

Sermon #3 “Male Elders in Church” 18SEP25

1 Tim 2:12 (p1192) *“I do not permit a woman to teach or to assume authority over a man, she must be quiet”.*

- I’m going to start with a rather bad joke....
 - A man went into a rather posh Italian restaurant, and took a seat, and then he just heard a very small voice saying *“I like your shirt”*.
 - Thinking it was the waiter, he said, “did you just say something?”
 - “No” said the waiter and handed him the menu, but then the voice returned more distinctly. *“I like your shirt”*.
 - “I just heard the voice again”, he said to the waiter, “it said *‘I like your shirt’*”.
 - “Ah...” said the waiter... “it was the complimentary olives”. ☺
- I wonder if you had heard of **“complementarianism”** before this series?
 - Or maybe you got confused between
 - 1) Something that is **“complimentary”**- ie free, like free olives, or (same spelling) someone who is **“complimentary”**- “I like your shirt”¹.
 - And 2) things that are **“complementary”**- ie fit well together².
 - **But the Complementarianism** we are talking about (with an E) sees men and women as having an equal value and worth in the image of God, but having different roles in the family & church.
- If this is your first sermon in the series, either on a Sunday or listening to the recordings, I’d encourage you to go back and listen to the first two,
 - The reason for that is that these are quite nuanced conversations, and in our social media age it’s so easy to mishear the bigger picture.
 - We’ve seen in **week 1** a very high view of men and women running all the way through Scripture.
 - And in **week 2** the very large number of roles that are open to men and women in the church, including even the ordination of female deacons.
- Today, we look at one passage in particular which has convinced many of us that while fully valuing the complementary roles of women in the church, it should be men that take the lead as the overall leaders (what the Bible calls “elders”) of a church.
 - Let’s pray for God’s help to understand this passage.

¹ <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/complimentary>

² <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/complementary>

- Let me read **1 Tim 2:11-14** again.
 - Now, like the passage we saw in 1 Corinthians last week, these verses do tend to induce a sharp intake of breath.
 - They are countercultural.
 - But as we saw last time, this can't be a ban on women speaking in church, because Paul himself expects women to pray and prophesy in church.
 - So what is he saying?
 - The passage can stir strong feelings, partly because some
 - think Paul was belittling women
 - others believe it reinforces outdated or stereotyped prejudices
 - And others believe the passage doesn't apply today.
 - For those reasons the passage is often ignored.
 - But as a friend of mine puts it, the Bible is not an "escape room" which we are to puzzle how to get out of what it might be saying to us.
 - We need humbly to sit under God's word.
- I believe that God is teaching us through this passage that men should be the overall leaders of a church, and that is **biblical, balanced and beneficial**.
- Well let's walk through it together. 3 main points. And then a brief summary of how we seek to put this into practice at CCH.
- But first a bit of background.
 - Timothy was in **Ephesus**, (and like Titus in Crete), he was there to silence false teaching and to promote godly Bible ministry.
 - He talks about the wonder of the good news of Jesus which says that even the worst of sinners, murderers like Paul can be totally forgiven through the kindness of Jesus (ch1),
 - *(now this is what we are **really excited** about today- the love of Christ shown at the cross, it's what we'll be celebrating at communion today, and it's the gospel that unites us, so that we are all on the same page, even if on this front we are on different paragraphs).*
 - he goes on (ch2) to talk about how God wants all kinds of people to become Christians, so he instructs Timothy to make sure people act in the light of that.
 - He calls upon **men** in particular to pray (in v8)
 - And he calls upon **women** (v9-10) to dress with godliness and good deeds rather than provocative clothing which was common in the Roman courts³,
 - so as not to be a barrier to people believing the gospel.
- Then he calls the women to learn, and that's my first point...

³ SM Baugh "A Foreign World: Ephesus in the First Century" in Kostenberger, Schreiner & Baldwin "Women in the Church, 3rd Edition" (Crossway). There is a brief interview with the editors [here](#), though I would differ from them in their prohibition of women in all teaching roles in the church (adult Sunday school, small groups).

