

1 Timothy 2:11-15 — The Role of Women in the Church

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We live in a world where women are taking on increasingly important roles in society. Marissa Mayer is the CEO of Yahoo. Indra Nooyi is the CEO of Pepsi. Virginia Rometty is the CEO of IBM. These are only some of the gifted women leading major corporations. Of course, we all know about Hillary Clinton. She almost became the first women president. With women taking so many important positions in society, why don't we have women pastoring and leading in our church or denomination? Is it because CrossWinds has a bunch of chauvinists? Maybe it is because we are behind the times. Today we will find out the answer.

This morning we are studying a few verses in 1 Timothy that make many people uncomfortable. There is more ink spilled on these five verses than any other part of this letter. While many people struggle with these verses, after we take the time to study them you will see they were not intended to frustrate us. They were written to help us honor Jesus, keep us from sin and spread the gospel to the world. These verses are about the role of women in the church. They also teach us the incredibly high value women have in the eyes of God.

Let me begin by reading these verses.

Let a woman learn quietly with all submissiveness. I do not permit a woman to teach or to exercise authority over a man; rather, she is to remain quiet. For Adam was formed first, then Eve; and Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and became a transgressor. Yet she will be saved through childbearing—if they continue in faith and love and holiness, with self-control. 1 Timothy 2:11–15 (ESV)

I have always taught you that context is king. We must understand verses in their context so before we study these tough verses, let me give you their context. In 1 Timothy 1, we learned the importance of Jesus. Paul taught us why we can't drift away from Jesus and that only Jesus can change a life. Last week, as we began chapter 2, we learned how to honor Jesus in the church. 1 Timothy 2 taught us that God desires us to be men and women of prayer. We are to offer all kinds of prayer for all kinds of people. We are to especially pray for people far from God. In the second half of this chapter, Paul looked at the opposite side of the equation, how we can bring dishonor to God through our lifestyle.

While men are to be leaders in the church when it comes to prayer, men can dishonor Jesus at church by dishonest work with their hands and holding anger and bitterness in their hearts.

In a similar way, last week we learned how women can bring dishonor to Jesus by their lifestyles. They can dishonor Jesus by the way they dress. In the Ephesian culture it was becoming fashionable for women to dress with fancy hair and skin-tight dresses. The problem with showing up to church looking like you were dressed to kill is that once you arrived, nobody at church is thinking about Jesus. Everybody, especially the men, are thinking about you. If you show up to church dressed to distract, you will be a distraction. The focus of people's minds will not be on Jesus, they will be on you. A woman can steal honor from Jesus by dressing to take all the honor to herself.

These verses on a woman's role in the church come as part of this discussion on how a woman can dishonor Jesus by her lifestyle.

Here is Paul's point. A woman can dishonor Jesus by seeking to fulfill a role in the church she was not created to fulfill. That will be the topic at hand.

The key to understanding these verses is realizing they are written in the structure of a Greek chiasm. That means Paul gave two commands in the first part, then he gave two reasons for these commands in the second part. A chiasm is like a verbal mirror. The commands in the first half (A and B) are reflect by the reasons for those commands in the second half (A' and B').

(A) - Let a woman learn quietly with all submissiveness.

(B) - I do not permit a woman to teach or to exercise authority over a man; rather she is to remain quiet.

(B') - For Adam was formed first, then Eve;

(A') - and Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and became a transgressor.

Let's work our way through these verses linking each command to the reason Paul gave for the command.

Women are to learn at church.

Let a woman learn quietly with all submissiveness...

The first thing Paul tells us is women are to learn at church. That may not sound profound but this was very countercultural when Paul wrote it. In the first century, women were typically shut out of the learning process. In the Judaism of Jesus' day, while women were not barred from attending the synagogue, they were not encouraged to attend. Most rabbis of the day refused to teach women and likened it to throwing pearls before pigs.

