**GOSPEL CULTURE IN GOD’S HOUSEHOLD**

***A Series on 1 Timothy***

**WOMEN AND THE PASTORAL OFFICE**

**1 Timothy 2:11-15**

**INTRODUCTION**

Today we come to one of the most controversial texts in the New Testament. This text has divided churches. It has divided entire denominations. It seems to have attracted more academic attention and scholarship than any other biblical text in the last fifty years. It has been rejected by some professing Christians, embraced by others, and explained away by many. The question it addresses is whether women can serve as pastors.

If you’ve been with our church for the last while, you’ll know where we stand on this issue. But for those who are newer to our church, I’m going to tell you up front that our church, and our family of churches, holds to the plain, historic interpretation of these verses: that God has reserved the pastoral office for men.

I recognize that this may cause offence to some of you today. That’s certainly not our intent. Our desire as a church is simply to understand God’s will as he has revealed it in his Word, and to do God’s will by the grace that he supplies. We want to do that humbly, with an awareness of our own sinfulness, and we want to do that lovingly, with a desire to help others see the truth and beauty of God’s will.

That’s how we must approach these verses. We approach them with a desire to learn God’s will for his church. This series is called “Gospel Culture in God’s Household”, because that’s how the church is described in this letter. It’s described as God’s household. He is the head of this household which we call a church. If you’re a Christian, if you’re united to Christ by faith, you’re one of God’s children. And as his children, our role is to joyfully and willingly submit to his loving authority.

Social science claims that the church is merely a product of social and cultural evolution that took place over thousands of years. If that were true, then we could change the church into whatever we want. If it was created by humanity, it can be changed by humanity. But the Bible teaches that the church didn’t originate from the minds of men, but from the mind of God. Christ is the head of the church, and he reigns over us as our Lord. Therefore, it is his exclusive right to establish the doctrine, culture, and offices of the church.

And if you have any knowledge of who God is, if you’ve studied the Scriptures and immersed yourself into God’s heart, you know that God’s will isn’t arbitrary. Nor is it selfish. It’s not God’s way of holding humanity back. That was the lie that Eve believed in the garden. The truth is that everything God does is for his glory and for our joy. That includes his boundaries and commands. He tells us what we can do, and what we can’t do, so that we can experience the fullness of life as he has designed it.

The title of this sermon is **Women and the Pastoral Office.** We will break up our text today into three points:

1. What is Permitted (v. 11)
2. What is Prohibited (v. 12)
3. The Reason for the Prohibition (v. 13-15)

(1) **WHAT IS PERMITTED** (v. 11)

The context is that Paul is giving young Timothy instructions on how to put the church in order. Chapter 1 addressed the importance of sound doctrine as Paul exhorted Timothy to address false teaching. The reason why this mattered was that without sound doctrine you won’t have a healthy community. It was the loving character of the church that was at stake. Paul’s aim in guarding sound doctrine was so that love for God and neighbour would flourish in the church.

Then in Chapter 2, Paul moves on to his next area of concern for the church: prayer. “First of all…pray for all people”, including the governing authorities, for the sake of our gospel witness. If people are to be saved, we must pray. And if God is going to use us to bring people to salvation, we must pray.

Paul then transitions to address the unique obstacles to prayer that face men and women. For men, it’s anger and quarreling. You can’t have a healthy prayer life if you don’t have healthy relationships with those around you. Likewise, women must not be characterized by an obsession over their appearances, but by a commitment to good works, including the good work of praying for others.

That leads us to our text today. If we keep this context in mind, we see that Paul’s not writing with an agenda *against* women. He’s writing with an agenda *for* the church. He’s not doing something that is *un*loving. He’s doing something that is meant to strengthen the loving character of the church.

But before we even get to what Paul prohibits in verse 12, we must not miss what Paul permits in verse 11:

“Let a woman *learn* quietly with all submissiveness.”

We may take this for granted today, but this was a radical statement in its historic context when education wasn’t a priority for women. Women weren’t expected to think for themselves. Even their religious convictions were subject to those of their husbands. They were to push aside their own views and opinions and submit themselves totally to their husbands.

But the New Testament offered something radically different. Yes, it upheld a husband’s authority in marriage, but it made that authority subject to God’s authority. “We must obey God rather than men” when men forbid what God requires or require what God forbids. So if an unbelieving husband told us believing wife to follow him and worship idols, or to forsake the church, or to burn her Bible, or to renounce Christ, she was to say, “I’m sorry, but I must obey God rather than men.”

