

## “Teaching, Authority & The Church”

### I Timothy

Downtown and Lexington

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Hey family! Today, we’ll be looking at **1 Timothy 2:11-15** which you just heard read. Some passages of the Bible are challenging because they’re confrontational. They confront the way we think about things or the way we live. Some passages are challenging because they’re confusing. We read them and think, “wait... what did that just say? This passage is one of the rare gems in Scripture that is both.

When you first hear it you think, “I’m not 100% sure what this means but, I *am* pretty sure I don’t like it.

**NT scholar Craig Blomberg** goes as far to say that verse 12 is “the single most scrutinized verse of Scripture in recent scholarship.”

So, Happy Sunday! I hope you’ve had your coffee, because today we’re just gonna dive in and do our best to clear things up, because this text has some powerful good for us. But, let me say a few things up front.

**First, let me say, there is a way to approach this text and already have a problem with it.** When it comes to the Bible, some of us are more American than Christian and, by that, I mean that we have a Marie Kondo approach to Scripture - we decide to keep what “sparks joy” and whatever doesn’t we toss out. And that’s a great way to organize your closet, but a terrible way to study the Bible. We need to submit our cultural biases and assumptions to the Word of Truth, not the other way around.

**Second, there is a way to approach this and other passages of Scripture like it and land differently theologically.** And that’s okay. This is not a passage that should break Christian fellowship. When it comes to texts like this, everyone is having to do their best in light of what the Scriptures clearly teach elsewhere. And, we should respect that.

**I think it bears mentioning that we have members in our church who land differently theologically here, but are not divisive.** And I want to make special mention of them - to honor them today because they set an incredibly beautiful example of what it looks like to dwell in unity. In fact, they probably live out some of the things this text says better than those who agree theologically because the primary muscles they use are submission and love. And the Bible is over and over and over again going to lift that up and honor it.

And for what it’s worth, I hope to follow your example of humility, today. My goal today is to be a little less “preachy” and instead invite us to explore the text together...

Let’s start by laying a little groundwork. In the middle of this passage, Paul is going to reference the creation of Adam and Eve as if that has some bearing on what he’s saying. So, we should probably start by developing an appropriate understanding of God’s design and intention for men, women and this whole human project in **Genesis 1**.

### **Genesis 1:26–27**

Then God said, “Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.” So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.

So, out the gate, here’s what Genesis teaches us about gender:

**First, gender is created by God.** It’s not a social construct. While the ways, in which, maleness and femaleness are expressed can sometimes, but not always, be socially constructed... being male and being female are not. Maleness and femaleness are rooted in God’s design of the world. They are given by God and a crucial part of what it means to be made in His image.

**Second, men and women are equal.** Period. He created both in his image, and gave *both* the dignity of being co-rulers (kings and queens), partners with Him in ruling over creation. For the Creator, men and women are equal parts of humankind. Equal in worth and value. Equal in dignity. Equal in honor. Equal, equal, equal.

Men are not better than women and any theology that teaches or culture that models otherwise is misguided. Women are not better than men - and likewise any theology that teaches or culture that models otherwise is equally misguided. Men and women equally show off unique aspects of the character and person of God. And humanity would not be complete without both.

**But third, men and women *are* different.** Period. God created them male and female. He did not create them the same. Equality does not mean androgyny. Men and women reflect the glory of God in unique and different - but equally important - ways.

And the next chapter of Genesis, highlights those ways a bit for us... In Genesis 2, God places the man, Adam - which is just Hebrew for “man” - in the Garden and gives him responsibility - to keep it, care for it, cultivate it - to ensure that it thrives according to God’s good will and design.

God recognizes this is a bit much for him on his own... and so He brings Woman into the picture...

### **Genesis 2:18**

Then the LORD God said, “It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him.”

**The word “helper” here is the Hebrew word: *Ezer*.** We translate it “helper” but honestly that often makes understanding womanhood a bit more difficult for us. We tend to look at that word with disdain in our culture... “daddy’s little helper”. But that’s not it. Biblically, speaking it’s the idea of “supporting strength”. Like the steel girders that secure and hold skyscrapers in place - that’s *ezer*.

