

1 Timothy 2:11-15

I want you to turn with me today to the final paragraph in 1 Timothy 2 – it's a follow-on from what we touched on briefly yesterday.

There, Paul was talking about Christian women and their lifestyle.

The apostle made the valid point that God-fearing ladies will do all in their power to keep their lives on an even keel – there is a sense of balance about them; a woman's testimony is massively enhanced by her spirituality, not her sex appeal. Her clothes, her coiffure, and her cosmetics speak volumes about her walk with the Lord. She may not realise it, but a woman's wardrobe affects her worship. Paul's mega concern is that gaudiness and glitter do not replace godliness. The age-old truth is: character, not clothes, make a woman.

The key phrase in verse 10 surely has to be '... appropriate for women who profess to worship God.' In other words, all they do and say should pay eloquent tribute to God's grace in their heart and life. Their down-to-earth, practical Christianity will be a daily expression of their vibrant relationship with the Lord – in all things and at all times, therefore, a godly woman will be irresistibly attractive. Her deep inner beauty will shine through because she has been on the receiving end of a divine makeover – you see, when the Lord skilfully applies the finishing touches, the 'wow' factor is ever-present.

One of the hot potatoes in today's church involves the role of women and what they should do and shouldn't do. We live in a world where equality between the sexes is the top line of many agendas – it's not PC to think any different; the rank and file in every walk of life are told there is no difference between men and women in terms of capability and intellect. Fair game, you are probably thinking to yourself. It seems to me that gender is one thing, while productivity is another.

As you would expect, this debate is raging like a forest fire in certain sections of the church – for some, it has the potential for causing a

huge split, especially among those who advocate the ordination of women. For others, in evangelicalism, it is being handled with superb sensitivity by those in leadership; many of them, both men and women, expressing a passionate desire to pursue key biblical principles.

To me this is where old-man Paul excels; the preacher develops his inspirational thinking on the function and role of women in the local church when he writes in verse 11: 'A woman should learn in quietness and full submission.' That's enough to throw the spanner in the works, isn't it – what on Earth is Paul talking about? Well, be patient, we'll find out in a minute!

As focused as ever, Paul goes on to expand his ideas in verse 12 where he categorically states, with a kind of blanket ban: 'I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man; she must be silent.' My, that's tough talk; it's a double negative – she's not allowed to teach and she must be silent. I can hear the grunts and groans already!

In the following three verses, from 13 thru 15, you can tell he is warming to his theme when he spells out the logic behind his thinking – basically, it all goes back to the very beginning and the order of creation as it impacted Adam and Eve. On top of that, there's the small matter of who fell in the Garden, of who was conned by the devil – who took first bite of the apple, as it were; this also weighs heavily on Paul's mind.

Then, Paul goes a step further in verse 15 when he details a specific role for women; he sees motherhood as something to be desired, not something to be avoided. Paul locks certain spiritual blessings in to her experience in the delivery suite in the local maternity unit.

There is the gift of a child, but allied to that, is the promise of salvation – more about that in a little while.

Before we delve into Paul's theology on women and ministry, let's pause for a short music break.

MUSIC BREAK

Paul's teaching in these verses is, in one sense, revolutionary, especially when we bear in mind what life was like for women in the first century. Judaism doesn't get a good press when it comes to treating women with respect – sure, they could attend the meetings in the synagogue, but there was no incentive given to them to learn the scriptures. The fact is, most of the teaching rabbis ignored them; some even believed they would be tossing pearls to pigs if they taught the ladies in the congregation.

The status of women in Greek society wasn't much better; they led a sheltered life and were more or less 'confined to barracks' – the woman lived in her own quarters and the only one who entered was her own husband, and you can guess what he was after. She didn't even appear at meal times – yes, good enough to cook the grub, but not deemed good enough to sit down and eat with the rest of the family. She never at any time appeared on the Main Street alone and you'd never find her in a public meeting place. So, you can see, a woman's lot was a tough one back then.