Peter writes about this in 1 Peter 3 when he addresses the situation of Christian women who are married to non-Christian men. They weren’t to surrender their faith or blindly follow their husbands. They were to stand firm in their personal conviction that Christ is Lord and Saviour and win their husbands over by the gentle testimony of their lives.

That’s what Paul is talking about in verse 11. Women are to learn, because they are to hold to the truths of the gospel for themselves. Women were invited into the assembly of the gathered church, not just to watch the children, not just out of submission to their husbands or parents, but in order to learn. They were to grow in the knowledge of God. They were to study the Scriptures. They were to make their faith their own as they too learned biblical truth and developed their own personal relationship with God.

Women are to learn. We see a beautiful illustration of that in Luke 10 where Jesus is visiting two sisters, Mary and Martha. While Martha was bustling about in the kitchen, there was Mary sitting at the feet of Jesus, listening to everything he said. She wasn’t there with a group of men. She was there all by herself receiving a master class on Scripture from the Lord himself. That’s how much Jesus values women. That’s how much Jesus wants them to learn.

Verse 11 adds that women are to learn with a certain disposition:

“Let a woman learn quietly with all submissiveness.”

Being “quiet” is not the same as being *silent*. We know that because Paul actually calls all Christians to be “quiet” in relation to the government in 2:2:

“… that we may lead a peaceful and **quiet** life, godly and dignified in every way.” (1 Timothy 2:2)

Paul didn’t mean that Christians are never to speak, so he’s obviously not saying that Christian women are never to speak in church. In fact, in 1 Corinthians 11, Paul assumes that women will be praying and prophesying in the context of corporate worship. So what does it mean for a woman to be quiet?

The word *quiet* refers to a gentle, respectful disposition. It’s not argumentative or easily angered, but is patient and calm. Peter writes of it when he speaks of

“…the imperishable beauty of a gentle and **quiet** spirit, which in God’s sight is very precious.” (1 Peter 3:4)

To live quietly is to not draw attention to yourself. That’s what it means to live a quiet life in relation to the government. We’re not clamouring for attention. We’re not causing needless controversies. We’re committing ourselves to living quietly in peace with those around us.

Quietness is similar to modesty. Modest people don’t dress to impress, and quiet people don’t speak to impress. Neither of them desire to draw attention to themselves. They’re like the other Mary, the mother of Jesus, who treasured up God’s Word in her heart. There was a time for her to speak, but there was also a time for her to listen quietly as she received God’s Word.

Paul also says that women are to “learn quietly with all *submissiveness*”. They are to have a disposition that is gentle, quiet, and submissive to the God-given authorities in her life. In the context of the church, this means that she is to be submissive to God’s Word and to God’s Shepherds, those who were appointed by God to lead the church and teach the Word.

We don’t like the word submission today. That’s partly because our sinful nature makes us rebels at heart. We don’t want to listen to anyone except ourselves. But we also don’t like authority because we’ve seen it so badly abused. Too often, it is wielded for the sake of self rather than for the sake of others. Those who have it tend to be arrogant and entitled. But that says more about those who wield authority than about authority itself. When authority is used according to its divine purposes for the good of others rather than the good of self, then submission becomes easy.

Jesus demonstrated that himself in his submission to the Father. Jesus didn’t come to the world to do whatever he wanted. He came to do his Father’s will. His life was one of listening and waiting for his Father’s instructions. To learn to submit is to become like Christ. And so, women can learn quietly with all submissiveness knowing that they’re following Jesus.

(1) **WHAT IS PROHIBITED** (v. 12)

That’s the permission. Now we turn to the prohibition and to our second point.

Verse 12:

“I do not permit a woman to teach or to exercise authority over a man; rather, she is to remain quiet.”

What exactly is being prohibited here? It’s not all teaching of men. If that were the case, then my wife wouldn’t be permitted to teach me. This is where we need to remember the context, because the context limits how broadly this verse is meant to be applied.

Remember that Paul wrote these verses with the aim of instructing Timothy on how to rightly order the church. His concern wasn’t all of life. His concern was the corporate gatherings of the church. It was worship services.

When we read verse 12 in that context, we can see that it doesn’t apply to many other contexts where women can teach men or exercise authority over men. Women can exercise authority over men in the workplace. Women can teach men in colleges and universities. Women can even teach men in the church provided that the context is right.

