On Mission

Believers are to be mindful of how they represent God in this world.

A member of a small church congregation called to ask if I would serve as their church’s interim pastor. Their previous pastor had resigned to move to a church in another state, and they wanted to maintain strong ministry leadership while they searched for a new pastor. I prayerfully considered the request and eventually agreed to serve the church during their transition.

Within a few weeks of my accepting the responsibility, the leadership situation at the church became even more challenging. The worship leader and pianist also departed, leaving the congregation to struggle to keep music and singing included in its worship services. Since no one in the congregation (including me) could play the piano or had any formal music training, we did our best to make a joyful noise without the benefit of accompaniment.

Realizing that the situation was not ideal, I began to try to recruit a music leader. I asked church members if they had friends or family who played the piano. I checked with other pastors in the area for suggestions but was unsuccessful in discovering anyone with the skills and willingness to serve.

My frustration mounted weekly. One Sunday while driving to church, I stopped my car on the side of the road and prayed about my frustrations. I complained to God about having to teach a Bible study group, lead the singing in worship, and preach too. I pleaded with Him to send someone to the church who could play the piano.

Later that morning, after our Bible study groups dismissed, I walked into the sanctuary to prepare for the worship service and noticed a woman and her daughter sitting in a pew. They were visitors, so I walked over and introduced myself to them. In the course of our brief conversation, the woman asked why no one was sitting at the piano. I explained that we had no one who knew how to play. She immediately responded that not only could she play the piano but also they were looking for a church home and a place to serve.

The church in Ephesus faced some critical challenges in Paul’s day. The apostle urged Timothy to lead the congregation to pray about their situation. God is more than ready to help His people fulfill the mission He gives them.
1 TIMOTHY 2:1-15

In chapter one, Paul stated his primary reason for writing to Timothy: to combat false teachers who were leading astray some believers in the Ephesian church (1 Tim 1:3,18). In chapter two, Paul turned his attention to the kinds of Christian conduct that sound gospel preaching produces. In contrast to endless debating about pointless myths, sound doctrinal teaching in the church leads to sincere, effective praying as well as proper, humble behavior in worship services by Christian men and women.

False teaching evidently had adversely affected the conduct of prayer and worship within the Ephesian congregation. Controversies over genealogies and empty speculation about distorted scriptural stories had led to arguments and anger within the body. The needless conflicts in turn were hindering the prayer lives of some Christian men. In addition, a worldly emphasis on physical appearance, especially among some of the Christian women, led Paul to exhort the women to maintain common-sense decency in their appearance. Further, Christian women needed to refrain from engaging in gossip, which evidently was helping to create an atmosphere of conflict in the church’s worship gatherings. Paul instructed the women to maintain a peaceful, teachable spirit with proper submission to authority.

EXPLORE THE TEXT

THROUGH PRAYER (1 Tim. 2:1-7)

VERSE 1

First of all, then, I urge that petitions, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for everyone,

The words first of all could refer either to something’s being first in a sequence or to being chief in importance. If Paul meant the second option, he was stressing the primary role of prayer in dealing with the problems in the Ephesian church. The word then (“therefore,” KJV) connects what follows with Paul’s charge in 1:18 for Timothy to “fight the good fight” of bold leadership in the Ephesian congregation.

Gospel ministry and faithful Christian living require courage. We engage in daily battles against “evil, spiritual forces in the heavens” (Eph. 6:12). We are foolish, then, to neglect the God-given spiritual armor of prayer.
Paul used four different Greek words to express the kinds of prayers in which Timothy and the Ephesians Christians could engage. The first two terms, rendered petitions (“supplications,” KJV; ESV) and prayers, are the most common words for prayer in the New Testament (see Eph. 6:18; Phil. 4:6; 1 Tim. 5:5). The third term, translated intercessions, is used in the New Testament only here and in 1 Timothy 4:5; it refers to praying on behalf of someone else. The fourth term, rendered thanksgivings, could refer either to having a grateful attitude throughout one’s praying or to expressions of gratitude for specific matters. Perhaps Paul had both ideas in mind in his exhortation to Timothy. To be sure, Paul’s collection of synonyms for prayer highlighted the foundational importance of prayer in dealing with the challenges that believers and churches face.

