

**The Rightly Ordered Church:**  
**God's Heart for Women in the Church** (1 Timothy 2:11-15)  
Preached by Pastor Jason Tarn at HCC on March 11, 2018

## Introduction

- ❖ I'm a big proponent of preaching through whole books of the Bible rather than jumping around Scripture, cherry picking passages to preach. Because if that's all we did, we'd never preach on today's passage. There's just way too much controversy and way too many chances to confuse or offend with a passage like ours. It's so much easier to skip it.
  - **But if a church is committed to a staple diet of preaching that primarily works through whole books of the Bible, then you can't ignore these verses forever.** Eventually you'll have to teach on them, and the congregation will be better off. If all Scripture is God-breathed, if all of it is profitable (2 Tim. 3:16), then it will benefit us all to hear God's Word even when it's a hard word.
  
- ❖ **So we've arrived at a passage of Scripture that, on face value, seems very regressive and appears to promote an injustice against women.** Sex discrimination is a very present evil in our society that we're still trying to eradicate. But here in 1 Timothy 2, the Bible seems to be perpetuating the same problem. Women are being discriminated against simply due to their gender and being restricted from certain roles that are reserved for men. Some would argue that that is just flat out sex discrimination.
  - So here is where I feel an urge to defend the Bible. Because I think that's an unfortunate and unfounded caricature of Scripture. **But every time I get the urge to try to defend the Bible, I'm reminded of that old Charles Spurgeon quote about how the Bible is like a lion. It doesn't need to be defended. It just needs to be let out of its cage.** I don't need to argue or debate on behalf of Scripture. I just need to clearly and faithfully preach it, and let the Word of God take care of itself.
  
- ❖ So this morning I have no intent to take on a combative tone. If I address a interpretation or position contrary to my own, I hope to present it in the best light possible. **It's inevitable that I will be taking on a position and advocating for a particular interpretation. Otherwise it wouldn't be preaching.**
  - If I just give you a survey of all the different options, that's called a lecture. You can get that in seminary or a Sunday School class. But in a pulpit, I'm obligated to speak out of biblical conviction. But as I said, I'm not here to argue. I'm not here to defend the Scriptures. I'm just opening up the cage, and letting the Bible take care of itself.
  
- ❖ Now as you just heard this passage read, I'm sure there are a number of questions racing through your mind. What does this word 'quiet' mean? Are women never allowed to talk in church? Why can't a woman teach or exercise authority over a man? Is Paul saying in v14 that women are more gullible than men? And what in the world does it mean that a woman will be saved through childbearing?
  - And an overarching question is: **Is this passage even applicable for us today?** Should we be ordering our churches according to the instructions found in this passage or were they specific only to that time and place in 1st-century Ephesus?

- ❖ First, let me remind you why Paul wrote this letter to Timothy, who is the young pastor in the church of Ephesus. In chapter 3:14-15, Paul explains that he writes so that Timothy would know “*how one ought to behave in the household of God, which is the church*”. **He wants Timothy to rightly order the church, so that it displays Jesus to the city of Ephesus like a pillar displays the statue of a famous person for all to see and marvel at.**
  - Now in chapter 2, we explained how Paul is addressing how the church should conduct itself when it gathers for corporate worship. So in vv1-7, Paul calls us to pray big missional prayers when we gather. In v8, he addresses the behavior of men in the church, and how we have a tendency to obscure Jesus – to make it hard for the lost to see him – due to our anger and quarrelsomeness. He calls us to prayer and unity.
  
- ❖ And then in vv9-15, Paul turns to the behavior of women in the church. First, in vv9-10, he calls for modesty in dress – not letting seductiveness or showiness distract others from Jesus. **And then in vv11-15, Paul explains another way in which a woman can obscure Jesus and his gospel by taking on roles in the church that God has not assigned.**
  - Now I want you to see this in the context of the church, so we can be clear on the scope of these instructions. Paul is teaching us *how* to order ourselves in the corporate gatherings of the church. **So whatever restrictions this passage might teach about women, let’s be clear that we’re not expanding this to the workplace or politics.** This passage is not restricting women from being managers or CEOs or presidents or prime ministers with authority over millions of men. This passage concerns leadership in the household of God. Not in society at large.
  