That’s why we have mixed small groups where men and women are teaching one another as they talk about the Bible. That’s why we encourage men and women to talk after church and share about what God is teaching them. But when the entire church is assembled for worship, these two functions of teaching and authority aren’t meant to be exercised by everyone. Instead, they’re reserved for pastors.

Both teaching and exercising authority are part of a pastor’s job description in 1 Timothy 5:17:

“Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honour, especially those who labour in preaching and teaching.”

And so, when verse 12 says that women cannot teach or exercise authority over a man, it’s saying that women cannot take on the pastoral office or perform pastoral functions in the context of the gathered church. They are not to become pastors, and they are not to do what pastors are meant to do when the church is gathered together.

Now, two very important qualifications. First, the word “teach” in verse 12 is a special word that is used in the New Testament to refer to the authoritative transmission of apostolic teaching. It’s opening up the Bible in a public context and proclaiming Christ as the culmination of all of Scripture. It’s what we do every Sunday during the sermon.

Sermons are a significant part of Christian teaching in the church, but there’s more to teaching than that. For example, we teach one another by how we live. We teach one another in our everyday conversation and fellowship. We teach one another when we hear each other pray.

None of this is “teaching” in the technical sense of the word. That’s why Paul had no objection to women praying and prophesying in 1 Corinthians 11. That’s why Luke had no objection to Aquila and his wife Priscilla teaching Apollos “the way of God more accurately” in Acts 18.

The prohibition on teaching does not at all mean that women cannot teach men in any way, shape, or form. There are many biblically faithful ways in which women can teach men in the life of the church.

What’s clear is that women cannot teach men through the authoritative declaration of God’s Word. But neither can the vast majority of men. The kind of teaching in verse 12 is reserved for pastors: qualified men who have been called by God to serve the church by teaching and leading.

Second qualification. In Titus 2, Paul says that older, spiritually mature women have a God-given teaching role in the church. It’s to teach younger women what is good, specifically in the areas of life relating to the family:

“Older women… are to teach what is good, and so train the younger women to love their husbands and children, to be self-controlled, pure, working at home, kind, and submissive to their own husbands, that the word of God may not be reviled.” (Titus 2:3-5)

Paul uses a different word for “teach” here than he does in 1 Timothy to reflect that he’s not referring to pastoral teaching, but it still involves faithful, biblical teaching from one woman to another. And so, while we want to take the prohibition in verse 12 seriously, we don’t want to overextend its application and turn it into something it isn’t. It’s not an absolute prohibition on all teaching in every context. It’s a limited prohibition on pastoral teaching when the church is gathered together.

(3) **THE REASON FOR THE PROHIBITION** (v. 13-15)

One question remains: why doesn’t God want women to be pastors? This leads to our third point.

The answer to this question is essential to how we apply verse 12 today. If the answer is that women cannot teach because they were uneducated, the obvious remedy would be to educate them so that they can teach. Or, if the answer is that women cannot teach because they were all too vain and obsessed with their looks, the remedy would be that women can teach provided that they have the requisite character.

The real answer is found in verse 13, which gives us the reason for the prohibition. And it doesn’t ground it in the historical or cultural context of the time, but in the creation order itself:

“For Adam was formed first, then Eve”.

It says *for* – indicating that Paul is about to give the reason for what he had just said in verse 12 – *Adam was formed first, then Eve*. Paul is referring to Genesis 2, where God formed the man from the dust of the earth and breathed into him the breath of life before he created the woman out of Adam’s rib to be a helper fit for him. The immediate implication of this is that men have been called by God to lead their wives in the home. We looked at this in-depth in our recent series on marriage. God created the woman *from* the man and *for* the man to be his uniquely qualified helper.

What Paul does in verse 13 is he shows us that this created order doesn’t just apply to the family. It applies to the church. Just as men are to lead in the home, they are to lead in the church. That’s God’s design for our households, and that’s God’s design for *his* household, which is the church.

God is like a father handing out different responsibilities to each of his children. He does so wisely, and he does so lovingly, because he knows us intimately and what’s the best for us. If you’re a parent, you know that there are some things you just can’t control when it comes to your children. You don’t give them their personality, or determine whether they’re introverts or extroverts, or tell them what they are to be passionate about. But God does. He designed every part of our being. He knows us because he made every little detail that characterizes us.