Paul urged that such prayers should be made for everyone. His emphasis on all-inclusive praying likely refers to praying for all types of people. No group of people was to be left out. This universal note is repeated two more times in this section: God “wants everyone to be saved” (2:4), and Jesus offered Himself as “a ransom for all” (2:6). Paul did not make explicit the reason he stressed this universal scope. Perhaps he wanted to confront the narrow, elitist tendencies of the false teachers. Their obsessive attention to religious myths resulted in their neglecting the gospel mission to the world.

**VERSE 2**

for kings and all those who are in authority, so that we may lead a tranquil and quiet life in all godliness and dignity.

Paul narrowed his focus to a more specific object of prayer: kings and all those who are in authority. The use of the plural word kings suggests that Paul was including not only the Roman emperor but also local rulers who derived their authority from the emperor. The phrase those who are in authority likely refers to provincial and local community leaders; Paul seemed to be focused on political leaders in this verse. The New Testament teaches that God created government for our benefit (Rom. 13:1-7; 1 Pet. 2:13-17). As such, Christians have a responsibility to pray for those who exercise governmental functions.

Paul’s goal for these prayers was related to the life of the church in the world, which he described in two parts. First, praying for government officials could help believers lead a tranquil and quiet life. The two Greek words translated tranquil and quiet, closely related in meaning, appear infrequently in the New Testament. The first word occurs only in 1 Timothy 2:2, and the second term appears only in this verse and in 1 Peter 3:4. Paul used a related form of the Greek word translated quiet in 1 Timothy 2:11-12 to describe the
role of women in worship. This Greek word group can refer to silence in the sense of not saying anything aloud, or it can refer to one’s peaceful manner of living (without fanfare or commotion). Paul included a similar appeal to a quiet life to encourage the Christians in Thessalonica “to behave properly in the presence of outsiders” (1 Thess. 4:11-12).

Second, praying for those in authority could help believers live in all godliness and dignity. The purpose of living a tranquil and quiet life was not for believers to go unnoticed by the world around them. On the contrary, believers were to exhibit behavior that reflected the gospel. Paul later used the Greek word translated dignity to describe the way a church’s pastoral overseer should manage his family (see 1 Tim. 3:4). Paul was appealing for behavior that elicited respect from outside observers.

VERSES 3-4

This is good, and it pleases God our Savior, who wants everyone to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.

The word this points back to Paul’s encouragement for Timothy and the Ephesian believers to start with prayer in solving their problems. That God is pleased with such prayer and declares it to be good should motivate believers to pray fervently for all people. By applying the title Savior to God, as he did previously in the letter’s opening verse, Paul emphasized God’s gracious initiative in providing the way of salvation for sinners.

Praying for others, including governmental leaders, is the right thing to do because God wants everyone to be saved. The term everyone (“all men,” KJV; “all people,” ESV; NIV) likely refers to the comprehensive group for whom Paul encouraged prayer in 2:1. The Greek word translated wants can refer to a desire or a wish, but it can also refer to intent or resolve (will). However, to say that God wants all to be saved does not mean everyone will be saved (universalism). In Christ, God provided the one and only way of salvation for all people—Jew or Gentile. It matters not one’s gender, ethnicity, religious heritage, education, social position, or any other personal qualification. It matters only whether or not one believes in Jesus Christ as Savior. Jesus said, “Anyone who believes in him is not condemned, but anyone who does not believe is already condemned, because he has not believed in the name of the one and only Son of God” (John 3:18).

