

Men, women & the church

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[0 : 00] Men, women, and the church is a topic which has actually gained national news headlines over recent weeks.! That's not seen in our church as we operate.

Is that okay? We want to hear from God's Word this morning. Is it okay? What is good for his people?

What is good for men and women who are following the Lord Jesus Christ? Perhaps we've got all sorts of questions as we come to this topic. Perhaps we've got all sorts of questions as we've read through those verses.

I certainly did as I opened them up this week. I think something that's really important as we come to this is remembering that as we consider these things together, we are thinking about something that doesn't belong to us.

The church doesn't belong to us. It doesn't belong to me. It doesn't belong to Jerome. It doesn't belong to Phil. It belongs to the Lord Jesus Christ.

[1 : 34] It's his church. And he sets up the church in the way that he, as the wise, eternal God, sees best.

And so we want to hear from him about what we should put into practice in the life of our own local church. Last week we were looking at Genesis 1-3 and we saw really the blueprint, the plan, the design for human beings in this world that God has made for us.

As said at the beginning, that was very much part one to this talk. So if you want to make more sense of what we're saying this week, do go back and listen.

But the headline really was that men, women, boys and girls are absolutely made equal in God's sight. And they are given the same mission to increase in number, to subdue the earth, to rule over the creation.

But we also saw there are differences between men and women too. And those differences are now much harder to practice because we're now living in a fallen world.

[2 : 59] And we ended last week seeing that the Lord Jesus Christ is bringing together a whole new humanity in the church.

He's bringing together men, women, boys and girls from all over the world to be part of this new creation, the church. That's the big thing he's doing in the world. And Galatians chapter 3 verse 28 affirms this.

So of all the Lord's people, there is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female. For you are all one in Christ Jesus. We looked at Galatians quite recently and we saw that that verse doesn't mean that we lose our God-given identity as men, male and female.

It doesn't mean we lose our identity culturally as British, Nigerian, Sri Lankan, German, French, etc. But it does mean that there is no one who is treated differently in terms of coming to Christ as Savior.

No one with a greater spiritual advantage. We all are fallen human beings in need of the mercy of our gods. And we all find that we're part, if we're in Christ Jesus, we're part of his church, his body.

[4 : 30] And there's various images of what the church looks like. We've mentioned one, the new humanity in Christ. Here in 1 Timothy it speaks of God's households.

So Paul, writing to Timothy, who's a pastor of a church, he says this, chapter 3, verse 15. If I am delayed, I'm writing these things, if I am delayed, you will know how people ought to conduct themselves in God's households.

Which is the church of the living God, the pillar and foundation of the truth. And last week in Genesis 1-3 we saw the creation of the first humans.

We also saw the creation of the first household, didn't we? Adam and Eve were the first married couple. And there was an order to their relationship together.

A God-given order. And so too, there is a God-given order to the church, the household of gods. We are absolutely equal in that, but we're also different.

[5 : 42] So let's go through the verses and see what the Lord says to men and women in church life. First of all, pursue godliness.

Chapter 2, verse 8 says this, addressing men, first of all. Therefore, I want the men everywhere to pray, lifting up holy hands without anger or disputing.

These are instructions for public praying in church. Instructions given to men. Because Paul seems to spot a potential issue that is relevant to the men in Timothy's church.

Absolutely, it's good to pray. It's good to lead others in prayer. But if it's taking place from a heart of anger or disputing, then there's something not quite right with our heart's motives in coming before the Lord and leading others in prayer.

Perhaps Paul has in mind some who, in the church, who were trying to sort of get one over on another chap in the church in their prayers. Lord, this person said this, we know they're wrong, so let's pray for this.

[7 : 08] Some sort of real competitive, argumentative thing going on in prayer. And that's not right, is it? That's not a right motive to be coming before the Lord in prayer.

And Paul wants to make sure this is dealt with. As he says elsewhere, a little yeast works through the whole batch of dough. Perhaps it's just a few men in Timothy's church who are prone to this.

But it could start with a few and lead out to others. And so, men, take care when you're praying.

