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SERVICE—OR CIRCUS?

Scripture text: 1 Timothy 2

Let all things be done decently and in order” (1 Cor. 14:40) is a basic principle for the conduct of the ministry of the church. Apparently, young Timothy was having some problems applying this principle to the assemblies in Ephesus. The public worship services were losing their order and effectiveness because **both the men and the women members of the church were disobeying God’s Word.**

“The church is an organism,” a pastor told me, “so we shouldn’t put too much emphasis on organization. We should allow the Spirit to have freedom.”

“But if an organism is *disorganized*,” I quickly reminded him, “it will die. Yes, I agree that we must permit the Spirit to have freedom, but **even the Holy Spirit is not free to disobey the Word of God.**”

Often, what we think is the “freedom of the Spirit” are the carnal ideas of some Christian who is not walking in the Spirit. Eventually this “freedom” becomes anarchy, and the Spirit grieves as a church gradually moves away from the standards of God’s Word.

To counteract this tendency, Paul exhorted the men and women in the church and **reminded them of their spiritual responsibilities.**

The Men—Praying (1 Tim. 2:1–8)

The priority of prayer (v. 1a).

The variety of prayer (v. 1b).

The objects of prayer (vv. 1c–2).

The reasons for prayer (vv. 3–4).

The basis for prayer (vv. 5–7).

The basis for prayer (vv. 5–7).

Many believers do not realize that prayer is based on the work of Jesus Christ as Savior and Mediator.

As the God-Man, Jesus Christ is the perfect Mediator between the holy God and His failing children.

One of Job's complaints had to do with the absence of a mediator who could take his message to the throne of God. "There is no umpire between us, who may lay his hand upon us both" (Job 9:33, nasb).

Job 9:33 There is no arbiter between us, who might lay his hand on us both.

Christ died for “all men,” and God is willing for “all men to be saved.” How does this Good News get out to a sinful world? **God calls and ordains messengers who take the Gospel to lost sinners.** Paul was such a messenger: he was a **preacher** (the herald of the King), **an apostle** (one sent with a special commission), and a **teacher**. The same God who ordains the end (the salvation of the lost) **also ordains the means to the end: prayer and preaching of the Word.** This *Good News is not for the Jews only, but also for the Gentiles.*

If the basis for prayer is the sacrificial work of Jesus Christ on the cross, then prayer is a most important activity in a church.

Not to pray is to slight the cross! To pray only for ourselves **is to deny the worldwide outreach of the cross.** To ignore lost souls is to ignore the cross. “All men” [people] is the key to this paragraph: **We pray for “all” because Christ died for “all” and it is God’s will that “all” be saved.** We must give **ourselves to God to be a part of His worldwide program to reach people before it is too late.**

The attitude in prayer (v. 8).

Paul stated definitely that **“men” should pray in the local assembly**. Both men and women prayed in the early church (1 Cor. 11:4–5), but **the emphasis here is on the men**. It is common to find women’s prayer meetings, but not often do we find men’s prayer meetings. **If the men do not pray, the local church will not have dedicated leaders to oversee its ministry.**

It was customary for Jewish men to pray with their arms extended and their hands open to heaven. *Our traditional posture of bowing the head, folding the hands, and closing the eyes is nowhere found or commanded in Scripture.*

Actually, there are many prayer postures found in the Bible: standing with outstretched hands (1 Kings 8:22);

1 Kings 8:22 Then Solomon **stood before the altar of the LORD** in the presence of all the assembly of Israel and **spread out his hands toward heaven,**

Kneeling; Daniel 6:10 When Daniel knew that the document had been signed, he went to his house where he had windows in his upper chamber open toward Jerusalem. **He got down on his knees** three times a day and prayed and gave thanks before his God, as he had done previously.

Standing; Luke 18:11 The Pharisee, standing by himself, prayed thus: 'God, I thank you that I am not like other men, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector.

Sitting; 2 Samuel 7:18 Then King David went in and **sat before the LORD** and said, "Who am I, O Lord GOD, and what is my house, that you have brought me thus far?"

bowing the head; Genesis 24:26 The man bowed his head and worshiped the LORD

lifting the eyes; John 17:1 When Jesus had spoken these words, **he lifted up his eyes to heaven**, and said, "Father, the hour has come; glorify your Son that the Son may glorify you,

falling on the ground;

Genesis 17:1-4 When Abram was ninety-nine years old the LORD appeared to Abram and said to him, "I am God Almighty; walk before me, and be blameless, that I may make my covenant between me and you, and may multiply you greatly." **Then Abram fell on his face.** And God said to him, "Behold, my covenant is with you, and you shall be the father of a multitude of nations.

