

“Take Your Places!”
Pastor Mark Blair
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1 Timothy 2:8-15

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

Heavenly Father, we thank you so much for our time of worship today. What beautiful songs we have lifted up to your great and glorious name. We pray now that as we turn to your Word, you will open our hearts and our minds. I pray, Father, that the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts together will be acceptable in your sight, our rock and our redeemer. Amen.

As we have studied this letter of Paul to Timothy, we have understood that these are commands given by an apostle to a bishop about how the church should believe and behave. Chapter one has emphasized the foundation of what the church thinks, and now we are studying how the church conducts itself. It is the first importance of the church to worship the Lord. These verses specify exactly what the roles of men and women are in the service of worship. In chapter three, Paul will say:

I hope to come to you soon, but I am writing these things to you so that, if I delay, you may know how one ought to behave in the household of God, which is the church of the living God, a pillar and buttress of truth. 1 Timothy 3:14,15

The rest of the letter is basically a working out of the relationships between leaders and members, men and women, rich and poor, widows and families, and how the church is to conduct itself regarding these relationships.

Introductory Comments on the Roles of Men and Women

1. Popularity

We've come to some controversial verses, and I am going to begin with introductory comments because we need common ground before we come to the text. This is a topic that is popular around the world; one that the denominations that many of us come from make pronouncements about at their annual meetings. Most denominational pronouncements are ignored by the world. What a denomination says about men, women, and gender issues, however, will make headlines in print or pixels around the

world. You can bet on it! People that do not even care about a church will want to know what that church says about this issue.

We have all the elements here for a great drama, first with the stiff, old, male-dominated, conservative, traditional institution called the church. The Pope himself has said that 2% of the leaders of his denomination could be pedophiles, so we think: "Wow, that thing needs to change." Into this institution, on a white horse, come the women. They get it, and they are sensitive and empathetic. They can understand what those stodgy old men will never figure out. The media plays all this very well. You can take the woman off the white horse and put homosexuals on the white horse, and they are equally praised for understanding it and getting it, because for the world, this is a justice issue. This is an issue of freedom. It is an issue of civil rights. We must have fairness in this world. Many rejoiced this month when the Church of England finally said that women can now be bishops. I was listening to BBC that day and they said, "Now that they allow women bishops, the Church of England can perhaps claim to be an equal-opportunity employer." (BBC News, 14 July 2014) Yes, this is a popular issue. It is also an issue we need to approach humbly.

2. Humility

I've been married for 32 years to a wonderful woman, and I still can't figure her out. I'm from California; she's from Hawaii. Even more, she's from Venus, and I'm from Mars. We are really different. Proverbs 30.18-19 says:

Three things are too wonderful for me; four I do not understand: the way of an eagle in the sky, the way of a serpent on a rock, the way of a ship on the high seas, and the way of a man with a virgin.

The roles of men and women are an amazing, curious and complex reality. I think that's why Paul began this chapter with verse one:

First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all people.

We must first go to our knees and try to figure out before God how to understand these things. This humility is necessary in all our study of Scripture.

3. Superiority

"Is this a question of superiority?" Many people think it is, but the Bible has no place for either chauvinism or feminism. In fact, a man who once was a chauvinistic, mono-cultural, self-righteous Pharisee said in 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.

How in the world did he reach that conclusion? He went to the cross. He realized there is neither Pharisee nor publican who can stand before the living God. We are all equally bad in the sight of a holy God. There is no superiority; in fact there is unity in the church. In Philippians 4:2-3, Paul commends his sisters in Philippi this way:

I entreat Euodia, and I entreat Syntyche to agree in the Lord. Yes I ask you also, true companion, help these women, who have labored side by side with me in the gospel together with Clement and the rest of my fellow workers, whose names are in the book of life.

