

Men and Women in Church

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[0 : 00] Today's Bible reading will be from 1 Timothy chapter 2 verses 8 to 15. 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.

A woman should learn in quietness and full submission. I do not permit a woman to teach or to assume authority over a man. She must be quiet.

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. But women will be saved through childbearing if they continue in faith, love and holiness with propriety.

This is the word of the Lord. Thank you Toby very much for reading. If we've not met before, I'm Martin Ayers, the lead pastor here.

It would be a great help to me if you could keep your Bibles open at 1 Timothy chapter 2, where we just had that read for us. It was page 1191.

[1 : 42] You can find an outline in the notice sheet. And I think you'd find that helpful as we look at this together. And let's ask for God's help. Let's pray. Heavenly Father, we thank you that you made us.

And we thank you that you've not left us in the dark about how best to live and how best to flourish as your people. And Father, we know as much as ever that we need your help this morning as we come to a Bible passage that has caused lots of division and lots of heat in churches in our times.

So, as our good Father, we turn to you and we ask that by your Spirit you will open our ears to hear your voice and also open our hearts to your word.

For we ask in Jesus' name. Amen. Well, we're coming to today, this afternoon, to difficult verses to wrestle with that actually put a lot of people off ever preaching 1 Timothy as a book.

And there are fine, godly Christians who disagree with each other about what these verses mean. We can disagree on what these verses mean and still be brothers and sisters in Christ.

[2 : 58] And we can disagree on these verses and still be partners together in gospel work, giving thanks for each other and praying for each other. The verses, we find them difficult partly because there are some difficulties in understanding them to resolve, which we'll try and do together.

But one of our bigger problems when we come to these verses is that we are so heavily shaped by our culture and by the worldviews around us.

And what people say today about men and women, how that's influenced and shaped the way that we think. These are the days of the Barbie movie. I don't know how many of you, how many of you have not seen the Barbie movie?

How many, quite a lot. Yeah, well done on managing to avoid the Barbie movie. But for those of us who watch the biggest box office hit of 2023, I think, as far as I could make it out, one of the big ideas was that men and women are different.

And we are, and conflict is inevitable between us, or certainly has been. And this year, a lot of talk has been about adolescence, the hit Netflix short series where a teenage boy is arrested for murdering a teenage girl.

[4 : 14] And there has been huge discussion involving very high profile people like Gareth Southgate, raising major concerns about the male role models today for boys and young men growing up.

And how that is leading them to devalue women in our society. So we've got all that going on in the world. And then in our churches, we often find these verses difficult because we come with our own experiences, positively or negatively, of how these verses have shaped churches that we've been in.

And maybe you're here this morning, and you have a close relative who is a woman who is an ordained minister or an elder of a church. Or maybe that's what you'd like to be.

Or you might have been involved in a church before where it's felt as though women were never really encouraged to be in any kind of ministry, let alone leadership in the church.

It seemed that it was always about the men. And they got all the focus and encouragement and teaching. And you felt that women were not listened to or that they were undervalued. But all of that means that it's really good for us not to sweep 1 Timothy 2 under the carpet, but to ask ourselves, well, what does God say about the roles of men and women in church, in his household?

[5 : 37] Just to recap where we've got to in 1 Timothy in our series so far, we know that Paul the Apostle wrote this letter to Timothy, who he'd left in charge of the church that he planted in Ephesus.

And evidently, things have gone wrong. There is some urgency to writing the letter because in chapter 3, verse 14, he tells us that he's on his way, Paul.

He says, verse 14, Although I hope to come to you soon, I'm writing to you with these instructions so that if I'm delayed, you will know how people ought to conduct themselves in God's household, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and foundation of the truth.

And as we thought about that image last time, we thought about Nelson's column in Trafalgar Square, where you have a huge pillar so that Nelson can be seen far and wide.

And that's to be the picture of God's household, the church, that we are to be the pillar holding up the truth about Jesus so that the world can see that truth and believe that truth and be saved.

[6 : 44] Why do we do that? Because God is a saviour, chapter 2, verse 3, and he wants all people to be saved, chapter 2, verse 4.

In Ephesus, evidently, some false teachers had obscured the message about Jesus. It was not clear. It was being covered up, distorted. And Timothy is being written this letter to put things right, to set things straight.