- ❖ **Last week, I explained that the Bible teaches male leadership in the context of two realms: the home and the church.** And I tried to give a theological foundation. I offered three pieces of evidence in Genesis 2-3 supporting the claim that in the Garden, before the Fall, God designed for man to take primary responsibility to lead his own household, as well as the household of God, the church.
  - **So just as he expects families to be led by godly male husbands, the argument I’m making today is that God designed for churches to be led by godly male elders.** Now we’ll get to elders when we get to chapter 3, but for now just know I’m using elders and pastors interchangeably. They refer to the same office. **So my point is that Paul’s teaching here supports the historical practice of restricting the office of elder/pastor to godly, qualified men.**
  
- ❖ Now I know that claim needs a lot more explanation, so let’s get to it. I’m going to break this down into four sections. We’ll talk about 1) what women are called to do in the church, 2) what women are not called to do in the church, 3) why these instructions are still applicable in the church, and 4) why women are highly regarded in the church.

## What Women are Called to Do in the Church

- ❖ Let's start by talking about what women are called to do in the church. Now to take the edge off, let's reserve the question of whether or not this is still applicable today to our third point. **Let's just listen to what Paul has to say about what women do in the church.** Now he doesn't address all that they're called to do. He just focuses on learning. Look at v11, "*Let a woman learn quietly with all submissiveness.*" Now women learning in church might seem obvious to you. But, in Paul's day, v11 would've been far more controversial than v12.
  - Many in his day would've read v11 and concluded Paul was a radical feminist. Why? **Because anyone in those days with a Jewish background would've been surprised at such a clear affirmation of a woman's right and responsibility to learn in a group setting with men.** In first-century Judaism, women were generally viewed as intellectual inferiors. Their religious education did not concern the rabbis.
    - According to the Jerusalem Talmud, "*It would be better for the words of Torah to be burned, than they should be entrusted to a woman.*" The Babylonian Talmud says that when worshippers gather in the synagogues, "*The men came to learn, the women came to hear.*"
  
- ❖ But the Apostle Paul says, "*Let a woman learn.*" **Let her sit under the preaching of God's Word because it speaks to her and to her heart as much as it does to a man.** Let her engage in deep, serious study of the Bible. Let her learn how to exegete a text – to study a passage of Scripture, to interpret it and apply it to her own life – *and* to the lives of others.
  - **Paul is willing to challenge cultural norms when necessary.** Remember these same Ephesian women, years earlier, heard a letter from Paul being read to the church (aka. the book of Ephesians), and in it he directly addressed them. He treated them as autonomous moral agents, responsible to learn and apply God's Word for themselves.
    - That's not how they were treated outside the church. In Greco-Roman society, if you had a word for a wife, you bring it up to her husband. You don't address her directly. **But Paul treated women as equally capable of instruction and equally responsible for learning and applying God's Word.** That's huge.
  
- ❖ But what did Paul mean by a woman learning "*quietly with all submissiveness*"? That still seems chauvinistic. Well he takes it as a given that women *should* learn alongside men in the church. Here he's concerned with *how* they learn – the manner and attitude in which they learn under the leadership of their elders and pastors.
  - The word "*quietly*" in v11 is the same word for "*remain quiet*" in v12, which is also the same word for "*peaceful and quiet life*" in v2. **So that tells me when Paul says quiet or quietly, he doesn't mean silent or silently.** He wasn't instructing them to pray to kings and all in high positions so that we may lead a peaceful and *silent* life. No, it's a quiet life, which is synonymous with a peaceful life.
    - So to "*learn quietly*" means to learn with a quiet spirit – a peaceable, orderly attitude versus a contentious, quarrelsome one. Quietness is *not* about keeping your mouth shut. **Quietness is describing a spirit that respects and supports the leadership of the men God has appointed to lead his church.**

- ❖ That same idea is there when a woman is called to learn “*with all submissiveness*”. That word 'submissiveness' has all sorts of negative connotations in our culture, but in the Bible, it's not a byword. Submission is not considered demeaning. Submission to the proper God-given authorities in your life is what makes for a rightly-ordered society (Rom. 13:1) or a rightly-ordered family (Eph. 5:22, 6:1) or a rightly-ordered church.
- ❖ But let's be clear: **Paul is *not* saying that submissiveness should characterize a woman's attitude towards all men in the church.** But only to those men who exercise authority and teach, which I'm saying are the church's elders/pastors. And I think it's helpful to say – I'm sure Paul would agree – that all the men in the church who aren't elders or pastors should have the same submissive spirit towards their leaders. We're not singling out women.
  - **Church members, as a whole, are called to submit to the leadership of their leaders.** Hebrew 13:17 says, “*Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls, as those who will have to give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with groaning, for that would be of no advantage to you.*”
- ❖ So before we move on, let me summarize our answer like this. What are women called to do in the church? **They're called to learn God's word – to be robust, biblical theologians – with an attitude that respects and supports the male elders/pastors of the church.**