Jesus treated women very differently from the culture around him. For example, some of Jesus' closest friends were women, like Mary and Martha. He allowed woman to touch him, which other rabbis did not. Much of Jesus' ministry was paid for by gifts from women. When Jesus was in the home of Mary and Martha, Martha was working in the kitchen and Mary was sitting at Jesus' feet learning about God. If you remember the story, Martha came busting out of the kitchen telling Jesus to command Mary to come help her make a meal because she thought a woman's place was always and only in the kitchen. Jesus didn't shoo Mary away but instead told Martha that Mary had chosen the better thing, to sit at his feet and learn about God. That was unheard of in that day.

The first people Jesus chose to know about his resurrection were women. Jesus healed many women. One of the biggest problems people had with Jesus is he hung out with sinful women. He talked to the sinful Samaritan woman at the well. He forgave a woman caught in the act of adultery. He let a sinful woman anoint his feet with expensive perfume.

My simple point is that Jesus bestowed on women a high value. He elevated their status. Wherever the good news of Jesus goes, you will always find the value and status of women significantly elevated. To prove this to you, in your mind take a moment to travel to cultures where the good news of Jesus is not heard. What scenes of women come to your mind? I picture women wearing veils. I see women that are uneducated. Women are not allowed to drive. Women can't vote. Women can't hold property but instead are considered property.

Women are beaten. Women have little value other than for sex and to bear children. Those are the cultures where the good news of Jesus has not come.

Jesus is different. He highly valued women and elevated their status. One of the ways Jesus elevated women is Jesus wanted women to learn about God. In the same way Paul said in this chapter that women honor Jesus at church by being good learners in church.

Paul also tells us how women are to learn at church. He said they are to learn quietly and submissively. What do these adjectives mean?

Quietly — This does not mean complete silence. It doesn't mean a woman cannot talk at church. It means *settled down, not unruly*. It is similar to what our school teachers ask for in their classrooms. If their students are chatting in the back of the room while the teacher is in the front of the room trying to teach, you know one thing that is not taking place. Learning! You can't have a conversation with your friends and learn from the teacher at the same time. You need to be quiet and pay attention if you are going to learn. When Paul said women are to be quiet in the church he was simply saying that when public worship and teaching in the church take place, women are not to use that time as a social hour. They are to give that time to quietly learning during the hour. This is no different from what any good teacher would ask of his or her students in the classroom today.

With all submissiveness — This means *to fall in line under*. It means to understand your role and play that role. If you work as an employee in a company, you work in submissiveness to your boss. Your role is to be the

employee. The role of your boss is to be the employer and tell you what to do. This is the same word used in Titus 2 to describe the way a congregation should be submissive to church leadership. It is also the same word used in Ephesians 2 to describe the way everything submits to Jesus Christ as the head of the universe. Jesus is the head of all things and everyone. We submit to him. Paul's simple point was that women should be learners in the church. They should be paying attention and know their role in the public worship is to be good learners. There is nothing oppressive or abusive about these words.

I told you earlier that each of these commands is connected to a reason for those commands from the book of Genesis. Paul explained the reason why he gave this command. He said the reason for women to be good learners in the church is because it was not that Adam was not deceived but Eve was deceived and became the transgressor.

As we learned in the book of Genesis, Genesis has foundational truth that is normative for the rest of life. Paul said what happened in Genesis 3 with sin entering into the world also has influence for the rest of life and on the church. In Genesis 3, Eve was deceived by the devil — in the form of a serpent — into eating from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Paul said one of the reasons Eve fell into sin is because she was not properly instructed in the truth. I don't know if Adam failed to teach her the full consequences of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. I don't know if Adam taught her but she was not quietly listening. I don't know exactly what happened. What we do know is Paul

said women must receive instruction at church so the devil will not be able to deceive them into sin, like he did for Eve.

Paul wanted women to be good students in the public worship of church so they become strong, godly women so they will not be deceived into sin like Eve.

This first command tells a woman what she should do in the church. They must be good learners to become mature, godly women. The next command Paul gave puts a cap on the role women play in the church.

Women are not to teach or exercise authority over men in the church.