We need to grasp that according to scripture, both Old and New Testaments, women are in no way spiritually inferior to men; in fact, they are seen as being on an equal footing. Women in the church family are not rated as second-class citizens ... we're all one and we're all equal. That said, there are different roles for men and women in the local church, and that's what Paul is on about in this section.

So far as I can see, there are no women pastor-teachers, no lady evangelists, and no female elders in the New Testament. None of the authors of the New Testament were women. There is no record of a sermon by a woman! That said, if my experience is anything to go by, most of our churches have more women than men sitting in the pews. And, if it weren't for the women, there would be a huge shortfall in personnel on the mission fields of the world. We must never devalue or underestimate the vitally important place that godly women played in the ministry of the church, both then and now.

It needs to be emphasised that Paul's instructions here in verses 11 and 12 have nothing to do with what happens in the business world, or in the cloisters of academia, or in government. These verses are all about order and how we conduct ourselves in the local assembly of God's people. The question is, how then do we understand Paul's prohibition? Is he wanting to gag women from the minute they walk into the building?

There is no way that Paul was attempting to muzzle women in the church; the thought behind the word 'quietness' in verse 11 is allied to that of being 'peaceful' in verse 2. There was a kind of first century heckling going on by some of the women; they abused their newfound freedom in Christ and so were causing disturbances in the meeting when others were speaking.

It is this problem that Paul addressed in this stern admonition. For women, therefore, it is better for them to focus on listening and learning, rather than be out-front leading or speaking out from the back seat.

If we look at other portions of Scripture such as Titus 2, it is clear that women are permitted to teach in certain contexts – older women should teach the younger women, and so on. One obvious example is Timothy, he was incredibly well taught at home by his mother and grandmother, Eunice and Lois. There is so much that a woman can do.

When Paul refers to 'full submission' he does not see women as proverbial doormats; far from it. They are not to bow down to men as if the male species was a kind of super god. No, he is simply saying that in their teaching ministry, they must not lord it over the men. She can teach, and when she does, it should be with the full blessing of the church elders. There is nothing wrong with a godly and gifted woman instructing a man in the privacy of his home or wherever, that's what occurred in Acts 18 where Priscilla and Aquila both instructed Apollos. But, she must not assume such authority in the church and try to take the place of a man. It's all down to God's preferred way of doing things.

We'll take a short music break and when we come back we'll take a look at the reasons that Paul gives for his thinking on the role of women in ministry.

MUSIC BREAK

The chances are, you're maybe wondering, on what does Paul base these distinctions? Does the apostle have some kind of hidden agenda to keep women down? Well, no, he doesn't. If we read his clear-as-crystal comments in verses 13 and 14, it's obvious why he says what he does.

Basically, Paul's model for the church is the order of Creation. We know from Genesis 2 verses 7-25 that man was created first, followed by woman – it was Adam, then Eve. As William Hendriksen notes: 'God made the human pair in such a manner that it is natural for him to lead, and for her to follow.'

We must keep in mind that priority does not mean superiority – man has no licence to dominate a woman; both were created by God and in God's image. The issue is only that of authority – nothing else, nothing more, nothing less; man was created first. I agree with the insight of John Stott when he writes: 'Paul's teaching is rooted in divine revelation, not human opinion, and in divine creation, not human culture.'

This is nothing new for Paul, he said pretty much the same thing in 1 Corinthians 11, where we read: 'For man did not come from woman, but woman from man; neither was man created for woman, but woman for man.' Look, our God could have created the two of them at precisely the same time, but he didn't! He created Eve for Adam. We know from the Genesis narrative that she was created to be his helper. The unchanging fact is that God desires the order of creation be reflected in his church, the body of Christ.

We can illustrate this truth by examining the way in which the army structures its discipline. A colonel is higher in rank than a private and a brigadier is further up the scale than a corporal; but that does not necessarily mean that the colonel or brigadier are better people than the private or corporal. In God's eyes all of them are equal.

The obvious difference is, the further up the promotion ladder someone climbs, the bigger their salary, and the more responsibility they have to bear. Contrary to opinion, when it comes to God's creation order, it is the men who wear the trousers, not the women! Another factor in the equation is Paul's comment in verse 14 re the Fall – let's be clear, for all his many faults, there is no way that Paul thinks women are more gullible than men. Eve's sin was certainly not one of blissful naïveté or anything resembling it; she was duped by the devil himself.