First Timothy 2:4 expresses God’s heart for all people, regardless of their ethnic origin, economic status, or any other factor. This understanding fits well with Paul’s opposition to the false teachers who appear to have espoused a limited, elitist view of the church in opposition to the gospel mission to the nations. Paul’s point was that no person is outside God’s loving care.
The phrase **the knowledge of the truth** was another way of referring to a person’s conversion experience (see Heb. 10:26). Paul was directly confronting the false teachers’ erroneous doctrine. Paul later referred to these men as those “whose minds are depraved and deprived of the truth” (1 Tim. 6:5). God’s desire was for everyone to recognize the truth of the gospel.

**VERSE 5**

**For there is one God and one mediator between God and humanity, the man Christ Jesus,**

Paul’s claim that prayer for all people is right because God wants all people to be saved was based on the foundational truth of God’s oneness (Deut. 6:4). Pagan deities were not really divine; thus, salvation could only come from the one true God to whom all people had access. And that one God had established **one mediator between God and humanity.** The term *mediator* refers to one who works with two parties to resolve disagreement and achieve a common purpose or goal. The New Testament speaks of only one Person who embodies both divine fullness and full humanness—**the man Christ Jesus.** While the Greek word rendered *mediator* does not of itself explain Jesus’ uniqueness as the God-Man, other Scriptures make clear the necessity of Jesus being both fully God and fully human (see Heb. 1:3; 2:14-17).

**VERSE 6**

**who gave himself as a ransom for all, a testimony at the proper time.**

Jesus’ role as mediator involved His voluntary self-sacrifice on behalf of all people. The Greek word translated *ransom* is a compound term that literally means “an ‘in-place-of’ payment price.” The Greek root word was typically used in reference to the monetary price that was paid to purchase the freedom of a slave or captive. Jesus paid the price to set sinners free from their bondage to sin and death, but He did not pay with money. He **gave himself** through His sacrificial death on the cross—the one sinless Mediator dying in place of all sinful mankind—so that everyone who believes in Him would be set free to know God, love God (and others), and truly live forever.

**EXPLORE FURTHER**

Read the article titled “Ransom” on page 1334 in the *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary, Revised and Expanded.* How does the concept of ransom help you understand how Jesus’ death changed the believer’s situation?
Paul stated further that Jesus’ death as a ransom provided a testimony, a powerful, life-changing message of truth. The Greek term translated testimony comes over into English as the word martyr. Jesus willingly laid down His life in obedience to God’s salvation plan. His sacrificial death testified of God’s gracious intention to provide the way of forgiveness and new life for sinners. The phrase at the proper time (“in due time,” KJV) may relate either to the right timing of Jesus’ atoning death in God’s plan of salvation or to the gospel message’s powerful impact in the present age. Both ideas are valid views.

VERSE 7

For this I was appointed a herald, an apostle (I am telling the truth; I am not lying), and a teacher of the Gentiles in faith and truth.

Paul reminded Timothy that the gospel was not only his (and Timothy’s) life but also his life’s calling. Christ not only saved Paul but subsequently appointed (“ordained,” KJV) him to be a herald (“a preacher,” KJV; ESV) of the gospel message. In Paul’s day, the Greek term rendered herald referred to one who proclaimed important announcements and decisions publicly for the benefit of all citizens. Paul had fully embraced this responsibility in regard to the gospel message (see also 2 Tim. 1:11).

The term apostle designated Paul’s ministry as a divinely appointed spokesman of God to the Gentiles (1 Tim. 1:1). Paul typically used this title in identifying himself in the opening of his letters. The early church affirmed Paul’s role as an apostle (see Acts 14:4,14).

Paul interrupted the description of his ministry with a declaration of the truth of his claim. He used similar language in Romans 9:1 (see also Gal. 1:20). Following the interruption, Paul listed the third aspect of his ministry, a teacher of the Gentiles. The parenthetical claim to truthfulness may have been directed either to his being an apostle or his claim to be a teacher of the Gentiles. Paul included teachers in two lists of leaders in the church (1 Cor. 12:28; Eph. 4:11). He also commanded Timothy to teach (1 Tim. 4:11; 6:2) and train other “faithful men who will be able to teach others also” (2 Tim. 2:2). Paul’s role as an authoritative spokesman for God (apostle) included both evangelistic proclamation (herald) and instruction (teacher).