I have taught preaching classes in several countries for several years, and I hate to admit it, but usually the best preachers in the class are the women. They are more verbal, more spiritual, more faithful, more sympathetic, and they get it when the men often do not. But 1 Timothy is about the church. It is not about the business world; it is not about the state. The Bible commends Lydia, who was a businesswoman. The Bible commends Deborah, who was a leader of state. Both of them were under the blessing of God. If you are considering whether to vote for a woman in your country's elections, 1 Timothy two has nothing to say about that question. It is only addressing the situation in the church.

4. Priority

What is the mission priority of the church? The gospel of Jesus Christ for everyone! That is why we are here. Paul says,

The saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the foremost. I Timothy 1.15

The supreme priority of the church is for people to know the love of God in Jesus Christ. The world is watching us! Let us not allow pigheadedness and lovelessness to prevent them from hearing about his love. In a similar way, Paul, in a pastoral letter to Titus, commands slaves:

Slaves are to be submissive to their own masters in everything; they are to be well-pleasing, not argumentative, not pilfering, but showing all good faith, so that in everything they may adorn the doctrine of God our Savior. Titus 2:9-10

5. Authority

The fifth thing we need to realize is that the Bible is the authority of the church: that is why this letter was written. Paul says this about the church in I Tim 3.15:

...if I delay, you may know how one ought to behave in the household of God, which is the church of the living God, a pillar and buttress of truth.

The Bible is the standard in the church in Ephesus, and in this church in ZhongGuanCun.

In 1975, I was a college student and a new Christian who was excited about my faith. One of our pastor's seminary professors was an occasional Sunday night preacher in our church. I remember the night when that professor addressed 1 Timothy chapter two. He reached a significantly different conclusion than I am going to reach here. There was a question and answer time afterward, and someone raised their hand and said, "Dr. Jewett, what you said doesn't seem to jive with what Paul said." He quickly

said, "Paul was wrong!" This man was a nice and learned guy, but I never saw Dr. Jewett again because he never came back to our church. Our church believed that we could not take scissors to the Bible, nor was it a wax nose that we could turn any way we wanted. In fact, Paul says here to Timothy:

...remain at Ephesus so that you may charge certain persons not to teach any different doctrine. Timothy 1.3

I saw many denominations switch to embracing women leaders decades ago, and now I am seeing those same denominations embrace homosexual leaders. The hermeneutic they used to justify the first has opened the door to anything.

a) Rigid Literalism?

The authority of the Bible is significant. It is our standard. Having said that, how do we interpret it? It is an old book, written long ago to people in far away places. Many people would say that we need to be rigidly literal about this book. "God said it, I believe it, that's enough." To a point this is a commendable idea. Men, I noticed many of you did not have your hands up when we prayed. Why not? And women, I noticed some of you wearing a little gold, some braided hair, and some jewelry. Take it off!

Maybe it is not that easy to apply the Scriptures rigidly and literally.

I once wrote a book on preaching that has been published in the Russian language. After its publication I was invited by a seminary professor in Kazakhstan to come speak at their school, which is part of a very conservative Baptist denomination. The president invited me into his office before I spoke and gave me a warning.

"Be careful," he said, "Some of those people have read your book and are angry about what you said because we take a very literal interpretation of 1 Timothy two."

So, I asked him, "What kind of tape do you use?"

"Tape?" he asked.

"Yes, to put over the ladies' mouths when they walk into church."

He said, "We don't use tape!" and I asked, "So when they walk in, can they say, 'Hello?'"

"Of course they can say 'Hello!'"

"Can they sing a song?"

"Yes."

"Can they give a testimony?"

"OK."

“Can they read a Bible verse?”

“Well, yeah.”

“And in the course of reading it, could they explain about what it says?”

“Yes.”

I said, “Brother, you have women teaching men in your church.” He had to think that through.

b) Polite Respect?

