



A Study of 1st & 2nd Timothy

1st Timothy 2:8-15 Men and Women in the Church

I am reading from 1st Timothy chapter two, verses eight through fifteen. If you're using one of the pew Bibles, the passage is located on page 991...1st Timothy 2:8-15.

This is what God's Word says:

ESV 1 Timothy 2:8...I desire then that in every place the men should pray, lifting holy hands without anger or quarreling; ⁹ 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, ¹⁰ but with what is proper for women who profess godliness-- with good works. ¹¹ Let a woman learn quietly with all submissiveness. ¹² I do not permit a woman to teach or to exercise authority over a man; rather, she is to remain quiet. ¹³ For Adam was formed first, then Eve; ¹⁴ and Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and became a transgressor. ¹⁵ Yet she will be saved through childbearing-- if they continue in faith and love and holiness, with self-control.

Let's pray.

Father, we come to you this morning confessing to you our great need. Father we need and we desire that the Holy Spirit come now and take the things of Christ and make them real to our hearts...to come and take the written word and as its true author and therefore its infallible teacher to instruct us in the truth of your Son. Open the book we pray to see what you have accomplished on our behalf, in Christ, in whose name, we pray, Amen.

There are not many passages in the Bible as controversial as the one we have before us this morning in 1st Timothy 2:8-15.

And the funny thing about that is that the passage itself is not really all that difficult to understand.

I mean...the syntax, the grammar, and even the lexical meaning of the various words used in the passage are not really all that difficult to understand or figure out. A careful reader can read the words and the commands in the text and sort out rather quickly what the author had in mind. Still the passage remains dreadfully controversial...dreadfully divisive. It has divided congregations, seminaries, denominations, and even homes.

Again, the reason for that is not because of the exegetical complexity of the passage. I think there is, broadly speaking, something of a consensus as to what Paul...or pseudo-Paul or whoever the modern interpreter or commentator might contend wrote this letter...probably had in mind with regard to his original audience. No, the problem is not exegetical. That is, the problem does not lie with how the passage would have been originally understood. Everyone agrees in principle...not in every detail but in principle...I think, as to what the passage

meant to its original readers. Rather the problem with the passage is hermeneutical...having to do with how modern day readers ought to properly apply the passage to their own situation in the church in light of the assertions or implications the passage makes.

Now before I continue, let me take a moment and remind you as to what some of these twenty-five cents words I've been using actually mean. When I use the word "**exegesis**" I am referring to the preacher or teacher's task of trying to figure out what the passage meant to its original audience. Exegesis is not the only task a Bible interpreter has to take up. But, it is always the first thing he must do.¹ That is, whenever anyone reads the Bible they must do so exegetically. What that means is that they must try to figure out how Brother Stephanus and Sister Lydia understood what the text was saying back to them when they were raising a family over near the meat market in the city of Antioch in the first century AD. They must make every effort to "**lead out**" the meaning of the text, and not try to put their meaning into the text.

On the other hand, when I talk about "**hermeneutics**" I am talking about the Bible teacher or preacher trying to figure out the significance of what the biblical text has to say to us today. I am talking about them trying to figure out and rightly apply what the text means to that cute couple Steve and Lydia who live over in Southlake and who are about to have their first baby. You know the couple I mean. He's an engineer and she's a dentist.

"**Exegesis**" then is the science and art of trying to rightly understand the Bible in its original context.

“Hermeneutics” is the science and art of trying to make the Bible both understandable and relevant for modern readers in a modern context.

And those two things, exegesis and hermeneutics, are linked together at the hip. You don’t have to apply a biblical passage to do exegesis but if you don’t something is seriously wrong. Howard Hendricks, the man famous for his Bible study methods class over at Dallas Seminary, used to say that interpretation without application is abortion...which was his way of saying whenever a preacher or teacher fails to apply the text they have exegeted they have cut short the whole point of messing with the text in the first place.

So exegesis and hermeneutics are inseparably linked at the hip.