1) WOMEN ARE ENCOURAGED TO LEARN

- Now that may sound a bit negative.
- It's actually hugely positive.
- During a time when education was far from what it is today and some considered women unable to learn, Paul encourages the women to learn.
 - Like Jesus, Paul was countercultural in promoting women.
 - He gives them the respect of being independent thinkers
 - Something which wasn't always common at the time
- (And by the way most of **the men** are going to be learning at this point too).
- But he does address the way in which the women were to learn.
 - *First*, he says that the women are to learn in **quietness**
 - (a word used in v2 and v12 for not being non belligerent)
 - and they are to learn in **submission**.
 - (ie with respect towards those teaching them- incidentally they are not asked to submit to other men who aren't their husbands).
 - *Next*, they aren't to do two things.
 - They aren't to **teach** (as I said, that isn't a total ban, because we've seen Paul encourage the older women to teach in the letter to Titus), but he's speaking about the gathered assembly, so I understand it to mean what we call preaching.
 - And they aren't to **assume authority**. That is to direct the affairs of the church absolutely.
- In fact those two verbs (*teach* and *assume authority*) go together because the way in which authority is exercised in the church is through teaching.
- So Paul is saying that women aren't to be the primary teachers and preachers of the gathered assembly.
- The corollary of that is our second point...
- 2) (SOME) MEN ARE TO LEAD & PREACH
 - I've said some (not all men), usually only a few in each church, are called according to their character, convictions and competence to be **elders**.
 - And the "some" is important. Presumably the rest of the men will also be learning with respect and submission to those authorised to teach. So all of the women and most of the men are learning at this point.
 - "Elders" or "Overseers" are words used in these pastoral letters for those locally recognised overall leaders who teach and govern the church, including the overall leader of a church, the pastor (or shepherd).
 - The qualifications for that office are also in the next chapter, where overseers are all described as male, as opposed to the description of the deacons which includes women. Elders are those who will give an account to God for their ministry (Heb 13:17, a sobering verse I have pinned to my computer monitor) and the congregation is to lovingly respect their lead.

- Now I wonder how that initially sits with you? **“Male elders in church”**.
 - ▲ In the film “Happy Feet” starring Elijah Wood and Robbie Williams, **Mumble** is a fun loving penguin who discovers that rather than being able to sing like the rest of the Emperor penguin world, he can tap-dance, hence the name of the film, “Happy Feet”.
 - But in the film there are older penguins, called “the Elders”⁴, led by Noah the rather forbidding Scottish leader, who with religious zeal is utterly opposed to Mumble and his new ways!
 - It’s cleverly done, and I think taps into the fear in culture that when a bunch of very conservative male leaders are in power they can sadly be generally resistant to justice, resistant to change, and resistant to love.
- Those fears have sometimes tragically been warranted, and we’ve seen several abuses of power amongst male leaders in conservative evangelical churches even in recent years.
 - You must ask in the Q&A on Wednesday how we seek to avoid those dangers.
 - But in today’s culture, where all authority structures are considered suspect, and truth claims are considered power grabs⁵, our culture has gone the other way and is in danger of throwing away all appropriate authority structures.
- Positive complementarianism isn’t to appoint unaccountable authoritarian male leaders who seek their own agenda.
- It seeks to have men and women in leadership in a church (and we have a council of men and women) with qualified men taking an overall lead, to reflect the authority structure that God has put into creation.
- So Paul is calling on the women to learn (1) and male elders to lead & preach (2).
- But here’s is what I think is the million dollar question.
 - Was Paul’s restriction of the women here in 1 Tim 2 temporary or permanent?
 - **Liberals** have no qualms in dismissing Paul as out of date, saying “he got it wrong”, and this command doesn’t stand today.
 - But you can’t be an evangelical and dismiss Paul, because we believe that however tricky to understand or countercultural what he said, God was speaking his good and authoritative Word through him as an apostle.
 - If we follow Jesus’ lead in having Scripture as our authority, then we need to be ready to change our minds, according to what we read here.
 - Now some **evangelicals** (who *do* have a high view of Scripture and Paul’s authority within it) claim that what Paul was commanding was binding to the women at the time in Ephesus, **but** because it was addressing a local and temporary problem it isn’t binding today.
 - Many would call themselves **egalitarian** evangelicals.

⁴ https://happyfeet.fandom.com/wiki/The_Elders

⁵ See <https://www.christian.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/Critical-theory-challenging-truth-and-reality-leaflet.pdf>