So our first point this morning, in the mission-shaped church, the church that's clear on that vision of the kind of church we're to be, a church that's looking out and reaching out, in the mission-shaped church, men and women run after godly virtues.

So Paul addresses the men in verse 8, and it's men fight the good fight through holiness and prayer. Let's look at verse 8 together. Therefore, I want the men everywhere to pray, lifting up holy hands without anger or disputing.

Now, prayer is a theme that's come into our chapter. In verses 1 and 2, which we looked at last time, the Apostle Paul says he wants his people to pray all kinds of prayers for all kinds of people when we come together, because God is a saviour.

[8 : 00] And so here, we bring that theme through to saying to the men, Paul wants them to pray. And lifting up your hands to pray is what every Christian did.

That was the posture for prayer. So the emphasis here is not lift up your hands, it's that as men pray, their hands should be holy hands.

That's the emphasis. You don't lift up your hands in anger on a Saturday night on Sockie Hall Street in a brawl, and then turn up and use those same hands in prayer on a Sunday morning.

Or you don't lift up your hands when you're driving the car to give someone the finger, or another obscene gesture, because you're in road rage, and then turn up to lead God's people in prayer with those same hands on a Sunday.

That's the emphasis. Be holy, and then come and pray. And your prayer is an overflow of that holy living. And he singles out men here, I guess.

[9 : 03] And it seems obvious that men can be more prone to fall into this kind of sin, of anger and disputing. Men are, on average, more likely to be competitive and aggressive than women.

In Scotland, what percentage of people in prison are men? 96%. In the UK, the executives of FTSE 100 companies, 89% are men.

In the global population of prisons, 94% of prisoners are men. And in chapter 1 and chapter 6 of this letter, Paul tells Timothy to be brave and fight the good fight.

He uses that language in chapter 1 and chapter 6 of fighting, but he's clarifying here that for a man to fight the good fight of faith, it's about holiness and prayer.

It's about being transformed to be more and more like Jesus. That's the thing to battle for in your life. Then he gives instruction to women, verse 9. And again, holiness is a clear theme here.

[10 : 16] But for women, adorn yourselves with good deeds. So verse 9. 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.

So the world encourages women to focus on how they look physically, their outward appearance. In verse 9, adorning themselves. It would be the first century equivalents of Prada, Versace, Louis Vuitton, ostentatious clothes and jewelry that show off their wealth.

We might think today of how often, and of course this isn't just true for women, but that we are encouraged. We're sold brands that we pay premium prices for because they convey a lifestyle that people see as attractive.

And that's how we want to be seen. And Paul isn't saying here that it's wrong for women or men to pay some attention to how they look. So long as it's modest, verse 9.

But he is saying, women, make your priority, your focus, the good works that you can do to please God. That should be what your focus is.

[11 : 39] Women, when people see you serving Jesus, when they see you living to please Jesus, let that be your adornment. Let that be what adorns you.

And for the men here, let's let this be the kind of beauty that we value in women, in the women around us. So that as we get into summer, and people are wearing what they wear in summer, as men, let's let our eyes wander, instead of letting our eyes wander to women who wear immodest clothes, or talking with other men about how women look, rather we honor the women in our church family, and we encourage our wives, when we see them adorning themselves with godliness, with godly living.

That's the kind of beauty that we admire in women. So that's our first point. Men and women run after godly virtues. Secondly then, and we'll spend most of our time here, in the Mission Shaped Church, men and women rejoice in God's creation differences.

So in verse 11, first we're told about what women should do. Verse 11, a woman should learn in quietness and full submission.

So women are to be learners. And that word for being a learner is a word for being a disciple. To be a disciple of Jesus is to learn from him, so that we become more like him.

[13 : 12] Women be encouraged to grow as disciples of Jesus. The manner in which women are to do that is, verse 11, in quietness and full submission.

And that word quietness we had in verse 2 of chapter 2 to describe how all of us as Christians want to be able to live in the world today, in godliness and quietness.

So it's not a word that means that we're to be silent, it's not a word that means to, that's to mean we're to be unnoticed, but it's, the word quietness is about not being unduly disruptive or unreasonably difficult.

That's to be the posture for women when we come together as the church gathering, coming to learn Christ, coming to grow in Christ as we hear God's word faithfully taught.

Then we get to verses 12 to 14 where we have the restriction and then the reason. So the restriction is in verse 12. Have a look with me.