Now the general rule regarding the connection between exegesis and hermeneutics goes something like this, **“You cannot possibly get the modern significance of the biblical text right unless you get the ancient significance of the text right.”**

Gordon Fee puts it like this: **“A text cannot mean what it has never meant.”²**

Proper exegesis is kind of like guardrails on the highway of interpretation. If you don’t pay adequate attention to exegesis you are apt to completely leave the highway when you get ready to apply the text to modern listeners.” So **“exegesis”** is the science and art of trying to understand what the passage meant to its original readers while **“hermeneutics”** is the science and art of applying biblical text to its modern readers.

Let me just give you one example of what I mean...a for instance.

There is well-known passage in the several of the gospels where Jesus says, **“How difficult it is for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God! For it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God.”**³

Now for many years there has been a popular interpretation of the passage that goes something like this, **“Well there used to be this gate in Jerusalem called the Eye of the Needle. It was place in the wall of the city used to tighten up security at night. In fact, to get a camel into the city, a camel driver used to have to make their camels get down on their knees and crawl through the gate. The idea was that such a gate would eliminate any sort of surprise attack at night. Now, of course, it was really a hard thing for a camel to do...to get down on its knees and crawl though a gate. And you can see why. Camels are not really built to crawl. Still, it was possible for a camel to get through such a gate...with a great deal of discomfort. That is what Jesus was talking about here.”**

The problem, of course, is that there was no such gate...not in Jesus' day and not in anyone's day prior at least to the 16th century. Now applying what Gordon Fee says when he says, **“A text cannot mean what it has never meant”** would mean that a good exegete would have to scrap that idea completely and go back to what the passage might have actually meant in the first century when Jesus lived.

Let's do that.

I want you to imagine, for a moment, a small, ancient, white-haired woman named Martha sitting in crowd listening to Jesus teach. Let's imagine Martha was a seamstress and made her living sewing for rich people and for friends. Imagine one of the people listening to Jesus and asking Martha, **"Well Martha, what do you think about this teacher Jesus? Do you like the way he teaches?"**

Imagine her replying, **"Oh yes, I like him a lot. Most of the time, I understand what he is talking about. He makes a lot of sense to me?"**

Imagine the other person saying to her, **"Really, he makes sense to you. Well, he doesn't to me. I didn't understand that whole eye of needle thing. What do you think he meant when he said that it was easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than it was for a rich person to enter into heaven?"**

"Oh that's easy. The eye of a needle is a little bitty thing...no bigger than that. And, of course, you already know big a camel is...you see them every single day in the marketplace. Well you could no more get a camel to go through the eye of the needle than the man in the moon."

"So, what do you think his point was?"

"I think he was saying there's not going to be very many rich people in heaven."

You can see what I mean. Jesus wasn't trying to be clever. He was trying to be clear. So if we want to understand the point he was making regarding the

allurement of riches in our time, we have to first get right what he meant in his time.

Once we understand what he meant back then, we can figure out how to rightly apply the text to our own day.

Still, that isn't always easy to do. It sounds like enough to mess with in and of itself, but there are still a couple of other things a Bible reader or teacher must take into consideration. One of those things has to do with things has to do with understanding how cultural considerations affect our understanding of the text.

Here's what I mean by a cultural consideration.

Sometimes the Bible expresses commands that don't readily translate from an ancient culture to a modern one. That is, the way a particular command would have been understood in biblical times may be thought of much differently in modern times.

Let me give you a for instance. There is a command given by Paul to the saints in Rome where he says:

^{ESV} **Romans 16:16...Greet** one another with a holy kiss. All the churches of Christ greet you.

Now just in case you might think this command happened to be some sort of aberration in Paul's instruction, I need you to know that he repeats the same

command in three other passages to two other churches. He gives the same command to the Corinthians in both of his letters to them.

ESV 1 Corinthians 16:20...All the brothers send you greetings. Greet one another with a holy kiss.

ESV 2 Corinthians 13:12...Greet one another with a holy kiss.

Paul also gives the same command to the saints at Thessalonica.

ESV 1 Thessalonians 5:26...Greet all the brothers with a holy kiss.

Now, here's the really important thing. Paul wasn't the only one to give that command. Peter also commands the exact same thing.

ESV 1 Peter 5:14...Greet one another with the kiss of love. Peace to all of you who are in Christ.

