

AUTHORITY & WOMEN

LESSON FOUR

Ice Breakers

~ What is your preferred prayer posture? When you pray, do you stand or kneel or lay prostrate or sit? Why is that your preferred position? (You might point out that all these postures are commanded in Scripture except for one: sitting)

~ How many men in the room raise their hands when they pray?

~ How many women in the class are wearing gold or pearls or expensive clothes? Does anyone have her hair braided?

Introduction –

Jesus tells us to love the Lord our God with all our heart, soul, strength, and mind. It's not just our feelings and emotions --- we make use of our intellect in our devotion to Christ. We employ our gray matter when we read the Bible. As we continue this study of the Scriptures, we should be reminded that what we're doing is OK. It's more than OK, it's good and it's expected. So let's agree to these following four truths. One, God never just makes up arbitrary rules and places them on us for no reason. Two, it's all right to ask if what we're reading makes sense. Three, Scripture should never cause us to act like fools. And, four, theology is the part of religion that requires our brains. It's perfectly fine to wrestle with and even question God's Word. It's an exercise in faith.

1 Timothy 2:1-15 –

There are a lot of instructions, or commands, in this passage. This is a list. We need to read the entire list to get the context. A text without a context is a pretext for a proof text. This is all related. Let's read it out loud and pay attention to who's being told to do what.

Read 1 Timothy 2:1-15. Did you pick out the four groups and their specific instructions?

~ **All Christians are instructed to “live peaceful and quiet lives” (2:2)**

Word of the Day: hesuchios, “peaceable or tranquil”

it doesn't mean “silent”

this word in 2:2 is the same exact word used in 2:11 and 2:12

it's translated “peaceful and quiet” in verse 2, but “silent” in verses 11 and 12

in 1 Peter 3:4, this same word is translated “gentle and quiet”

Strong's Dictionary: sedentary, keeping one's seat; still, undisturbed, undisturbing; peaceable, quiet, gentle

Vine's Dictionary: tranquility arising from within, causing no disturbance to others

~ **Men are instructed to “lift up holy hands in prayer” (2:8)**

We have traditionally interpreted this verse as a universal principle for all time with a cultural and temporary practice. The universal command is to pray. But lifting hands complies with the customs of that day. It's not required. It's not necessary. Just make sure you pray in a way that's acceptable with our contemporary culture.

~ **Women are instructed to dress modestly and not with costly clothes and jewelry (2:9)**

We see this as an eternal command for women to dress modestly and simply. This is non-negotiable. But the braided hair, gold, pearls, and expensive clothes are part of a by-gone culture. How we express modesty, decency, and propriety certainly changes and varies from time to time and culture to culture.

~ **Women are instructed to not teach or have authority over a man (2:12)**

For some reason we have chosen to bind this entire sentence as an eternal command for all time.

We overrule lifting hands and braiding hair as based on ancient culture. But we decide women not teaching or having authority over men is universally and eternally binding. Why? Not based on context. We would propose a better interpretation would fit in line with the context of the entire passage. Thus, the universal rule is that women are to be submissive. Not teaching or having authority over men is a cultural condition that changes with time and place. Otherwise, it's hard to dismiss the first two commands and come down so decisively on this third.

Ephesian Background –

We know these instructions made sense to Timothy. So let's get into the full context of the whole letter. We know Paul wrote 1 Timothy to Timothy while Timothy was in Ephesus. We know Paul takes personal credit for the controversial command in 2:12. He says "I do not permit..." It sounds like he's making a rule to meet the needs of the particular time and place.

We know that later New Testament writings begin to deal with early forms of Gnosticism. This was a heretical branch of Christianity that emphasized special rules, special behaviors, secret knowledge, and a commitment to being separate from the world. For the most part, "Gnostic Christians" were ascetics. This means they believed and taught that all material things are evil and must be given up in order to be truly spiritual. One cannot enjoy the pleasures of the physical world --- sex, food, family, friends, money --- and be united to the spiritual world. Paul actually addresses this in the same letter to Timothy.

Read 1 Timothy 4:1-8. These false teachers in Ephesus are forbidding marriage and requiring abstinence from certain foods. Paul counters this by declaring that everything created by God is good and nothing is to be rejected. He tells young Timothy to have nothing to do with irreverent, silly myths. Or wives' tales.