The phrase in faith and truth could refer either to the content of what Paul taught or to his role as a teacher. While both interpretations are possible, Paul likely ended this section with a focus on the gospel’s characteristics; it is trustworthy and true. The life-changing gospel message contrasted sharply with the false teachers’ focus on pointless myths.
LED BY GODLY MEN (1 Tim. 2:8)

VERSE 8

Therefore, I want the men in every place to pray, lifting up holy hands without anger or argument.

Paul moved from a general discussion of prayer to specific instructions for various groups in the church. He first addressed the men in every place. The Greek word translated men refers to males and, depending on the context, could refer to husbands. The word therefore (“then,” ESV) indicates that Paul based his instructions concerning prayer and worship on the preceding emphasis of the gospel and its transforming impact on believers’ conduct. The Greek term rendered want (“will,” KJV; “desire,” ESV) can describe a wish or desire, or it can refer to a plan or course of action a person intends to carry out. Paul intended for believers to follow his instructions.

With the phrase in every place, Paul may have assured male believers in Ephesus that his instruction to them was consistent with what he taught in churches everywhere. An alternate view is that Paul was instructing the Christian men of Ephesus as to how they were to behave whenever and wherever believers gathered for worship. They were to pray, lifting up holy hands without anger or argument. In these few brief words, Paul instructed Christian men about their proper activity in worship, proper character, and proper behavior.

The phrase lifting up holy hands emphasizes the believer’s character more than his posture in prayer. First-century Jewish men commonly prayed with their faces and arms uplifted toward heaven in a gesture of openness before God. Psalm 24:4 teaches that one who comes before the Lord should have “clean hands and a pure heart, who has not appealed to what is false, and who has not sworn deceitfully.”

The phrase without anger or argument (“doubting,” KJV; “quarreling,” ESV; “disputing,” NIV) points to the proper ways believers are to relate to one another. Where anger erupts, patience, kindness, and forgiveness are lacking. The Greek word rendered argument refers in this context to bitter disputes. That such behavior might occur in the setting of Christian worship makes it all the more shameful.

EXPLORE FURTHER

Who are some men in your church whose public prayers are especially meaningful in worship gatherings? What makes their prayers meaningful to you?
VERSE 9
Also, the women are to dress themselves in modest clothing, with decency and good sense, not with elaborate hairstyles, gold, pearls, or expensive apparel,

After instructing Christian men in verse 8, Paul then addressed Christian women in verses 9-15. In both cases his instructions appear to focus on the context of Christian worship gatherings. In other words, Paul was especially concerned that worship gatherings in Ephesus were consistently characterized by sound gospel teaching demonstrated in Christlike attitudes and behavior among believers.

Paul used three closely related words to describe an appropriate manner of dress for Christian women in public worship. First, they should dress themselves in modest clothing. The word rendered modest also can mean “respectable,” “orderly,” “decent,” and “virtuous.” Second, the phrase with decency (“with shamefacedness,” KJV), similarly described apparel that was neither shamefully extravagant nor provocative. Third, Christian women were to use good sense (“sobriety,” KJV; “self-control,” ESV; “propriety,” NIV). This term emphasized women using good judgment regarding their outward appearance. Elaborate hairstyles, gold jewelry, pearls, and expensive apparel might impress (or provoke) other worshipers, but they would not impress the Lord, who is the focus of all genuine worship.

VERSE 10
but with good works, as is proper for women who profess to worship God.

As with Christian men, God is more interested in how His people appear on the inside than on the outside (see 1 Sam. 16:7). He looks for a changed heart that leads to good works. Peter made a similar point when he wrote to Christian wives, “Don’t let your beauty consist of outward things like elaborate hairstyles and wearing gold jewelry, but rather what is inside the heart—the imperishable quality of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is of great worth in God’s sight” (1 Pet. 3:3-4).

