

Men and Women in God's Household

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Preacher: Andrew Price

[0 : 00] Aren't you glad he came today? And Mother's Day, no less.

This is what happens as you just work through books of the Bible, you come to passages like! And yet the very fact that it seems to have worked out to be on Mother's Day, I didn't plan it, I think it's actually not a bad thing because Mother's Day not only celebrates mothers, it celebrates the differences. That's why we have Mother's Day and Father's Day, isn't it? Because God has made us male and female, equal and yet different.

I know because these are controversial verses today, I'm going to put more verses on the screen just so you know everything I'm getting is from God's Word, although hopefully you know me well enough by now that I always seek to be faithful to God's Word. But before we get to the controversial part, there are some other verses to look at before that, starting with men in the church.

So point one, verse eight. Paul begins by saying, therefore, I want the men everywhere to pray, lifting up holy hands without anger and disputing. Now remember the purpose of this letter was to give the house rules for God's house or the church. We saw this a couple of weeks ago, if you were here in chapter three, Paul's hoping to visit Timothy at his church in Ephesus, but he might be delayed, verse 15. And so he's writing so that people know how to conduct themselves in God's household, which is the church. And so that as a pillar holds up a building, the church might hold up God's truth, including God's good design, as we'll see later. And we see this church context in verse eight of our passage as well with that word everywhere. Literally that word everywhere is literally in every place. Our NIV Bibles are just kind of condensate. That is every place the church meets. Back then in Ephesus, they mostly met in homes. They were house churches. Today, we mostly meet in bigger buildings, don't we? Like this one, although there are still some house churches too. And so where the church meets might be shaped by culture. But this instruction, I take it is still to be obeyed in every place that the church meets, including today. And so when it meets, men are to pray without anger or disputing. Last week, he urged prayer for all people to be saved, to hear the good news of

Jesus, including our governments to be saved, so that everyone can have the hope of heaven. And if you're not a Christian here this morning on online, I encourage you to go back and listen to the last couple of weeks and hear the good news of Jesus. Annette mentioned it at the start of our service, which was terrific as well. But therefore, verse eight, in light of, I want prayer for all people and prayer for governments. Therefore, verse eight, when it comes to praying for those things, Paul wants men to lift holy hands. Now, just like culture shapes where church meets, so it shapes how people pray. In the early church, it was shaped by their Jewish culture, where they did lift their hands like this in prayer. It didn't matter if you were standing or kneeling or sit, I can't sit, you'd lift your hands like that. And we see it in Psalms, for example, 141, where the psalmist says, may my prayer, may the lifting of my hands. They're in parallel. That's how they prayed.

[3 : 54] And so culture can shape the posture of prayer. But again, the instruction remains the same, I take it. Men in church are to pray without anger or disputing. But does this mean you can pray with anger outside the church? Or that only men can pray inside the church? Well, of course not.

This is where we let the Bible interpret the Bible. We look at elsewhere to get a fuller picture. Because as we'll see in a moment, Paul's addressing a particular situation. And so when we look at other parts of the Bible, we do see that we're to do everything inside and outside the church without grumbling or arguing. I mean, there's some application for us this morning. How hard is it to do everything without complaining or arguing? We also see that Paul assumes that just as every man can pray or prophesy in church, so can every woman pray and prophesy in church. It's just that the situation at Timothy's church was that there were false teachers who seemed to be all men. When he names false teachers, like in chapter 1, verse 20, Alexander and Hymenaeus, they're both, they're all men.

All the names were given to men. And we're told at the end of 1 Timothy chapter 6 that these guys have an unhealthy interest in controversies and quarrels. You know, anger, disputing about words that result in envy, strife, malicious talk, evil suspicions, constant friction. Here is anger and disputing.