So are we missing the boat here? Should we line up after class today and have a big kiss off? I don't think so.

I think the point is that Paul and Peter want the readers of their time to show their affection for each other in a manner that was appropriate to their time and recognized as an acceptable thing to do in their culture. The kiss that is intended here would have been men kissing men and women kissing women. It would have been an outrage for one man to kiss another man's wife. Still, it was not an outrage for a man to kiss a man, or a woman to kiss a woman. Now I am not talking about some sort of erotic modern day lip lock. I am talking instead about

the kind of respectful kiss on the cheek you often see modern day Middle Easterners do to each other.

Paul's point is that his readers were to show their affection and devotion to one another in a culturally acceptable way. The Semitic culture of that day (in fact even the Middle Eastern culture of today) often showed affection between men by kissing each other on the cheek.

We westerners don't want any part of it.

In particular, we Texans don't want any part of it. We may occasionally kiss our wives if nobody is looking. We may even publically kiss our horses. But western Christian men we are foursquare against kissing other men, and we are eight square against other men kissing our wives. Does that mean that we are to ignore Paul's command or to poo poo Peter's command outright? I don't think so.

I think we are to implement his command recognizing the cultural differences between the ancient world and the world we live in today taking account of them while doing our best to show our affection for each other. How should we do that? I think we try to do that here by shaking hands.

How did we come to that conclusion?

First, we exegeted the passage to determine what it was that Paul wanted his first century readers to do. That is, we worked hard to figure out how they would have understood him in the first century, and then, and only then, did we

abstract a principle from his command that we can readily apply in our situation here at Grace.

Now what am I spending so much time laying the groundwork for understanding this passage here in 1 Timothy 2. I am doing so because the controversy regarding this passage found here in 1 Timothy 2:8-15 really hangs one way or the other on whether a person understands the significance of the command given here to be totally culture or something that transcends culture and thus remains applicable for us today.

If a person, for example, thinks that there is no cultural significance at all regarding what the passage says they will be apt to read it and say something like this, **“Look this whole idea of women keeping silent in the church is just the way the Lord wants it. I don’t mean to be a grump about it but that is clearly what the text says.”**

On the other hand, if a person thinks Paul’s command is so culturally conditioned by the way men dominated women in the first century then they are apt to say, **“Well it is ridiculous that women aren’t allowed to preach or serve in authoritative positions. That was a patriarchal time...and today we are a lot more sensitive to the reality that women are just as capable as men and are often superior to men and ought to be allowed to serve Christ according to their ability. I mean for Pete’s sake, women have been allowed to take their place in the business world and in the political world. They ought to be able to take their place in the ecclesiastical world as well. It is, after all, the twenty-first century.”**

You can see what I mean.

You can also see that there is not much wiggle room...not much ground for any sort of mediating position between the two groups. In fact, it seems highly unlikely that those two groups could ever manage to come to any sort of consensus or middle position regarding what Paul means here in 1st Timothy.

Still, that is the issue we face. We have to come to some sort of decision about how much if any of the passage we have before us this morning is culturally conditioned. There is always the possibility that part of the passage might be culturally conditioned while the rest of it is not. What I mean by that is that part of the passage might need to be interpreted in light of the differences in Paul's time and culture while the rest of it might need to be understood as having exactly the same meaning today that it had back then.

Now before I try to answer those questions, I need to try to explain the dangers associated with getting this wrong.

First of all...if we get this wrong we might possibly be ignoring a resource with which the Spirit of God has gifted the Body of Christ. That is, if we don't allow women to hold teaching positions and positions of authoritative leadership when the Spirit of God really desires us to do just that...we are doing a great disservice to the church.

On the other hand, if we demand that women in the church be allowed to teach men authoritatively and to hold positions of leadership when the biblical text given through the blessed Holy Spirit has commanded us not to...we will be

forcing an action on the church based on our culture's concept of political correctness rather than on our simple obedience to the text. That would equally bad o maybe even worse than the alternative.

Even worse, I think than either of the previous two things, is the position that says, **"I don't care what the text says...I think we should do this or that regardless of what the text says."** That position is dangerous no matter which side holds the view.

Now, with all that having been said let me explain how our church and denomination understands the passage.

