

The Compass

Week 42

OT Readings: Jeremiah 26:1 - 38:28

NT Readings: 2 Thessalonians 3:1 - 1 Timothy 6:21

Things to Watch for in Your Readings this Week

Old Testament

- The events of chapter 26 match Jeremiah's message of chapter 7.
- Chapters 27-29 show the conflict between Jeremiah and the false prophets who proclaim "good" for Judah while she remains in her sin.
- 30-33 are "consolation" oracles showing God's intent to restore after the tragedy that looms on the horizon.¹
- The context for 37-38 is the reign of Judah's last king, Zedekiah, and then the Babylonian siege. Note how even now God is at work to alleviate the suffering if His people will only respond (e.g., 38:2-3).

New Testament

- 1 Timothy is Paul's correspondence to his protégé Timothy whom he has given responsibility for the affairs of the Ephesian church. Paul alternates between words of encouragement to Timothy and words of correction for the situation at Ephesus.²

Highlight of the Week: Who is God?

Jer. 26:1-24.³ We find here a fascinating look into God's heart and His ways in dealing with humanity. God hopes for a change, one that will allow Him to "relent" of the plans for judgment (26:1-3). Here is an application of the principle we saw last week in Jer. 18. The word "relent" here implies a change of direction or mind; God is moving on one course but if His people will change, turn and repent, He will change His plans as well. Behind this dynamic is God's hope for a redemptive solution to the difficulty of their hard hearts and sin. God is fully and actively involved in our world and willing to adjust His plans according to His great heart of mercy. We might say it like this: God is unchangeable in His character and nature, but flexible in the way He brings about His purposes in the world. Jeremiah and God's people understood this truth about God; this is seen in 26:12-13 and 26:19. God had prophesied the destruction of Jerusalem through Micah in the days of Hezekiah (26:16-19), but "relented" (changed His mind) when they repented.⁴ The future was not fixed or pre-determined; both the people and God have choices that will determine what *kind* of future will come into being.

The take away? God is a living dynamic Person, involved in our lives, working with our choices; He is not distant from us, "executing" some divine blueprint independent from and oblivious to His world. History is not a deterministic blueprint that comes to pass regardless of our choices; rather God the "omni-competent" Sovereign is able to work with our lives and choices and still bring about His good purposes for the world.⁵

Application: "What about me? How does this apply?"

1 Timothy 6:9-10, 17-18. The recent protest over the "1%" and "we are the 99%" is difficult to take seriously given the actual reality of the world.⁶ If you live in America, you are the 1% when we reflect on the world as a whole. Paul is not advocating some sort of "redistribution" of wealth; that would be too easy!⁷ Pay your share and keep the rest! Rather, he is challenging the place that wealth can have in our hearts, the "rootedness," the deep attachment we have to it. And we are so saturated with our affluence that we have difficulty seeing it. Riches, it seems, have within them an inherent danger. The solution? Be recklessly generous! Refuse the temptation to "buy in" to the materialism of our culture. Fill your heart and mind with the dreams of God and find practical ways to *fund* His dreams. Make this a global dream, because that is God's dream; when we consider the world, we give disproportionately to projects within our own nation. When we stand to give an account, God will not ask us only about our immediate neighbor. Hardly. In an age where technology has brought the world a mouse click (or a jet ride) away our neighbor might well live in Tanzania.

Difficult Question of the Week

1 Tim 2:1-15. Q. “Does Paul forbid women from teaching and leadership roles?”

Few passages invoke the kind of heat this one does; few are more misinterpreted and misapplied. As in all interpretive questions, one must consider the immediate context, the historical setting and the author’s intent. While we cannot look at this passage in detail, the following bullet points will lay out what I believe Paul intends.

- In the Timothy letters, Paul is concerned with false teaching and this involved both women and men. The Ephesian historical situation might have easily lent itself to error in the church, given the prevalence of Artemis worship and related practices. The context of 2:1-15 concerns the gathered Christian community.⁸ Is it possible that women, perhaps even women leading house churches, were especially susceptible to this error and that Paul seeks only a *temporary* restriction until these women are corrected?
- A surface reading of 2:9-15 might leave one feeling that the meaning is obvious, however, a closer look shows that it is fraught with difficulties. What are to make of lifting holy hands, clothing and jewelry restrictions, the need for women to learn – quietly and submitted, being saved through “childbearing”?⁹ What about the allusion to Adam and Eve? How is it that Paul intends to use this analogy? Perhaps the most vexing question of all is the language Paul uses for “have authority over.” To “teach” is clear enough, but the Greek for “have authority over” is not.¹⁰
- Does Paul intend some sort of universal that would apply to all churches in all times? It seems highly unlikely. There is no similar such restriction in any other of Paul’s writings, in fact, he encourages the believers at Colossae to “teach one another” (Col. 3:16) and this without any qualification.¹¹ I would argue that at Ephesus Paul intends a temporary restriction for this particular setting and that it was not Paul’s intention to make this a “rule” for all churches in all times and places.¹²
- Finally, there is the question of application.¹³ If we attempt to apply this passage today in some universal, unqualified and “literal” way; many, many questions emerge. Do we mean to say then that a woman cannot teach any man anything at any time?¹⁴ Do we mean that if my wife shares something from the Bible and I learn something, then I should forbid her from doing that again? What if a woman in the church shares something and I learn something? Well some say, “Women can teach other women.” Should we then forbid *men* from hearing these teachings lest they learn something?¹⁵ It seems it should not be so complicated if it is fact a universal for all times and places.¹⁶

I would add a footnote. Some of the church’s great pioneers and yes, teachers, have been and continue to be women.¹⁷ If you would like more on the issue of women’s role in the church, follow this footnote below.¹⁸

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¹ This section includes a very important passage of “new covenant” (Jer. 31:31-34) which will be significant in the NT.

