliteration stand point, the fact that Paul would even mention this, right in the midst of this exact portion of scripture, infers that women were at least on his mind. But why?

Have you ever attended a church, where the Pastor is married, and had any indication that his wife was not invested in serving the church? In a small baptist church down the road, the Pastor's wife leads the choir and counsels women. In a larger community church several states away they refer to the Pastor's wife as the "First Lady" of the church, an moniker of honor. In the next county over the Pastor's wife is not a paid staff member, but she attends every meeting and acts as the voice of women in her church. In other churches, a Pastor's wife might serve as the Women's Ministry leader.

When we examine the ancient church we see women who served along side their husbands, widows who were revered leaders in the community, and noble women that carried great influence. Archeology supports that there were indeed women leaders in the early church. It would be foolish of us to think that a deacon or elder, would not have a wife that would carry influence and lead the women in their community and church. She would be a pillar, respected, and utilized in the Kingdom mission. Therefore, it was vital the Paul imparted to Timothy that the requirements of leadership extended to the men and their wives, who would from the forefront set the example for other women.

We also cannot afford to overlook translation for this portion of scripture, this is one of those unfortunate areas of scripture where the greek word used ("gyn") can translate to the word "woman" or "wife". In certain bible translations, either word may be used. If it was actually intended to be the word "woman", it would be a fairly cut and dry argument that supported that women could in fact hold leadership positions. And, unfortunately Paul references wives as well as women in general throughout the letter. We can't use the letter to confirm the most accurate translation. We can, however, use the rest of scripture. Knowing that there were women who served as deaconesses (Phoebe, for example), we can use these scriptures to support that these leadership roles and requirements were open to both genders, at the very least, at some point.

These character requirements, added to the aforementioned foundations Paul was establishing for women's ministry, establishing that our first task was to get our own character in order. Our next task is to be an example to other women of what a godly woman looks and behaves like. Which includes being good students of the word, and influencing the women around us. This charge doesn't change,

regardless of the word “woman” or “wife” being used, the responsibility remains the same. Women carried influence in the community, and thus those who are representing the faith needed to meet a certain standard. Paul recognized this, encouraged it, and instructed Timothy to hold them accountable to it.

When women serve in these leadership positions, they become connected to the needs of the community. Women will come to them not only for guidance, but also when they are suffering and need assistance. I've noticed in the the modern church, often a woman who is in need will approach the Pastor's wife or their bible study leader. They are looking for a woman of compassion toward the needs of the flock, who will approach the church leadership on their behalf. The more the women become interconnected with the community, their God given gift of compassion flourishes. Coupled with their spiritual gifts, women leaders discern the best avenues to help, and coordinate the effort. This is also a blessing to the male leadership of the church, as it frees them up to tend to the other needs within the body. We become their helper in not only the practical operations of the church, but also in the emotional needs of it's female members.

One of the reasons that male leadership may give against women in leadership positions is a concern that the women will challenge leadership, but if we are teaching biblical womanhood in the church (through women's ministry) the result is the exact opposite. We develop into a team of leaders who assist the church, taking off some of the burden off the Pastors, using our gifts of womanhood to serve the women in the church in ways the Pastor may not be able to, and ultimately providing a voice to what has become over half our congregation.

Women have an inherent ability to see past the obvious. We can tell when our child is upset, because we recognize the change in their carriage and demeanor. A woman can recognize when her friend is upset about something, because she can recognize the variation in her tone of voice. We have the ability to see the eyes welling up before the tears begin to fall, and we look to each other for support and guidance. A study by UCLA on stress identified that when men suffer from stress, they withdraw from their community (wife, coworkers, etc) and will hole up in their office. However, when women were dealing with stress, they would gather as a community and serve. They start cleaning up the space around them and looking to be in proximity with someone who can either give advice or simply elevate their mood. As a women would enter the room, she would pick up on the stress the other person was suffering from. She would help clean up the space, offer a cup of coffee, and was willing to sit down and talk it through.

This is part of God designed us. We see the weak, suffering, and hurting. We care about the needs and pain of others. We want to help, we are actually compelled to help others from our core. This study changed the perception of “fight or flight” because for decades stress response studies were mostly conducted on men. A male response is “fight or flight”, but a female response is “tend and befriend”. The more she serves, the more she bonds with others, more oxytocin is released and she begins to calm down. The exact methods women will employ to “tend and befriend” may vary.

Some will resort to acts of service. When a friend's husband was in the hospital, she was overwhelmed by his illness, her children, managing the home, and life in general. I showed up at her house, with some activities to keep her kids busy, and cleaned her kitchen and dining room. She needed relief from her daily duties and to focus on her husband. When a woman from our church was diagnosed with cancer, her small group showed up at her home with dinner and they just spent time together as friends. Women will cry with other women, pray with women, raise funds, find meals, get clothing, and even offer up a room in their own home. God called us to open our arms to the needy, whether poor in finances or poor in spirit.

This is how women minister to women in practical ways, through our compassion, sympathy, and empathy. We develop these relationships, which then breeds trust and credibility, and then we fulfill our roles further as we disciple and mentor these same women. Part of our discipleship goes beyond book knowledge of the scriptures, but deeper emotional connections are made, and when fostered we push those emotional connections out into the word. We need trust, and women establish trust in the realm of community, which then opens the door for compassion and deeper relationship.

Many of the events that male leadership may not support, are ones that foster community; and community builds trust and bonded connections. Men see these events as “fluff” and inconsequential, what they don't realize is that these gatherings are part of living life together as Christian women. This community is the basis of the early church's ministry amongst women. As our communities have become disconnected over the ages, we find the community when we gather together as women. We begin building relationships with each other, finding someone who has similar interests or in a similar stage of life. Yet, we also get the opportunity to find the woman with more experience than us to serve as a mentor. We are able to identify the woman with scriptural wisdom to teach us.

Fellowship events become the “tend and befriend” environments women not only want to attend, but need to. How many times has a husband commented that his wife is in a better mood after she gets a girls night out, or comes back from a women's event? In my experiences with the MOPS group, many husbands recognized the blessing that this group was for their wives. Not only was it a group that was encouraging healthy marriages, but they were tending and befriending each other. Women would come home in a better mood, and their husbands would encourage their attendance each week.

The events are important, and as women's ministry leaders we must be mindful that God is always the first on the guest list.