

Men & Women Learning to Pray

Thomas Robinson, *Life Together in a Difficult World 3*, February 23, 2020

1 Timothy 2:1-15

¹ I'm urging, therefore, as first of all, that **entreaties, prayers, petitions, thanksgivings** be made on behalf of **all people**, ² on behalf of **emperors** and all who are in preeminent positions, in order that we may lead a **tranquil and quiet life**, in all devotion to God and dignity.

³ This is excellent and welcome in the presence of **God our Deliverer**, ⁴ who desires that **all humans be delivered** and come to a **recognition of truth**.

⁵ For **God is One, One** also as **mediator** for God and humans, as a **human, Anointed King Jesus**, ⁶ the one who **gave himself** as a **redemption from slavery** on behalf of everyone.

This is the **testimony** to be given at proper times, ⁷ for which I was appointed a proclaimer and an apostle. It's truth I tell – I don't lie – as a **teacher** of nations in **faith and truth**.

⁸ Therefore, I wish **the men** in every place **to pray**, as they lift up **holy hands without anger or dispute**, ⁹ and, as **women do likewise**, I wish them to **adorn themselves** in respectable apparel with propriety and good judgment, not, for example, with complex plaits and gold or pearls or expensive clothing, ¹⁰ but, as is fitting for women who are promising a devotion to God, to adorn themselves **through the practice of noble deeds**.

¹¹ **A woman must be learning** (as a disciple) without public show, with all recognition of her expected place. ¹² But I'm not giving permission for a woman to **teach** (publicly) or **exercise public dominance** over a man, but to be quiet (without public show). ¹³ For Adam was formed first and then Eve. ¹⁴ And Adam was not the object of deception, but the woman, when she was deceived, came into a transgression. ¹⁵ But she will be saved through the **bearing of children**, if they continue in faith and love and holiness with self-control.

1 Timothy 1:3-5

³ Instruct certain people not ... ⁴ to devote their attention to myths and genealogies without end, which create speculations rather than God's way of doing things that's based on faith.

⁵ But the goal of our instruction is a love that's from a pure heart, a good conscience, and a faith without hypocrisy.

1 Timothy 4:1-6

¹ Now the Spirit is expressly saying that in (these) later periods some will abandon faith by devoting their attention to deceptive spirits and teachings of little gods ² by a pretense of people who speak falsely, since they've seared their own conscience, ³ forbidding marriage and requiring abstinence from foods that God created to be shared with thanksgiving by people with faith who recognize the truth. ⁴ For every creation of God is beautiful and nothing is to be rejected when it's received with thanksgiving. ⁵ For it is sanctified by God's word and by prayer.

1 Timothy 5:13-15

¹³ (The younger widows) as idle people learn by going around from one household to another, not only being idle but becoming people who talk babble and are officious, saying things that are not right. ¹⁴ I, therefore, wish that the younger widows would marry, bear children, govern their household, and not give the adversary any occasion to revile. ¹⁵ For some have already turned aside behind the Accuser (Satan).

2 Timothy 3:1-2, 4-8

¹ ...In these last days difficult seasons will come. ² For people will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boastful, arrogant, ...⁴ ... loving pleasure rather than loving God, ⁵ maintaining an outward form of devotion to God but rejecting its power. Avoid these people. ⁶ For some of these work their way into households and take captive vulnerable women who feel overwhelmed by sins and led along by complicated desires, ⁷ always becoming their disciples (learning) and never able to arrive at a recognition of truth. ⁸ ... Those [who mislead them] oppose that truth and are ... disqualified with regard to faith.

Praying for a Quiet, Active Life Under a Threatening Empire.

Reading scripture challenges our imagination and empathy. Or does it? Is Paul writing to his co-worker Timothy and instructing him by stating the ideal arrangements of the church?

Nero began persecution of Christians in Rome after fire. No systematic official persecution. But being a Christian was illegal and anyone could bring accusation. Permission to kill. Hard vulnerability. What does a community do? Still pray for the emperor? Withdraw from public life? How can we fulfill our principal mission? How can we live by the Gospel in a world of honor and shame.

There was also the vivid danger of a Heresy that focused on myths and speculation instead of Faith. Semi-Gnostic withdrawal: We are those who know our Divine inner reality. The physical is corrupt. Avoid marriage and giving birth to more flesh. Women, young widows were especially attracted. Men, fairly simple. Pray for emperor and quiet life. But stay quiet: Don't show anger, dispute.

Texts Written for One Context, Read in a Changed Situation

What about women? Our translation traditions from KJV on reflect a context in which women did not participate in leadership or public worship. Church became fully in concert with patriarchal structure of culture. But that patriarchal structure was not from Jesus but from Greece and Rome. Women were always by law under the control and command of a man. Any break was dangerous as a slave rebellion and was considered shameful.

Paul is not describing the ideal Christian community but giving important guidance so that the church can survive and fulfill its mission under a new, generalized, mortal threat. And challenged by growing theology that sacrificed the mission for safety of withdrawal. He urges the church to fit in with the society in every visible way that doesn't destroy their faith and mission. Don't try to get yourself killed. Pray for the tranquility to live "under the radar" of the threatening empire.

Women Participating in a World that Believes that They're Shameful.

Christians like Paul had to rank what was most important. Proclaim the Gospel – public. Use of Gifts of the Spirit. Now Rome gave permission to have Christians killed.

Paul assumes that women will pray. But choose noble deeds as adornment, not display that calls attention to itself – be like a respectable Roman! Women don't stay uneducated, but must learn. Do it without display, quietly. In public assemblies, Paul urges following Roman sensibilities, to avoid accusation of disgrace. But Paul's guidance takes a strange turn: Adam and Eve. Saved by bearing children? What's going on. Heresy? Paul is not advocating sin without deception, but reflecting those most attracted to "Speculations" in the community. "Childbearing" seems a code-word for rejecting the heresy that forbids marriage and denigrates the physical.

Paul has evaluated the context in which the church lives and gives his guidance. Following Paul's teaching today is not by enforcing what the community had to do under hard persecution by Rome, but rather to evaluate the possibilities of our own society and fulfill our mission and the gifts of the Holy Spirit to the fullest extent possible.