

## 1 Timothy 2:8-15

By Bob Young

*[excerpted and expanded from Bible Study Guide: Pastoral Letters]*

2:8. The reference to men in this verse uses a word that is specific to the males (*aner*). Another word (*anthropos*) is usually translated man but refers to humanity, both male and female, as in vv. 2, 5, and 6. The phrase “in every place” or “everywhere” may eliminate an exclusive application of this verse to public worship. The phrase could be applied very broadly; it could also be applied to house churches throughout the city of Ephesus.

Paul’s instructions to the men includes one verb modified by a prepositional phrase, “to lift holy hands without anger and disputes.” Despite the grammatical construction, translations of this verse often describe three behaviors that are associated with acceptable prayer: lifting holy hands, without anger, without disagreements or arguments. Lifting hands in prayer was a common Jewish practice. Lifting holy hands is interpreted by some as meaning holy living; that is, the emphasis is not on lifting hands but is on lifting holy hands. Drawings in the catacombs show Christians with upturned hands, possibly indicating a posture of openness and an attitude of receiving more than of giving.

The instructions of this verse likely have little relationship to the often-observed practice in contemporary churches of arms fully extended upward. Lifting hands in this context relates only to the men as they are leading in prayer. Anger is likely a reference to personal relationships more than relationship with God. Dissension (disputes) refers to disruptive actions and argumentation between human beings (cf. Rom. 14:1-2). Paul’s focus is on the attitude of prayer.

2:9-15. The use of “likewise” to introduce a new group will occur again in 3:8 and 3:11. After the men are admonished toward proper behavior and attitudes in prayer (without anger or arguments), the women are instructed to demonstrate in their lives appropriate dress, attitudes, and behaviors. The most obvious application is in the context of the assembly although the principles can easily be applied to other public settings.

2:11. In the text of 2:9-15, the number of the noun changes from plural to singular and back to plural (women in vv. 9-10, 15b; woman in vv. 11-15a). This change is key to understanding the passage. Some translations connect the last phrase of v. 10, “with good works,” with v. 11. The use of the singular noun beginning in v. 11 does not prohibit an application to all Christian women, but the context suggests a specific application to a married woman in relation to her husband.

I fear that we read this text through twenty-first century eyes and fail to hear it clearly. “All submission” may be better than “full submission.” In the contemporary world, we abhor submission and forget that Jesus was submissive, that all are called to submission to God, and that all Christians are called to mutual submission as a part of being filled with the Spirit (Eph. 5:21). That a woman was receiving instruction in the church was an advance over Judaism where she was forbidden to study the Law or attend school.

2:12-14. The verb “to have authority” (Greek, *authenteo*) is not easy to interpret; in this verse is its only occurrence in the New Testament. The word is usually defined as domination or acting on one’s own authority (without proper authority). The concept of quietness appears twice in vv. 11-12. The word “quiet” (*hesuchia*, silence) modifies submission in v. 11, and is applied to learning and teaching in v. 12. The verb that comes from the same root appears in 1 Thess. 4:11 and seems to refer to attitude more than absolute silence. The adjectival form of the same word appears in 1 Tim. 2:2 with reference to every Christian. The context here does not suggest that the named actions are acceptable if done with the proper attitude—not domineering. The modifier moves the meaning in the opposite direction.

An analysis of the text shows that the limiter is not related to the teaching or manner of teaching; the limiter is the “whom”—the persons being taught. As noted above, the singular may suggest that the question has to do with how a wife and husband should interact in the public assembly. How does a woman show

respect for her husband (Eph. 5:33)? Remember that both Ephesians and 1 Timothy were addressed to the church in Ephesus. The application to a husband and wife gives background for understanding 1 Cor. 14:33-36.

Paul's illustration based on Adam and Eve seems to support the husband-wife relationship application. The argument is theological, based on the consequences of the events in the garden and God's instruction that the woman's desire will be for her husband (Gen. 3:16). Perhaps the basis of the instruction is that the women were more susceptible to the false teachers (2 Tim. 3:6-9). Paul notes that Eve was created after Adam as his helper, that Eve was the one deceived, and that Eve was also the one who fell into transgression. Two consequences were assigned to Eve: submission to her husband and pain in childbirth.

2:15a. Translations of this verse often ignore the grammatical number (singular or plural) of the pronouns. The singular continues in the first part of this verse. Here is the literal reading: "she (the woman, Eve) will be saved (delivered, protected) through bearing children." The use of the singular in the first half of the verse maintains the close connection of this verse to Gen. 3:13, 16.

2:15b. With Eve as the model or representative of all women, the second part of the verse returns to the plural number: "if they continue in faith...."

2:9-15. If the paragraph with the singular number noun or pronoun (2:11-15a) is treated as a complete parenthetical thought that has as its purpose to illustrate Paul's point, then the reading of the text is something like this (2:9,10,15b).

...likewise, also that women should adorn themselves in respectable apparel, with modesty and self-control, not with braided hair and gold or pearls or costly attire, but with what is proper for women who profess godliness with good works—if they continue in faith and love and holiness, with self-control.

The ESV suggests this connection between v. 10 and v. 15 with hyphens, setting off the section of text (2:11-15a) that is illustrative.

...but with what is proper for women who profess godliness—if they continue in faith and love and holiness, with self-control.

This passage has been the source of much controversy and even division in the church and deserves close study in an effort to understand the message of the book.

"Men should pray with holy hands and without anger and quarrels.

"Women should dress respectably, not ostentatiously. It is fitting that they demonstrate modesty and self-control that reflect godliness through good works—

[if they continue in faith and love and holiness with self-control.]

"A woman (wife) should learn quietly and submissively, not teaching and exercising authority over a man (her husband), but exhibiting quietness. This instruction is based on Adam's creation first, and Eve's creation as his helper. Adam was not deceived; Eve was deceived and she transgressed. Her transgression was not beyond God's ability to save. She will be saved through child bearing.

"So, the women should continue in faith, love, holiness, and self-control."