The other extreme of Biblical interpretation would be having just a “polite respect” for the Bible. Such a person appreciates the ancient wisdom and beautiful literature of Scripture. Ultimately, though, the person thinks: “Come on, let’s understand that in the first century, they didn’t know much. We are twenty-first century scholarly people who know about modern science and genetics and gender studies and sociology.” One commentator says, “Just as the first half of this chapter showed us the author at his best, so the second half seems to show him at his worst. Christians are under no obligation to accept his teaching on women.” (A.T. Hanson) This attitude toward Scripture becomes much like going to your grandparents’ house. You keep your mouth shut, you listen politely to everything they say, and then you walk out the door not planning to do any of it. Another commentator that many of us may have read, although I do not encourage you to read him very often, says “All things in this chapter are mere temporary regulations to meet a given situation.” (William Barclay) Their attitude is that we are a little too sophisticated for Paul and “that old stuff.”

So, how do we interpret this Bible? There are rigid literalists who would keep the baby and the bathwater. Then there are polite respecters who would throw out the baby and the bathwater. But I am suggesting we be faithful Christians who keep the baby, but change the bathwater.

Rigid Literalist – Keeps the Baby and the Bathwater

Polite Respecter – Throws Out the Baby and the Bathwater

Faithful Christian - Keeps the Baby and Changes the Bathwater

To keep the baby and change the bathwater is nice slogan. How are we going to do that? To answer, we must go back to I Timothy two.

1. Looking Good – In the Sight of God

1. Man-Pleasing

a) Religious Men

There were problems in this church in I Timothy. They were looking good in the eyes of men. Those men looked great. You saw them all raising their hands in worship. They were religious men. Look at verse 8:

I desire then that in every place the men should pray, lifting holy hands without anger or quarreling.

Many people come to church to look good, don't they? They come to be seen, and the same was true here in I Timothy. The reality was that these guys had dirty hands. Even worse, their hearts were dirty, and that is what Paul was most concerned about. You see, it is hypocritical to lift up your hands in worship when there is something wrong between you and someone else, or between you and God. In fact, Peter will talk to husbands and say this in I Peter 3.7:

Husbands, live with your wives in an understanding way, showing honor to the woman as the weaker vessel, since they are heirs with you of the grace of life, so that your prayers may not be hindered.

There is a connection between what you do in your marriage and what you do in your prayers.

2) Revealing Women

So this church had religious-looking men, but there were also revealing women. Verse 9 tells us:

...likewise also that women should adorn themselves with respectable apparel, with modesty and self-control, not with braided hair and gold or pearls or costly attire...

Warren Wiersbe says, "Ephesus was a wealthy commercial city, and some women there competed against each other for attention and popularity." There is nothing new under the sun here. Sex sells, whether in the first century or the twenty-first century, and it is pleasing. I confess, as a sinful man, it is pleasing to me more often than it should be. But when I look at my sister, I ask, "Are you trying to arouse *me* or edify *me*? You ought to be seeking God when you put on clothes." You ought to say, "This is what I want to wear when I stand before God," because you *are* standing before God.

b. God-Pleasing

1) Reconciled Men

In verse 8 we see these men who are without anger and disputes: or at least they should be. That should not only be the condition of their hands, but also the condition of their hearts in being right with God. Jesus describes in Matthew:

If you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift. Matthew 5.23,24

So if we have a prayer meeting, our primary concern should not be what we should wear, but how we are ready to appear before him, keeping our relationships with God and with men and women in good order.

Who shall ascend the hill of the LORD? And who shall stand in his holy place?
He who has clean hands and a pure heart, who does not lift up his soul to what is false and does not swear deceitfully. He will receive blessing from the LORD.
Psalm 24.3-5

2) Respectable Women

For women, verses 9 and 10 describe how

...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 you don't want to be treated like a sex object, don't look the part. But notice in verse 9, it says, "Women should adorn themselves." I love the comment of a bachelor who has said,

"Paul recognizes both that women are beautiful and that they should increase and exhibit their beauty. There is no biblical warrant in these verses for women to neglect their appearance, conceal their beauty or become dowdy and frumpish. The question is how they should adorn themselves." (John Stott)

We want to see the purity of both men and women before God.

If we consider the concept of the baby and the bathwater, what do we keep and what do we throw away in these verses? In the case of men, holiness, peace, letting go of anger and quarreling: all those are eternal. Whether your hands are up or down, or even in your pockets, is not really the issue as you approach God in prayer. Similarly for our sisters, it is the inward more than the outward fashions that are important.