It's used 21 times in the Old Testament, 2 of those times in reference to the first woman, 3 in reference to people either helping or failing to help in life-threatening situations and **16 in reference to God - specifically in reference to God's power and rescue.**

**Woman is a supporting strength.** Designed to be a source of stability, security and ever-present help to the purposes of God through mankind in the world. If you grew up in a home or you've been around a woman who does not bring this strength and stability to life, but instead becomes a source of instability and chaos you know how damaging that can be to herself and the people around her and how much better it is otherwise.

Likewise, if you've grown up or been around men who don't take responsibility, you know just how bad that can go for everything.

Man was designed for responsibility; **woman, for the stability and strength to make it happen.**

Now obviously, much has gone wrong for this vision of humanity. In Genesis 3, Adam and Eve decide to do what is right in their own eyes and in so doing fracture the order of creation itself. Woman's strength was misused and Man's responsibility was vacated.

And it's important to know who God holds primarily responsible for this fall - Paul actually references this in verse 15 - even though Eve was the first to listen to the devil's lie, the man - Adam - was the first called to account.

And the subsequent effects of their actions broke how God has designed the creation, and humanity specifically to operate, - from the abdication of our God-given responsibilities, to the oppression of women, to even the outright denial of maleness and femaleness as objective truths. And if we're honest, we have to admit that throughout human history women have borne the brunt of just how badly this has gone.

**But this is where the church comes into play.**

**The church is God's picture of a renewed humanity.** Language we've used before is that the church is a signpost of the coming Kingdom. The redeemed people of God are meant to repaint the portrait for the rest of the world of what life under God's loving rule and reign looks like - what humanity is meant to be.

We are a people saved from our sinfulness and the fall - to walk in new life - life as it was meant to be.

This is our honor and privilege - we get to rehearse - on earth - life in God's kingdom. And that has all kinds of implications for our lives, but it includes stepping into what it means to be men and women, sons and daughters of the King.

And that's the context by which we have to understand what the entire New Testament, and this section of 1 Timothy specifically, is saying when it gives any kind of instruction regarding how we are to live as men and women...

So, with that as our starting point, let's look back at the text...

### **I Timothy 2:11-12**

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.

Initially, the words "submissiveness" and "remain quiet" probably jump off the page to us as really retrograde. It feels like it's all the evidence you need to conclude that the Bible thinks the woman's place is to stay in the kitchen and keep quiet. But that's not actually what's going on. Let's clear some things up.

When it comes to any text of Scripture, and especially hard texts like this one, there are two important principles of interpretation to apply. Let me highlight them for you and then we'll use them here.

- **Principle of history.** The principle of history is the awareness that God has revealed Scriptural truth in specific historical and cultural settings.

The Scriptures were not written in a 21st-century American context. They were written for an ancient Middle Eastern audience. And so, if we're going to rightly understand what the Bible has to say to us today, we first have to understand what it would have meant to the original author and audience.

And that usually leads us to two important questions: What part of the text is cultural expression? And What part never changes?

- **Principle of harmony** - which means we interpret Scripture in light of Scripture - or to put in another way, the Scriptures work in harmony with each other to give us the whole truth. We don't just look at texts in isolation of each other. We look at the whole.

A really great example of this is the doctrine of the Trinity. There is no explicit place in the Bible that says, "God is Trinity. Three persons. One God." But, when you look at the Scriptures in total, you see it all over the place. You see God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit... All treated as God. All treated as One. And, rudimentarily speaking, this is how Trinitarian doctrine is formed.

**So first, based on the principle of harmony**, one thing we can know right out of the gate is that this is not a wholesale prohibition of women from speaking or teaching at all times and in all circumstances within the church.

- We know from other places in Scripture - including Paul's own writings - women are encouraged to speak and play an active role in the church including but not limited to using gifts of teaching, prayer and prophecy

- Such as **Titus 2:3**, which encourages women to teach what is good. And **1 Corinthians 11**, indicates that Paul expects women to pray and prophesy when the church is gathered, but in appropriate and respectful ways.

This text is not about teaching *per se* but about authority - specifically the expression of authority through teaching.

And actually harmonizes with context clues from the rest of the letter.

So for example, the Greek word used here for “have authority” is the word *authenteó*. And it’s an incredibly interesting word.