And so it seems these men were lifting their hands as Jewish culture, but they were not lifting their hands as holy hands. Holy means set apart to lead people in prayer to God. No, no, they were lifting them in anger and disputing. Anger at others and disputing amongst others in the church. You know, it's like kind of saying me saying, at leading the prayer time and saying, dear God, I thank you that I'm not like that Barry Joel, who does not understand we need to follow the food laws to be extra spiritual. If only he knew how spiritual I was and would listen to me. That kind of thing.

Like most books of the Bible, these instructions are written for a historical situation. But again, while the instruction might arise from a situation and be expressed or shaped by culture, you know, the lifting of hands, I take it the instruction still holds true for church in every place. Men in church are to pray without anger and disputing.

[6 : 42] Which firstly means for us men here this morning, we are to pray. Not just at home, but also in church. It's great having both men and women on the prayer roster. Although I know in some congregations, we have more women willing to step up and lead in prayer than we have men. I know public prayers is a lot of work. It takes a bit of time to prepare. But men are to step up and pray in church as well.

And second, when we pray, we are to pray with holy hands, so to speak. You know, our prayers are meant to be set aside to help people pray to God. Not using our prayers as a platform to promote our personal cause or political views or something like that. Men in church pray to lead others in prayer, not in anger or to promote our cause. Women in church are to dress not to impress others, but God point to verse 9 and 10. 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 God. Notice the word also, the second word of verse 9, it means we're also still in church. And of course, men are to do good deeds as well. But again, the situation back then seems to be that some wealthy women were flaunting their wealth and turning church into a bit of a beauty contest, you know, caring more about how they looked than doing good deeds. And so Paul says, dress with modesty and decency rather than being showy. And with propriety. The word propriety in the original language is probably better translated as good judgment. Thinking about what's appropriate, not just for the occasion, but verse 10, for a woman who professes to worship God. And so it's not saying women cannot dress up for church. It's not as though you're to go around, you know, wearing a hessian bag, something like that, so that people can say, ah, there's a Holy Trinity woman, look at what she's wearing. Of course not. No, no, you're to use your good judgment, verse 10, to wear what's appropriate as a woman who worships God.

And what's appropriate on other occasions too, really. And so for most women getting married, we had a wedding here on Friday. It's actually probably entirely appropriate that they do have an elaborate hairstyle, a more elaborate hairstyle and a more expensive dress. It's appropriate for the occasion. In fact, after Michelle and I were married, I got in trouble because I suggested we sell her wedding dress, make some money. What made my suggestion even more cheeky was that her parents actually paid for it. But the context here is Sunday church and women are to dress with modesty, decency and with good deeds rather than being showy, trying to impress others, whether that's trying to outdo other women or turn the eye of other men. And again, our culture can shape how this is expressed. That is our culture and even our conscience actually can shape what's classified as modest and decent, can't it? And so in a previous culture, not that long ago, women wore hats and gloves to church. That was appropriate. But while culture may shape how it's expressed and that the instruction arises from a particular situation, the instruction itself remains the same.

And I think women do a brilliant job here of living this out. But we have women who come to church to worship God, not engage in a beauty contest. They dress up for church, but it's always appropriate.

And many, many women amongst us do good deeds, which is brilliant. For women in church are to dress not to impress others, but God.

[11 : 05] And to reflect God's good design, point three, verse 11 and 12. A woman should not learn in quietness and full submission. I do not permit a woman to teach or assume authority over a man.

She must be quiet. Now, this is where we shift uncomfortably in our seats, right? And the preacher starts to sweat profusely. But let's see what it is and is not saying. And this is going to be our longest point.

This is going to take some explaining. The plain reading tells us, I think pretty clearly, two instructions. First, to learn in quietness and full submission. And second, which is just the flip side, verse 12, to not teach or have authority. Learn, not teach. Submission, not authority.

But there's a few things worth noticing. First, quietness does not mean complete silence. The word quiet there, or quietness, is exactly the same word back in verse 2, where we're to live quiet lives in all godliness and holiness.