	Men and their Prayers	Women and their Dress
"Baby to Keep" Biblical Commands	Have holiness, love, peace Stop anger & quarreling	Have inner beauty, purity, modesty, Edify those around them
"Bathwater to Change" Cultural Forms	Lifting Hands	Gold, Braids, Jewels

We need to be aware of what pushes people's buttons. I have preached many times in rural African churches, and the front row was a sea of women's breasts. Now, I do not think they had them out for me; they were feeding their babies, but it did make me focus more on the back row in my preaching! When we went to Hawaii, women were

wearing shorts which were sometimes much too short. I saw lots of legs. But in Africa, I did not see any legs because, as African brothers told me, "It is erotic to show those legs!" I do not always know what pushes people's buttons. So the question is, are you looking good in the sight of God and in the sight of man?

2. Listening Well – To the Message of God

It is also important to consider whether or not you are listening well to the message of God. The most important piece of furniture in the church of Jesus Christ is the Bible. That is why in chapter four Paul will say to Timothy:

Devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to exhortation, to teaching.
1 Timothy 4.13

But it seems that in this church in Ephesus something had gone wrong. There is commotion, as we see in verse 11, and Paul rebukes them, telling the women to be quiet.

a. Commotion

Now, we don't know exactly what was happening or who was to blame. We read these verses quite differently depending on the period of time in which we live. If you are a twenty-first century woman, you are going to read that verse and say, "What? Women can't teach?" If you are a first century woman, however, you would say, "Wow! Women can learn!" because in most first century settings they could not. So in this early church, which was divided by gender like the synagogue or a mosque, only without a wall or a curtain, some commotion was going on.

Paul is writing this from Corinth, across the Aegean Sea, and interestingly, that church was in a similar upheaval. We read in 1 Corinthians 14.33-35:

God is not a God of confusion but of peace. As in all the churches of the saints, the women should keep silent in the churches. For they are not permitted to speak, but should be in submission, as the Law also says. If there is anything they desire to learn, let them ask their husbands at home. For it is shameful for a woman to speak in church.

Now remember, these letters are like one side of a phone call. We only hear part of the conversation. We do not fully understand what was happening on the other side, but we do know that if anything is wrong in the church, it is the elders' responsibility. This is because, as we will see in chapter three, the elders are the overseers. They are the ones charged to bring order in the church. Somehow, women speaking in these two congregations seems to have brought upheaval.

b. Calling

To see what the prohibition of speaking for women means, we need to step back. We will look at the big picture of the Bible and the calling of women. In the first century, the Roman culture and the Jewish culture allowed very few opportunities for women.

In fact, there was great prejudice against women. Jesus was counter-cultural. We see him in the gospel of Luke moving around with twelve men and a group of women.

Soon afterward he went on through cities and villages, proclaiming and bringing the good news of the kingdom of God. And the twelve were with him, and also some women who had been cured of evil spirits and infirmities: Mary, called Magdalene, from whom seven demons had gone out, and Joanna the wife of Chuza, Herod's household manager, and Susanna, and many others, who provided for them out of their means. Luke 8.1-3

That must have looked quite strange to people then, and verse 3 tells us that these women were paying the bills. So the women were significantly involved in leading, assisting, and advancing the work of the gospel.

1) Sharing the Word

If you are a woman, you should love the writings of Luke. Luke tells us more about women than any other Bible writer. He tells about the virgin Mary, about her cousin Elizabeth, about a prophetess named Anna who was faithful in the temple, about a teacher named Priscilla, and about Philip who had four daughters, all of them prophets. In Luke fifteen there are pictures of God, and one of these pictures is of a woman who lost a coin and searches it out, in essence implying a description of God as a woman!