1. This is the only place this exact word appears in the entire New Testament.
2. To understand it, we have to look outside of the Bible and we see it used in other ancient writings within 100 years of 1 Timothy, and in the context of those cases most scholars think that it is better translated as “usurp authority”.

Whatever Paul is prohibiting about teaching, it seems to be tied to a negative action about taking authority that belongs to another.

In Chapter 3, which we’ll get to next week, Paul talks about elders - what we call pastors - we use those terms interchangeably - in the church. Elders are meant to serve as overseers and responsibility-takers for the spiritual vitality of the congregation. And one of the chief ways Paul indicates they express that authority is through the vehicle of teaching. Specifically, elders oversee or lead *through* the teaching.

Then at the end of the letter, in chapter 5, Paul connects these ideas again. He references pastors who "rule well" (an authority term) and "labor in preaching and teaching". This parallelism in the same letter would lead us to understand that whatever he means by "teaching" here is in reference to an authoritative function within the church - specifically the authoritative role of pastors.

Therefore, it is logical to conclude that in verses 11-12, he is not saying women should always and only stay quiet, but rather that they should respect the authority of their pastors.

**And the principle of history - or the historical and cultural context - also supports this idea.**

For one, his first clause, “let a woman learn” would have been dramatically unorthodox - specifically for anybody coming from a Jewish background in this congregation. We’ve mentioned this in other places, but when it comes to levels of Jewish higher learning, women were cut off from anything past what we would consider elementary school.

Jewish Talmud from the 200s, says this: “It would be better for the words of the Torah (that’s the first 5 books of the Old Testament) to be burned, then they should be entrusted to a woman.”

And this is part of what made Jesus so radical that he welcomed men, women and children to follow Him, to learn from Him. In the story of Mary and Martha in the gospels, where Mary sits at Jesus' feet and Martha is busy with the housework. Jesus says that Mary chose what was better. He's not merely talking about being a busybody versus slowing down to spend time with Jesus. To sit at a Rabbi's feet, was seeking to learn from and become like this teacher - to be a disciple. Martha was doing what culturally-speaking the woman was supposed to do. Mary was doing something only reserved for men... and Jesus is saying, "Martha... where Mary is at... this is where I want you. This is where I want everyone."

We read this text and bristle at the word "submissiveness" and "quiet"... but a 1st century Jew would have bristled much earlier.

Secondly, we have to keep in mind Paul's whole purpose behind writing this letter in the first place: to root out heresy.

Ephesus was a center for the cult of Artemis. A female-only cult where the women dictated everything to men. It's likely that many of the women being reached by this young church were former, wealthy women who at the very least were influenced by this cult, if not members of it altogether.

These verses come right after Paul's appeal to these women to not be distracting from Christ. In fact, they are a part of the same instruction. Some scholars argue that the spreading of the false teaching in the Ephesian church was potentially due to wealthy, single women who were influenced by this weird mixture of Jewish and pagan belief who spent their time going from house-to-house gossiping and spreading it in others - arguing for a "higher spirituality" that denied eating certain foods, and marriage and sex... which they contend, was what was causing the quarrelling with the men.

Historically speaking, what we have happening here in this church is some women apparently attempting to distract from the gospel of Christ by establishing an authority of their own - similar to the surrounding culture - apart from the leaders of the church - from Timothy, Paul and others - specifically by teaching things and encouraging others to follow patterns of life that are contrary to the gospel.

And Paul's point here is... **this is not how things should go in the renewed community of God.** In the renewed community of God, there are men under God's authority who have been given the responsibility to shepherd your soul, and you should listen to them and receive what they have to say - not be trying to unseat them or do your own thing.

And, we may be tempted at this point to think, "Okay, great. So this was a specific command to a specific problem. Women in Ephesus were distracting from the work of Christ by usurping authority, so Paul establishes some boundaries. It's a cultural instruction to a cultural problem. And that makes sense, until the next verse.

### **I Timothy 2:13-14**

For Adam was formed first, then Eve; and Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and became a transgressor.