### **What Women are Not Called to Do in the Church**

- ❖ Having said what they are called to do, Paul now turns to what women are *not* called to do in the church. Again let's focus right now on what Paul was saying in his time and place. I would summarize it like this: **Paul is teaching that women are not called to serve in the office of elder/pastor or to preach in the gathered assembly of the church.** Let's read what he says in v12, “*I do not permit a woman to teach or to exercise authority over a man; rather, she is to remain quiet.*”
- ❖ Now was Paul just flat out against women teachers? **Was he opposed to women teaching in the church?** Biblical evidence would point to No. Paul is *for* women teaching in the church. In Titus 2:3, he instructs older women to “*teach what is good*” and to train the young women of the church.
  - **Paul doesn't just have in view the teaching of other women.** In 1 Corinthians 11, he's supportive of women praying or prophesying in the gathered assembly of the church. And in Colossians 3:16, Paul tells church members (men *and* women) to let the word of Christ dwell in them richly so they can teach and admonish one another in all wisdom. **So there are many kinds of teaching in the church that Paul thinks women are gifted and called to participate in.**
- ❖ **But there is one form of teaching in the church to which Paul says he does *not* permit them to do, and that would be teaching in the gathered assembly of the church.** What we would call the preaching ministry. Remember the context of these instructions. This is about how we are to behave and order ourselves in the context of corporate worship.

- ❖ **And keep in mind, the Bible doesn't permit the vast majority of men in the church to preach in the church.** Preaching is a responsibility assigned to men who meet the qualifications of the office of elder/pastor, as we'll see when we get to chapter 3. **In this sense, all women in the church are in the same shoes as all men who are not elders or pastors.** They are to joyfully submit to the Word of God as it's preached in the church.
  - Now I know I said I'll reserve applying this to our own context until the next point, but let me just make one quick aside. **We do permit some men to preach, who are not elders or pastors, such as our ministers.** But we do it because we see them as elders-in-training, and we're giving them chances to test and hone their ability to teach, which is a key qualification for elders.
  
- ❖ Okay, back to the 1st-century context. Besides teaching, Paul says that he does not permit a woman *"to exercise authority over a man"*. **Now there has been no shortage of ink spilled over the best translation for the Greek word, *authenteo*.** Some say *"exercise authority"* (ESV, NASB). Others say *"have authority"* (NIV1984, NLT, NKJV, RSV). The commonality in these translations is that *authenteo* carries either a positive or neutral connotation. It's just about the possession or the right use of authority.
  - But some translations say *"assume authority"* (NIV2011) or *"usurp authority"* (KJV), which carry a pejorative sense. Which leads some to draw the conclusion that Paul has no issue with women having or exercising authority over men in the church – **as long as they don't usurp that authority.** As long as men willingly give it to them.
    - **Or some would argue that Paul is only against women misusing authority or exercising it in a domineering manner.** But if that were the case, I find it strange that Paul would single out women for the abuse of authority. I'm sure he'd be equally against any man misusing authority in the church.
  
- ❖ It's because of these translation difficulties that so much research has been made to understand the usage of *authenteo* outside of the NT, since this is the only scriptural occurrence. I would say the definitive research can be found in the works of Henry Scott Baldwin and Al Wolters, which you can find in the various editions of the book *Women in the Church*. **They conclude that the word *authenteo* is not inherently pejorative.**
  - You have to consider context to know if Paul meant for it to be taken positively or negatively. **And so the best clue in our case is to consider how *authenteo* is coupled with teaching.** In the NT, whenever you have a couplet like this, both verbs are either positive or both are negative. Either both 'teaching' and 'authority' carry a negative sense or they're both positive.
  
- ❖ So if Paul meant 'usurp authority' or 'to domineer' – if he's only against a misuse of authority – then when he mentions the act of teaching, he must be using it pejoratively as well. He must not permitting false teaching. But the problem is: In all the other instances of the word 'teaching' here in this letter refer to a positive, good activity (unless explicitly coupled with an object like *"different doctrine"* in 1:3). **So since teaching in corporate worship is a positive, good activity, then *authenteo* must be referring to a positive, good activity.**