[14 : 18] I do not permit a woman to teach or to assume authority over a man. She must be quiet. Again, it's that quietness word.

It doesn't mean never speaking, but this kind of not being unduly disruptive. And I think what we have to say about verse 12 is that God's word is clearly restricting something here.

It won't do just to say, as some people today say, goodness, these verses are really difficult. The word for assume authority is very unusual, which it is.

So let's just not do anything with them. That's not a good way to handle the Bible. What exactly the Bible is forbidding here is something we can discuss graciously and openly, but we should all accept the apostle is definitely saying there is something in church life that women are not called to do.

And these two activities, teaching and having authority in the church, it says here, assume authority, but in the ESV it's exercise authority.

[15 : 29] It's a word about having authority. And these are key themes in Paul's letters to Timothy about church leadership. If we just think about the things he's writing to Timothy about, in chapter one, he stands down two leaders by name because their teaching is false teaching.

And so he's saying to Timothy, stand those guys down because they're obscure in the gospel. And then he's telling Timothy to command people to stop teaching what's wrong.

And then in chapter three that we'll look at next week, he's going to give Timothy a list of the qualities to look for in a group of new leaders, a group of people to appoint to be the elders, the leaders in the church.

And a key quality for them is that they're able to teach faithfully. Here then, he says that the roles of teaching the gathered church and having authority over the church should be given to a restricted group of authorized men.

It doesn't mean that women are not permitted to teach at other times and in other settings. In Titus chapter two, the apostle Paul tells Titus to teach the older women so that they can teach and disciple the younger women.

[16 : 49] In Acts chapter 12, we meet Priscilla and Aquila, who are this husband and wife combo. Significantly, I think, the woman's name's put first, Priscilla. And they become co-workers for Paul and they disciple a young Christian called Apollos in their home.

In Colossians chapter three, in Ephesians chapter four, men and women are all called to teach each other all the time as we help each other grow in Christ by speaking God's word to one another.

So we should, in a healthy church, hear women speaking God's word and teaching others in lots of ways. I also don't think that verse 12 means that women shouldn't speak at any point in the church gathering.

For when Paul writes to the church in Corinth, he talks in chapter 11 of that letter in 1 Corinthians about how women should pray and prophesy.

And then three chapters later, in chapter 14, he says that women should be silent in church. And we don't know what the first generation church meetings looked like, but it sounds as though there would be times when women and men would speak, they would prophesy and they would pray.

[18 : 08] And then at other times, there were times when the appointed elders would speak, they would exercise their authority as elders, they would teach. And at those times, the women were to be silent.

So what is the teaching here that's not permitted for a woman in chapter 2 verse 12? Well, in the wider letter, we see that word of teaching being used by Paul towards Timothy.

and he talks about it in the context of passing on the apostles' teaching, safeguarding the Bibles, saving truth about Jesus.

Timothy's told in chapter 4 and chapter 6 to correct false teaching. So he has to guard the truth, he has to teach the truth. In 2 Timothy chapter 2, he's told to find reliable men and entrust the truth to them so that they in turn can teach others.

And it also includes how we're to live. Timothy is told to command and teach the congregation what it looks like to live a life that pleases God.

[19 : 15] So here, in chapter 2, Paul evidently is clarifying that when the church meets together, that teaching role that carries the authority of teaching God's word and applying God's word is to be restricted to a group of appropriate men.

And in the New Testament, those men are sometimes called elders, like they are in the next chapter. Sometimes they're called pastors, a shepherding word, or undershepherds.

Sometimes they're called overseers, which is where we get our word bishops from. Those words are used interchangeably in the New Testament. But was this because of some particular issue in Ephesus?

Was something going on there that meant women shouldn't be involved in the teaching? Or is it because of something to do with the first century, first century culture? Well, after Paul gives us the restriction, he tells us why.

He gives us the reason. And strikingly, Paul goes right back to God's design in creation. If you look at verse 13, for, he says, so here's the reason why, Adam was formed first, then Eve.

[20 : 27] God created men and women equally in the image of God. So we don't get our value from what we do or from the roles God calls us to.

We get our value from being made in God's image. And back in Genesis chapter 2, God put the man in the Garden of Eden before he'd made the woman, and he put the man there to guard it and to keep it.

