

STUDY 4

PAUL'S ATTITUDE ABOUT WOMEN

OBJECTIVES

- ❖ To be able to distinguish between those issues of cultural context and those that are timeless principles in Paul's statements about women.
- ❖ To compare and contrast Paul's other statements about women and their role within the church.
- ❖ To employ *the analogy of faith* in dealing with obscure or controversial biblical passages.
- ❖ To be able to describe the two main views about the relationship of men and women in ministry within the church.



BACKGROUND

Paul's statements about women and their role within the church as presented in First Timothy 2:9-15 are some of the most controversial passages in the New Testament. Entire denominations have based their view of women and the extent or otherwise of their role within the church on this passage. For those churches or denominations who encourage women to participate in their church's worship service, they are often denounced as either "theologically liberal", "culturally progressive", or worse by those

fundamentalist churches who forbid women from participating in their church services. Our mission as we examine this passage and its application is to be faithful to, and consistent, with the entirety of Scripture.

INSTRUCTION

Objective 1. To be able to distinguish between those issues of cultural context and those that are timeless principles in Paul's statements about women.

First Timothy 2:9-15 presents the modern Bible reader with several difficulties. Was Paul addressing problems that existed *only* in the Ephesian church? Were the issues broader than Ephesus? How should we apply the principles today from this passage.

THE EDICT OF CAESAR AUGUSTUS

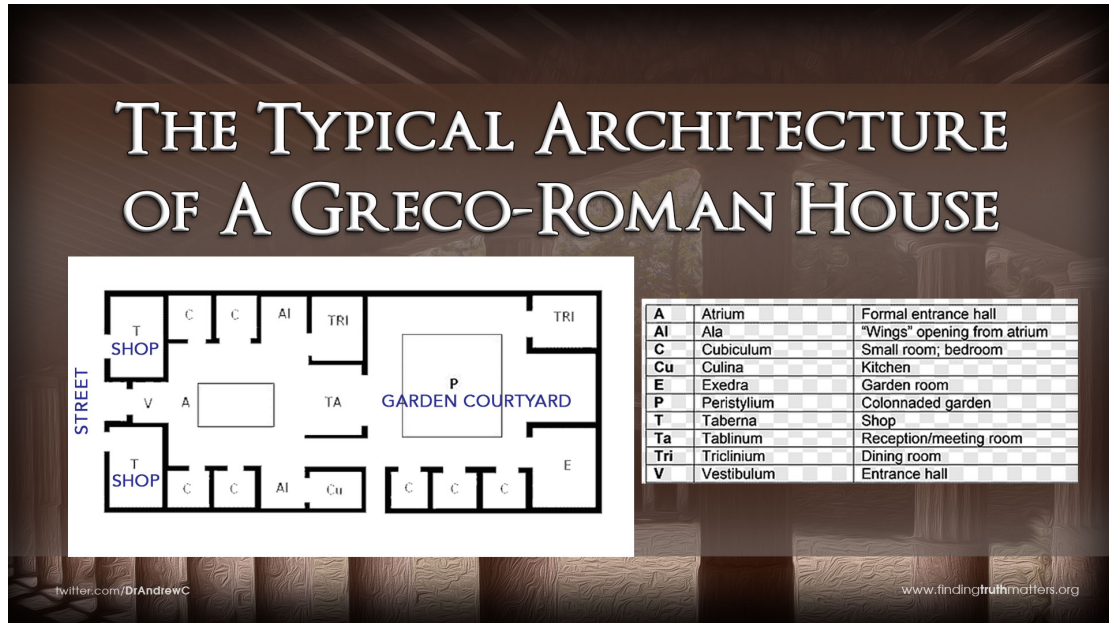
What might shed some cultural light on this passage is what Dr. Philip Towner describes as the emergence of “the new imperial Roman woman” (NICNT 2006). These women were women of means, many of whom (though not all) who were the young widows of householders¹, who used their wealth and positions within society to cast off restraint in dress and sexual propriety. Towner states, “*Perhaps the most notable symbol of the movement was outer adornment and apparel, and that of the new woman transgressed the traditional dress code of respectability...Some women of means and position (married and widowed), supported in some cases by free-thinking males, flouted traditional values governing adornment and dress and sexual propriety.*” For a woman to be “loud” and dressed “lewdly” (which involved refusing to wear her veil which was a symbol of being under a man’s protection) in the presence of men that she was not related to, as these ‘new imperial Roman women’ were doing, was disgraceful and a shameful thing. “*Emergence of this movement was so disturbing to the status-quo that Augustus issued legislation against it*” (Towner, 2006). Yet despite this edict, the ‘new woman’ movement continued outside of Rome well after the death of Augustus, particularly in Ephesus and Corinth.

1. Why might the apostle Paul have instructed the Christian women in the Ephesian church to take care how they presented themselves? (1Tim. 2:9)

The church at Ephesus was a “householder” church. A non-Christian visiting the church would have entered through the *vestibulum* (entrance) which opened onto the street and then proceeded into the gathering of the

¹ S. M. Baugh, “A Foreign World: Ephesus in the First Century,” in A. J. Köstenberger, et. Al. (eds.), *Women in the Church: A Fresh Analysis of 1 Timothy 2:9–15* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1995), 13–52.

assembled church members in the atrium where they would have continued to spill into the *tablinum* ('lounge room') which then opened onto the courtyard area. A visitor entering into this household would have been familiar with the structure and roles within the household and particularly the role of women within this structure.