Take care of your own heart. Remember what the psalmist says, Who may ascend the hill of the Lord, who may come into his presence, only the one with pure hands and a clean heart.

And that's first and foremost the Lord Jesus, isn't it? And by his grace we stand in him and his finished work. And because we stand in him, we can come before him rightly.

[8 : 15] But remember that our hearts are sinful. And so perhaps before coming to be with God's people, before if you are leading others in prayer, before coming to do that, pray to the Lord about your own heart.

Confess your own sin. If you're feeling angry with someone in the church or a situation in the church, pray about that before you come to the church.

Don't try and rile things up in the prayer meeting or in leading a service. Consider your attitude before God when you come in prayer.

That's what Paul's warning, particularly the men in the church. Men, I guess, are a bit more prone to argumentative attitudes, competitiveness.

It's not true for all men. And it can be true of women too. But there's a tendency for men to have that sort of feeling. And so Paul wants to make sure he addresses this.

[9 : 21] And then he instructs women about something too. So in verse 9, have a look. I also want the women to dress modestly, with decency and propriety, adorning themselves not with elaborate hairstyles or gold or pearls or expensive clothes, but with good deeds appropriate for women who profess to worship the Lord.

Again, I don't think Paul's assuming every woman in Timothy's church is doing this, but he's recognizing that this is becoming a bit of a problem in this church.

And he doesn't want it to become more of a problem for more women. It's instructions about fashion and what they're coming to wear.

And these instructions, according to one commentator, stand in contrast with the pagan practice of dressing up for public festivals in a woman's finest garments.

The decadent, extravagant styles of fashion in Rome with the Empress serving as the prime model quickly spread to the rest of the Greco-Roman world and found eager followers among women everywhere who copied the elaborate hairstyles and fashion trends.

[10 : 43] That was an issue going on in the day when Paul is writing. So Paul is wanting to say something about that, something and giving instructions which are better for the Lord's people.

Focus on something more important than your outward appearance. Yes, it can be fun and nice to dress up in fancy jewellery and clothes, but consider your heart before the Lord's.

It's good to help us interpret Scripture with other Scripture at times, and I think 1 Peter 3, verse 3 to 4, a good verse is to have alongside these ones.

Paul says, your beauty should not come from outward adornment, such as elaborate hairstyles and the wearing of gold or jewellery or fine clothes.

Rather, it should be that of your inner self, the unfading beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit which is of great worth in God's sight.

[11 : 58] It's not saying don't wear these things. Don't wear clothes. Don't wear nice jewellery. In fact, if you're reading the King James Version, you could potentially read verse 3 of 1 Peter 3 as don't wear clothes.

Then we'd have other problems as well, so we need to read this carefully, don't we? But he is saying, remember where your true beauty comes from as a Christian.

What really matters is where your heart is at before God's. As we sang earlier, my value, our value before God's is not in what I own.

It's not in what I dress in. Not in what hairstyle I have. It's found in the costly wounds of love found in Jesus, our Redeemer.

And so our focus on coming to be with God's people should be on pursuing godliness, but preparing our hearts to meet with the Lord and to grow in Him and to be a blessing to His people.

[13 : 15] I wonder if Paul was writing this today, whether he would just address the women, whether he'd address men too. As I think nowadays, men and women are very interested in fashion and what they wear.

I remember going through a phase early on in my 20s where I was very much making sure I dressed well and spent time in the mirror doing my hair. Nowadays, I hardly spend a moment in front of the mirror.

And actually, I would spend too much time probably making sure I looked okay before going to church when I could have spent a lot more time praying, praying about my own heart and coming to worship the Lord and being with His people rather than focusing on my own outward looks.

And that's what Paul is encouraging us here with. Verse 10.

What's better? Come with good deeds appropriate for women who profess to worship the Lord. The Lord has saved us by His grace and He saves us to do good works, to do good things for Him and for His people.

[14 : 39] It's part of living godly lives that we do good things for Him. So pursue godliness and we prepare to come to church.

Is that our aim? Or is our priority to be getting a win over someone at church? Is our priority to show and help others feel our anger about something in church?