- ❖ It's the good authority of elders/pastors. **If you keep reading 1 and 2 Timothy and Titus** (known together as the Pastoral Epistles), **it becomes clear that elders/pastors have two primary functions: They're to lead the church and teach in it.** The next thing Paul deals with in this letter is the qualifications of elders (overseers), and the one qualification unique to elders (and not expected of deacons or church members) is in 3:2. It's the ability to teach.
  - And the clearest example of this dual function of teaching and leading is in chapter 5:17. Look there, it says, "*Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in preaching and teaching.*"
- ❖ So given the context, the most natural way to read chapter 2:12 is that Paul is saying, "*I do not permit a woman to exercise the office of elder whose job it is to rule (or lead) and preach and teach.*" **This authority is a good authority for the good of the church, but it's not an authority that God calls a woman to exercise in the church.**
  - Let's summarize: Paul is all for women learning the Bible. He's all for women teaching and serving in a multitude of settings. The one restriction is that women are not to function as elders/pastors who teach in the gathered assembly of the church.

### Why These Instructions are Still Applicable in the Church

- ❖ Now up to this point, we've been talking about what Paul was saying to his audience. But here comes the big question: **Does all of this still apply today?** I would answer Yes. This is our third point. Let's talk about why these instructions are still applicable in the church.
  - I'll start by addressing the various reasons given for why these instructions are *not* binding upon us today. **Some would say that Paul was only expressing a personal preference.** They'd point to v8 and how this section begins with Paul expressing his desire. It's just *his* desire. But to that we just have to remember that he's speaking with the authority of an apostle, and in v12, when he uses the language of permission, it's clear that he's expressing more than a wish or personal preference.
- ❖ **I know that others would limit the scope of these instructions by suggesting Paul is only speaking to wives and only applying it in relation to their husbands.** But remember, the context of chapter 2 is the church's public worship, so a plain reading would assume Paul is still speaking about the church and hasn't suddenly shifted his attention to marriage.
  - **Another argument is that Paul was speaking these instructions only to the church of Ephesus due to the outsized influence of female false teachers who have crept into the church.** From this point of view, everything Paul wrote in this letter was to a specific church with a specific problem in view.
- ❖ But to that, I just keep going back to chapter 3:15 and how Paul had the household of God in view – the church at large – and not just the Ephesian church. **I think most people would assume the qualifications listed in chapter 3 were not just for Ephesian elders but for all elders in all churches in all times and places.** So it would be arbitrary to limit verses in chapter 2 to 1st-century Ephesus and then to expand it universally in chapter 3.

- And to the suggestion that there were female false teachers influencing the church, there's just no evidence in the Bible, or outside of it, that women were teaching false doctrine in Ephesus. And even if it were true, if only *some* women were teaching false doctrine, why would Paul prohibit *all* women from teaching in the church?
- ❖ I think the best way to understand why these instructions are applicable today is to look at v13 in our text. Last week, we explained how the connecting word “*for*” tells us Paul’s rationale, his theological foundation, for his instructions for women in the church.
    - Let me read vv13-14, “<sup>13</sup>*For Adam was formed first, then Eve; <sup>14</sup>and Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and became a transgressor.*” **Now notice that Paul is *not* basing his rationale on any culturally-bound reason or culturally-specific context.** But rather he grounds his argument on God’s good design in the creation order before sin entered the world.
  - ❖ As I explained last week, Adam's *firstness* communicates his primary responsibility to lead his household. God could have created Adam and Eve at the exact same time. But he didn't. What does that communicate? **It definitely does *not* communicate that men are superior to women.** According to our culture, being first means being the best. But according to Scripture, being first just means you're given a responsibility not given to the second. Now we said before that Genesis clearly affirms the theological principle of male-female equality. And yet it also teaches the principle of male leadership. **As we argued last week, God created men and women equal in worth yet different in role.**
    - In his previous letter to them, in Ephesians, Paul already applied these two principles to marriage. And there he grounded his call for husbands to lead their households in Genesis 2. So it makes sense that here – in a follow-up letter written to the same church – **Paul would root his design for the household of God in the way he designed individual households to be led by godly men.**
  - ❖ Now the second rationale flows out of the first. **He’s arguing that the neglect of God’s good design and order is what led to the damage and ruin of sin.** Look at v14, “*and Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and became a transgressor.*” Let’s be clear: This does *not* mean women are more gullible and can’t be trusted to teach. I think that’s a poor interpretation of this verse.
    - Paul is *not* saying women are more deceivable. **He’s saying the disharmony between men and women is the result when God’s good design is attacked and reversed.** When the devil attacked, notice how he tried to reverse the gender roles between men and women. He approached Eve to deceive her – not only about what God said about the tree but to deceive her into leading Adam into sin.
  - ❖ In God’s good design, humanity was given dominion over the animals, but now an animal (a serpent) is leading humanity into sin. **In God’s good design, Adam was given leadership over Eve, but now Eve is leading Adam into sin.**