- And from the books⁶ and articles⁷ I've been reading and the people I've talked to, egalitarians would say that in Ephesus where Timothy was based, there was a particular local problem.
- Perhaps influenced by the subculture around them, which promoted the goddess Diana/Artemis (See Acts 19), women had been targeted by false teachers (2 Tim 3:6), and were in danger of pursuing an "aggressive, domineering attitude" which Paul challenges here⁸.
- Egalitarians therefore often argue that Paul's prohibition of women as teachers here was a local and temporary restriction for Ephesus, which wasn't transferable to other contexts, and not necessarily to the 21st century today.
- It's a thoughtful and respectful argument that seeks to do justice to the Bible's authority and its context in the 1st Century.
 - And can I say that many of my friends are evangelical egalitarians, and some of them are in this church.
 - And we love each other and agree to disagree on this secondary issue.
 - (A secondary issue is an area where one's salvation is not at stake by believing a different gospel).
 - It's certainly not an area that we are going to separate over, and you don't need to be a complementarian to be a member of our church!
- But I do see a problem with that interpretation.
 - It's not what the text says.
 - Look carefully at the reasoning in v13 & 14 *"I do not permit...For Adam was formed first then Eve"*.
 - The reason that Paul gives for why women are not to teach or assume authority is not rooted in some local problem, but it's rooted in Genesis 1-3.

This is my third point 3) THIS IS CREATIONAL (and therefore permanent) NOT CULTURAL.

- He doesn't say "I don't permit a woman to teach because in your town there is a particular problem with the women".
 - Or "I don't permit a woman to teach until you eradicate the particular false teaching in Ephesus, then you can appoint women elders",
- His prohibition is rooted in Creation (v13)- as we saw in Genesis 2- v11: *"Adam was formed first, and then Eve"*.
 - He is therefore the firstborn, which in the Bible connotes authority.
- Then Paul references the Fall. V14. *"And Adam was not the one deceived; it was the woman who was deceived and became a sinner"*.
 - Now don't misunderstand this. It's not saying that women are more gullible, or that Adam wasn't a sinner.

⁶ https://cbeinternational.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/SSBS-a4-ENGLISH-complete_web.pdf

⁷ <https://www.cbeinternational.org/>

⁸ A quote from "Still side by side", Janet George, See footnote 6 page 21.

- He abdicated responsibility and was guilty for his rebellion against God. And sin is described as entering through “one man, Adam”, in the rest of Scripture (Rom 5:12). But the strategy that Satan used to bring sin into the world was deception.
 - So referencing Genesis 2 and Genesis 3, Paul draws out some permanent principles which should apply across cultures⁹.
- For me this is the key passage and the key issue, and I am yet to find an alternative interpretation of the passage that makes sense of Paul’s reasoning here. Paul is teaching that the preachers and overall leaders of a church are to be men.
- Why?
 - Not because women aren’t able to.
 - Not because their sermons wouldn’t be edifying
 - Not because men will always get everything right.
 - But because God has woven into the creation in marriage and the church an order, reflecting Christ and his bride.
- [v15 is tricky and there’s much more I could say¹⁰ but in summary I think Paul is saying women are to work out their faith in the context that God has given them which for many (but not all) will involve childbearing, and Paul uses that context to stand for the whole¹¹].

RECAP: 1) Women are to learn, 2) Male elders are to lead & preach. 3) The reason for this is rooted in how we are made, rather than a local cultural issue.

Well, briefly, how do we seek to put this into practice as a church?

- As a leadership we’ve been doing a lot of thinking about this over the last year.
- There’s a position paper [here](#) which goes into much more detail, which we gave out at Partnership Sunday last week and which is online as well.
- We’ve tried to think through which ministries are open to men and women,
 - and which are for the recognised male leaders of the local church- what you might call an “elder only”, or “elder like” authorised teaching ministry.
- If it’s directive and didactic teaching to the gathered assembly that brings the Scriptures to bear on the whole church, it’s for the elders to do.

⁹ “Here’s what scholar John Stott said in a Christianity Today interview a few years ago, “There is something in the Pauline teaching about headship that cannot be ignored as a purely cultural phenomenon, because he roots it in Creation. We may find his exegesis of Genesis 2 difficult- that women were made after men, out of men, and for men- but he does root his argument in Creation. I have a very high view of apostolic authority. I don’t feel able to reject Paul’s exegesis”. Christianity Today Vol 37 No 2 (Feb 1993) p8. See [here](#). Quoted in R Kent Hughes & Bryan Chapell (1&2 Tim & Titus Preaching the Word Commentary “To Guard the Deposit”).

¹⁰ It can’t be talking about getting right with God by giving birth to children. It’s also not about women being preserved physically through childbirth, since it was and continues tragically to be one of the more risky activities for humankind. There are 2 mainstream interpretations. 1) Either Paul is talking about THE childbearing, referring back to Adam and Eve, and the seed that came from them, Jesus, the Serpent Crusher who would bring salvation. Or 2) (and I think this is more likely). It’s talking about childbearing as one of the normal contexts for most women in most cultures in the world to “work out their salvation” to borrow a phrase from Philippians 2:12. See also Don Carson’s 2023 talk on this passage [here](#) and search for “childbearing” in v15.