Is our priority about what we're wearing when we're coming to church and looking good before others? Or are we coming with a prayerful attitude?

Wanting to hear from our gods? Wanting to be growing in Him? Wanting to be equipped for good works? And wanting to be blessed as we share time with His people?

Consider our motivations. Motivations. Is it to pursue godliness? Or is it something else? Secondly, listen to the words.

[15 : 43] Hopefully, those things in that first point were fairly uncontroversial. This is where it could get a lot trickier. So bear with us. Let's see something very positive.

Verse 11. A woman should learn. A woman should learn. That was a really positive statement from Paul in writing to Timothy here that a woman should learn because writing from a Jewish background in the first century would be common for many amongst the people that Paul knew to say that women can't learn or should not learn, aren't able to learn.

some Jewish traditions even had forbidden women from learning things at all. And that doesn't seem right.

And that's certainly not right when we know who our God is. Our God who honors women, who has made women. Remember how the Lord Jesus treated women.

He never sidelined them. He showed that He cared for them. He listened to them. He loved them. Remember who were the first to the two? It wasn't the men.

[17 : 10] Most of them were pretty fearful and terrified but the women went. And the first to see the risen Lord Jesus as far as I can see is Mary.

Mary. And Jesus even said her name Mary. He spoke to her and He instructed her to go and tell the men who were cowardly.

And so the Bible is very positive about women. The Lord Jesus is. And so you can't say Paul is saying you can't say women can't listen to the word.

They should. They must. And women can listen to the Bible being preached. That was culturally radical for Paul to write that.

And for the most part as we're listening most men in our gathered assembly today are also not called to be preachers of the word either.

[18 : 27] All of us get to sit and listen to the word of God preached. And as we listen it's a privilege that men and women boys and girls can hear from God in His words.

Listen to His life-changing words. But then things get tricky don't they in the verses. A woman should learn in quietness and with full submission.

I do not permit a woman to teach or assume authority over a man. She must be quiet. What's going on there?

Because to be completely honest with you I would very much rather these verses weren't here. It would make my job easier. But they are here. And as Jerome as he opened the scriptures to read to us reminded us they are God's words.

God's inspired words. We need to read them. We need to listen to them. What is going on when someone is preaching as we heard a few weeks ago is an authoritative declaration of God's truth found in his words.

[19 : 49] And it's preached so that our hearts may be changed and we may understand what he is saying to us. So when someone gets up to preach they are doing so with a God given authority.

Therefore when it's done amongst a whole gathered church church, if a woman stands and preaches they take an authoritative role over the whole congregation.

as we said at the beginning, have times changed? There's now a female archbishop of Canterbury. Other churches have women in the pulpit. Have times changed and we just sort of need to catch up as a church? Or is this something relevant still for the church to hear today?

Well that's where the next two verses come into play and help us. The reason Paul gives for this is this, for Adam was formed first, then Eve.

[21 : 05] And Adam was not the one deceived, it was the woman who was deceived and became a sinner. Paul comes back to creation in these verses and that seems really important.

It goes back to the things that we considered last week, which is why last week was very much part one, where we saw there is an order to God's creation. There's an order to God's creation of human beings.

God intentionally made Adam first. And we felt in the passage in Genesis 2, we read the verses that said it was not good for Adam to be alone.

But we also can't say it was a mistake of God just to make Adam and not give him anyone else alongside him.

God doesn't make mistakes. And so it was very good when he then created the woman, Eve.

[22 : 20] and as men and women were made in that order, that sets an order of creation in place.

God is over all creation. He is first, he is the creator, then Adam who is to submit to God, and Eve then to Adam.

But remember Eve was made out of Adam's side and we saw that's a good thing. They work side by side together. Eve wasn't made out of Adam's foot and therefore Adam sort of drags her up alongside her.

No, side by side they go together. And then they are instructed to together rule over the creation that God has made for them.

That's God's original blueprint for his creation. God's But then, as we read here in 2 Timothy, things went difficult, didn't they?

[23 : 30] Verse 13 again, for Adam was formed first, then Eve, and Adam was not the one deceived, it was the woman who was deceived and became a sinner. in the fall, there was a reversal of God's created order.