Or what woman, having ten silver coins, if she loses one coin, does not light a lamp and sweep the house and seek diligently till she finds it? And when she has found it, she calls together her friends and neighbors, saying, "Rejoice with me, for I have found the coin that I had lost." Just so, I tell you, there is joy before the angels of God over one sinner who repents. Luke 15:8-10

When all the men ran away from the crucified Savior, the women stuck around and became the first to preach the resurrection. There are many other examples in the Bible where women preach and teach the Word of God. You would not be reading 1 Timothy or 2 Timothy if women did not teach. Paul recognizes the influence of Timothy's mother and grandmother on his faith in 2 Timothy:

I am reminded of your sincere faith, a faith that dwelt first in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice and now, I am sure, dwells in you as well...But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it and how from childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. 2 Timothy 1.5, 3.14,15

Even this bishop, Timothy, is to continue his learning from the godly women in his life.

In Titus, Paul speaks to older women:

Older women likewise are to be reverent in behavior, not slanderers or slaves to much wine. They are to teach what is good, and so train the young women to love their husbands and children. Titus 2.3,4

So women, put down the bottle! Pick up the Bible and teach it. As they teach it to women it ripples over to men, to children, to the world as you are faithfully teaching the Word of God.

In Acts eighteen, we read about a couple in this church in Ephesus:

Now a Jew named Apollos, a native of Alexandria, came to Ephesus. He was an eloquent man, competent in the Scriptures. He had been instructed in the way of the Lord. And being fervent in spirit, he spoke and taught accurately the things concerning Jesus, though he knew only the baptism of John. He began to speak boldly in the synagogue, but when Priscilla and Aquila heard him, they took him and explained to him the way of God more accurately. Acts 18.24-26

Luke is radical in naming the wife before the husband: Priscilla and Aquila. Priscilla is the woman! They come to a gifted teacher named Apollos, who had preached a great sermon but missed a few things. Instead of going home, sitting around the lunch table, and talking behind Apollos' back about everything that was wrong with his sermon, they took Apollos to lunch! They said, "Apollos, we'd like to explain the way of the Lord a little more accurately to you." Priscilla led the way as her husband supported her.

Paul also says:

...but every wife who prays or prophesies with her head uncovered dishonors her head, since it is the same as if her head were shaven. 1 Corinthians 11.5

Now this is a huge chapter, but I want to highlight a particular point here. The Corinthian church had a head problem. Men had something on their heads when they were not supposed to. Women did not have anything on their heads, but they should have. They were all mixed up. They were discombobulated in their authority structure because men are designed to be the head of the relationship in the church and in the family. Paul reminds us, "Hey, you Corinthians, the prostitutes wear their hair down, so the married, dignified women put their hair up." I think the head covering is simply the hair of these women who are acknowledging their faith in their God: but the head covering is a bath water issue today.

2) Sermons during Worship

Notice in verse 5 that women in the church were praying and prophesying! Does Paul say to stop it? No! He just says, "Hey, make sure you're doing it in the right way. Make sure you have the right authority structure for that ministry." So why in chapter eleven is he fine with this, but three chapters later in chapter fourteen, he says "Keep quiet!"? Because it is not just a matter of sharing the Word, it is a matter of preaching the sermon during worship. 1 Corinthians fourteen is the chapter about how to love one another in a worship service, and verse 26 shows that it is participatory.

When you come together, each one has a hymn, a lesson, a revelation, a tongue, or an interpretation. Let all things be done for building up. 1 Corinthians 14.26

Different people take part in the service. There should be no interruption. There should be unity. There should be no speaking out of turn. There should be an order to all of this. He says in verse 29:

Let two or three prophets speak, and let the others weigh what is said... the women should keep silent in the churches. For they are not permitted to speak, but should be in submission..." (1 Corinthians 14.29,34)

This instruction is for when prophecies, some of which are spoken by women, are shared. At that time, it is the elders of the church who will give the pronouncement as to their faithfulness. Women are silent on that evaluation.