And those same words, guard and keep, be a guardian for the sanctuary of God, the Garden of Eden, those same words are used to describe the job that God then gives to the Old Testament priests for his sanctuary, his temple.

The male Levites are told to guard and to keep the temple. Jesus then calls 12 male apostles, and he gives them the spiritual authority over his church.

And when we're talking about authority in the Bible over God's people or over his sanctuary, always Christian leadership is a sacrificial call. It's a call to lead like Jesus in sacrificial service.

[21 : 39] And today, the church, the people of God, is the temple of God. It's the sanctuary. So it's not from nowhere that we hear that the appointed leaders of the church should be men.

They're in a similar kind of role today. They are guardians. Another way of thinking about it is that when Paul writes the letter, not just to Timothy, he was in charge in Ephesus, but to the church in Ephesus, Ephesians, he commands the men in Ephesians 5 to lead their households sacrificially.

They are to be the leaders of their households. And here in chapter 3, we've just seen that down in chapter 3, we're told the church is God's household. And so again, it's not from nowhere that God says in his household, it's a group of godly men who are called to this role of being the authorized guardians.

Paul then adds that it was when that creation order was rejected and subverted that things went so spectacularly wrong in the Garden of Eden in Genesis 3. So look at verse 14 of chapter 2 here.

He says, and Adam was not the one deceived, it was the woman who was deceived and became a sinner. In other words, it was when the man, Adam, neglected his duty to be the guardian of the garden, you know, when the evil one was there, speaking falsely of what God had said, Adam should have driven the serpent out, but instead, he neglects his role and Eve is deceived and the whole thing is completely wrecked and the world is wrecked.

[23 : 24] So Paul's reasons for the restrictions here on what women are called to do in church, they're not unique to Ephesus, they're not unique to the first century, they go right back to God's design.

It's for reasons that apply in every time and every place. And of course, it's not because women are less intelligent than men, of course, of course they're not, or that women are more easily deceived than men.

I'm, I've got three daughters at home, I'm married to Kathy, there are many times in my life, basically every day, when I get out-thought, out-talked, and out-witted by women in my life.

But that doesn't mean that we move on from God's instructions for his household and how he calls for it to work. So how do we work out these instructions as a church?

Well, at St. Silas, we are a work in progress in this area. We're working things out. We want to be gracious with each other and with others who apply these verses in different ways.

[24 : 38] and I'm sure that we're not getting everything right. And this should be an ongoing conversation for us as church. So do keep talking to me, talking to other ministry staff, to small group leaders about what you think about how best to apply these verses.

In terms of how we're organized, we are an Anglican church in terms of our structures, which means that our elders are the ordained ministers. So that's Jonathan and me.

In our diocese, our network, we allow churches to make their own decision if they think that women should be lead pastors and they want to appoint a woman as a lead pastor.

So I meet women who are ordained ministers. What should I think about her ministry if I meet a woman who's an ordained minister? Well, most importantly, is it faithful?

Is her ministry faithful to the Bible? If her ministry is faithful, I can praise God for that. I can thank God for saving her, for growing her.

[25 : 48] I can thank God for her message. I can pray for her. I don't think God has called her to be an ordained church leader. I know that's difficult, but it seems to me that's clear from 1 Timothy chapter 2 that the Lord does not call women to that role, to be an ordained pastor teacher with spiritual oversight of a church.

But though we may disagree on that, if her ministry is faithful, praise God and may God be at work through her gospel work for him. Here at St. Silas, where we've got our ordained ministers are men, Jonathan and me, alongside the ordained ministers, our leadership body, the vestry, are not elders.

And it's a very healthy thing for us that that means that we have women on the vestry as well as men. And it's great to have more and more women on the vestry using their gifts and bringing their wisdom as decisions are made.

They're not in a role, I'm clear, that 1 Timothy 2 would say would be inappropriate for women. I think it's good to have men and women on that board.

when it comes to our gospel work and word ministry as a church, we have women here doing lots of invaluable word ministry, some on staff, some of you as volunteers, very servant-hearted.

[27 : 13] And that's great because men and women are interdependent in the same way that the Apostle Paul himself had lots of co-workers, women as well as men. And we as a church want to raise up and encourage and equip women for appropriate word ministry roles.

Should women preach on a Sunday? At St. Silas in the past we've had that, women preaching here. And some of us would say, so long as there are male elders present to provide that spiritual oversight of the teaching of the church, a woman preaching occasionally on a Sunday is fine.