The rest of the creation came first, the snake, who then deceived the woman, and then the man took the fruit and ate from the woman, and then God was left at the bottom.

His words, his commands to the human beings were not followed. He was forgotten. And so, in the fall, we saw the creation order was reversed.

And Paul says that's relevant to the church today. In God's new humanity that he is building in the church, the original God-given design for men and women should be honoured.

God's love and holiness. That's what Paul is saying. That's why he's going back to creation. It's not just a cultural thing, a cultural matter for that time.

[24 : 51] And then we've got more tricky verses, verse 15. But women will be saved through child bearing if they continue in faith, love, and holiness with propriety.

What's going on here? The words for women there in verse 15 would be much better translated as woman, singular.

In other words, referring to Eve, who he has already been speaking about. Otherwise, we read this as if you're a woman who hasn't had a child, then you cannot be saved.

And that does not fit with the scriptures, and that would be an awful thing to say. There are some women who remain single, and childbearing is not an option.

There are some women who very painfully cannot have children, and we weep with those who weep. And there are others who are very happy to choose not to, so that they can use their time to serve the Lord in other ways.

[26 : 02] Paul is not saying that women are only saved through childbearing. He is saying that the first woman will be saved through childbearing.

That's how to read it, but woman, Eve, will be saved through childbearing. What does that mean? Well, it was kind of crucial, wasn't it, that Eve had children. children. I don't think we're in doubt about that, otherwise none of us would be here.

And it's kind of crucial in another way because God gave that promise that we saw amid the fall of an offspring who would come from the woman who would crush the serpent's heads.

and that offspring, as we saw last week, was the Lord Jesus. Because if you go through the generations of human beings throughout the Old Testament, you end up in the New Testament and you see that Mary was called to give birth to a son, the son of God.

And what a great dignity is then given to women in child bearing. Though child bearing now is painful as a result of the fall, from it comes wonderful blessings of new life and from it comes even the Lord Jesus Christ himself.

[27 : 32] God in the flesh come to bring salvation to all who will receive it. And so that's what Paul is saying there about women, a woman will be saved through child bearing.

We're talking about the big child bearing of the Lord Jesus Christ. That's who we find our salvation in. Now some will take all of these verses to mean that a woman must not then do any role in society which assumes authority over a man.

some will read this and think we can't have female police officers we can't even have a female prime minister. But that is not what Paul is saying here.

This is talking very much about the church. Remember chapter 3 verse 15 these instructions are how to conduct yourselves in God's households. And what he's talking about is referring to teaching in the gathered church.

So we need to be very careful if that's where we're coming to. And for those who say that this is all just cultural matters for Paul and Timothy's day, well we can say it was incredibly radical at the time really to say women could sit and they could learn.

[29 : 03] That's a dignified thing for women at the time. But we don't update this further. We don't try and align ourselves with the world as it is today because Paul goes back to God's original design and creation.

And we need to say and humbly say our creator knows what's best for us. And we need to humbly say that when we come to find salvation in Jesus Christ we find that God is our good father and he wants good for his children.

He doesn't withhold what's good and so what he wants is the flourishing of men, women, boys and girls in his kingdom. And so if we see that God is good and God's ways are good, we can surely humbly and happily submit to his good rule for this world and for his church.

So how does all this work out practically? Well, how long have we got? Let's try and think about that briefly as we come to a close, but we can think about this further this evening.

In chapter 3, 1-7, Paul lays out the qualifications for an elder or overseer in church life.

[30 : 38] Someone to take the role of leading a church. And we see that that role is for men. Verse 2, now the overseer is to be above reproach, faithful to his wife.

So already we can't argue with that. It is for men to take that role of an elder, overseer, pastor of a church.

That is there. But the call isn't for men to do it in a very domineering, harsh, controlling way.

As you read through those lists of qualifications in chapter 3, 1-7, you would read that really the only skill or gift is being able to teach.

The rest of it is about character. So if you're looking for a new elder in a church, don't think so much about their skills, think about their character first.

