

Men and Women Together in God's Home

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[0 : 00] Well, we have been in Paul's first letter to Timothy as a church for a few weeks now. If this is your first Sunday joining us, we're so, so glad that you are here.

But it's important for you to know that what we're going to be thinking about tonight comes in the context of a whole letter. Now, perhaps what we just read seems shocking or confusing.

And let me say this as we begin, that I'm happy to try to answer any questions that you have about what we've read, about anything that I say after our service.

Please do come and ask anything if you have a question. But as with any letter that we come to, well, this letter was written from someone to someone at a certain time and to deal with certain things.

So let's remind ourselves, this is Paul writing. He's an apostle, a spokesperson for the Lord Jesus. And he is writing to his true son in the faith, a faithful minister called Timothy.

[1 : 09] And Timothy has been set over a church which is in trouble. And Paul tells Timothy in chapter 3 that he's written him this letter so that, verse 15, if I am 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.

So this is a letter from Paul to help Timothy to put God's church in order. Now, I'll say again, as I said at the start of our series, that the reason we're spending time in this letter here at Bon Accord is not because I think we are falling apart as a church.

If we are, it's certainly not obvious to me anyway. But it's important for us to put down deep, deep roots in the truth of God's word as a church in the good times, so that as we grow and we bear fruit over the coming years, in all circumstances, it will be healthy gospel fruit by God's grace.

I've invited us throughout our time in this letter to think of our church in five years' time or ten years' time and think, what would it take for us to still be a thriving, healthy gospel church, all the more so in five or ten years' time?

What would it take? Well, this letter was written to teach us how, by God's grace, we will be that church in another five or another ten years' time.

[2 : 46] It's helping us to deepen our roots, isn't it, in the gospel, to help us keep growing in the way that God wants his church to be growing. And it's all the more important that we're putting down these roots in our day, because the way that God wants us to live and work and grow as a church, well, it goes against the powerful tide of our culture.

In fact, everything that we have learned so far from this letter is extremely countercultural. So much of what Paul is teaching us as a church would be considered heresy in the world.

And yet, these are truths that Paul says can help a church be healthy and whole. The church of the living God is built on an incredibly countercultural blueprint.

And I want to say that to prepare us to continue to be shocked by how countercultural this letter is. And because our passage tonight obviously chafes, doesn't it, against so many deeply held values in our world and maybe in this very room.

Even for Paul to write to men and women and have different things to say to them, well, it cuts against the grain of our age, doesn't it?

[4 : 12] And one of the big questions of our day is, do men and women even exist? And if men and women do exist, they certainly shouldn't be treated or spoken to differently.

And so before we open up these verses, let's start simply by recognizing that here, God is saying something to us that is completely different from what our world would have us believe.

Men and women are equal, but different. Our bodies tell us that. Every cell in our bodies tells us that.

From the point of conception, our very first cell was male or female. God created you to be a man or a woman. And that is a glorious thing. And tonight, Paul wants us to recognize that truth.

That instead of trying to play it down, he wants our church to hold it up and live it out. The glory and the beauty of being men and women together in his church.

[5 : 18] And I hope that by the end of our service, if not already, we are certainly thanking God for the way he's brought us together as men and women in his family.

So we've got two points this evening. Men and women living together and learning together. Firstly, then, we're going to look at men and women living together.

In a sense, all the words in this passage, I want to suggest to you that the two most important words are the first words in verses 8 and 9.

Can you see what they are? The first word in verse 8, therefore. And the first words in verse 9, also or likewise.

Therefore, I want the men to. Likewise, I want the women to. And that tells us, doesn't it, that these instructions are flowing out of Paul's point at the start of the chapter.

[6 : 15] Just turn back there with me, please, to the start of chapter 2. So what does he say? Paul's talking there in verse 2 about us living peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness.

But why? Because, verse 3, this is good and pleases God our Savior who wants all people to be saved and come to a knowledge of the truth.

And so the motive that Paul is giving us for living a certain way is because God wants all kinds of people to know that the way to him is open through his son, Jesus Christ.

Paul's saying the way that we live should point people to that glorious truth that God has opened the way to come to him in Christ. And Paul doesn't want any obstacle in the way of the gospel, taking root in the church or growing out of the church into the world.