Genesis 3 is a catalogue of what went wrong – the bottom line is, Eve seriously overstepped the mark when she usurped the headship role. The net result was the entire human race fell in to depravity and judgment. That's why you and I are branded as sinners today, it's because they yielded to temptation in the idyllic surroundings of the Garden of Eden.

This whole sad and sorry saga tells me something profound, Eve was not suited by nature to assume the position of ultimate responsibility. When she stepped out from under the protection and leadership of Adam, she was highly vulnerable and fell, she ended up with an omelette on her face. To change the analogy, if you put your finger in the fire, you'll get burned!

And, of course, when Adam violated his leadership role and followed Eve, the perversion of God's order was complete. In that sense, they both disobeyed God's command; by their deeds – she took and Adam ate – they also ignored God's role for the sexes. Adam was no less culpable than Eve, she was no more defective than Adam – they both blew it, big time.

You see, as the head of their relationship in the Garden of Eden Adam bore ultimate responsibility for what happened – we can put it like this, the buck stopped with him! That explains why the New Testament always links the Fall to Adam's sin, not his wife's disobedience, we see ample evidence of that in the book of Romans. That's why, in God's design, men are there to take the lead; and, as

men fulfil their God-given commission in the arena of a public worship service, so the name of the Lord is honoured.

I will say it one more time, no man should ever exaggerate, or expand, or even exploit his role – his ministry parameters are clearly defined by Scripture and he must never presume on the grace of God.

On a purely human level, all this could leave women thinking, what good am I in the local church, what can I contribute if I can't do this, or that; it could knock their self-esteem for six. Again, Paul spells their phenomenal contribution out in verse 15 when he talks about motherhood. Here is the glorious role of women – something men definitely can't do!

Generally speaking, women will be kept safe in child bearing and they will receive immense spiritual blessing through the joy of bringing children into this world, and in bringing them up in the ways of the Lord. True, there have been exceptions to this, as there are to every principle, but that in no way negates or devalues the privilege given to them.

At its very simplest, a woman's chief role is not to run the church, but to care for the home and bear children to the glory of God. As Warren Wiersbe notes: 'Their home congregation would give them abundant opportunities for teaching the Word and ministering to the saints.'

The word 'saved' that Paul used is a word that means preserved – it can also mean to rescue, to heal, to set free, to deliver from, or to preserve safe and unharmed. It's a word that pops up all over the place in the New Testament. Again, it reinforces the apostle's idea that women have a tremendously special role in life – bringing children into this world, nurturing them, loving them, guiding them, then seeing them grow up into young men and women of God. So far as Paul is concerned, for a woman, there is no greater calling. In doing what God wants her to do, in being what God intends for her to be, she will find fulfilment and total satisfaction.

In closing, let me say this: this has been one of those difficult portions in the Bible that we have had to handle together, but it is there for a specific purpose and the man is a fool if he tries to outwit the Lord at any time. God knows best. At the end of the day, when it comes to his church, it always goes so much better when we follow the Maker's instructions.

Men have their part to play, women have their role – together, we aim to see God working his purposes out; we're not there to outdo or outshine one another, we're not there to tramp on one another's toes, we're not there to put each other down – all that matters is that we do church God's way. So far as leadership is concerned, that's where men have it – and that's not me saying it, that's the inspirational verdict of the apostle Paul.

As they say, good enough for him, good enough for me! This is all about fidelity to biblical truth – it's about inviting God's Word to shape the life of the church, rather than the intrusive winds of culture. Don't be caught napping – if we don't let the Bible do it, culture will. And we see plenty of evidence of that all around us today!

Hence, right here, at the end of 1 Timothy 2, is an impassioned appeal for us to get back to the Bible, back to the word of God, back to you and I leading from the front and living the way the Lord wants us to – women, you do your bit; men, you do yours; for when we do, we can trust a faithful God to do the rest.