[31 : 50] Do they display the godly character laid out in these verses? And what we should then find is someone who is faithful, someone who is self-controlled, someone who's respectable, someone who's gentle, someone whose leadership men and women are happy to submit to.

And then the other role that is laid out in this chapter is the role of deacons.

A deacon literally means servant, and in some respect all of us are deacons, all of us serve the Lord amongst his church.

but it seems wise and good for the church to recognize certain people to be deacons in order to serve the church, and particularly in terms of practical things, to help the elders focus to be on the preaching of the words and pastoral care of others.

And the role of deacons is open to men and women. We see there in verse 11, it says this, in the same way that women, or that women deacons, to be worthy of respect.

[33 : 18] There's some who would translate that word women, maybe it's in your Bibles, as wives, but actually it seems consistent with other scriptures that it's women, women deacons.

So in Romans 16, for example, in the first couple of verses, you see Phoebe mentioned as a woman deacon or deaconess.

Men and women can do this role of deacon. But I guess this all may leave us with some questions, and that's why we've got this evening.

But just to answer a few that may be on our minds, like can a woman teach at all? Can a woman preach at all? Perhaps we've sat and heard women preaching and been blessed by it.

I think the answer is yes. Titus 2, verse 3 to 5.

[34 : 36] Titus 2, just a few pages on. Verse 3, likewise, teach the older women to be reverent in the way they live, not to be slanderers addicted to too much wine, but to teach what is good.

There's a role for them to teach. And particularly so that they can then urge the younger women to love their husbands and children, to be self-controlled and pure, to be busy at home, to be kind, and to be subject to their husbands so that no one will malign the words of God.

Older women can teach, and what must they teach? Well, verse 1 lays out what is meant to be taught, what is appropriate to sound doctrine. Women can teach, but if we're following what 1 Timothy says about it, not to the whole gathered church of men and women, boys and girls, but they can teach other women, and we believe it's right and good for them to teach children as well, children as they grow up.

And so there is a place where women teaching, women teaching in small groups, women teaching one-to-ones, other ladies, at ladies' breakfasts, ladies' conferences, teaching in children's groups. girls. Another question which we might have from all this is can a woman speak in a service? Well, if the answer is no, we don't do that as a church, do we?

[36 : 25] As in, we failed as a church. It says here, learning in quietness, but I take that as only to do with the preaching of the words.

Other aspects are very open for women to be able to take a part in, to be able to pray, to be able to share as Blessing did about the See You Events Week.

So when we come together, we can be expectant to hear from God through the preached words, but also to hear from God through one another.

Men, women, boys and girls who are following the Lord Jesus. We can be expectant to do that as we pray together, as we speak together, both formally in a meeting and informally over tea and coffee and lunches and things.

Often on a Sunday evening and a Wednesday evening, there's times that are open to discuss and we want to hear the voices of men and women speaking to help build each other up.

[37 : 35] so there should be opportunities for both men and women to read the Bible publicly, to lead others in prayer, to lead others in song if that's a gift that you have, to share a word of testimony, to share something we can pray for.

There is much, much freedom for men and women and the roles that they play in church life. And as elders, we need to hear the voices of women in our church to help us in leading the church wisely and well, side by side together, not so that we're just dragging everyone up behind us. As we come into land with this for this morning, I want to recognize that for some of us, this feels all quite hard to hear.

And actually, the church has failed to do these things well. We live in a fallen world, don't we? In recent years, there's been figures like Andrew Tate who have gained a growing popularity, particularly amongst younger men.

And he has used the Quran and even the Bible to back up his harmful views of women. And we want to say that is not good. There was a study done by the Gospel Coalition in the US saying that 10% of people who've left the church in the last 25 years have left because of misogyny, prejudice against women.

[39 : 22] That is not good. God has a good and positive design for men and women to operate together in his church and to together make known the Lord Jesus to a world that so desperately needs to hear him.

And when we clearly show what the Bible says in terms of what it means to be a human being, what it means to be a man and a woman in 2026, we should be giving to the world around us a better story, a good story about what it means to flourish together as men and women in his church. Let's pray.