And so how, then, do we live in this godly, holy way, this way that points people to God in Christ? Well, this is where it gets a bit more challenging for us because Paul seems to think that men and women typically have different sorts of obstacles to living lives of godliness and holiness, or at least they did back then in this church.

[7 : 42] Now, I wonder if you can see any point of contact, perhaps, between the problems that men and women were having then and how men and women might be tempted to conduct themselves today.

So just have a little look with me at verses 8 and 9. Paul says, We live in a culture, don't we, that's deeply, deeply suspicious of stereotypes, and sometimes rightly so.

But sometimes stereotypes stick because there is a grain of truth in them. Now, remember if you can, maybe it was a short time ago, maybe it was a longer time ago, remember if you can, what happened in high school?

Okay, somewhere between the ages of 11 and 16, nearly everyone started to want to be noticed. And how do teens tend to do that?

Well, not all quite in the same way, do they? The boys, what do they do? They tend to get physical, fighting, competing, sports. And the girls, well, the girls tend to discover makeup, short skirts, fashion.

[9 : 08] Now, there are always exceptions, aren't there? Maybe you were one of them. But generally, generally, men and women tend to have different ways of being noticed.

And Paul is saying that church, certainly back then, could sometimes feel weirdly like high school. Of course, of course, okay?

Of course, men, never, never do they use their physicality or anger to dominate a room, do they? Men are incapable of doing that, aren't they?

Of course not. The men back then in that church seem to have had that problem. We know some of them love controversy and intrigue. They come to church wanting to get into a war of words.

Surely that competitiveness, that physicality, that competing for positions, surely that couldn't filter into the culture of a church, could it? Well, it can, and it has, hasn't it?

[10 : 12] Now, of course, this isn't only a man thing. Women are perfectly capable, aren't they, of deploying anger as a weapon, forgetting what they want.

But brothers, is this not higher up the list of things that we struggle with? See, we could say, couldn't we, that Paul is confronting these guys in this church with an uncomfortable truth about the strategies that they are using to get their own way and leave it there in the past.

But friends, we know that that is not how the Bible works, don't we? Because God, the divine author of Scripture, is confronting men in every church, men everywhere, with our masculine leaning towards a quick temper or aggressive speech or domineering behavior to get our own way.

And so Paul is saying, if anger is a weapon in our arsenal, and to the degree that we use it freely to get what we want, well, God wants us all, but men in particular, to change that for something else.

And what is it, verse 8? Pray, he says. Pray lifting up holy hands. Okay, holy hands, notice. There's the holiness that pleases God.

[11 : 36] And how can we live it, brothers? Well, Paul says, by raising our hands, not in anger, but in prayer. By unclenching our fists into open hands before God.

And just to sharpen this a wee bit further, I take it from the context that this means that men were to take the lead in prayer. Okay, since verse 8 flows out of a section that begins in verse 1 with an instruction to pray, remember.

And so, if we have leadership responsibility in the church, well, this has everything to do with the way that we lead, doesn't it? Paul wants us to know that anger, using anger to get our own way, is not a valid way to lead a church.

Okay, that it's not a question of having a strong personality or a bold leadership style. Anger is ungodly, and it is unholy.

Instead, he says, let us lead humbly and prayerfully as God wants men everywhere to do. Okay, that way we will be seeking God's will for what he wants, and not asserting our own will for what we want.

[12 : 54] Okay, but what about the women then? Well, verse 9 begins, also, or likewise. And so, as with verse 8 and the men, I take it that this has relevance, of course, in its original setting, but is ultimately an instruction for women everywhere.

And so, sisters, again, can you see any connection, perhaps, between what was going on back then, and what women might be tempted to today in the church?

Glance down then at verse 9 with me, where he says, Now, I realize, coming to preach this, that I'm treading a very fine line.

Okay, and I want you to know that I hold the women in this church in very, very high regard, as Paul did with the women in his life, in the churches he worked with, who he loved.

Think of Phoebe, and Lydia, and Priscilla, and Chloe. He talks about them in his letters, doesn't he, as women that he loved working with. He values them very, very highly.

[14 : 16] But it's clear that in this church back then, the women, we had their own strategies, and we're using them to get their own way, to gain influence in the church.

And Paul, he's not scared, is he, of confronting them, speaking directly about it. Now, what they're doing is probably best described as turning up the charm.