- ❖ The roles were reversed. The devil knew where to strike. **Adam should have taken leadership and protected his household by leading with the truth of God’s Word, but instead he stood there watching the deception of his wife take place.** Listen to Genesis 3:6, “*she took of its fruit and ate, and she also gave some to her husband who was with her, and he ate.*” Adam heard the whole thing and did nothing. He abdicated his leadership.
- ❖ **By alluding to this tragic moment in human history, Paul is reminding the church that this is what happens when God’s good design between men and women is not observed.** It leads to pain. It leads to disorder. This is Paul’s rationale for why men should take primary responsibility to teach God’s Word and exercise authority, to function as elders/pastors in the church. That’s why these instructions are universal and applicable in every time and place.
  - And that would include our church. **Fidelity to Scripture leads us to affirm and apply, in our church, the dual principles of male-female equality and male leadership.** And we do that by calling godly, qualified men to serve as our elders and pastors, while at the same time supporting and encouraging women to teach and lead in our church in various capacities.
- ❖ **It’s been my honor to serve alongside strong, capable, godly women in our church.** I’m thinking of recent English-side deaconess like Karen Ho, Amy Tsui, Thuy Kao, and Yen Kong. Or the capable English-side women who have given so much leadership to our Children, Nursery, and Youth ministries – Ellie Tow, Theresa Leong, Theresa Tarn, Winnie Poon, and Myra Yang. The Women’s Ministry leaders – Catherine Joe, Alison Woo, Alice Ho, and Ellie & Theresa. The leaders of English Buddy – Chi Chi Au, Danielle Wang, Angela Sung. The leaders of MOLO and PNO – Aya Huang and Chelsea Jiang. And recent college fellowship presidents – Catherine Miller, Suzanne Wen, and Melissa Kok. I’m thankful for gifted female teachers like Alice Ho who are utilizing their gifts in Sunday School. And I haven’t even mention all the many female small group leaders in our church.
  - Suffice it to say, we are strong supporters of strong women in leadership.  
**Considering all the ministry that’s available to women in the church – not being able to be an elder or pastor in a church is a very small restriction.**
- ❖ But I understand if you still have a hard time accepting that “very small restriction”. But all I can do is commend you the Scriptures and hope God helps you see the goodness of his created order. **He knows that men and women will flourish in ministry and Jesus will be most clearly displayed in the church – when godly, qualified men take primary responsibility to teach and exercise authority as elders/pastors in the church.**

### **Why Women are Highly Regarded in the Church**

- ❖ Now I don't want to end focused on the one restriction for women in the church – but rather on our highest regard for women in the church. Because that’s exactly what Paul does in v15. Look there with me, “*Yet she will be saved through childbearing—if they continue in faith and love and holiness, with self-control.*” Now v15 is quite challenging to interpret in and of itself. She’ll be saved through childbearing? What in the world is Paul teaching here?



- ❖ Let's just say, very quickly, what we know Paul wasn't teaching. **He wasn't teaching that a woman can be saved by her own merit or good works – in this case, having a baby.** That would be completely contradictory to the whole tenor of Paul's gospel of salvation by grace through faith (Eph. 2:8-9).
  - And though some have tried to interpret this to mean being "kept safe" through childbirth (labor), we know from experience that godly women can still die in childbirth, and we know that Paul's usage of the word for "*saved*" (*sozo*) almost always refers to deliverance from sin and not physical danger.
  
- ❖ **I think a better interpretation is to see Paul as referring not to childbirth in general but to The Childbirth in particular – to the birth of Christ.** In the Greek there's a definite article before the word for childbearing. So think about it. In v14, Paul mentions Eve, who bore sin into the world. So in v15, that "*she*" is likely referring to Eve – and to all women for whom she stands as a representative. Paul's saying that women (and men) will experience salvation through The Childbirth. **The curse of sin will be reversed through the birth of the offspring promised to Eve back in Genesis 3:15.** Provided that believing women continue in faith and love and holiness with self-control.
  - So even though Scripture has a "very small restriction" for women in the church – and even if you still have a hard time accepting that – **let's end by remembering how much we owe to a woman.** If Mary (a second Eve) had not given birth to the Promised One, there would be no salvation for any of us. **The high regard we have for women in the church stems from the highest regard for the one woman who bore our Savior into the world.** No man could've done it.