First of all the really controversial part of the passage, verse twelve, is simply that...a small portion of the passage.

The immediate context of the passage concerns what Paul wants Timothy to do to counter the false teachers at Ephesus. You will remember that he wants Timothy to begin his defense of the gospel...to guard the treasure entrusted to him...by first of all have the Ephesians pray for all kinds of people everywhere...including all kinds of people in authority. He wants the Ephesians to do that in order that the gospel might exist in an environment where it can go forth without distraction or interruption. That is the whole point of 1 Timothy 2:1-4.

^{ESV} **1 Timothy 2:1**...First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all people, ² for kings and all who are in high positions, that we may lead a peaceful and quiet life, godly and dignified in every way. ³ This is good, and it is pleasing in the sight of God our

Savior, ⁴ who desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.

Secondly, the reason the Lord commands the Ephesians to pray for such things is because there is only one God appointed mediator between God and man. That is, God has ordained only one way of salvation...the man...the mediator Christ Jesus. As a result, God wants his children to be in prayer for all kinds of people everywhere and for all kinds of leaders in order for them to participate in the proclamation not just of the gospel but of the only gospel. That is the point of verse five through seven.

ESV 1 Timothy 2:5...For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, ⁶ who gave himself as a ransom for all, which is the testimony given at the proper time. ⁷ For this I was appointed a preacher and an apostle (I am telling the truth, I am not lying), a teacher of the Gentiles in faith and truth.

And then starting in verse eight Paul explains the manner or way the men and women in Ephesus are to do that.

The men are to do that by worshipping together in a kind of peaceful unity with one another...not battling each other for the highest places...not battling for dominion over one another, but rather being unified in purpose. We understand that to be the point of verse eight.

ESV 1 Timothy 2:8...I desire then that in every place the men should pray, lifting holy hands without anger or quarreling;

Now we do take the point about lifting holy hands to be cultural. That is, we don't think that Paul is as concerned about the physical act of lifting one's hands

in prayer as he is that men do so in a way that is peaceable. It seems to me that the point about lifting up holy hands is that there is a unity of purpose and that there is no violence or anger directed toward any other man. Hands that are lifted up together in prayer cannot be lifted up against one another. In that sense, the imagery here is the exact opposite of Cain lifting up his hand against his brother Abel. As a result, we do not dictate that men raise their hands when they pray. Some people may call us hermeneutically inconsistent in our application of the Scripture but we think Paul is much more concerned about the unity of purpose than the posture of those praying. Sometimes when men pray in the Bible they do so with uplifted hands. Sometimes they do so sitting down or kneeling. Sometimes they do so lying prone on the ground. We think Paul's focus is that men should not be promoting themselves but should rather be peacefully unified in their prayers for all men.

In the same way, Paul continues the women in the church should be dignified and modest in how they dress not calling attention to themselves by being ostentatious or provocative but rather by being modest and godly in their deportment. Look at verse nine.

^{ESV} **1 Timothy 2:9**...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, ¹⁰ but with what is proper for women who profess godliness-- with good works.

We take the specifics that Paul mentions here to be cultural. That is, we do not think that Paul is universally and perpetually condemning braided hair. Braided hair was a cultural issue in Paul's day. It signified excess in the ancient world. Paul's point, I think, was not specifically that women ought to avoid braided hair

or wearing particular kinds of jewelry but rather that they ought to avoid dressing up to the degree that it made the other women in the church self-conscious about their inability to dress the same way. In other words, women were not to make themselves the center of attention in worship through their beauty any more than men were to make themselves the center of attention through their power.

Instead, men and women were to worship together in humility of heart and unity of spirit...praying for all kinds of people and all kinds of authorities that the gospel might go out unencumbered.

And then Paul goes one step farther. Look at verse eleven.

^{ESV} **1 Timothy 2:11**...Let a woman learn quietly with all submissiveness. ¹² I do not permit a woman to teach or to exercise authority over a man; rather, she is to remain quiet. ¹³ For Adam was formed first, then Eve; ¹⁴ and Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and became a transgressor. ¹⁵ Yet she will be saved through childbearing-- if they continue in faith and love and holiness, with self-control.