Therefore, what I am doing right here, right now, in the preaching, applying, and explaining of the Word to the gathered congregation for our normal meeting is the job of men. It was the job of men in the church in Corinth and it is the job of men in the church today. That is why verse 12 in our text says:

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

Teaching and having authority are two different activities. There are overlaps, especially when you are teaching as I am right now. I pray you are not indifferent to the Word of God. It is not enough to think, "Oh, that's interesting. Oh, that's cool." No, it is more than interesting. It is more than cool. You must do something - it is the Word of God - all of us must ultimately obey. So women prophesy, pray, exhort, sing, lead small group, teach classes, all under the authority of the elders and their husbands if they are married.

What is happening at this moment, though, as the gathered church is listening to the applied Word of God, is the job of men. It is the time in which God's Word is explained, applied, and impressed upon the congregation in an ongoing, intentional, authoritative, instruction of God's Word to God's people. If you want to teach motorcycle maintenance, go ahead. If you want to teach piano, go ahead. If you want to teach the Bible, go ahead. But in this setting of weekly formal worship, women are not to teach the Bible. Men are elders, as you will hear next week, and the elders supervise the preaching. So there should not be, in my understanding of the Bible, women serving as bishops, as pastors, as elders, or even as preachers in Sunday services. Now some of you will say, "That's ridiculous. Everybody's doing it." They are, and I realize that I am a voice from the distant past, but I am not trying to please the world. Some people have asked, "Well, can't we, like, once a year have a woman preach?" and I have replied, "Well should the men use the women's bathroom once a year? Wouldn't that be cool?"

c. Creation

This is what the Word of God says. Why does it say it? Two reasons are given. The first is creation. Verse 13 reminds us that Adam was formed first, then Eve. That means this is relevant not only to the first century, but to the twenty-first century, and beyond. That means it is not a matter of culture or custom, but a matter of creation. There is something about our wiring from God that made us this way. Men's leadership is not a result of the fall, but is a part of creation. It is very good in the eyes of God. Why?

Honestly, I do not know. Why do birds fly? Why do women have babies? Why am I here as a preacher? I do not know. I think of Paul's words to the Corinthians when he said:

It pleased God through the folly of what we preach to save those who believe.
1 Corinthians 1.21

Why God allows an old fool like me to stand here and talk to you, I do not know. For some reason that is the way he has designed it. On many levels, this world is created with structure. There are governments, militaries, businesses, organizations, families, and churches. We live in a world of structure, and that is just the way God has made it.

This is not teaching that all women must submit to all men. Nothing says that. Women submit to the king, the elders, their husband (if they have one) and nobody else. We are all standing before God together, so it is not a matter of intellect, ability, purity, effectiveness, faithfulness, or compassion: it is simply the teaching of God's Word. The order in which God has placed us has nothing to do with value. We are going to read about parents and children, rulers and subjects, men and women, husbands and wives, all of them equally valuable in the eyes of God. Leadership in the church is not supposed to be about power, although sadly, it often is. It is really supposed to be about dying; about giving your life away for the sake of the gospel. It is supposed to be about telling the world that 2,000 years ago, a man was nailed naked to a cross, and by that death we are saved. The folly of the gospel is what we are commanded to live and die for.

d. Culpability

Then Paul mentions culpability in verse 14:

Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and became a transgressor.

Please understand that verse 14 is not a compliment. It is a statement of fact. Eve was deceived. How do we know that? Read Genesis! She says it!

"I was deceived." Genesis 3:13

She got the wool pulled over her eyes by the serpent. But Adam, wide-eyed, fully aware, having heard the commandment of God and its consequences, willfully rebelled against God. There was no deception there, just an attitude: "I'll do it," and he did. He disobeyed God fully knowing what that revolt meant. So in verse 14, Paul is saying that the whole structure went crazy. Adam and Eve, who were made to rule over the animals, have now submitted themselves to a creature in the garden. Eve, who was created to help her husband, now leads him into sin against God. Adam, who was designed to protect his wife, passively stood there while the serpent talked to the woman and just watched her eat the very thing that God had said not to eat. Finally, both of them just stood there and let that creature trash-talk God. They essentially said, "Whatever." They should have beaten that lying serpent with a stick!