Paul jumps out of his contextual teaching and grounds his argument in creation. To clarify, he's not saying that women should follow the instruction of verses 11-12 because they are more easily duped than men. Rather, this is a reference back to our first parent's initial failures in the garden. Adam was created first and had the responsibility to care for Eve and guard the truth... and he did not. He had the responsibility and abdicated it - he did not step up with godly, gracious leadership - and thus sin entered the world.

The most logical conclusion we can draw from all of this is not that "women are more susceptible to lies, therefore they should not teach". It's not, "women are inferior to men, so only men should lead." Rather, the most logical, biblically harmonious conclusion is that men, qualified men, are to be the ones meant to shoulder the responsibility of overseeing the church and both women and non-elder men should gladly submit to that leadership.

His point to the Ephesian church is, "what you are doing - whether you are aware of it or not - is setting the stage for Garden-like events all over again. You're making room for your men to further abdicate their responsibility, and preventing women from flourishing as the "ezer" because you can't be a supporting strength, if you're trying to tear down what Christ has built.

And his point is - If the church is meant to reflect the renewed reality of life in the Kingdom, then that must include men embracing the responsibility they previously forfeited. It must include the oversight, shepherding, care and protection of God's family as was intended for Adam.

And for us, this is why we only have men as pastors. This is what locks in the view of male eldership for me. If Paul were strictly dealing with something that was strictly a cultural issue, he wouldn't appeal to creation. An appeal to the created order is an appeal to something timeless.

The most common pushback to the things Paul lays out in this text are that it's all just cultural or only addressing something specific for the church in Ephesus. But if that was the case, He wouldn't have drawn this argument. And because he stops in that moment and draws their attention to created order, we've got to recognize that it applies to us as much as it applies to them.

Both women and non-elder men should come in with a teachable spirit and a posture to listen attentively to the God-ordained leaders in the church. Not trying to usurp their authority but, using their varied gifts to support it for their good and the good of the rest of the church. This is part of how we rehearse life together in God's Kingdom.

And just in case anyone was struggling with this text up to this point, he wraps up his point with this fun little tidbit:

**I Timothy 2:11**

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

Paul apparently likes to keep it easy... Once again though, when we apply the principle of harmony, we know what he's not saying. We know he's not saying giving birth saves women from their sin. The Scriptures are unequivocally clear elsewhere - including in 1 Timothy itself - that Jesus saves sinners. Not Jesus plus fertility. Not Jesus plus 2.5 and a white picket fence. Just Jesus.

If this were the case Paul wouldn't encourage elsewhere, like in 1 Corinthians 7, for women to stay single. Instead he'd say, "Get married quick and have a bunch of babies because the fate of your soul is at stake." And he never ever does that.

There are a few possible things Paul could be referencing here, I'll talk about some of them on the Midweek podcast that gets released in sermon feed on Wednesday, but I'm only going to address one that seems most consistent to me with the rest of the text.

I think Paul is making the point that women (and men, for that matter) are sanctified by stepping into the roles and responsibilities God has entrusted to them. He uses "childbearing" here to simply serve as a primary example of something only women can do. It likely also connects to the fact the Ephesian heresy had something to do with the denying "marriage" and subsequently denying "childbearing".

The point being that as men and women in particular (and the church at large) embrace our distinct roles and responsibilities - we progressively become more and more like Jesus. We, like Paul says elsewhere, "work out our salvation" as we fully embrace God's call on our life - in faith, love and holiness.

And here's why I say that - because to embrace any role - always requires trust. I won't pretend like this instruction is anything other than what it is - it is a prohibition or a limitation. And I know that is hard for many of us... but we must understand every time God gives us an instruction or limitation it is always and only for our good. God is never trying to take something from us, but always give something to us - Namely, Himself.

And sometimes what can happen is we can get so consumed with where God puts up the fence that we fail to enjoy and experience the goodness of the field He's provided with it.

But, that's what trust does. Trust is learning to enjoy the field. And trust is what God ultimately wants for us. Trust that God knows what He's doing. Trust that God not only has our good in mind but that anytime He instructs us in anything it is only for our good and never for our demise.

And so this verse is saying for the church to reflect the renewed humanity in Christ does not *just* mean it must include qualified men embracing their responsibility, but it must include women embracing and flourishing as "ezer" in the image of God... flourishing as sisters gifted for the work of God in our world, flourishing as wives and mothers, and grandmothers. Flourishing as leaders and teachers and intellectuals

and professionals - **all** for the good of the church, **all** for the good of humanity and **all** for the glory of God.