The important thing is not the posture of the body but the posture of the heart.

Paul stated three essentials for effective prayer, and the first was “**holy hands.**” Obviously this means a holy life. “**Clean hands**” was symbolic of a blameless life (2 Sam. 22:21; Ps. 24:4). **If we have sin in our lives, we cannot pray and expect God to answer** (Ps. 66:18).

Psalm 24:3-5 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 and righteousness from the God of his salvation.

2 Samuel 22:21 "The LORD dealt with me according to my righteousness; **according to the cleanness of my hands he rewarded me.**

Psalm 66:18 If I had cherished iniquity in my heart, the Lord would not have listened.

“Without wrath” is the second essential, and requires that we be on good terms with one another. **“Without anger”** might be a better translation. **A person who is constantly having trouble with other believers, who is a troublemaker rather than a peacemaker, cannot pray and get answers from God.**

“**Doubting**” suggests that we must pray in faith, but the word really means “disputing.” When we have anger in the heart, we often have open disagreements with others. **Christians should learn to disagree without being disagreeable.** We should “do all things without murmurings and disputings” (Phil. 2:14).

Effective praying, then, **demands that I be in a right relationship with God** (“holy hands”) and with my fellow believers (“without murmurings and disputings”). Jesus taught the same truth (Mark 11:24–26). **If we spent more time preparing to pray and getting our hearts right before God, our prayers would be more effective.**

Mark 11:22-26 And Jesus answered them, "Have faith in God. Truly, I say to you, whoever says to this mountain, 'Be taken up and thrown into the sea,' and **does not doubt in his heart**, but believes that what he says will come to pass, it will be done for him. Therefore I tell you, **whatever you ask in prayer**, believe that **you have received it**, and it will be yours. And **whenever you stand praying, forgive**, if you have anything against anyone, so that your Father also who is in heaven **may forgive you your trespasses.**" [*But if you do not forgive, neither will your Father who is in heaven forgive your trespasses.*]

The Women—Submitting (1 Tim. 2:9–15)

In these days of “Women’s Lib” and other feminist movements, the word “submission” makes some people see red. Some well-meaning writers have even accused Paul of being a “crusty old bachelor” who was antiwomen. Those of us who hold to the inspiration and authority of the Word of God know that Paul’s teachings came from God and not from himself. If we have a problem with what the Bible says about women in the church, the issue is not with Paul (or Peter—see 1 Peter 3:1–7), but with the Lord who gave the Word (2 Tim. 3:16–17).

1 Peter 3:1-5 Likewise, **wives, be subject to your own husbands**, so that even if some do not obey the word, **they may be won without a word by the conduct of their wives, when they see your respectful and pure conduct.** Do not let your adorning be external--the braiding of hair and the putting on of gold jewelry, or the clothing you wear-- but **let your adorning be the hidden person of the heart with the imperishable beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which in God's sight is very precious.** For this is how the holy women who hoped in God used to adorn themselves, by submitting to their own husbands,

1 Peter 3:6-7 as Sarah obeyed Abraham, calling him lord. And **you are her children, if you do good and do not fear anything that is frightening.** Likewise, **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.**

2 Timothy 3:16-17 **All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that **the man of God may be competent, equipped for every good work.****

The word translated “subjection” in 1 Timothy 2:11 is translated “submitting” and “submit” in Ephesians 5:21–22 and Colossians 3:18. It literally means “to rank under.”

Anyone who has served in the armed forces knows that “rank” **has to do with order and authority, not with value or ability.** A colonel is higher in rank than a private, but that does not necessarily mean that the colonel is a better man than the private. **It only means that the colonel has a higher rank and, therefore, more authority.**

Ephesians 5:21-22 **submitting** to one another out of reverence for Christ. Wives, **submit** to your own husbands, as to the Lord.

Colossians 3:17-20 And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him. Wives, **submit to your husbands**, as is fitting in the Lord. Husbands, love your wives, and do not be harsh with them. Children, obey your parents in everything, for this pleases the Lord.

“Let all things be done decently and in order” (1 Cor. 14:40) is a principle God follows in His creation. Just as an army would be in confusion if there were no levels of authority, so society would be in chaos without submission. Children should submit to their parents because God has given parents the authority to train their children and discipline them in love. Employees should submit to employers and obey them (Eph. 6:5–8, where the immediate reference is to household slaves, but the application can be made to workers today). Citizens should submit to government authorities, even if the authorities are not Christians (Rom. 13; 1 Peter 2:13–20).