It is out of this knowledge that he gives us our roles. Men and women weren’t created to be clones of one another. They were created to be complements of one another, two different but complementary pieces that fit together to make something better. And in the church, he created men to serve as pastors, not all men, but some, in order to reflect his design.

Paul gives us a second reason for the prohibition in verse 14:

“…and Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and became a transgressor.”

Now Paul is turning our attention to Genesis 3, and his point isn’t that women are more gullible than men and therefore can’t serve as pastors. His point is that devastating things happen when the created order is overturned. That’s what happened in Genesis 3 where Satan, in the form of the serpent, approached the helper rather than the head. He targeted her rather than him as an insult to what God had created and pronounced to be very good. The man was meant to be first, the leader of his home, followed by his wife, followed by the creatures, but here we see the creature approaching the wife and ignoring the man.

But when God enters the scene, he doesn’t follow Satan’s pattern. He follows his own. He speaks to the man first, then the woman, then the serpent, as a statement about the inherent goodness and the enduring validity of his created order.

God created men to lead in the home and in the church. Verse 14 tells us that we ignore this at our own peril. This doesn’t mean that men always get leadership right. In fact, we often get it wrong, because we’re sinners, and we have no hope to become godly leaders apart from the grace of God. But it does mean that when sin is put to death, when it is weeded out of our hearts and replaced with the fear of the Lord and a humble mind, God’s people will flourish under our servant-hearted leadership.

Paul ends this set of instructions in verse 15:

“Yet she will be saved through childbearing – if they continue in faith and love and holiness, with self-control.”

There’s very little consensus on what exactly this means. One possible interpretation is that “childbearing” refers to the child of Eve, the child that was prophesied in Genesis 3 who would crush the serpent’s head, the child we know to be Jesus Christ. It is in Christ alone that women have hope for salvation, if indeed they persevere in growing in the fruit of faith, love, holiness and self-control.

I think a better interpretation is to see “saved” not in the absolute sense of “saved from the penalty of sin”, but in the progressive sense of “being saved from the power of sin”. The Bible talks about salvation as something we already have, but it also talks about salvation as something we have more of every day:

“For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.” (1 Cor. 1:18)

“Now I would remind you, brothers, of the gospel I preached to you, which you received, in which you stand, and by which you are being saved” (1 Cor. 15:1-2)

Christians are already saved from the penalty for our sins, and we are also being saved from the power of our sins.

When verse 15 is understood in this sense, we see that Paul is speaking about the sanctifying power of motherhood. Women may struggle with vanity or with a desire for power and authority, but it is motherhood – whether biological or spiritual – that humbles a woman and frees her from their power.

When a woman embraces this God-given role, she rediscovers the identity that God created her to have. It’s not to be loud and bombastic. It’s to be quiet and rich in good works. It’s to be characterized by faith and love and holiness, with self-control.

**CONCLUSION**

If you’re here today and you’re not a Christian, I can only imagine what you may be thinking right now. I encourage you to look at what the Bible as a whole teaches about what it means to be a woman, because it goes far beyond what is captured in these verses. That’s one of the reasons why I had Proverbs 31 read earlier in the service. It paints a picture of a woman who is strong, confident, and courageous. She takes initiative in her home. Her husband trusts her to make wise decisions. Her children praise her for how she cares for her family and for others. She is known throughout the city for her good works.

But most importantly, she is a woman who fears the Lord. She lives in reverent awe of her creator and grateful submission to her redeemer. That’s the only way we can ever discover our true identity. The only way to discover your true purpose in life is by living in right relationship with God through Jesus Christ.

And so, wherever you are in life, whatever background you come from, I invite you to consider what God says about who we are, and who we were meant to be. You may be surprised, but I promise you that if you come to believe it for yourself, you will discover a freedom you’ve never known before, and a peace that you haven’t been able to find anywhere else.

And for my fellow believers, my brothers and sisters in Christ, I want to encourage you to not only tolerate texts like these, but to learn to embrace them. That’s not going to be easy because of how counter cultural these ideas are in today’s society. Holding these views won’t make you popular. Who dares to say, “There are some things that women aren’t meant to do”? But that’s precisely what the Scriptures have said to us today.

We need to pay the most attention to the parts of the Bible that make us most uncomfortable, because that’s precisely where our thinking has been shaped more by the world than by the word of God. Conformity to the world means nothing. Faithfulness to God means everything. So let us all learn to embrace and celebrate God’s will for our lives, and for his church.