Okay, dressing up, the nicest clothes, getting the most fashionable haircut, putting on the expensive perfume, and coming to church as if it were a date night.

And again, it's not impossible, is it, for men to do something similar, to maybe get noticed, get their own way. But we'd be lying if we said that that was how men normally went about that.

Now, I have no desire at all, okay, or need, really, to speak about the way that women dress. In our own church, I don't think this is a point that needs to be pressed.

[15 : 19] But while we're here, sisters, it's something to keep in mind, isn't it? Even in the back pocket. It's not a sin to take care of our appearance at all. But if you ever find yourself coming to church and wanting to be noticed for the wrong reasons, or dressing in a way that you think will get someone's interest or get you a hearing, well, Paul wants you to know that it is not right for a godly woman.

Okay, fashions change, I guess. Perhaps he's speaking about expensive clothing, maybe today an equivalent, might be something that is inappropriately revealing. But if dress or appearance is ever a weapon in your arsenal, and to the extent that you freely use it, well, God wants us all, but women in particular, to change into something else.

And that something else, notice verse 10, is good deeds, appropriate for women who profess to worship God. Some commentators start talking here about the difference between outer and inner beauty.

Notice that's not what Paul is doing. He's saying exchange outward glamour for outward good works. There's something more beautiful and more attractive in the Christian community, he's saying, than physical looks, and it is godliness.

Good works. And so for men and for women, there is behaviour that God wants us, if we are prone to it, and if we are doing it, to stop doing it, and things that he wants us to, to start doing as men and women.

[17 : 01] Okay, we may, might we be more open to using our bodies in different ways to promote our own interests, but Paul is teaching us men and women in the church a better way of living together in God's home, and that is in godliness and holiness.

And of course, again, Paul isn't saying that, you know, prayer is the domain of men, and good works are to be left to women. Rather, in the life of the church, these are things that he wants men and women to commit to together, instead of competing, trying to get one over on each other, trying to force one's own way.

He wants men and women to be partnering together to do God's will, and not seeking their own will. And remember, what is God's will? What is the therefore, therefore?

Well, because God our Savior wants all people to be saved and come to a knowledge of the truth. Paul is simply saying, when we stop competing and strategizing and turning inwards, when we are living God's way, then we turn outwards and live together as God calls us to, and hold out the promise of the gospel to the world.

That is what God wants men and women to be doing together, in his household, as we live lives of holiness and godliness together. And for the same reason, God wants us men and women to be learning together in God's home, living together and learning together.

[18 : 44] So this is our second point. Now, these verses have often been taken as teaching only, okay, what women shouldn't do in a church.

But notice that Paul is as much, if not more, interested in what women should do in a church. Notice how he starts verse 11. What does he say a woman should do?

A woman should learn. Okay, not simply that women have permission to come to church and learn, but that women should come to church and learn.

It's an imperative. Now, why does he need to say that in the first century? Well, because this is one area where women were treated differently from men.

Okay, Jewish rabbis and Greek philosophers did not have female disciples. And so it's something that really stands out in the ministry of Jesus, that there were women who followed him.

[19 : 46] Remember when Mary comes to sit at the feet of Jesus in her house and listen to his teaching? Well, she's actually taking up the position of a disciple.

And what does Jesus say to her? Remember, Mary's sister Martha comes through from the kitchen and says, Lord, won't you send her through to help me in the kitchen? And Jesus simply says, doesn't he, Mary has chosen something better, the good portion, and it won't be taken away from her.

So to state the obvious, Jesus did not say that a woman's place is in the kitchen. He said that the best place for a man or a woman to be is listening to his teaching.

And that was a radical reordering of the world for Mary and Martha and for Paul and Timothy as well. So when Paul says in verse 5, there's one God and one mediator between God and mankind, the man Christ Jesus, well, he includes women in that.

The word mankind is the word for human beings, for humanity. Saying women have as much right to come personally to God through Jesus Christ as any man.

[21 : 03] And that made churches incredibly counter-cultural places in the first century. The freedom that women had to come and learn with men and from men.

And of course, beyond the gathered worship on a Sunday, we find in the New Testament, women funding Jesus' ministry, keeping the disciples on the road, hosting house churches.

As I said, they're part of Paul's wider team of gospel workers, even helping to correct teachers who don't have a full grasp on the truth. Classically in Acts chapter 18, when Apollos is preaching the baptism of John, we read in verse 26, when Priscilla and Aquila heard him, they invited him to their home and explained to him the way of God more adequately.