2. Why might a woman in the Greco-Roman world have presented herself in public immodestly, and adorned with gold, pearls, and costly attire? (Refer to 1Tim.2:9)

3. The apostle Paul's problem with women wearing braided hair and pearls was-

- not with the pearls and braided hair as such, but what it meant in that culture about a woman wearing them in a public church meeting.
- that wearing pearls was so yesterday and would give them a false impression that Christians did not keep up with the latest trends in fashion.
- that he really didn't like women braiding their hair and that he would much prefer them to plait their hair instead and only wear one small pearl.

Every culture has symbols of meaning. A uniform is a cultural symbol of meaning. A gold ring on the ring finger of the left-hand is a cultural symbol in the west, while in some other cultures when that ring is worn on the *left*-hand

it means something else. Some of what Paul says about women in his epistles is grounded in the Greco-Roman cultural standards and localised problems — particularly in Corinth and Ephesus.

4. One of the ways we determine whether a New Testament guideline was addressing an issue of immediate cultural context or was a timeless ethical/moral principle for believers of all ages is-
 - (a) a localised cultural issue such how a women should present her hair was always introduced by Paul with the words, “Now this only relates to Ephesians and Corinthians.”
 - (b) a timeless principle for all believers of all ages and cultures always contains the introductory phrase, “Now listen up people!”
 - (c) that a timeless principle for Christian conduct in the New Testament was usually stated in several places to different audiences such as Romans 12:16 “*Live in harmony with one another*” (Rom 15:15; 2Cor. 13:11; Phil. 2:2; 1Pet. 3:8).

Objective 2. To compare and contrast Paul’s other statements about women and their role within the church.

While it seems that Paul was sensitive to cultural norms and not misrepresenting Christ to an unsaved world, we shouldn’t think that Paul was sanctioning the *suppression* of women.

5. Match these statements by Paul with their Scriptural references:
 - ___ Men should treat older women as mothers and younger women as their sisters. (a) Galatians 3:28
 - ___ Philip’s four daughters were each gifted with a ministry from God that necessitated that they speak in church. (b) First Timothy 5:2
 - ___ When it comes to access to God, there is no distinction between men and women, slave or free, Jew or Gentile. (c) Acts 21:9
 - ___ Many of these house church leaders were women. (d) Romans 16:1-15

From these Scriptures it becomes apparent that women *did* exercise teaching/preaching ministries within the early Church. Added to this are the following -

- ◆ The first ones to announce the resurrection of Christ were w _ _ _ n (Mtt. 28:8)
- ◆ These women ‘t _ _ _ _ t’ the male disciples of Christ that Jesus had risen from the dead (Mk. 16:10-11; Lk. 24:9; John 20:17-18)
- ◆ When Paul was giving instructions to women about how they were to p _ _ y or p _ _ _ _ _ y in church, he instructed them *not to be silent* but to have their heads covered presumably with a veil as was c _ _ _ _ _ _ _ _ y appropriate (1Cor. 11:5)
- ◆ In the book of Acts, *Priscilla* and Aquila both c _ _ _ _ _ _ _ _ d Apollos and taught him a *more accurate* understanding of the gospel (Acts 18:25-26)

Objective 3. To employ *the analogy of faith* in dealing with obscure or controversial biblical passages.

The *analogy of faith* was a term coined by the Reformers as a principle for interpreting the Bible. It is referred to in Romans 12:6 (“*the ‘analogue’ of the faith*”) where the Greek word *analogia* is rendered into English as ‘proportion’. In this instance, “the faith” or “our faith” refers to *the beliefs of Christianity*. That is, Romans 12 is advising the church to weigh up any prophecy given by someone in a church against the standard of Scripture. Whenever we encounter what appears to be an obscure verse of Scripture, we should interpret it in the light of other Scriptures that speak plainly to the same issue.

6. If someone was teaching that we could only be cleansed from our sin if we were in constant fellowship with other believers, based on First John 1:7, how might you use *the analogy of faith* to correct this interpretation?

Some of the things Paul states in this First Timothy passage seem obscure to us and require that we employ *the analogy of faith* to bring clarity to them. This is especially the case with such verses like First Timothy 2:12 and verse 15 which should be weighed up in light of all the New Testament’s teaching on the role of women in ministry within the church.

7. Based on First Timothy 2:14, who does Paul indicate was more to blame for “the fall” of mankind into sin?

Objective 4. To be able to describe the two main views about the relationship of men and women in ministry within the church.

When it comes to how different churches view the ministries and roles of women within a church, most traditional Christian denominations have a conservative position. They regard the ministry roles of men and women within the church as distinct but *complementary*.

However, most charismatic and Pentecostal denominations adopt a different view of the ministries and roles of women within the church where they see men and women as equally able to be called and gifted by God. This view is referred to as *egalitarianism*.

8. Which of these two positions do you regard as being the most biblical? Why?

APPLICATION

9. If another believer shared with you their rather odd view about God and Christianity based on an obscure verse in the Bible, what challenge might you present to them?

10. How do Paul's views about women, shape our church's view about the role of women within our church?

11. How might you use the *analogy of faith* to rebut someone’s teaching that since “faith without works is dead” (James 2:17) to become a Christian, you had to give your life to Christ and pray and read your Bible everyday, attend church twice every Sunday, attend three church prayer-meetings a week, attend two Bible studies a week, help out on the ushers’ team, serve on the worship team, teach Sunday-School at least once a month, and financially support the church’s general fund, mission’s fund, building fund, and project fund — and if you didn’t do all of this, you would lose your salvation?

12. How would you describe the biblical position of the roles of women in ministry and leadership within your church?