Many people find this verse difficult. Before we dive in, let me give you some background. When I looked up this verse on the Internet and in many popular commentaries, they say this verse is controversial and open to many different interpretations because what it says isn't clear. That isn't true. This verse has been subject to a variety of different opinions but it is not open to a variety of different interpretations. What this verse says in Greek is plain and clear.

As I was preparing for this message, I ran across some research by Dr. Bob Yarbrough. He is a professor at Trinity International University, our denomination's school. He did research on the controversy surrounding this verse. He learned there was almost zero disagreement on the meaning of this verse until 1969. For almost 2,000 years of church history, for the greatest minds in the church for the last 60 generations, the meaning of this verse wasn't considered controversial. The first articles disputing the meaning of this verse show up in 1969 as a capitulation to the feminist move of the 1960s. I like the way Dr. O.J. Brown, a former professor at Trinity, put it. He said that when there

is no new archaeological evidence and no new linguistic evidence about this verse and the only thing that changed is our culture, we need to be very suspicious of any new interpretations.

Let me give you some of the ways people try to dismiss this verse.

1. **Paul was wrong.** Dr. Paul Jewett of Fuller Seminary first used this explanation in 1975. He said Paul was just wrong when he wrote these words. The problem is the Bible says it is God's word. We can't just cross out the hard parts. When Dr. Jewett decided to cross out this verse, that was only the beginning of his slide away from the Bible. He continued crossing out verses in the Scriptures to justify his pro-homosexuality and pro-abortion beliefs. Since he crossed out of the Bible what he doesn't want to believe, I have crossed him out.
2. **Paul was just writing about excessive women authority.** Some people claim that because the temple of the female goddess Artemis dominated ancient Ephesus, the city was a bastion of feminist leadership in the ancient world (like a bunch of Amazon women running the city). Some claim Paul was just putting a cap on excessive women teaching and authority in the church, not normal woman teaching and carrying authority in the church. Unfortunately, nothing in archaeology or history supports the theory that Ephesus was a bastion of feminism in the ancient world. All archaeological evidence shows us it was a city no different than others in the Roman Empire, like Corinth or Rome. There is no evidence to support this theory.

3. **Paul was talking about abusive authority over men.** Some claim Paul was just talking about a woman abusing her authority over men in the church and this is not talking restricting a woman from having a cap on her teaching or leadership authority in the church. Unfortunately, the word authority in the Greek is a general word for authority. It doesn't have anything to do with authority being abusive or wholesome. This linguistic argument falls on its face. There is nothing in Greek grammar, history or archeology to support it.
4. **When Paul said, "I do not permit" he was just giving his opinion and not authoritative teaching.** That doesn't hold water because 2 Timothy 3:16 tells us all of Scripture is God-breathed, including these words. As I showed in our Doctrine series, Jesus claims every consonant, every vowel¹ and even every verb tense is exactly what God wanted², and that would include Paul's words in this verse. In addition, Paul was about to support his reasons for these commands from Genesis, not from his opinion.
5. **Galatians 3:28 erases this verse.**

There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. Galatians 3:28 (ESV)

The problem is Galatians 3:28 is not talking about the elimination of roles in society. There are still men and women, Jews and Greeks and slaves or free men. This verse is talking about salvation in Christ, which is offered equally to everyone, no matter your role in society. The gospel is open to everyone. It

¹ Matthew 5:18

² Matthew 22:32

doesn't mean that after we come to Jesus our roles in life are eliminated. If you become a Christian on the weekend, you are still a Jew or a Greek on Monday.

What does it mean for a woman to not teach or exercise authority over a man in the church?

When Paul talked about a woman not being able to teach a man, in this context he was talking about the public teaching office of the church. Remember this is about how the church can honor Christ. The position of public teaching authority today is called the pastor. Paul said women should not be pastors.

The second place Paul said is off limits is the place of authority in the church. These are the board members that oversee the church, like the elder board. Why did Paul say only men are to be in the pulpit and only men should be in the position of the highest spiritual and practical authority in the church? Is it because he was a chauvinist? No! Remember the chiasm. His reason came from Genesis. It is because Adam was formed first then Eve. The reason for male leadership in the church is from the roles Adam and Eve were given in creation.