So in their home, husband and wife helped Apollos to come to a better understanding of the truth. And so before we get any further, it's important for us to see not only a negative command here, but a really positive command that men and women are to learn together as equals before God and as equal members of God's family.

Now, if Christianity introduced that radical equality as it did, then why does Paul need to state it here? Well, this is where we need to zoom back in.

[22 : 37] Isn't it? To the context in Ephesus. Because clearly the issue is not that the women of the church had decided that they shouldn't be learning. It's that some of them had decided that they should be teaching.

Paul goes on to say, verse 11, a woman should learn in quietness and full submission. I do not permit a woman to teach or assume authority over a man.

So we've seen what Paul isn't saying. He's not saying that women are lesser than men. And so what is he saying here? Well, context is our best friend.

Okay? Some people want to say, well, this is more to do with family dynamics than the life of the church because the words for man and woman can be translated husband and wife.

And so is Paul really talking about men and women as a whole or simply is he saying that a wife shouldn't publicly and formally be teaching her husband? Now, the problem with that is that it doesn't really fit the context in this church.

[23 : 49] In chapter 4, verse 3, we find that the false teachers in Ephesus were forbidding people to marry. And so surely if marriage was forbidden by these teachers, well, it wouldn't have been married women that were teaching on a Sunday.

It would have been the unmarried women who were gaining influence and given positions of authority. And if that's the case, if Paul's talking about wives, then his point is pointless, isn't it?

You know, the context suggests that this is speaking to any woman who's teaching in this way, assuming authority in the church, not only married women.

And so what Paul seems to be saying is that in public, formal, gathered worship, women should learn, but shouldn't teach, and that they should not try to take positions of authority.

In practical terms, we could sum that up by saying that women shouldn't be preaching in gathered church settings and shouldn't either formally be or informally be playing the part of an elder in the church.

[25 : 05] Now, sometimes those kind of prohibitions have been stretched so far, haven't they, to cover almost any way that a woman could serve in a church, as if being a preacher, a teacher, or an elder were the only ways that one could serve a church.

Now, that is obviously not true because there's a million ways, aren't there, that men and women can serve a church that don't include preaching or leading. Those, remember, are very specific types of service.

And Paul's going to go on, isn't he, to speak about the role of elders for whom those types of service are normally restricted. And there are, of course, ways that women are specifically called to serve a church.

And I don't mean making tea. In Titus, we read that older women should teach the younger women. There are things about being a godly woman that can only be taught by other godly women.

And there are other areas, aren't there, where it takes wisdom to know how to apply these principles properly. For example, churches who take this passage of Scripture seriously will differ on whether it's right for a woman to lead a Bible study of men and women in a home, and if so, how that can best be done.

[26 : 32] So there are things that shouldn't be done, there are things that should be done, and there is a spectrum of things that might be done. But the principles are clear that in a church context, women should be listening gladly with men and other women, and should be learning from men and other women, and not seeking to exert inappropriate leadership over men or other women.

Now, perhaps tonight, you're just dropping in, you're visiting from another church, perhaps where you have a woman minister, or you have women who preach, and this all just seems a little bit crazy.

Like, are we actually discussing what women should or shouldn't be doing in a church? Surely, even if Paul is saying those things, surely he is just echoing the sexism of his age.

You know, now we know better, don't we? Now, we've already seen that Paul was not in any way sexist. He really, really valued the women that he worked with.

And speaking personally, as the person who is preaching these truths tonight, I really value my female colleagues. In fact, Anne and I regularly sit down to study and look at the passage that is to be preached on a Sunday together.

[27 : 59] this week, actually, Gigi joined us because even though it's my responsibility to study and to preach, well, I'm not the only one who can read the Bible.

And I really value what my female colleagues have to say. So, that aside, this is not about cultural, changing cultural norms.

Notice that Paul is resting it on the unchanging truth of God's word. Verses 13 and 14 give us some whole Bible context, don't they?

Is this culturally conditioned? Or is it an unchanging truth? We read earlier in our service from Genesis 2, and Paul looks back there and reminds us Adam was formed first, then Eve.