And when we're to live quiet lives, surely Paul doesn't mean complete silence. Silence. You know, we're to go out our whole week taking a vow of silence. No, that's not what he's talking about. Rather, he's talking about a peacefulness, a peaceful attitude that doesn't create conflict.

[12 : 28] And so, verse 11, women of the church are to learn in peacefulness, if you like. Verse 12 ends like this too. So, this idea of peaceful attitude kind of bookends verse 11 and 12.

You see, it seems that the women who were trying to outdo each other in beauty were likely the ones who were creating conflict amongst the church, stirring things up.

In fact, the word propriety or good judgment in verse 9, that we saw a moment ago, comes up again at the end of our passage in verse 15, kind of connecting these two sets of instructions, suggesting that it's the same group of women.

Interestingly, Peter, not Paul, Peter himself, kind of connects true beauty with this peaceable or quiet spirit, saying word, which is of great worth in God's sight.

And so, this would explain why Paul ends up speaking or spending more time addressing the women here than men. Some people complain, why do the men only get one verse and the women have to get all these other verses? Well, because there's two situations happening that are connected.

[13 : 35] And it's likely to be the same group of women. Second, despite what our world says, the word submissiveness is not actually evil.

Yes, people have used it and abused it, and we should never do that. But for the Christian, it's actually normal. I mean, Jesus submits to his Father, doesn't he?

And we voluntarily submit to one another. And so, it's not evil, it's normal and voluntary.

Jesus said, not my will, but yours be done. And when the song leader says, please stand, or as Ian often does, we voluntarily submit, don't we, and stand.

We don't have to, but we choose to. A submission in the Bible is not evil, but normal and voluntary. At third notice, so this submission here is limited to the church.

[14 : 37] That's the occasion he's writing. That's the purpose of the letter. This is in every place people gather for church, not every place in life. And so, it's not saying women can't be CEOs, or principals, or any number of other things, which they can be.

Rather, it's limited to the church, the public gathering. In fact, this submitting is even limited to just those who teach and exercise authority, not to every man in the church.

Because not every man is given the responsibility to teach or exercise authority in the church. Only those who meet the requirements of chapter three next week, which is why chapter three follows these instructions this week.

In fact, even the other men are to submit to those who teach and have authority in church too. And this authority is always to serve, love, encourage, never to domineer.

And I have worked hard amongst you for over a decade to try and do just that. In fact, it's one of the reasons I refuse to call myself the vicar in public.

[15 : 48] People say, why don't you call yourself the vicar or the senior minister? No, I don't want to give any impression of domineering over people. I'm here to use my authority to serve and to love.

And it's actually meant to be for your good. As Hebrews goes on to say, to submit to the leader's authority because we keep watch over your souls.

We encourage you so you don't miss out on life eternal. And so it's meant to be a benefit or for your good. Fourth, so this authority is a servant authority and this submission is voluntary and normal.

Fourth, since it's limited to the public gathering of the church, it seems to be limited to the teaching that takes place at the public gathering of the church to what we call the sermon, which means women can teach outside the sermon.

And we see this elsewhere in the Bible. For example, where older women are to teach younger women and where women are to teach children like Lois.

[16 : 55] And we also read that Priscilla, along with her husband Aquila, explained the faith to Apollos in their homes privately.

In fact, the Bible says that we're to teach and admonish one another through psalms, hymns and songs, but also I take it through encouraging one another, reminding each other of God's promises.

In our culture, this is expressed by women teaching one-to-one or in pastoral visits or in kids' ministry or youth ministry or sometimes in Bible study, or those women who preached at the women's conference at Entrust the other Saturday.

I've trained women to preach. Or it's seen in theological writing, some of the best commentaries I have on my bookshelf are written by women who teach me.

And the women on our staff team often teach me things too, for which I'm very grateful. It means women can teach outside the sermon. And it means women can speak in other ways during the service.

[18 : 10] But as we saw before, women can pray and prophesy, that is, speak the word informally during the service. And there were female prophetesses like Philip's four daughters.