It seems to me that these last few verses of chapter two are concerned primarily with maintaining the peace between men and women in the church. I say that because the first part of this section, verse eight, seems to be concerned with men maintaining peace among themselves by not trying to lord it over one another while the center section, verse nine and ten, seems to be about women maintaining their relationships together by not purposely trying to make one another feel inferior. Men are to lift up holy hands together in prayer...not asserting themselves over against each other but jointly uniting in all kinds of prayer. Women are to display godliness and charity toward one another both by

their good works and by not trying to outdo each other with regard to how they look.

That only leaves the relationship between men and women. How is that to be managed?

Paul says women are to remain silent and submissive to men when it comes to their relationship to men and to both teaching and ruling in the church.

Now let me take a moment and point out what the passage does not say.

The text does not say, nor does it imply that men are smarter than women. Only a fool would make that sort of assertion. The text certainly does not say that men are by nature more theologically adept than women or that men are more capable with regard to language or logic than women. Any man that makes that sort of assertion deserves what he gets.

The text does not say, nor does it imply that men are necessarily more gifted than women. That is, it does not say that the Holy Spirit only gifts men or that he gifts men more than he does women. I take it from a number of other passages that women receive not just the same gifts that men do but that they are obligated to exercise their gifts in the same way men do.

What the text does say is that women are not to exercise their gifts over men.

Our denomination does not take that restriction to be culturally conditioned.

The reason that it does not take it to be that way is because of the way Paul ties the restriction to the order of creation. Look at verse thirteen.

ESV 1 Timothy 2:13...For Adam was formed first, then Eve;

You can see that Paul is making his argument based on the fact that Adam was created first. The implication is that since man was created before woman and since woman is derived from man, man by nature ought to exercise authority over woman. That does not mean that man is to be abusive or domineering over woman. The gospel does not allow for that. Still, Paul's point is that woman is not take authority over man by teaching him or ruling over him.

Of course, other Scriptures seem to blur the distinctiveness between men and women. Take for instance Galatians 3:28.

ESV Galatians 3:28...There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. ²⁹ And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise.

Paul's point, and it is Paul again, is that positionally in Christ no one is superior to anyone else.

The letter to the Ephesians seems to do the same sort of thing pointing to the fact that in Christ all the world's distinctions have forever been put away...that the dividing wall between Jews and Gentiles and men and women has been torn down. And then Paul turns right around in Ephesians and tells his readers to keep all of their basic social structures and relationships, but to keep them in a new sort of way.

Husbands are to love their wives.

Wives are to submit to their husbands.

Children are to obey their parents.

Slaves are to honor their masters.

My point is that the gospel restores the natural structure of the relationship between men and women in the church. It doesn't obliterate it; it restores it.

And then Paul goes on in verse fourteen.

^{ESV} **1 Timothy 2:14**...and Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and became a transgressor.

I think this verse is best understood in light of the nature of the false teachers at Ephesus. That is Paul was particularly concerned with the false teachers at Ephesus...that is the whole reason he sends Timothy there. Timothy is to confront and combat their false teaching. He seems to want to tie the need for the women in the church to be silent with regard to teaching and ruling back to the Eve's deception in the Garden. I think his point is that the woman got in trouble in the Garden because she usurped Adam's headship, and that she should not try to continue to do so by exercising authority over man by teaching him and ruling over him.

Now what application are we to draw from all of this for our own church here at Grace?

I think the principal point is that in corporate worship men are to exercise leadership both in terms of ruling the church and in terms of teaching. That doesn't mean...and it has never meant...that women are insignificant. They are to exercise their gifts both in teaching one another and in teaching our children. And they are to fill complementary roles in their relationship to the men in the church. That does not mean that we men ought to somehow view women as inferior second class citizens in the church. They have much to contribute and our failure to implement and encourage them in their ministries to the church will result in us fighting the good fight with one arm tied behind our back.

Let's pray.

Now I had intended to take your questions, but a number of women made it clear to me before this class began that we absolutely had to be out of here by ten after. I'm just kidding. Do you have any questions?

¹ Gordon Fee and Douglas Stuart, *How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003), 24.

² Ibid, 30.

³ **ESV Luke 18:24-25**