So, Paul's rooting this teaching, isn't he, in the creation of humanity, male and female. We saw in Genesis that God did not, did he create one sort of generic human being that he then split in two, into men and women, nor did he create a man and a woman kind of separately and at the same time.

[29 : 13] He created a man, and from the man he took a rib from which he formed a woman. Of all the ways that God could have chosen to create us, that is how he chose to do it.

And the point I think Paul's making is less to do with priority. He's not saying that Adam was more important than Eve just because he came first. He's saying Adam had a different role within God's creation.

Adam was created first, and we heard God spoke to him and told him how to live in his presence and how to keep and to guard and work the garden.

And then he created Eve. And the idea is that Adam was to share with Eve what God had said so that she could be his helper, help him carry out their God-given role together.

Now we know that that partnership went wrong. But the way that it went wrong is important for Paul's point. He says, verse 14, Adam was not the one deceived, it was the woman who was deceived and became a sinner.

[30 : 23] Okay, Adam is at fault here because he stood idly by. He watched as Eve was being tricked and deceived. He didn't correct her when she got wrong what God had said.

And in most places in the Bible, Paul actually lays the blame for sin and the fall squarely on Adam's feet. Okay, sin entered the world through one man, he says.

But here he adds that of course Eve was also at fault in her own way. She was deceived. She did get God's words wrong.

She did give the fruit to her husband because ultimately she did want to be like God and God's equal. And so between them, Adam and Eve turned God's created order on its head.

Adam failed to be the keeper of God's word Eve failed to be his helper. And the result of their changing places was the fall.

[31 : 26] And so Paul's instruction that men are to handle God's word in the gathered congregation and to lead rather than women, it's not a reward and nor is it a punishment.

It is actually the redeeming of God's created order. in Christ, that relationship that God created us for, men and women is put back and restored.

In Ephesus, men and women were working to overturn it again. Women were snatching at preaching and leading and men were letting them.

And the result, again, was a world of sin. But turn the church the right way up, says Paul, and it will stand as a pillar and foundation of the truth.

Not because anyone in it is more or less valuable, but because this is how God designed us and has designed his church.

[32 : 30] And at the end, as we close, Paul reminds us, of course, why all this is important. Notice those words in verse 15, the woman will be saved through childbearing.

Now, the NIV puts women there, but the Greek word is simply she. Now, who is she? Well, surely the woman, Eve. Paul is saying that Eve would be saved by having children.

How? Well, because God promised her offspring would come to crush the head of the one who had deceived her. he would come to take away the curse of sin, a descendant of Eve.

And he has come, the Lord Jesus Christ. To be clear, that verse is not saying that women will be saved somehow if they only have children or stick to the home.

It's Paul reminding the church that all this instruction for men and for women is all to be understood in the light of God's vast eternal plan in redeeming creation, in redeeming humanity, men and women, from our sin.

[33 : 45] Even Adam and Eve, he says, were saved as they put their hope in the promise of Christ. And so now, men and women who trust in Christ are redeemed and brought into God's family.

And that family is put back together in his church in the way that God desired in the beginning. And so, friends, let's give great thanks to him for that, for bringing us together, men and women, into his family to live and to learn together as redeemed human beings in Christ.

Let's pray together. God, our Father, we praise you for your grace towards us in Christ.

We thank you that he is our redeemer. Father, we thank you that you did not leave us to our sin and our rebellion and foolishness. We thank you that in Christ you sent the serpent crusher and Father, we pray that even as we have confessed, we struggle to understand all the outworkings of your plan.

And yet, Father, we pray that by your spirit you would help us. We pray that you would help us to be rooted deeply in the gospel of Christ. We pray, Father, that we would be open to your instruction.

[35 : 17] and Father, that we would serve together as men and women in your church, gladly and with joy. Father, we pray that you would help us to partner together as one in the service of Christ.

We pray, Father, that you would show us how to serve you, that you would open up avenues for us each to serve you and to hold out Christ to the world. Father, we pray that you would build us up as we serve together as men and women.

We thank you for the family that you are gathering here. Father, we pray that you would keep us from foolishly limiting what women can do and the ways that they can serve rightly under your word.

Father, forgive us for times when we have done that. And help us, we pray, to have soft hearts that are responsive to your word and able, Lord, to handle your word rightly.

And digest it fully. Lord, build your church, we pray, and may Christ be exalted. We ask in his name. Amen.