If you remember back to our studies of Genesis, we learned that God made Adam and put him in charge of creation. God made a helper suitable for Adam to assist him, not replace him, in ruling the creation.

Then the Lord God said, "It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him." Genesis 2:18 (ESV)

God created Eve from Adam's side and for Adam's side. Eve was created from Adam's side so she was equal in personhood and worth but she was created to fulfill the role of being an essential helpmate for Adam not to rule over Adam or to replace Adam. Look at the original order of creation in Genesis 2.

God was the head of man. Man was the head of the women and together they ruled the creation.

Creation before sin in Genesis 2

God → Man → Woman → Creation

When we get to Genesis 3, and sin entered the world, everything ran in reverse. It

was the inversion of God's creation order that led to sin entering the world. We

Creation order that led to sin in Genesis 3

Creation (the snake) → Woman → Man → God

have a part of the creation, the snake, providing leadership for the woman. The

woman then provided leadership for the man, who then led himself away from God. *Moses' point was the inversion of the creation order is what led to sin entering the world.* As the world continues to function in this inverted order, it will continue to lead to the spread of sin and chaos, because men and women are not functioning in the roles God created for them.

This is why Paul, in Ephesians 5, insisted that husbands are to be head of their wives, like Christ is head of the church. It comes from Genesis 2, which is the order of creation before sin. Inversing the creation roles, and having a wife rule over her husband, led to the fall in Genesis 3, and it will lead to sin in the home. God's plan is that as redeemed humanity in the home we go back to the original creation order of God first, husbands as head of their homes and their wives as their helpmates, Together they rule over creation in their home. This displays to the world around us the wisdom of God.

In the same way, it is God's plan that the church, which is God's home, also displays the wisdom of the Genesis 2 creation order and godly men be the leaders and spiritual authority in the church with godly women delighting in helping and serving in the church. As the church lives in the wisdom of the Genesis 2 creation order, not the inverted Genesis 3 order that led to sin, the wisdom of God is displayed to the world, and the gospel will be clearly proclaimed as the world sees the relational health in the home and the church.

Eve's original sin involved overturning of the creation order and being the teacher and leader of her husband. In a similar way, Adam's sin came from not leading his wife but listening to his wife and letting her lead him into sin. He was taught by her and Adam allowed himself to be put under her authority.

Paul said that in the Christian home and the church the proper God-honoring creation order must be restored. If it is not restored, chaos and sin will reign and ultimately the gospel will not spread.

Where does maintaining the proper creation order NOT apply?

This obviously does not mean women are inferior to men. Every guy knows women are smart. They are the ones that usually ruin the curve on tests for the rest of us. This has nothing to do with women being inferior.

It does not refer to the work world. A woman can be a very gifted business leader. God does not expect the proper creation order to be mirrored in all the world because we live in a fallen world. God expects the proper creation order to be displayed in his church and in our homes. Those are areas where this order should be displayed.

This does not mean a women can't contribute in a small group Bible study. In Acts 18:26, Aquilla and Priscilla took Apollos aside to their home in a small group Bible study and instructed him in the way of Christ more clearly. They probably also served pie. This husband and wife team instructed a powerful pastor but they didn't do it publicly in the church. They did it privately and respectfully by inviting him into their home.

Women are commanded to teach other women in Titus 2:3-4. Women are also commanded to teach children.

Women can pray in the church and contribute in church in many ways. Women should be involved in many aspects of church life. What is off limits is the public teaching office of the church of the pastor and the top level of practical and spiritual authority in the church body..

This has nothing to do with giftedness. CrossWinds is a church filled with many highly gifted women. We are blessed because of them. This is about maintaining the proper creation order, which Paul said in Ephesians 5 is essential in marriage, and he also said in 1 Timothy 2 is essential for the health of the church.

Why are these verses hard to hear?

For many of this, this is hard to hear. I know this is hard to hear. For many years I didn't understand this until I studied this topic in the Bible. I began asking myself, why is this topic so hard to swallow for many of us, including myself? Here are some thoughts.