¹¹ See Kostenberger and Schreiner [here](#). “Tom and I agree on the latter point—that “childbearing” is a *synecdoche* encompassing a woman’s role not only in giving birth to children but also in her familial and domestic role at large”.

- If it's outside the setting of the local gathered assembly (like a small group or teaching in the context of a conference or a book),
 - Or if it doesn't require the level of authority reserved for the elders
 - then it's open for qualified men or women to do it, and we want to maximise those ministries as much as possible.
- So with that in mind, we believe some things are **clearly for qualified men**:
 - Bishops (in our denomination we have senior elders or presbyters who oversee the churches)
 - Eldership (local presbyters who take a lead in governing the affairs of the church)
 - Preachers (we have some non-elder preachers who support the elders in this role who have been carefully selected for their character and bible teaching gifts)¹².
- There are also many non-Sunday-preaching ministries that we've seen in our series that are clearly **open to women**¹³:
 - Ministry to other women,
 - Ministry to children
 - Ministry to men and women
 - A bible thought at a church council or committee
 - An outreach talk at an old folks home
 - Writing ministries and conference ministries.
 - Small group pastoral work
- How about 3 grey areas, where different complementarian churches have quite a variety of practice. Well we wouldn't go to the stake for these, but here is where we have landed...
 - **Kids spots** early on in the service, (because they teach a bible passage to men and women in the whole congregation), are more like preaching. But those that review what the kids have learned afterwards, or illustrate what has already been taught do not share the directive and didactic character that is reserved as elder only or elder like teaching, and can be led by women.
 - **Leading** services in the way we do it, starts with authoritative teaching to the gathered congregation, and so we top and tail our services normally with an elder, but we encourage women to be involved in every other way, reading the Bible, praying, introducing songs, sharing testimony, interviews that help to illustrate and apply the preaching and so on.
 - We believe **lifegroup** studies, particularly those that dig deeper into the teaching given on a Sunday are not "elder like ministries", and can be led by women. They are not Sunday preaching ministries.

¹² Some might argue (like John Stott) that like a non-elder male, a non-elder female can preach occasionally under the leadership of the elders. While we respect this position, we still think that it upturns the creational order and has women giving authoritative teaching to men. See Beynon & Tooher appendix 1 p141.

¹³ We might call them "little-t teaching", as opposed to the "big-T Teaching", to use a term from Andrew Wilson quoted in "Embracing Complementarianism" Beynon & Tooher p75.

- **To sum up**, if a teaching is the kind of ministry that is authoritative teaching to the whole flock when men and women are gathered (what one writer has called “**Capital-T Teaching**”), then it should be reserved primarily for the elders and occasional preachers. If not, it’s “**lower case-t teaching**”

Well, we’d welcome questions on all of that, and recognise that it’s possible to get a bit stuck on the fine tuning, but for now let’s wrap things up, with 3 B’s!

- I’ve tried to show that complementarianism, (including today the teaching that the pastors and preachers of a church are to be men) is **biblical**.
 - Yes like “Trinitarianism” the word isn’t in the Bible, but I believe it is clearly taught from these passages when read carefully against one another.
- Next it is **balanced**.
 - In arguing for complementarianism, we haven’t been arguing for an interchangeability of the roles of the sexes (**egalitarianism**),
 - but nor have we been arguing for **patriarchy**, a very traditional view of gender roles that pushes these roles beyond the church and assumes that women cannot take senior leadership positions in government or in business, nor have we been overly prescriptive on roles in the home.
- And finally, because I believe that this is biblical, not only is it balanced but it’s **beneficial** too.
 - It enables men and women to maximise the use of their gifts in the contexts that God calls them to.
 - It doesn’t silence women, but encourages and promotes their ministries, so that we can all declare the excellencies of Christ.
- **Positive complementarianism.**
 - To return to the analogy I used in week 1. **A musical chord** has...
 - Different notes, distinct and diverse.
 - But equally needed, and complementing one another beautifully.
 - I hope wherever we stand at the end of this series, we are united in our desire to see Jesus Christ honoured and praised as we will be doing for all eternity, many different voices singing one song of praise in perfect harmony.
 - Let’s pray. *Father please by your Spirit help us to glorify you as we continue to discuss and apply this, help us to love one another well, and use all our gifts, to speak the truth in love, building up the Church for the honour and praise of the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.*