1 Corinthians 14:40 But all things should be done decently and in order.

Ephesians 6:5-8 Slaves, obey your earthly masters with fear and trembling, with a sincere heart, as you would Christ, not by the way of eye-service, as people-pleasers, but as servants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart, rendering service with a good will as to the Lord and not to man, knowing that whatever good anyone does, this he will receive back from the Lord, whether he is a slave or free.

Romans 13:1-5 Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God. Therefore whoever resists the authorities resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgment. For **rulers are not a terror to good conduct, but to bad.** Would you have no fear of the one who is in authority? Then do what is good, and you will receive his approval, for he is **God's servant for your good**. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for he does not bear the sword in vain. For he is the servant of God, an avenger who carries out God's wrath on the wrongdoer. Therefore **one must be in subjection, not only to avoid God's wrath but also for the sake of conscience.**

1 Peter 2:13-16 Be subject for the Lord's sake to every human institution, whether it be to the emperor as supreme, or to governors as sent by him to punish those who do evil and to praise those who do good. For **this is the will of God, that by doing good you should put to silence the ignorance of foolish people.** Live as people who are free, **not using your freedom as a cover-up for evil, but living as servants of God.**

1 Peter 2:17-20 Honor everyone. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the emperor. Servants, be subject to your masters with all respect, not only to the good and gentle but also to the unjust. For this is a gracious thing, when, mindful of God, one endures sorrows while suffering unjustly. For what credit is it if, when you sin and are beaten for it, you endure? But if when you do good and suffer for it you endure, this is a gracious thing in the sight of God.

Submission is not subjugation.

Submission is recognizing God's order in the home and the church, and joyfully obeying it. When a Christian wife joyfully submits to the Lord and to her own husband, **it should bring out the best in her.** (For this to happen, the husband must love his wife and use God's order as a tool to build with, **not a weapon to fight with**—Eph. 5:18–33.) **Submission is the key to spiritual growth and ministry:** husbands should be submitted to the Lord, Christians should submit to each other (Eph. 5:21), and **wives should be submitted to the Lord and to their husbands.**

The emphasis in this section (1 Tim. 2:9–15) **is on the place of women in the local church.** Paul admonished these believing women to give evidence of their submission in several ways.

Modest dress (v. 9).

The **contrast here is between the artificial glamour of the world and the true beauty of a godly life.** Paul did not forbid the use of jewelry or lovely clothes, but rather **the excessive use of them** as substitutes for the true beauty of “a meek and quiet spirit” (see 1 Peter 3:1–6).

1 Peter 3:1-6 Likewise, wives, be subject to your own husbands, so that even if some do not obey the word, they may be won without a word by the conduct of their wives, when they see your respectful and pure conduct. Do not let your adorning be external--the braiding of hair and the putting on of gold jewelry, or the clothing you wear--but **let your adorning be the hidden person of the heart with the imperishable beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which in God's sight is very precious.** For this is how the holy women who hoped in God used to adorn themselves, **by submitting to their own husbands,** as Sarah obeyed Abraham, calling him lord. And you are her children, if you do good and do not fear anything that is frightening.

A woman who depends only on externals will soon run out of ammunition! She may attract attention, but she will not win lasting affection. Perhaps the latest fashion fads were tempting the women in the church at Ephesus, and **Paul had to remind Timothy to warn the women not to get trapped.**

The word translated “**modest**” (1 Tim. 2:9) simply means “**decent and orderly.**” It is related to the Greek word from which we get the English word “cosmetic.”

***1 Timothy 2:9** 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,*

A woman's clothing should be decent, orderly, and in good taste. **“Shamefacedness”** literally means **“modesty, the avoidance of extremes.”**

A woman who possesses this quality **is ashamed to go beyond the bounds of what is decent and proper.**

“Sobriety” comes from a Greek word that means **“having a sound mind and good sense.”** It describes an inner self-control—a spiritual “radar” that tells a person what is good and proper.

Ephesus was a wealthy commercial city, and **some women there competed against each other for attention and popularity.** In that day expensive hairdos arrayed with costly jewelry were an accepted way to get to the top socially. Paul admonished the Christian women to major on the “inner person,” **the true beauty that only Christ can give.** He did not forbid the use of nice clothing or ornaments. **He urged balance and propriety, with the emphasis on modesty and holy character.**

Godly works (v. 10).

Paul did not suggest that good works are a substitute for clothing! **Rather, he was contrasting the “cheapness” of expensive clothes and jewelry with the true values of godly character and Christian service.**

“Godliness” is another key word in Paul’s pastoral letters (1 Tim. 2:2, 10; 3:16; 4:7–8; 6:3, 5–6, 11; 2 Tim. 3:5; Titus 1:1).