We use "wives' tales" as a figure of speech. Paul meant it literally. During Paul's time, generally speaking, women were uneducated, illiterate, degraded, and never left the house. Once they raised their children, they often became idle with gossip. They developed reputations for busybodies, always stirring things up. These same women formed the foundation for many Ephesian religions. False teachers would raise themselves to positions of influence and make money at the expense of these naïve women.

Read 1 Timothy 5:11-15 where Paul addresses this exact issue in plain language.

Read 2 Timothy 3:6-7 where Paul mentions the same problem.

Paul is very concerned for the public reputation of the Ephesian women and the church. The strange line about being saved through childbearing (1 Tim. 2:15) is about restoring those reputations, doing things that are regarded as "right." The command to marry and have children is to protect their reputation in a world where unmarried women frequently became temple prostitutes or, at least, became duped by false teachers of questionable religions. It's important to note that Paul is not being critical of women as much as he's criticizing what was going on in Ephesus at that time.

Women or Wives? –

Remember, the Greek word for woman is the exact same as the Greek word for wife. You have to discern the meaning from the context. In this case, Paul is writing about wives usurping authority over their husbands. This is not about women having authority over men. Think about it. Only wives should be saved by bearing children! Even with all our questions surrounding this phrase, we know he's only talking about married women. He would not expect unmarried women to seek this route to salvation.

Exercise Authority (*authenteo*) –

This is the only time this Greek word is used as a verb in the New Testament. Strong's Dictionary says this means to assume a stance of independent authority; to give orders to, dictate to; to act of oneself; or to dominate or usurp authority over. Vine's Dictionary tells us this word means to exercise authority on one's own account, to domineer over; in earlier usage it signified one who with his own hand killed others. Later it came to denote one who acts on his own authority; hence, to exercise authority or dominion. Thayer's Greek Lexicon defines *authenteo* as acting on one's own authority, autocratic, an absolute master; to exercise dominion over.

This word is placed in contrast in 1 Timothy 2:12 to “be in quietness” and “learn in gentleness.” To teach in a dominating way is the opposite of learning in a gentle way.

This word is translated in many different ways: “have dominion” (RSV), “domineer over” (NEB), “have dominion over” (ASV), and “lording over” (LBT). We must read “have authority” or “exercise authority” in our Bibles as “domineer.” Paul does not prohibit women from having authority or exercising authority, but from domineering. The New Testament is clear that no one dominates, including men in general and elders in particular.

So may a woman teach if she does not do it in a domineering way? Yes! Of course! You remember Priscilla and Aquilla? This verse is not about teaching per se, it's about teaching in a domineering fashion.

Again, some Greek is helpful. In the original language, both “teach” and “domineer” have “man” as the direct object. In Greek, when two verbs are joined this way, the nearer qualifies the farther. “Domineer” describes “teach,” not “man.” When you diagram this sentence, it reads “I do not permit a wife to teach her husband in a domineering way.” And, as we know, it's just as wrong for a man to refuse to submit and insist on dominance. That just wasn't the specific issue being addressed in this letter here.

Conclusions –

Not to teach or have authority over a man is cultural, like lifting hands and braiding hair. Teaching in a domineering way, exercising authority in a non-submissive or autocratic way, is always prohibited for all of us in every circumstance. “Be silent” is better translated gentle, tranquil, and peaceable; don’t disturb things.

Close –

Throughout our long history, this church at Central has always affirmed the equal God-given value of both women and men. As a people, we have been blessed when we hear the hearts of our Christian sisters expressed in song, prayer, and in the reading of God’s Word. We hear a different angle. We experience a different view. We are made to consider things we haven’t before. It’s good for us. We grow. We learn. We’re better for it. Our daughters and granddaughters get a sense that their talents are not being buried. They are affirmed by God and by their congregation in ways our men probably don’t understand. And it’s beautiful.

Now the Central shepherds are affirming that we should continue doing what we’ve been doing and do it even more. They are blessing and encouraging those with the giftedness and desire, regardless of gender, to participate fully in all our corporate gatherings.

We believe this is what the Bible teaches. Central is expanding the service roles and public participation of women with a strong biblical conviction. We believe this draws us closer to God’s will. It also promotes our unified understanding of God’s intent for how men and women are to worship and serve together in his Kingdom. This shift expresses a more accurate picture of the Gospel and a healthier theology of Christian worship. And this allows all of us at Central to benefit from all the spiritual gifts given to this church by God.

During this transition, we pray that we might all honor Christ in the ways we speak and treat each other and that we continue to proclaim Jesus as Lord to the people of our city and to those around the world.