VERSE 11
A woman is to learn quietly with full submission.

Paul’s instructions to Christian women moved from proper dress to proper conduct in worship. The Greek word rendered woman can also refer to
a wife, but Paul probably was not trying to distinguish between married and unmarried women in this context.

In the context of Christian worship gatherings, women were to learn quietly with full submission. The issue Paul addressed was not whether women should learn in worship—they should—but rather whether they should engage in teaching. The directive was qualified in two ways. First, a woman was to learn quietly. The Greek word can mean “to be silent,” in the sense of not speaking. However, it can also describe peacefulness with no disturbance or interruption. Paul did not prohibit women from speaking at all; rather, he urged them to exhibit a peaceful, teachable attitude.

Second, women were to learn with full submission. The text does not identify to whom women were to be submissive. Probably Paul was directing Christian women to respect the authority of the church’s pastor-teacher. Teaching and learning are both practically impossible in a situation in which rebellious people constantly challenge the teacher’s authority.

VERSE 12
I do not allow a woman to teach or to have authority over a man; instead, she is to remain quiet.

Paul limited the role of Christian women in worship gatherings in two ways. First, he did not allow a woman to teach. Bible students have long debated the scope of Paul’s command. Evidently women were permitted to teach other women (see Titus 2:3-4). In a context such as Ephesus, however, where false teaching was flourishing, Paul limited the role of doctrinal teaching in worship gatherings to male Christian leaders.

Second, Paul stated that he did not permit women to have authority over a man. The Greek word translated authority occurs only here in the New Testament. The term’s basic meaning is “to have or to exercise authority over someone.” Paul ended the section by once again calling for Christian women to have a quiet, peaceful demeanor that contributed to learning.

VERSE 13
For Adam was formed first, then Eve.

Paul grounded his instruction about the role of women in worship on two events in the Genesis creation account. First, Paul pointed out that Adam was formed first (see Gen. 2:7,21-22). Paul used a similar scriptural basis in 1 Corinthians 11:7-9 to instruct Christian women to wear head coverings. After distinguishing gender roles, Paul qualified the illustration, emphasizing men and women’s equal status with God (11:11-12). Paul likewise made a distinction in gender roles between men and women in 1 Timothy 2:12.
VERSE 14

And Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and transgressed.

The second event from which Paul drew a basis for women to learn quietly in worship was Eve’s yielding to the serpent’s (Satan’s) temptation in the garden of Eden. The woman was deceived and transgressed. Paul did not exonerate the man when he wrote that Adam was not deceived. In Romans 5:12-14, the apostle clearly affirmed Adam’s responsibility in bringing death into the world through sin.

VERSE 15

But she will be saved through childbearing, if they continue in faith, love, and holiness, with good sense.

We do well to remind ourselves that much of our difficulty in understanding this verse relates to our distance from the situation that Paul and Timothy were facing. The believers in first-century Ephesus probably did not struggle with Paul’s meaning as we do. The verse includes a claim—that women will be saved by childbearing—followed by a condition—if they continue in faith, love, and holiness, with good sense. Problems include the exact meaning of the phrases will be saved and by childbearing as well as the relationship between the promise and the condition that follows.

The Greek word translated saved can refer to either physical preservation or spiritual salvation, depending on the context. Moreover, the term rendered childbearing has been taken to mean childbirth in general or to the birth of the Messiah. The Greek word translated childbearing occurs only here in the New Testament, although Paul later used a related form of the word in encouraging young believing women in the church to “marry, have children, [and] manage their households” (1 Tim. 5:14). The false teachers were forbidding marriage and challenging God’s goodness (4:3). In contrast, Paul was calling for the women in the Ephesian church to reject false teaching and accept the value of motherhood and the sanctity of the family.

EXPLORE FURTHER

Who are some women in your church who exemplify Paul’s description of godly women in these verses? How can you show appreciation for the contributions of Christian women to your church’s life and ministry?