In our culture, this is expressed by having women involved in public services here on Sundays by reading and praying and singing and playing music, welcoming, serving, even leading the service.

which is, kind of comes with a kind of prophecy as Annette did at the very start. She reminded us of God's word and the gospel. That's kind of prophesying, encouraging us, trying to build us up.

In fact, it's brilliant having so many women involved in so many ministries, both in the service and outside it, for which I'm very thankful. But in the public assembly of the church, it seems Paul is saying that a woman is not to teach you'll have authority over a man, which would mean not being the leader of a church, nor giving what we call the sermon.

But why? Why is he kind of hang up on this? Well, he explains in verse 13. He says, for because Adam was formed first, then Eve.

[19 : 22] Here's the first reason. Paul appeals to Genesis chapter two, where we see the creation of man and woman, but there is an order. Adam was formed first.

It doesn't mean he's the best. No, no, no. You know, when kids pick footy teams and they always pick the best player first, you know, it's not like that. Rather, it means he's like the firstborn who inherits certain rights and responsibilities.

And so in Genesis two, Adam is the one who's given the authority to name the animals. We're told that three times, just so we don't miss the point. He even names Eve twice.

But he's also given the responsibility to work the ground and care for it, which is perhaps why Adam was created from the ground.

And he's given the responsibility of teaching God's word to Eve. But when God gave him that word about not eating from that one tree, Eve wasn't even created yet.

[20 : 24] So Adam had to have the responsibility to teach it to her. It's why when sin enters the world, God actually comes looking for the man.

They hid, Adam and Eve both hid, but God called to the man. Where are you? Because it was his responsibility. Or in Romans 5 verse 12, when sin entered the world, Paul says it was through one man who he names as Adam because it was his responsibility.

In other words, Adam was formed first to lovingly rule over God's creation and teach others. But as you know, he needed help. And so Eve is created next as a helper.

We hear the word helper and we don't like it because it sounds like they're inferior. Not at all. We all know that most women are smarter than most men, right? Well, it's true in my family anyway.

More than that though, God himself is called helper in the Bible. And that doesn't make God inferior, does it? Of course not.

[21 : 28] So it's not about superiority or inferiority. It's about working together with different roles, equal and different. Interestingly, Eve is taken from Adam's rib to show that she's equal worth with him, made of the same stuff as him, but with a different role to him as helper.

Part of this different role was bearing children to fill the earth, which only women can do, right? It doesn't mean all women have to have children, no. But it does mean only women can have or bear children.

Part of our problem in our world is that it attaches our worth to our role, doesn't it? So when you meet someone, you say, what's your name?

And the second question, almost invariably, the second question is, what do you do? You know, and oh, you're a doctor. Well, let me find out more about that.

Oh, you're a garbage collector. Have you had a shower today? Oh, you're a minister. I think someone's calling me over there. That's happened to me.

[22 : 43] But our worth is not found in our role. It is found in being made in God's image and being God's child in Christ.

It's why every person in the body of Christ has equal worth, but just a different role. You know, hands, feet, arms, whatever it is.

And it's why our reading, our first reading said that God created mankind singular in his image. So equality, all created in God's image, all have equal worth.

But immediately he goes on to say he created them, plural, male and female. All in God's image, equal, but different. Different bodies for different roles.

As I said at the start, it's why we rightly celebrate Mother's Day today and Father's Day later because it involves celebrating the differences as well as the equality. Yet they're meant to work together to glorify God by raising their kids to know Jesus.

[23 : 49] And just talk to any parent, even non-Christians who are single parents, and they will tell you it's much harder on their own. And so we need to support those single parents amongst us.

But Adam was formed first and then Eve. And it was part of God's good creation design. For after God created this humanity of equal worth, male and female, with different bodies, for different roles, he said, and he saw what he'd made and it was very very good.

For man and woman could complement each other, work together to glorify God as his image bearers. This is God's good design, which is complementary. In our diocese, the idea of being complementarian is not welcome.