Sin causes us to rebel against our God-given roles.

After Adam and Eve fell into sin, look at the consequences of sin and how it influenced Eve in her desire to play her role in life as a woman.

To the woman he said, "I will surely multiply your pain in childbearing; in pain you shall bring forth children. Your desire shall be contrary to your husband, but he shall rule over you." Genesis 3:16 (ESV)

The way sin manifests itself in the life of a woman is instead of desiring to play her role as a helpmate for her husband, she will naturally desire to be contrary to her husband. Sin in the life of a wife will give her a desire to not help her husband but to rule over her husband.

In a similar way, the sin manifests itself in a woman at church in that she will not be content to be a learner in the church but she will desire to be the leader of the church. Once again, this is not an issue of giftedness. It is an issue of roles embedded into the creation order as seen in Genesis that Paul, Peter and other apostles recognize as eternally binding and applying to marriage and the church today.

We have a misunderstanding of godly leadership. Another reason there is so much rebellion against this is because we misunderstand the nature of biblical leadership. We think biblical leadership is about power and control. We think it is about who has authority. We think it is about who can force his or her agenda on someone else like we see in the political debates on the news today.

That is not biblical leadership. Biblical leadership is about death. Let me run the parallels to help you understand. Jesus leads his church by dying for the church. Husbands lead their wives by dying for them every day, not by using them. The pastors and leaders of the church are also called die every day for the

flock God has put them over. Your pastors and leaders are not here for the power. They are here to die so you would know Jesus.

God honoring leadership is seen in dying for the ones you lead. Just as Jesus loves his church and gave his very life for his church, of which you and I are a part of, in the same way, a God-honoring husband leads his wife by dying for her every day. He works as many hours as he needs to so there is food on the table and a roof over the head of his wife and children. He doesn't come home from work and spend the evening with his buddies at the bar. He comes home from a hard day's work and he gives his wife the time, energy and affection she craves. He props open his eyelids with toothpicks so he can read his kids a Bible story at bedtime because his life isn't about what he wants but his life is about sacrificing himself for his children. They need his time. Godly leadership is a Christian man sacrificing his life for his wife so she can be the absolute best she can be. She is constantly being built up by her husband not drained out of by her husband, just like Jesus pours his love and care into each of our lives every day.

In the same way, leadership in the church is about sacrificing yourself for the sheep. It is not about power. It is about sacrificing yourself for the church God has given you charge over.

The Contribution of Women

Yet she will be saved through childbearing—if they continue in faith and love and holiness, with self-control. 1 Timothy 2:15 (ESV)

This sounds funny. Does this mean a woman becomes saved by having a baby? Absolutely not! When Paul talked about being saved, he was talking about being saved from the stigma of the fall.

Paul was saying mothers have a huge responsibility. They raise children. One of the reasons it is so important for women to learn in the church is so mothers can avoid the deceptions of the devil and they can teach their children about Jesus. A Christian mother is the primary spiritual influence on her children during their formative years. If you survey many of the great spiritual male leaders in the church, behind them you will find gifted and godly mothers who poured spiritual learning into them when they were children. Mom, you cannot underestimate the awesome responsibility you have as you train your children.

Paul said there may be a position that only a man can do, which is be the teaching elders and top leaders in the church, but there is also a position that only a woman can do, and that is be the mothers that raises the church of the next generation to know Jesus. Both the church leaders and home leaders have extremely important positions. The men determine the future of the church today, the women determine the future of the church of tomorrow.

This passage is not saying all women need to be stay-at-home moms. This passage is saying that in a culture that thinks mothers don't have an important position in this world, God says the opposite. A mother's primary job is the future of the church. She leads and trains her children to love Jesus, and that is an incredibly high position. Women, do not undervalue your contribution to the church. You are essential. In particular do not undervalue the important role you

play in teaching your children and raising the church of the next generation. Do not say, “If I was just a pastor over the church, I would be able to make a real difference for Christ.” You are making a real difference. You are a mother. Nothing can replace you.



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