Others of us would say it would be a healthy thing given this chapter and others like it in the Bible to draw a line somewhere in church life and say our best judgment is that the Sunday sermon is the place where at our church we have that kind of teaching and the kind of exercising authority that's happening in 1 Timothy chapter 2.

As the church gathers together and the kind of teaching in 1 Timothy is being given because truth is being proclaimed from God's word and it's being guarded and it's being applied.

And it's not hard to find many other ways for women to contribute their gifts and ministry. And in our Sunday meetings that can still include other upfront things leading us in prayers, being interviewed, reviewing a book, leading a feature, reading God's word for us.

[28 : 50] Should women lead church services? I know these questions have come up as our growth groups have been discussing this chapter.

So should women lead church services? I don't think that's a teaching role in the way that our services are led. So it just depends. If you think it's a role that only men should do because in its nature it's a shepherding role, a role of spiritual oversight.

Should women lead a midweek seminar where they teach from God's word? Well, the setting of a midweek seminar is quite different to the Sunday gathering and the teaching is in a different form.

So that seems to me to be a place where men and women can all benefit from the ministry and maturity of Christian women. And leading a small group Bible study, again it seems to me that is a different kind of role to the teaching when the church gathers together like this.

And when people lead those groups, in the way we do that here at St Silas, they do it under the overall leadership of the ordained ministry team here. So what we're trying to do is work these things out and be faithful to God's word because we trust him and you can help us to do that.

[30 : 14] As we do that, our final point this morning reminds us of the bigger picture of what God is doing today through his church. It's that men and women rest in God's saving work.

Verse 15 is not an easy verse but it is written for our reassurance. Verse 15, but women will be saved through childbearing if they continue in faith, love and holiness with propriety.

So no woman should think because I'm being told here that there's a role I'm not called to, I'm somehow less likely to get saved by God or I'm less valued than men.

Men and women are saved in the same way and so for any woman or any woman Paul says who continues in her faith and it's a saving faith so it produces works of love, she will be saved by persevering and trusting God's promises.

When Paul mentions childbearing here, he would not for a moment mean that a woman who doesn't bear a child can't be saved. But childbearing is perhaps the most obvious thing that women ordinarily have the physical potential to do that men could never do.

[31 : 36] And so in other words, Paul is saying to women, don't worry about things you've not been called to do. God made you a woman and he will save you if you have faith in Christ as a woman.

And verse 15 therefore encourages all of us, men and women, to honor the women in our church. Just as Paul in chapter 5 encourages the church to honor widows in their calling, he encourages us to honor elders in their calling and we are to be a church family, the household of God, where no one is looked down on and everyone is honored.

Do you notice you look over in chapter 3 verse 1, he adds, here is a trustworthy saying, and in our translations it's said to be about what he's about to say, but it could just as easily be about verse 15 of chapter 2 and whether or not it is doesn't matter so much, but it just is striking that the first trustworthy saying that Paul makes in his letter is chapter 1 verse 15.

Here is a trustworthy saying and it's a saying about salvation. Jesus came into our world to save sinners and maybe here as well that trustworthy saying again is about salvation, chapter 2 verse 15.

Keep going in your faith and God will save you. And so the final word of chapter 2 is not about restriction, it's about redemption. It reminds us of that bigger picture that God is a savior, chapter 2 verse 3, and he wants all kinds of people to be saved, chapter 2 verse 4, and he made that possible through the ultimate childbearing.

[33 : 19] Paul has reminded us in verse 14 that sin came into the world through a woman who was deceived, but in verse 15 here he reminds us that our savior also came into the world through a woman.

God promised as early as Genesis 3 that it was the seed of the woman who would defeat the evil one forever, who would crush the head of Satan. and now that child has come, Jesus has come into the world so that everyone who trusts in him can be saved.

That's our message. Let's pray together. Heavenly Father, we thank you so much for the Lord Jesus that he is our leader with all authority, that he is the one who teaches us with all authority, and that he is the one worthy of our honor and praise.

We pray, Heavenly Father, that in light of your word here we would strive to be a holy people, men who run after holiness, women who run after holiness, and where we honor each other and compliment each other in a way that upholds your good design for us, and we ask that for Jesus' name's sake.

Amen.