But we see it in God's good creation. Even by the way he created night and day, complementary, land and sea, sun and moon.

And this complementarianism in the garden between man and woman is meant to be a beautiful picture of loving unity and diversity, of loving equality and difference, working together in complementary roles to glorify God.

[25 : 14] And it's this beautiful and good design that's then meant to be reflected in the family household in marriage, where husbands lay down their lives for their wife and their wife lets them.

And that's what loving headship and voluntary submission is meant to look like. It's me saying to my wife, Michelle, don't do the dishes, let me do them. And then she submits by going, okay.

Seriously, that's meant to be true complementarianism. And it's then to be reflected in God's household in the church too, where men who meet the qualifications to teach and exercise authority are to lovingly, gently and patiently lay down our lives for you, if you like, for your good.

And the women in the church are to let them. Because verse 13, Adam was formed first, then Eve. Equal in worth, different in role. And because verse 14, Adam was not the one deceived, it was the woman who was deceived and became a sinner.

By the way, Paul is just simply quoting Eve. In Genesis chapter 3, the woman, Eve, said, the snake deceived me and I ate. He's not making a derogatory comment, he's just quoting what Eve herself said in Genesis 3.

[26 : 39] And he doesn't mean that all women are more gullible or more open to deception than men, no. It's just what happened to Eve when she chose not to submit to Adam's leadership or teaching.

She was deceived. That's just what happened. And Paul uses these foundational verses in Genesis as his reasons for these instructions about men and women in the church.

And because they're foundational, because they happened just before sin entered the world, then they can't be cultural. They're tied to the very creation, not to any particular culture.

Oh, sure, they may be expressed and shaped by our culture, but like the instructions about men praying or women dressing, I take it they still stand today.

They're not just for Timothy's church back then, but in every place that the church meets. Now, obviously, people disagree with this, though for different reasons.

[27 : 40] Some because they simply want the women they know to be able to preach to a mixed congregation. Some because they haven't understood that complementarianism is meant to be a beautiful loving picture of working together.

But for others, they disagree based on the Bible. They say, well, look at Jesus. He championed women, caring for them, including them, even making them the first witnesses of his resurrection, and he did, which is terrific.

But if Jesus did more in his day to champion women than anyone else, even going against his culture and including them, why didn't he make any of them an apostle?

It can't be because it was Jewish culture. He was always happy to go against culture. I mean, he overturned the tables of the temple. So why didn't he with the apostles? It seems that Jesus wanted to love and promote women, but also reflect God's good creation.

Or some points are the verses in the Bible and examples of women doing ministry, which I'm all for. We have five women on staff, so I'm all for women's ministry, but none of those examples actually overturn this passage in 1 Timothy.

[28 : 58] Or they say verse 15 is so hard to understand that we can't follow verse 11 and 12, and verse 15 is hard to understand. It's not saying you have to have children to be saved.

The second word women is literally she, so it's actually referring to Eve for starters. And I don't have time to unpack it because I'm not exactly sure either. But even if we take verse 15 away, we still have verse 13, which is clear, and verse 14 too.

We still have Paul's reasons. And having said all that though, you and I both know our previous vicars and assistant ministers, whom I know you respect, and who respect God's word, and some of those would agree, and some of those would disagree.

And so I'm not going to go to the stake for this. And I always want to act in grace, but I do need to stick with what God's word seems to clearly say.

even if it would make my job a whole lot easier if I didn't. I'm happy to talk to you more about it later if you'd like to. But for now, men in church, pray without anger or disputing.

[30 : 15] Women in church, dress not to impress others but God, and let's all reflect God's good design of beautiful complementarity, working together as men and women to glorify God.

Let's pray. God's Gracious Father, we thank you for your creation. We thank you that you have made us in your image, equal in worth.

But we also thank you that you have made us with difference, male and female. Help us not to shy away from this, but to celebrate this by working together in complementary ways for your glory.

We ask it in Jesus' name. Amen.