And that's who we want to be. We want to be a people who trust Jesus deeply and step into his design for life in the Kingdom of God.

**So, let me tell you what this looks like here.**

Here this means there is no role outside of the role of elder or pastor that a woman cannot do. If you are a woman here, just like non-elder men, you have the freedom to use your gifts and abilities (whatever they may be) to build up the body of Christ under the oversight of our pastors.

This means we either have and want to have women involved in every rung of our ministry underneath the authority of pastors. We have women leading and coaching LifeGroups. We have women leading and teaching classes and seminars. We have women using their gifts in Kidtown and Host Team. We have women on our staff, and women on our financial teams, and want women up front and visible as partners in the work of the Kingdom.

We hold tightly to the reality that Scripture is saying let women lead as women, and men lead as men, and some qualified men lead as overseeing pastors of the church, reflecting God's intention for life in the Garden.

If women aren't freed up to use their gifts in our church, we're missing. We're losing as a church. Just like a building without its strengthening support beams can't stand, neither can the church of God without women.

We want to be obedient to the truth - which means men and women figuring out these roles together so that every member can thrive.

But likewise, if qualified men are not stepping into their God-given responsibility... and if that God-given responsibility isn't being honored by all... we're losing as a church. And, that's something, we'll talk about that more in the coming weeks.

**Conclusion:** But on that note, let me give a parting word to my sisters and my brothers

**First, to our sisters - flourish!** Sometimes we get so caught up in what this passage is restricting that we can miss the beauty of what it's giving! Sometimes we get so concerned with pushing down the fence that we forget to enjoy the field!

You are invited to come and sit at the feet of King Jesus. To be with Him, become like Him and do the things He did. Paul says, "let women come and learn." And that invitation is for you, too. I know far too many women who don't care to become biblically sharp. Who don't care to become more like Jesus. Don't let that be you! Flourish!

And by that I also mean, use your gifts. Whatever they are, *use them* for the purpose of God in humanity and through our church. Don't sit on the sidelines. You are "ezer". And, I'd just encourage you to ask yourself the question this week: would those in your life characterize you that way?

**A word to brothers - *honor*** There is a reason why these words have been so controversial... and that's because they have been abused. Men - maybe well-meaning, maybe not - have used these words to actually work against what the Scriptures teach - to work against the flourishing of creation - namely the flourishing of our sisters. Honor your sisters. Lift them up. Celebrate their contributions to the work of God.

And... Honor your sisters by embracing some responsibility. Ironically in most churches in the US, it's the men who are floundering. The women, by and large, tend to do ok. Men tend to be present but passive, if not absent altogether.

Take some ownership so we can all flourish. I've met men in the past who won't serve in Kidtown because "that's women's work" - nope, that's *our* work. All of us. I know men, especially young men, who want the pulpit but aren't first willing to embrace the pew. Aren't first willing to embrace learning to follow Jesus and use what they've got for the Kingdom behind the scenes because they feel this entitlement to be up front.

Some of you love the ease of life you get when you let your wife carry the whole load... Some of you are perfectly content to let our sisters do the work of ministry while you focus on your career or your hobbies.

Don't let that be you. That is dishonoring. It's dishonoring to our sisters, and dishonoring to the intentions of God for manhood. We need you to step up and lead. We need some drive and some passion and some energy from you for the things of Christ. Especially in this season where fatigue and apathy towards the things of Christ can most easily win the day.

Our church needs it, your family needs it, and so does your own soul.

Every person matters. Every contribution is important. We are less without you. Let's step into this together.

*Father, we thank you that you are the architect of creation, the designer of everything that is. God, I ask that you would make us evermore a picture of renewed humanity. Help us to rehearse life in your Kingdom in the here and now for everyone around us, especially those who find in themselves a yearning for it. Grant us the strength, wisdom and humility to fully embrace our design as men and women. Make us men who embrace responsibility and women who utilize their strength. May none of us sit on the sidelines. As always, we need You in this.*

*In Jesus name, Amen.*