So in verse 14 Paul reminds all of us that we live in a fallen world. The whole order of creation was turned upside down. Was Eve inherently more gullible? Was she more

naive, foolish, or weak? Absolutely not. If that were true, she could not have been declared “very good” by our Creator God. She was as bright, capable, and gifted as any man. In fact, she is so capable that Paul commands she teach in the right settings under God.

Fallen men have taken leadership to two crazy extremes. On the one hand, we abuse it. Sadly, there are a lot of people who even use the Bible to abuse their position in leadership. That is horrible! But the other crazy extreme is that we are absentees. We went A.W.O.L. We are not taking up our responsibility. Both of these, abuse and absenteeism, are an abomination in the sight of God. Paul is simply saying, “Get it together, church! Remember that Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners, whether their name is Adam or Eve, to put things right again.”

e. Comfort

Paul ends with what I think is a word of comfort in verse 15:

Yet she will be saved through childbearing—if they continue in faith and love and holiness, with self-control.

The reality was that most women in Ephesus were going to get married, and most married women, would have children. But there is danger in childbirth because of the curse in Genesis three:

To the woman he said, ‘I will surely multiply your pain in childbearing; in pain you shall bring forth children.’ Genesis 3:16

At that point of pain in childbearing, there is a curse. Many first century women died in childbirth, or suffered immensely, or received wounds that meant they could never have another child, or a normal sexual life. There was no anesthesia, there were no sutures, there were no spinal blocks, antibiotics, or anesthetics. And still child birth is not easy, even in the twenty-first century. So perhaps women are thinking, “God is my curser.” But what Paul is saying to the Christian women in Ephesus, and throughout all time, is that you will be saved through childbearing.

Now please do not think that Paul means having a baby gets you to heaven. If that were true, there would be a whole lot of women in heaven. It is not having a baby that gets you to heaven. Rather, in Christ, you will safely pass through childbirth on your way to heaven. As a cross reference, consider 1 Corinthians 3:15, which says:

If anyone’s work is burned up, he will suffer loss, though he himself will be saved, but only as through fire.

It is not childbirth or fire that saves you. Those are what you are saved through. You will make it through all those things by God’s grace because he promises his compassion and his presence.

Does this mean that no Christian woman will die in childbirth? Well, we know that is not true. My own grandmother died in childbirth. The reality is, if a woman knows Jesus Christ, she will be saved through childbirth; that will be her entryway into the

presence of God. It is a promise that women can hold on to as they live their lives under the headship of God, and in the home. A life of faithfulness and all of those virtues that verse 15 mentions are the normal life. So the verse is hope, not pain, not curse, not that God is going to damn you, but that God is going to save you. The message is that He's come for that very purpose, and our faith is our link to Him. In the fruit of that faith, which is love, holiness, and self-control, there will be blessings.

I am passionately convinced that God's Word is true and eternal, not a wax nose that we can move about at the dictates of whatever we call civil rights. These old, archaic views are God's words, and it is a great danger to declare independence from God. Our world has done that, and look at our wars which no side can win; look at our climate catastrophes; our political gridlock; our hopelessness that runs from continent to continent. We are independent from God! Long ago, Judah declared their independence from their God, Yahweh, the Lord of the covenant, and God responded to them:

Thus says the LORD, your Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel: "I am the LORD your God, who teaches you to profit, who leads you in the way you should go. Oh that you had paid attention to my commandments! Then your peace would have been like a river, and your righteousness like the waves of the sea..."

Isaiah 48.17,18

Heavenly Father, I pray that we, as the people of God, will know your peace. I pray that we will embrace your righteousness, that we will be clothed in it even as Jesus Christ extends it to us from the cross. I ask that we would stand fast on the foundation of Your Word, though highly unpopular, greatly misunderstood: may we be a people who pilgrim through this world even embracing the misunderstanding, so that your name and your glory will be held high. Help us to be careful teachers of the Word. Help us to explain. Deliver us from chauvinism and feminism, that we will simply, as servants of the living God, live our lives humbly and lovingly for the advancement of your Kingdom. In Your Name, Amen.