² See Fee and Stuart, *How to Read the Bible Book by Book* for details. This understanding of the contextual situation is vital to understanding the “women’s issue” addressed in chapter 2; see Difficult Question above.

³ This passage is the context for Jeremiah’s message in Jer. 7. Like all prophets, Jeremiah’s words are less than well received; they threaten his life. No wonder he was hesitant about his call.

⁴ Apparently God was more concerned to show mercy to Hezekiah and Judah than to insist that Micah’s prophesy be fulfilled! This unfulfilled prophecy is a good illustration of the fact that much prophecy is conditional.

⁵ I am uncertain where this term, “omni-competent,” originates; however, it captures something wonderful about God!

⁶ Such an assertion would be laughable were it not so tragic; most of the world lives in abject poverty.

⁷ Does the Bible have anything to say about economics? I would suggest, yes. One problem with secular progressivism’s answer to poverty is that it is coerced redistribution; taxation can become simply a form of theft. Want to read more? Read these together: Ron Sider, *Rich Christians in an Age of Hunger* and the critique/answer to Sider; David Chilton, *Rich Christians in an Age of Guilt Manipulators*.

⁸ However, the “gathered community” looked nothing like our contemporary church services. Likely they gathered in small house churches scattered across the region and these house churches were the place where this false teaching was being disseminated. Notice that the passage is concerned with propriety when they gather and concerns men (2:8) as well as women. This passage is not a “woman” passage alone.

⁹ “Saved by childbearing” hardly captures the idea: there is a definite article in front of “childbirth,” thus “saved through **the** childbirth” or better, “birth of the Child,” meaning Jesus.

¹⁰ The word used is *authentēin* and **only** here in the NT. It is seldom used in secular literature and the exact meaning is uncertain. If Paul wanted to be sure that his readers understood “authority” he simply could have used *exousia* and it would have been clear. He does not and this leads one to carefully consider, why not? In my mind, because he is speaking to a particular situation at Ephesus, he uses a particular word, *authentēin*, to describe that situation. This seems further evidence that he intends this restriction only for Ephesus at this moment in time.

¹¹ Certainly Paul would have qualified this injunction to “teach” one another if there was a universal restriction in his mind. Some would argue that what Paul intends at Ephesus is a limitation upon women concerning leadership and teaching role, not just “sharing” in the context of Body life like Colossians. If that be so, then one could just as easily argue that the reason Paul would feel the need to address the “teaching/leadership” role is that women in Ephesus were already functioning in that role and there is a need for only *correction*, **not** absolute restriction. Further, where does the distinction between “sharing” and “teach/lead” come from? Seemingly not from either text; the same word is used for “teaching” in both instances.

¹² There is evidence in the NT that woman did have leadership and teaching roles, e.g., Priscilla. Also, Junia is a feminine name (Rom. 13:7) and the grammar allows for her to be “among the apostles,” i.e., an apostle.

¹³ I might add a guideline on the application side, “Can I realistically apply my interpretive conclusion?” By this I mean, “Is my interpretation such that it would have made sense to the original audience, as would the application coming from it?” Further, can I now apply this text to the present situation in some coherent manner? If not, I need to take another look at my interpretation. Many who want to see this passage as a restriction on women’s roles in the church seem less inclined to enforce the clothing/appearance restrictions, insist on men lifting up hands in worship or make sure the women in the congregation are pregnant to insure their salvation. It is hardly possible to consider part of this passage as culture bound and restricted to Ephesus or the first century and then universalize the rest. The point is that the passage is not as clear as some would have us believe.

¹⁴ Some argue that this is not what Paul intends, however, if one is to universalize this passage, then it must be any woman at any time. Can a mother “teach” her male child to tie his shoes? While I am being factious, the questions are many.

¹⁵ The counter argument that these restrictions apply only to the church setting are unsatisfying. After all, what is the church if not God’s people and their relationships? Too often in this discussion the situation of the first century church is thought of as something like the American church setting, which of course it was not.

¹⁶ Then how might we apply it? If we faced a similar situation as did Paul at Ephesus with women (or men for that matter) teaching error, we might find the principles in this passage quite useful.

¹⁷ If women had not taken up the responsibilities of world mission, we would be a couple generations behind. See Ruth Tucker’s books: *Daughters of the Church* and *Guardians of the Great Commission*.

¹⁸ For a look at the Timothy passage on this issue, see Gordon Fee, *Gospel and Spirit*, p. 52-65. For an overall of the pastoral epistles see Gordon Fee’s commentary, 1 and 2 Timothy, Titus (New International Biblical Commentary, 1995). To explore alternative positions on the women’s issue, see Robert and Bonnidell Clouse, eds., *Women in Ministry: Four Views*. For the “egalitarian” view see Cunningham and Hamilton, *Why Not Women?*, Gilbert Bilezikian, *Beyond Sex Roles*, Alvera Mickelsen, ed., *Women, Authority and the Bible*, Ruth Tucker, *Women in the Maze*. For the hierarchal position, see Wayne Grudem and John Piper, eds., *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood* (Wheaton, Illinois, Crossway Books, 1991).